

Attempt of Audioblog Use on English Speaking Confidence for After-School Speaking Practice

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Abstract: The study was conducted to advance EFL speaking instructional design that endeavored to not only provide students alternative opportunities for oral practice after class but also affect their perception of English speaking confidence. In order to encourage the students to engage with a continual learning immersion on English speaking practice, the use of audioblog was taken as facilitation to aid out-of-class learning. To this end, the study aimed to discover two folded perspectives: (1) whether the EFL students' English speaking confidence would vary before and after the facilitation engaged in the instruction; (2) if so, whether and how the number of recording uploads on audioblogs influence their English speaking confidence accordingly. The participants were 574 senior night school students attending the required English speaking class for one semester. They were tutored to accomplish one theme-related oral recording and post it on their audioblogs after each in-class instruction. Pre/ post- surveys were given to the students to collect responses of their English speaking confidence, as well as the amount of oral recording uploads were gathered for data analysis. The findings of this study showed that a significant difference of improvement on the students' English speaking confidence by the assistance of oral recording practice. Additionally, regarding different number of oral recording uploads, it displayed that those who accomplished at least four oral recording uploads had a significant difference on English speaking confidence while comparing to those who did none. Although the outperformance on students' English speaking confidence was appeared only if they uploaded a minimum of four oral recordings, an ascent of English speaking confidence was illustrated via those who did more oral recording uploads on their audioblogs. In sum, the findings of this study highlighted that in terms of 'more practice' on EFL speaking, the instructor should be cautious about adapting the English speaking instructional design as well as a systematic extent of speaking practice.

Keywords: EFL, perception of English speaking, English speaking instruction, audioblog,

1. Introduction

Speaking skill, a means of verbal communication, offers various interactions among interlocutors for communication. In terms of learning practice, the speaking skill has been highlighted as one of essentials in English language learning, for the most part, in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) setting. However, due to the fact that the nature of EFL setting lacks of occasions for learners to communicate with interlocutors in the target language, i.e., English, the EFL learners seem to in short of English speaking opportunities for practice. Accordingly, it might lead to complex emotional impact, such as English speaking anxiety increasing, English confidence break down, and subsequently affect their willingness to speak out in English. As a result, regarding this weakness of EFL setting, it brings EFL instructors into further contemplation of alternative instructional design to fulfill adequate engagement for learners on speaking practice. Thus, it is a need of the speaking instructional design concerning a continual learning immersion, which not only emphasizes in a classroom-based teaching but also a connected follow-up of out-of-class learning.

Further to satisfying this need of a comprehensive speaking instructional design, this current study attempted to utilize an effective tool, computer-mediated communication (CMC), as the facilitation to assist different designed speaking activities for speaking practice. The CMC tool has been widely corroborated its advantages on supporting language learning (Hegelheimer & Tower,

2004; Stepp-Greany, 2002), as well as benefiting particularly on speaking (Alastuey, 2011; Ko, 2012; Sun, 2012; Yanguas, 2012). Along with two modes of CMC tool, that is either synchronous or asynchronous approach, such as chat room and videoconferencing, or email exchange and blog, has distinct functions to aid diverse language learning purposes. As to the emphasis of this study to encourage learners to have a continual learning immersion for English speaking practice, the asynchronous CMC approach, i.e., use of audioblog is taken as an implement for each learner on out-of-class learning. To this end, this study aimed to examine whether the EFL learners' English speaking confidence alters among number of recording uploads on their audioblogs for speaking practice. The research question was addressed as follow: Is there a difference of learners' English speaking confidence by the number of English oral recording uploads on audioblogs?

2. Literature reviews

According to previous studies on EFL learning, lacking of practice often led students to an unfamiliarity of English language (Alastuey, 2011; Xiao, 2007). The speaking, which a skill was required to be active producing information presented a particular learning difficulty in EFL learning, and it was even more obvious to EFL Asian students (Liu, Zhang, & Lu, 2011). Consequently, the students would be easily anxious about the time to speak in English, and be deficient in building English confidence (Cao & Philp, 2006). Ellis (2008) pointed out that student English learning attitude, such as confidence in English should be considered as one of the essential elements affecting learning performance. In the meanwhile, Yashima (2002) argued that to have confidence in the target language communication, it would positively influence willingness to communicate in the language. Thus, in order to offer more opportunities for EFL students to speak in English, and further increase their English confidence on English speaking, an alternative instructional design for speaking practice was proposed in this study. By this means, not only to encourage students to communicate more in English, but also to ultimately be confidence in English speaking.

Zou (2013) and Ko (2012) specified that by applying a suitable medium as an aid to satisfy the need of an English instructional design was able to benefit effective English learning. Therefore, a speaking instructional design which included both in-class and out-of-class learning was presented to provide more oral practice opportunities for students. More precisely, this study designed to discover the out-of-class learning that employed one of the effective CMC tools, audioblog, to facilitate speaking practice. Audioblog was defined by combing audio with blog, which inherited key features of blog with the use of voice for expression (Huann & Thong, 2006). In other words, the audioblog attended to appeal the mixture of audio and text that allowed various modes of presentations, such as texts, hypertexts, pictures, or videos to supplement the audio post. Hsu, Wang and Comac (2008) and Huang and Hung (2010) displayed that the representation of audioblog could serve as a great tool for instructors conducting speaking assessment regarding the curriculum. Even more, by integrating the use of audioblog in the instructional design, it enabled students to come up with discipline and manage their own learning progress (Sun, 2009; Tan & Tan, 2010).

According to empirical studies on the use of audioblog for speaking practice, it affirmed that the audioblog could enhance students on cognitive and affective aspects, such as strategy learning and motivation (Fareed, 2010; Hung, 2011). Overall speaking, several studies have explored how the use of audioblog could play a role to assist speaking practice for the target language (Hsu, Wang, & Comac, 2008; Huann & Thong, 2006; Sun, 2009, 2012), which was positively reported in pedagogical context (Fareed, 2010). However, from these previous studies, it also noted several important issues in using audioblog: (1) students tended to lose interests engaging in audioblogs progressively; (2) the size of class would influence audioblog activity in class; (3) a lack of face-to-face interaction; and (4) with rehearsal practice before uploading on audioblog, it concealed the authentic speaking. To this end, this study was essentially based on a speaking instructional design which the audioblog was taken as one part of facilitation to assist students on speaking learning. More specifically, the use of audioblog mainly served students at out-of-class time instead of in-class instruction.

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

The participants were 574 senior high school (grade 10) students who attended the required English speaking class for one semester. Apart from a general English class, they did not have other experiences of a formal English speaking class at school formerly. Besides, all of them had basic computing skills, such as surfing the Internet and being able to create a *Google* mail account.

3.2 Instruments

In order to provide each learner to have their own audioblog access, *Google Blogger* was selected for the use because of its free entry, friendly interface, and ease of registration for senior high school students. In the meanwhile, each student was able to adorn their own audioblogs with preferred color and layout, which made each audioblog space individually and characteristically. In addition to uploading the out-of-class work on their space of *Google Blogger*, an open online voice recorder, namely, Vocaroo (vocaroo.com) was taken as the tool to assist recording. Students were able to record the work online directly, and embed the code on their own audioblogs afterwards to complete the recording work. Moreover, a means of pre-survey (whether be confidence in English speaking) and post-survey (whether be able to increase English speaking confidence by recording English oral practice on the audioblog) was given to collect students' responses on scaling their English confidence.

3.3 Procedure

The English speaking class that the students attended was to encourage and advance their English speaking confidence, and allow more opportunities for English speaking practice. It was a semester-long class which contained seven thematic English speaking instructions. Due to the fact that the students would engage in heavy study load at the end of the semester, the seventh oral recording was optional for them to share their ideas on their audioblogs. Each thematic class followed by four revolving activities, which were thematic oral practice, thematic oral composition, interpersonal appreciation, and sharing and reflection respectively. Additionally, the pre-survey and post-survey were delivered to gather level of their English speaking confidence before and after the English speaking instruction.

3.4 Data analysis

Analysis of a paired sample *t*-test was conducted to compare the students' pre-survey answers of their English confidence in speaking with their post-survey responses of whether their English speaking confidence changed after having oral recording practice on audioblogs. Also, in order to examine whether the number of English oral recording uploads on students' audioblogs would affect their English speaking confidence after all, one-way ANOVA was used to be suitable to compare three or more independent groups of sampled data. A series of post-hoc tests (Scheffe's method) was also employed to assess if there was any significant difference in the mean scores on the number of oral recording uploads (independent variable) influencing their English speaking confidence (dependent variable). The independent variable was the number of English recording posting on students' audioblogs. The dependent variable was the students' English speaking confidence, which was defined by their self-reporting on five-point Likert scale (1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= neutrally, 4= agree, 5= strongly agree), the post-survey. Additionally, descriptive analysis was also engaged in reporting mean scores of English speaking confidence among the number of recording uploads.

4. Results and discussion

Table 1 reports the result from paired sample *t*-test comparison examining the students' responses of English speaking confidence via pre-survey and post-survey. The result displayed a significant enhancement in English speaking confidence between pre-survey (mean= 3.16, S. D.= 0.97) and post-survey (mean= 3.54, S. D.= 0.96), $t = -7.48$, $p < .01$, which by employing the assistance of oral recording uploads on audioblogs. Furthermore, to understand whether the EFL students' English speaking confidence alters among the number of recording uploads on their audioblogs for speaking practice, the current study is keen to figure out if there is a difference of students' English speaking confidence by different number of English oral recording post on audioblogs. There were seven thematic English instructions administrated during the semester; however, students were coached to complete six relevant oral recordings in total, which the seventh one was not required. According to the different number of posting oral recording on audioblog, the students were divided into eight groups with regard to the number of recording uploads: T0 (n=126), T1 (n= 84), T2 (n= 69), T3 (n= 43), T4 (n= 53), T5 (n= 55), T6 (n= 130), and T7 (n= 14). More specifically, these eight categorized groups indicated the numbers of student and the number of the posting recording, which meant that among the total 574 students, there were 84 students did only one recording and there were 130 students completed six recordings as example. Then, a series of ANOVA test analyses were conducted in this study, and the results are presented in Table 2.

Table 1: Pre/ Post- Survey Samples t-test Analysis

Pre-survey	Be confidence in English speaking
Post-survey	Be able to increase English speaking confidence by recording English oral practice on the audioblog
Paired Samples Test	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pre- survey Post- survey	.000

As revealed in Table 2, the average of mean scores of distinct recording number was 3.10, 3.46, 3.48, 3.44, 3.87, 3.76, 3.78, and 4.14 respectively, and T7 revealed the highest mean score (mean= 4.14) while T0 showed the lowest (mean= 3.10). Additionally, Levene's test for homogeneity of variances uncovered that there was no violation on the assumption of homogeneity of variances (Levene= 1.36, $p = .22$). Further to utilizing one-way ANOVA to examine whether or not there was observed differences on the mean scores of English speaking confidence for the eight groups. The result yielded a statistical significance ($F(7, 566) = 7.80$, $p < .01$) among the groups. In other words, it confirmed that the eight groups behaved dissimilarly on the attitude regarding English speaking confidence, yet, it did not display where the significant difference took place among which groups. Accordingly, a series of Sheffe tests (post hoc tests) further determined where precisely the significance lay of significant mean difference between groups. The results from post hoc Sheffe tests disclosed that four sets of groups had significant mean differences, which were between T4 and T0 (mean difference= 0.77, $p < .01$), T5 and T0 (mean difference= 0.66, $p < .01$), T6 and T0 (mean difference= 0.68, $p < .01$), and T7 and T0 (mean difference= 1.04, $p < .05$). Conversely, it was no significant mean difference among other two groups.

Table 2: Influence of the Number of Recording Uploads on Students' English Speaking Confidence.

	T0	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6	T7
N	126	84	69	43	53	55	130	14
Mean	3.10	3.46	3.48	3.44	3.87	3.76	3.78	4.14
S. D.	0.91	1.01	0.96	0.80	0.94	0.94	0.87	0.95
F (ANOVA)	7.80**							

Scheffe Test	T4>T0
	T5>T0
	T6>T0
	T7>T0

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

In terms of the results revealed from the current study, it attempted to figure out whether the EFL students' English speaking confidence alters among different number of recording uploads on their audioblogs for speaking practice. Though the English speaking class was a required course for the grade 10 students, it was obvious to see unlike efforts they spent doing the English oral recording works after class. More specifically, the number of student who fulfilled the oral recording works was distinct. For instance, among 574 students, there were approximately 22% of students (T0, 126) did not post any oral recording on their audioblogs at all, and there was a low of student number (T3, 43) who completed three oral recordings in total on their audioblogs. For those who completed all six recordings (T6, 130) reached the highest number among others. Also, it was interesting to observe that there were 14 students accomplished seven oral recordings on their audioblogs, particularly because the seventh oral recording was an alternative which was not a requirement.

According to the abovementioned result from pre/ post- survey, students' perception on English speaking confidence significantly improved after engaging with English oral practice on recording uploads on their audioblogs. Further to understanding whether the number of oral recording uploads affect the students' English speaking confidence, it was compared to the students (T0) who did not upload any oral recording on their audioblogs, the rest of the students (T1, T2, T3, T4, T5, T6, T7) led to an outperformance on mean score of English speaking confidence; especially, for those who finished four (T4) and seven (T7) oral recordings respectively achieved a peak on English speaking confidence mean score. Additionally, the supplementary post hoc Scheffe tests further indicated that the students who completed at least four oral recordings scored statistically greater than those who did no oral recording. However, students who did one, two, and three oral recordings showed no significant difference on their English speaking confidence concerning those did any. Similarly, apart from associating with (T0) group, the results did not reveal any significant difference between other groups (T1 to T7). In other words, the findings might imply that if the students have had more opportunities for English oral practice, in this case, they accomplished English oral recordings and uploaded on their audioblogs, it might boost their English speaking confidence from time to time. As Trang, Bldauf Jr. and Moni (2013) indicated that the majority of EFL students still suffered considerably from English language learning anxiety which would affect their English speaking confidence, and the instructor should be cautious concerning this issue relatively in the instructional design. Yet, in addition to the finding of this study, the number of oral recording uploads seemed to be highlighted as a matter affecting their English speaking confidence, which triggered a farther investigation of adapting the use of audioblog on assisting the out-of-class English speaking practice. According to Hsu, Wang and Comac (2008) revealed that some students posted fewer audio clips and failed to sustain their motivation throughout the semester, which might require diverse activity designs to supply the learning gap. Thus, this study employed the use of audioblog in the after-class activity, to provide a space for EFL students carrying on a lasting opportunity of speaking practice. Hence, by achieving a degree of the number of oral recording posting on audioblogs, the students' English speaking confidence showed positively higher than those who did none; although it did not reveal any significant results between the students who did less than three recordings. Still, a rise of inclination on students' English speaking confidence was presented to those who completed more oral recording uploads. In brief, the finding might further indicate that the nature meaning of "more practice" which referred to not only giving extra once or twice exercise, but also a systematic pattern for extensive practice. By doing so, the EFL students could even advantage more to an English-oriented setting for speaking practice; conversely, a consideration on offering a variety of encouragements to those who did none or less recordings was suggested.

Conclusion

The current study attempted to advance the EFL speaking instructional design to not only offer students alternative opportunities on oral practice after class but also have an impact on their perception of English speaking confidence. Thus, by a thread of lasting the in-class thematic speaking instruction which covered various theme-relevant ideas, the students were instructed to accomplish one theme-relevant English oral recording on their audioblogs afterwards. The findings of this study exposed that the students' English speaking confidence did improved statistically in terms of the supplementary oral recording for speaking practice. In addition to noting that there was an influence between different number of recording uploads and the enhancement of English speaking confidence. It underlined that if the students could have achieved to an extent of oral practice during the out-of-class period, it would be a benefit on increasing their English speaking confidence. In other words, if the students merely took efforts working on a couple of oral recording practice, the impact on increasing of English speaking confidence would not be significantly apparent although an ascent of the more oral recordings they completed the more English speaking confidence they gained. Besides, a few limitations of this study design were revealed and worth of further investigations; such as a comparison between gender differences and reduction the number of participants with regard to integrating qualitative analysis for deepening educational implications.

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