**Applying Innovation Method to Assess English Speaking Performance on**

**Communication Apprehension**

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*Abstract: A growing number of research studies are now available to shed some light on ELT methods. Currently, educational portfolios are implemented in Science, Mathematics and Geography and also have become widely used in ELT. When the students prepared their own portfolios, they self-monitored their performances. The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of self-monitoring and portfolios on college students' English speaking performance. The participants involved in this study were 60 college students majoring in the Department of Applied Foreign Languages at one university of technology in Taiwan. In the study, descriptive statistics and t-tests were used to test the effects of using communication apprehension. In the portfolio group, the students' communication apprehension was lowered. In conducting this study, the researcher hoped that this research could provide valuable perspective on the use of portfolios and self-monitoring.*

*Keywords: English as foreign language; communication apprehension; portfolios; self-monitoring*

## 1 Introduction

Over the past 20 years there have been many changes in English language teaching (ELT). Ruhland & Brewer (2001) called attention to the increased demands for accountability that emphasize assessment of student learning. Universities have begun to focus on student learning outcomes as a way to measure what students have learned and are able to do when they complete their degree (Dori & Belcher, 2005; Wickersham & Chambers, 2006). Grades are no longer proof enough of learning; multiple stakeholders in education want documentation that demonstrates the entire learning process (Heaney, 1990).

A growing number of research studies are now available to shed some light on ELT

methods. Technological innovations of past century, from audiotape recorders to the Internet, can be used to provide English as speaking language (ESL) and English as foreign language (EFL) students with authentic language exposure and meaningful practice, but many learners need guidance in accessing these resources and integrating them into daily life (Dahlman & Rilling, 2001). A common method of portfolio is an effective way to assess student performance. Later it was used to support career education and to assess and credit experiential learning in higher education (Farr & Tone, 1998). Currently, educational portfolios are implemented in Science, Mathematics and Geography and also have become widely used in ELT (Melles, 2009).

Santos (1997) mentions that as part of the portfolio process, students are asked to think about their needs, goals, weaknesses and strategies in language learning. They are often asked to select their best work and to explain why the work is valuable to them. When the students prepared their own portfolios, they self-monitored their performances. Students utilized their own learning portfolios to do learning assessment and self-correction. Although growing numbers of researchers have considered the positive potential for using the portfolios in language teaching and learning, very little attention has been given to student self-monitoring, of their performances in English speaking and their frequent use of the portfolio as a leaning assessment. Therefore, this study was designed to investigate the effects of using self-monitoring and portfolios in the EFL speaking classroom.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of self-monitoring and portfolios on college students' English speaking performance. Based on the purposes of the study, the following a research question was explored: What effect does the treatment of self-monitoring and the portfolios have on college students' communication apprehension (CA)? In conducting this study, the researcher hoped that this research could provide valuable perspective on the use of portfolios and self-monitoring. Through using portfolios and self-monitoring, teachers can help students to find their strengths and weaknesses in English

speaking performance.

This article is structured as follows. Section 2 presents literature review and hypotheses. Section 3 presents the method for procedures of the study. Section 4 purposely selects a case study of English speaking performance empirical research. And the results for the various analyses are presented following each of these descriptive sections, the results are discussed. Discussion, conclusions, implication and limitations for future work are all reported in the last section.

**2 Literature review and hypotheses**

While many foreign language educators may have ignored the role of the portfolio in language teaching, the portfolio is still widely used in learning. An educational portfolio is a collection of work that an individual has built to demonstrate his or her learning processes and progress (Chambers & Wickersham, 2007). Digital portfolios include using recorders, cameras, digital cameras, computers, and learning management system as the instruments for teaching.

Moreover, Farr & Tone (1998) argued that if students are to improve, they must to see the need for that improvement. The students must to self-assess and to consider how to improve- by identifying both strengths to be practiced and perfected and areas that need strengthening through focused practice on them. Self-monitoring improves learning in many fundamental ways. First, it focuses students' attention on limited number of responses (Zimmerman & Paulsen, 1995). Self-monitoring helps students discriminate between effective and ineffective performance (Thoresen & Mahoney, 1974). Finally, self-monitoring fosters reflective thinking (Bandura, 1986). It can lead to better organization of one's knowledge, more accurate self-judgments, and more effective planning and goal setting for future efforts to learn (Lan, 1994; Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994).

CA was defined as "an individual's level of fear of anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons" (Richmond & McCrosky, 1989). Speakers feel nervous and tense while they are speaking in public. The problems include lack of confidence, afraid of making mistakes, and lack of speaking skills. It appears that CA can be reduced by upgrading skills (Kelly, 1997), changing cognitions (Wilcox, 1997), getting people to relax (Friedrich et al., 1997), and/or altering the way one envisions oneself as a speaker (Ayres et al., 1997). A meta-analysis (Allen et al., 1989) suggests that all of these approaches are of consequence in reducing fear associated with public speaking. CA is one of the most pressing concerns for those who are in search of communication competence and for those who teach others how to increase communication competence (Carrell & Willmington, 1998).

Based on the previous findings, a portfolio is used widely in language learning. The flexibility and versatility of the concept of portfolios makes it a useful tool for engaging students of all abilities as they examine the process and products of their learning (Hebert, 2001). On the other hand, videotaping is an effective way to record students' English speaking performance. In this study, after the students review their English speaking performance, they understood their strengths and weaknesses in their performance. Next time they can perform better than before. Through the use of portfolios, all the performances that include students' videotapes and several records: observation reports, checklists, and reflection papers. Moreover, after the treatment of self-monitoring and portfolios, communication apprehension was lowered, and English speaking performance was enhanced. Therefore, we accounted the treatment of the self-monitoring and the portfolios will have no effect on college students' communication apprehension. Based on the purposes of the study, the following three research hypotheses were described in this study.

**Hypothesis 1:** The students in the non-portfolio group will not have significantly lower communication apprehension after the treatment.

**Hypothesis 2:** The students in the portfolio group will not have significantly lower communication apprehension after the treatment.

**Hypothesis 3:** The students in the portfolio group will not have lower communication apprehension than the students in the non-portfolio group.

## 3 Procedures of the study

The participants involved in this study were 60 college students majoring in the Department of Applied Foreign Languages at one university of technology in Taiwan. As the participants were all from the same department, they shared similar backgrounds. All of students had taken a course in English speaking for more than six months. In this study, two instructors scored their English speaking performances. The participants in the study were randomly divided into an experimental group and a control group. The participants in the experimental group were asked to review their English speaking videotapes and deliver their own portfolios after the treatment of self-monitoring and portfolios.

This study is a pretest-treatment-posttest design. The pretest was conducted to evaluate the participants' English oral performances and communication apprehension in the first week of a semester. After delivering the first speech, the students were asked to turn in 2-page reflection papers. Students in the experimental group reviewed the videotapes of their speaking performances and collected their personal videotapes in their portfolios. Students in the control group were only asked to prepare their weekly oral presentations. The researcher also videotaped students' speeches weekly. In the final week, students in the experimental group delivered CDs and portfolios that included grade record forms, consultation record forms, self-access language learning center cab work forms, outlines, handouts, group evaluation forms, speech outlines, reflection forms, final outlines, self-evaluation forms, peer evaluation forms, instructor evaluation forms, reflection forms, mid term speech outlines,

final speech outlines and VCDs. Students in the control group did not deliver any portfolios. Data collection throughout the semester included observation reports, checklists, videotaping of students individual speeches, peer feedback papers, teacher feedback papers and students' reflection papers. In the study, descriptive statistics and t-tests were used to test the effects of using communication apprehension.

The Personal Report of Communication Apprehension-24 explored the personal information of the participants and their degree of communication apprehension when speaking English in public. The Personal Report of Communication Apprehension-24 consists of four sections (McCroskey, 2001). Phrased in the form of statements to which subjects rate students' levels of agreement or disagreement, the items in the PRCA-24 are based on a five-point Likert-type scale and represent four distinct dimensions of CA. They are (a) group discussion, (b) meetings, (c) interpersonal conversation, and (d) public speaking. The PRCA-24 is widely used in the communication field and is established as both valid and reliable (Chen, 2001; McCroskey, 1984).

After data collection, the researcher used the Statistic Package for the Social Science for Windows (SPSS) 13.0 version to compute the data analyses of the study. First, in order to understand the participant background information, the researcher utilized descriptive statistics to summarize and analyze the data. Additionally, an independent t-test was used to compare communication apprehension and English speaking performances with the control group and the experimental group. In this study, the researcher averaged the two evaluators' ratings on the English speaking evaluation forms in the first speaking performance.

## 4   Result and discussion

Cronbach's coefficient alpha was used to check internal reliability. The alpha coefficient for the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension-24 was 0.89, which is satisfactory

for research purposes. Correlation coefficient was used to check the reliability. The agreement of the evaluator shown in correlation coefficient was 0.96.

The hypothesis stated that the treatment of self-monitoring and portfolio would have no effect on college students' communication apprehension. Table 1 (1 and 2) summarize the descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations of the pretest and posttest of college students' communication apprehension, respectively. Table 1 (3) summarizes the descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviation of the posttest of non-portfolio group and portfolio group. Data are grouped by the independent variables of the treatment.

Table 1 No Effect on College Students' Communication Apprehension

| Hypothesis | Test | N | M | SD | t | p |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Hypothesis 1* | Pretest | 30 | 79.11 | 11.17 | 3.29 | 0.44 |
| | Posttest | 30 | 68.39 | 13.11 | | |
| *Hypothesis 2* | Pretest | 30 | 78.27 | 12.59 | 3.16 | 0.12 |
| | Posttest | 30 | 68.89 | 15.42 | | |
| *Hypothesis 3* | Non-portfolio Group | 30 | 68.39 | 13.11 | -1.41 | 0.34 |
| | Portfolio Group | 30 | 68.89 | 15.42 | | |

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.05$; * $p < 0.1$

Independent sample t-test found no significant difference between the conditions at pretest and posttest, $p$=.44, $p$ .05. The statistical results in table 1 (1) indicate that the students in the non-portfolio group had lower communication apprehension at posttest. The result showed that the students' communication apprehension was reduced. The mean score of pretest was 79.11; the mean score of posttest was 68.39.

Independent sample t-test found no significant difference between the conditions at pretest and posttest, $p$=.12, $p$ .05. The statistical results in table 1 (2) indicate that the students in the portfolio group had lower communication apprehension at posttest. The results showed that the students' communication apprehension was reduced. The mean score of the

pretest was 78.27; the mean score of posttest was 68.89.

Independent sample t-test found that there was no significant difference between the non-portfolio group and the portfolio group at posttest, $p=.34$, $p$ .05. The statistical results in table 1 (3) indicate that the students in the non-portfolio group had decreased communication apprehension at posttest. The results showed that the students in the portfolio group did not show more of a decrease in communication apprehension than the students in the non-portfolio group. The mean score of the non-portfolio group was 68.39; the mean score of the portfolio group was 68.89. The scores for communication apprehension in the non-portfolio group and the portfolio group are similar.

We presented the statistical analysis procedures used in this research and the results obtained from these analyses. Using Independent sample t-test, the null hypothesis of non-portfolio students' lowering communication apprehension was rejected. In the non-portfolio group, the students' communication apprehension was lowered. However, the students in the non-portfolio group did not show a significant difference between the pretest and posttest on communication apprehension. The null hypothesis of portfolio students' lowering communication apprehension was rejected. In the portfolio group, the students' communication apprehension was lowered. However, the students in the portfolio group showed no significant difference between the pretest and the posttest on communication apprehension. The null hypothesis of portfolio students' communication apprehension compared with non-portfolio students was retained. The students in the non-portfolio group had lower communication apprehension than the students in the portfolio group. However, there was no significant difference between the non-portfolio group and the portfolio group.

An independent t-test was utilized to determine the difference between the pretest and the posttest on communication apprehension in the non-portfolio group. The researcher found that in the non-portfolio group the students' communication apprehension was lowered.

However, there was no significant reduction of communication apprehension. In the portfolio group, the students' communication apprehension was lowered. However, there was no significant reduction of communication apprehension in the posttest. The researcher presumed that the students in the portfolio group received 14-weeks treatment of self-monitoring and the portfolio. It is hard to lower communication apprehension more significantly. The researcher suggested that the future researchers can spend more time on applying self-monitoring and the portfolios to reduce students' communication apprehension. In addition, according Hebert (2001) argued that videotaping is an effective way to record students' English speaking performance, that they understood their strengths and weaknesses in their performance. Next time they can perform better than before. However, the students in the portfolio group did not have significantly lower communication apprehension than the students in the non-portfolio group. The researcher presumed that it might be because the students had to do too much work (e.g. create their portfolios, complete their assignments of other courses, and download their videos). The students may have been confused by this complicated work. The reasoning is that the students had less motivation to focus on observing their English speaking performance via the videotapes.

## 5 Conclusion

Due to the assessment emphasis alternative processes to the traditional test are being developed as a means to meet accreditation and accountability expectations (Ruhland & Brewer, 2001). A paradigm shift in the past decade has changed the focus in education from a teacher-centered instructional environment to a student-centered one (Brooks, 1997). Hopefully, this study will help EFL teachers increase their understanding of portfolio use from the English majored college students' perspective and provide useful guidance for instructors of English major students.

The findings obtained from the present study may offer the following pedagogical implications. First, if the students could learn from themselves, they could directly know how to modify their learning process. Secondly, findings indicated that through the use of videotaping students' presentations, the students' communication apprehension was lowered. Some participants indicated that they had been willing to observe their videotaped English speaking performance actively. They also agreed that they had reflections about their English presentation after observing their performance. Third, many questions remain unanswered. As a result, portfolios will remain a significant fertile field for exploration by future researchers. Finally, this study was subject to several limitations. Since the study was only conducted in one technological university, the findings may not be generalized to populations in other cultures or educational contexts. It is suggested that future research should involve English major students in other institutional settings.

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