

English Performances and Motivation at Osaka Jogakuin College

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This article investigates student performances, analyzing four types of English contests conducted annually at Osaka Jogakuin College (OJC), and the ways in which formal performances motivate students toward excellence. Various motivational factors are explored, with definitions of two basic types of motivation in foreign language learning. Findings are also drawn from a student interview, leading to observations on the nature of performances and their motivational effectiveness for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) pedagogy.

Campus English Contests

Osaka Jogakuin College (OJC) is a women's college near Osaka Castle where all students major in English for international communication. Content-based EFL at OJC is nationally recognized in terms of average TOEIC IP scores and education ministry (MEXT) Good Practice awards for curriculum. The role of various campus-wide English contests, however, has not been systematically analyzed until now.

The OJC two-year and four-year divisions combine for four different English contests every year, which are outlined below in Table 1. Students are motivated in each instance by time for preparation, anticipating themselves on stage, a campus-wide audience, possible prizes, and the intrinsic rewards of a polished English performance. The chart in Table 1 profiles the contestants, highlighting the time span, preparation issues and teacher help available. The column on the right side adds some particular motivational factors in Japanese socioculture to the hypothesized universal factors such as preparation, anticipation, audience, prizes, and intrinsic rewards for the individuals involved.

Contest	Contestants, year, class	Time frame	Preparation assistance	Sociocultural motivations
Peace Dialogue	Pairs, 1 st year, Discussion	Spring for late spring	In class, out of class teacher help	Represent their class
Presentation	Pairs/groups, 2 nd year, Paper writing & discussion	Late spring & summer for early fall	In class, out of class teacher help	Represent their class
Song	Whole class, 1 st year, Phonetics	Fall for college festival	Mainly in class	Class solidarity for friendships & group competence
Vocabulary	Individual, 1 st to 4 th year (all students)	All year for winter	Self-study room Academic Word List worksheets	Represent group traits of effort & competence

Table 1. Osaka Jogakuin College English Contests

The **Peace Dialogue Contest** is the first time students encounter the possibility of entering a college English contest. It comes soon after students have practiced speaking skills and discussion strategies to carry on English conversations in their Topic Discussion class. The Pursuit of Peace is the first content-based topic of the four units of core studies in the integrated curriculum. That is, Reading and Writing, two other classes besides Discussion in the core curriculum, also focus on similar content at the same time. Teachers are also integrated, coordinating classes, writing and updating the textbooks for the core subjects. The peace dialogue contest for first year students is based on current events, a creative role play of conflict resolution in stages, often negotiating peace between opposing leaders. Students develop their own script, checked by the teacher, practice in and out of class,

then perform in front of the class. Teachers evaluate individual students according to written criteria in a rubric. Students evaluate their peers, usually voting to choose the pair to represent them in the contest toward the end of the first semester.

The **Presentation Contest** stems from second year classes in Topic or Theme Studies where students discuss and write a research paper about one of the global issues in the content-based curriculum. Classes further develop one of the core topics from the first year: the Pursuit of Peace, Science and Religion, Human rights, and Crises of Life. Each student delivers a two-minute oral summary of her research paper at the end of the semester, and then the class usually votes on two of the best presenters to enter the contest. The students had different topics, so they decide on one for the contest. Although the one-semester class has ended, they can get help from the teacher during the summer or early in the fall. The presentations utilize displays or, more often, a PowerPoint presentation projected in the auditorium. Compared to the peace dialogues in the first year, the presentations are non-fiction and informative about a global issue.

The **Song Contest** is a prepared performance with whole classes competing as part of a first year required course in Phonetics. Teachers supervise the choice of a popular song to practice in class and perform at the annual college festival. With much practice, the aim is for whole classes of students to reach a level of pronunciation, rhythm and other qualities quite different from Japanese that are expressed in popular English songs. Students sometimes practice outside of class on their own, which shows that they enjoy the music and bonding with their class group. Unlike the peace dialogue and presentation contests where most students are in the audience rooting for their representatives, in the song contest all students are performers, on stage for a while and then returning to the audience.

The **Vocabulary Contest** is not a part of any particular class, although there are related classes such as Academic Vocabulary. Students therefore compete as individuals, and can do so more than once because it takes place each year. As a performance it is not prepared, but all students are generally encouraged to study the vocabulary lists involved on their own in the self-study room with a view to the contest. Academic Word Lists compile word families that appear with high frequency in all academic fields that are studied in English. In the contest everyone stands up in an auditorium, and hand signals are utilized to indicate their answer to multiple choice questions on the English definitions of academic words. Students sit down when their answer is incorrect, with the last ones standing the winners. This process with multiple winners of modest prizes is repeated a few times.

Besides the above four events, OJC conducts auditions for **regional English speech contests** off campus. The intensive coaching by faculty members provides valuable training in English enunciation for selected students regardless of the outcome in terms of prizes. Student interviews and observations show that some students are engaging in other forms of performances as well during a given semester. On campus and elsewhere, some are musical or unrelated to English, while other performances involve speaking English in community activities such as secondary school events or intercultural meetings.

Two Types of Motivation

Different types of performances are hypothesized to be motivating in different ways. In particular, there are two distinct types of motivation concerned with foreign language learning:

Instrumental motivation refers to learning for utilitarian purposes such as proficiency test goals or job qualifications. Regarding the culture behind the foreign language, learners may aspire to be bilingual but not necessarily bicultural. For communication, English serves as an international *lingua franca* between speakers of languages other than English as well as a way of doing business with native speakers of English who do not know the local language. East Asian educators report that instrumental motivation is prevalent in their societies.

Integrative motivation is a quite different type of motivation where the learner would welcome becoming bicultural as well as bilingual. The learner likes the users and culture behind the foreign language and wishes to be more like them or to communicate with them not just as a function but as a person. The learner imagines a community of target language speakers and wants to be part of that world.

Along these lines, when the author was studying Japanese in graduate school, integrative motivation arose strongly from studying the culture and meeting Japanese people who were studying or living abroad. The author was motivated to try moving to Japan and to conduct thesis research *in situ*, then ended up staying permanently for this academic career.

In another instance more relevant to this article, a Japanese student at OJC was interviewed for a forthcoming paper about her performances and motivation. She very explicitly expressed both instrumental motivation, calling English “more of a tool” when the performance was a class requirement, *and* integrative motivation, the “longing” for real communication with the English language speaking community. She added that “performances motivate me to master English,” which confirms the importance of investigating the relationship between performances and motivation.

English Contest Performances and Motivational Factors

The four OJC English contests arose organically, arguably appealing to latent motives that drive students to excel. They evolved in practice over years, each intuitively staking out a niche in the complex socio-psychological terrain where the motivation of Japanese students to excel in English can be enhanced.

Each contest is visible and audible in English to an audience in an auditorium. Each allows students to polish their skills by extra practice outside of class, and there are possible prizes. Similar conditions also apply to regional English speech contests, but for a small number of students and for high stakes in terms of training and possible rewards such as a trip abroad.

The four OJC English contests could be analyzed in terms of types or intensity of motivation, and other factors including the sociocultural context in Japan. Each contest differs from the others in appealing to different motives, learning styles, strengths among the four skills, social issues such as peer group dynamics, identity issues such as bilingual goals, and activating other unrealized potentialities of students.

The peace dialogue and presentation contests are prepared performances with student-created content, dramatized in the former and researched in the latter. Classes choose their best group of two or occasionally more students. Those selected become class representatives, so there is some investment by all students in the contest outcome. The *kumi* involved are the closest equivalents to home rooms of the first and second year, respectively. A disadvantage compared to the song and vocabulary contests is that only the selected representatives perform, but all students had the chance to perform in front of their class. Contest spectators root for their own classmates and might also be inspired by excellent performances by others in their cohort. The contestants are treated distinctively, judged similarly to a speech contest on the relative merit of their English and overall performances. Better preparation and more interesting ideas are rewarded. Students who win awards are palpably moved, and celebrated by classmates.

The song contest, involving all the first year students in Phonetics classes, is largely a group experience compared to the other contests. The individual voice usually does not stand out but necessarily blends into the group. Individual students do not have many choices such as whether or not to participate on stage. Through group solidarity they can enhance friendships while producing smoother English. Thus they are invested in the process socially, but there is not as much scope for their autonomy as individuals compared to the peace dialogue and presentation contests.

The vocabulary contest, the newest among the four, relies upon self-motivated study habits for success. Since 2004 its purpose has been to encourage students to systematically compile many words that are increasingly shown to be essential for comprehending academic English. The performance on the day of the event is not prepared as with the other contests, but the Academic Word Lists to be tested upon are posted weekly. Unlike the other contests, the vocabulary contest involves receptive skills, reading and understanding but not having to verbalize in English. Participation in the vocabulary contest is not mandatory for all students, and they compete as individuals. Thus it appeals to very different drives and skills compared to the song contest and the other contests that focus on active skills. For sociocultural reasons, without much peer social reward, individual winners show less emotion compared to the other contests.

Conclusions

Whatever the comparative advantages of the different OJC English contests, they have all stood the test of time, each finding a niche in the ways suggested above and more. It is also telling that voluntary individual English speech contests did not end up among the four popular contests, which reflects the sociocultural imperatives of peer groups in Japan. Yet individual students willingly compete in off-campus regional contests, in effect representing their whole college cohort.

One conclusion of the comparative analysis is that the peace dialogue and presentation contests evoke a wider range of cognitive and affective factors, and these two do seem to be taken more seriously on campus. The students exhibit higher order thinking skills such as originality and analysis of contemporary global issues while being judged like English speech contestants.

Among other comparative benefits of the peace dialogue and presentation contests, students have the opportunity for coaching of their English speaking outside of class by their teacher, which may develop motivating personal bonds and promote integrative motivation. The author has gone further in posting some winning student peace dialogues and presentations online as audio files in the podcasting blog [Japancasting](#), which have been highly evaluated abroad. Although no personal information of the students is disclosed, they are excited to hear their own voices available globally. The extra effort given by the teacher to amplify their work shows students that they can be contributing members of the target language community, which may in turn encourage the more transformative type of motivation.

In conclusion, all of these types of English contests and more are to be recommended, because of the efficacy of performances in improving language competencies and activating various wellsprings of motivation to excel.

The Author

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