

ENHANCING L2 ENGLISH SPEAKING AND LEARNER AUTONOMY VIA ONLINE SELF- AND PEER-ASSESSMENT

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ABSTRACT

Previous studies have shown positive effects of self-assessment on L2 English learners' speaking performance, but it is unclear whether the same is true with peer assessment. Research is also scarce on the effects of such assessments on the learner's sense of autonomy. This study thus investigated the effects of self- and peer-assessment on L2 English speaking performance and learner autonomy. To take advantage of the information communication technologies in assessment, the online platform VoiceThread was used. While all participants received feedback from the same instructor, only the experimental group, known as the "online assessment group" used VoiceThread to narrate a self-assessment of their own uploaded speech videos and to narrate peer-assessments of their classmates' uploaded speech videos. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected from the 39 participants majoring in English at a 4-year college in Taiwan. Results showed that the experimental group outperformed the control group in both speech performance and sense of learner autonomy. In an open-ended survey, participants in the experimental group also expressed confidence that the online self- and peer-assessment helped them become better English speakers. These findings suggest that with proper guidance, L2 learners can become more proactive in improving their speech performance.

Key Words: L2 English speaking, online self- and peer-assessment, learner autonomy, VoiceThread

INTRODUCTION

Being able to orally present ideas with clarity, coherence, and eloquence has been the ultimate goal of many adult English as foreign/second language (EFL/L2) learners. Public speaking in English stands out as the most challenging aspect of their overall English proficiency to hone. Without English immersion outside of class, EFL learners will have to monitor their own speech strengths and weaknesses proactively and intentionally seek out constructive feedback to keep refining their speaking performance. Merely receiving guidance and feedback from the instructor will not go far as the EFL learners desire to develop their public speaking in English continuously. Unfortunately, many adult EFL learners, including English-major students, do not have the impetus to steer their own language learning journey in the driver's seat. Consequently, a considerable percentage of English-major graduates are not equipped with the English-speaking proficiency they ought to have developed throughout their 4-year language education; neither are they taking active ownership of their language learning.

It is difficult for EFL instructors to constantly monitor students' progress and assess the exact improvement of their oral proficiency across a semester. However, the students themselves are best positioned to reflect upon what skills have been enhanced from lesson to lesson and consolidate those learning experiences (Garrigan, 1997). This shift of responsibility from teachers to students is referred to as "Learner Autonomy." Learner autonomy is generally defined by saying that learners are the guides of their own language learning journey. Empirical studies found learner autonomy beneficial in enhancing motivation (Gardner, 2000; Natri, 2007), promoting learner awareness (Nunan, 2004), and facilitating language development (Usuki, 2002). Alongside these positive findings, some researchers also identified various tasks/activities that help cultivate learner autonomy.

Two important tasks that can be used to enhance learner autonomy are self-assessment and peer-assessment. Tholin (2008) defines self-assessment as a natural component of autonomous learning. It offers the learners a self-monitoring device that provides learners with instant feedback on their language proficiency and allows them to evaluate the usefulness of their learning strategies better. Peer assessment is defined as "an agreement in which individuals consider the amount, level, value, worth, quality, or success of the products or outcomes of learning of peers of similar status" (Topping, 1998,

p.250). Echoing the concept of “learning by assessing,” Topping (2017) noted that peer-assessment encourages the assessors to actively engage in reviewing, summarizing, and commenting, which in turn provides an opportunity to examine self-learning progress through the evaluation process. It also helps nurture student-centered learning and enhance communicative skills among learner groups (Cheng & Warren, 2005).

LITERATURE REVIEW

L2 Speech Performance and Learner Autonomy

Public speaking is a nerve-racking task that most L2 learners shun because speaking itself is such a multifaceted task that involves cognitive, affective, and psychomotor demands on the L2 learners’ developing interlanguage. When delivering a speech, a speaker must remember what to say, think about how to say it, and cope with fluctuating confidence. On top of an intensified cognitive load, the speaker has to cope with emotional burdens. While these cognitive and affective challenges are waging, the speaker must manage to articulate and pronounce his/her L2 sentences/words accurately and clearly. It is imperative to incorporate instructional methods that can respond to the cognitive and affective demands of L2 public speaking and reorient the language learners to the goal-driven mode of language learning. The present study posits that cultivating learner autonomy can boost L2 learners’ motivation by acknowledging that they can control their language learning process, which in turn allows them more cognitive capacities to undertake challenging L2 tasks, such as giving speeches. That is, cultivating learner autonomy renders facilitating effects on easing intrinsic cognitive load. Motivation theories agree that the benefit of enhanced motivation to the L2 proficiency development hinges upon its place in the learning process, as it functions as a propeller that generates enthusiastic attitudes and promotes actions that lead to better learning outcomes (Pourhosein Gilakjani et al., 2012). Research focusing on the role of motivation in cognitive load during the learning process postulates that enhanced motivation increases cognitive resources’ devotion to a task at hand (Chen & Hsieh, 2011).

Learner Autonomy in Language Learning

Defining learner autonomy conclusively is challenging due to its conceptual complexity (Benson, 2007). Holec (1981) defined autonomy as the ability to bear the full range of responsibilities in deciding every single aspect of language learning, such as determining the objectives, defining the progress, and monitoring the learning process. Subsequently, Little (1991) defined autonomy as a capacity for “detachment, critical reflection, decision-making, and independent action” (p. 4). Little (2004) is the first person to extend the definition of learner autonomy to include two affective domains, namely motivation and metacognitive awareness, as additional constructs in conceptualizing learner autonomy. Moreover, Benson (2007) claimed that autonomous language learners take control of how they learn the language. In sum, learner autonomy can be viewed as the learner’s capacity and ability to act independently, take responsibility, set temporary learning objectives, and gradually control their own learning process to achieve their ultimate goals.

Many studies aiming to cultivate students’ learner autonomy via instructional intervention have yielded positive results (Usuki, 2002; Yang, 2003). For example, the students who participated in Usuki’s learner training-incorporated programs considered the program helpful in improving their language and prompting them to become more proactive learners. In the local EFL context, Huang (2015) carried out learner autonomy-based instruction in a university English class and found that the students developed more positive attitudes toward English learning, and their awareness toward their learner responsibility was simultaneously enhanced. In addition, Yang (2003) attempted to guide students to become autonomous language learners by combining strategy training with a content course and reported that students’ overall autonomy, such as goal-setting, self-assessment, and self-evaluation, being explicitly developed. The review of literature indicates the scarcity of empirical studies in investigating the relationship between language learner autonomy and language proficiency.

Self-Assessment in Language Learning

In the quest to cultivate learner autonomy, many researchers consider self-assessment one of the most important tools (Natri, 2007; Spiller, 2012). Self-assessment not only serves as a self-monitoring

mechanism for personal growth but also provides learners with immediate feedback on their language proficiency. Being able to see an increase in proficiency has a motivational effect on the learner. As Gardner (2000) put it, “self-assessment does not always demonstrate success but where it does, even on a small scale, learners’ motivation will be boosted” (p. 52). Little (2004) maintained that learner reflection is a prerequisite for autonomy. Ridley (2003) noted that language learners need to engage in two types of reflection: meta-linguistic and meta-cognitive reflections. Despite numerous studies validating the role of self-assessment in learner autonomy, there has been considerable discussion on whether self-assessment is reliable (Chen, 2008; Joo, 2016). Questioned reliability of self-assessments, however, should not prevent their use. As Nunan (2004) asserted, “While self-assessment has been criticized on the grounds that not all learners are accurate judges of their own ability, this criticism misses the point to some extent, which is to involve learners in their own learning processes” (p. 149).

Studies examining the effects of self-assessment on language learning autonomy and language proficiency reported mixed results. Gholami’s (2016) quasi-experimental study with 49 adult EFL students in Iran indicates that self-assessment helps promote learner autonomy. However, no significant effect was found in improving English proficiency. Natri’s (2007) study identified the positive effects of self- and peer-assessment on motivation and autonomy among college French language learners. The findings highlighted the correlation between self-assessment, motivation, and autonomy, which resonated with Nunan’s (2004) postulation. Moreover, Alibakhshi & Sarani (2014) confirmed the positive effect of self-assessment on EFL learners’ speaking fluency and accuracy.

Peer-Assessment in Language Learning

Given the assumption that assessment promotes learners’ responsibility, peer assessment has gained momentum in global higher education (Boud & Falchikov, 2006). Being used as an alternative assessment method in higher education, peer assessment is credited as a facilitator to more effective learning. For instance, Wu and Miller (2020) explored how a mobile-assisted peer assessment enhanced adult EFL students’ learning experience regarding their speaking skills at a Hong Kong university. The results showed that most students acknowledged the positive effects of mobile-assisted peer feedback while identifying the technological constraints of such

mobile applications. Additionally, Khonbi and Sadeghi (2012) reported that EFL students at an Iranian university found peer-assessment to be significantly more influential than self-assessment.

However, while there is a general agreement on the potential value of peer assessment in promoting learning, whether peer assessment could be addressed as a practical learning facilitator remains questionable (Topping, 2017). Some researchers have implemented online peer assessment to avoid the pitfalls of adopting peer assessment, including the inability of some to give a reliable and valid evaluation of peers' products. This eliminates time and space constraints and enhances participants' engagement by offering flexible assessment alternatives (Swanson & Schlig, 2010).

Information Communication Technology-Mediated Self- and Peer-Assessment

The evolving information communication technologies (ICT) have afforded self- and peer-assessment over the last few decades. L2 research on ICT-enhanced assessment has identified numerous advantages of such assessment alternatives over its face-to-face or paper-and-pencil counterparts, such as providing more formats, overcoming time-and-place constraints, curbing the anxiety of giving instant responses, and offering teachers access for supervising students' engagement and language performance (Chapelle & Voss, 2016). Many studies on computer-mediated assessment in L2 aimed to establish the validity and reliability of such assessment compared to the traditional assessment formats (Craig & Kim, 2010; Nakatsuhara et al., 2017) rather than focusing on students' language development. Teo (2012) is one of the few researchers who has looked into how ICT-mediated assessments impact L2 development and found that the computerized dynamic assessment promoted EFL students' inferential reading skills.

In L2 speaking, some studies reported positive attitudes held by the L2 learners toward ICT-mediated speaking practices (Huang, 2015; Sherine et al., 2020). Nevertheless, only a few explored if ICT-mediated self- or peer-assessment is a viable means to enhance English speaking (Hsu, 2016; Yeh et al., 2019; Çetin Köroğlu, 2021). Hsu (2016) employed an online platform to provide Taiwanese EFL students with extracurricular speaking practice by having students upload recorded speeches to a blog. They also listened to their peers' audios and provided feedback. After analyzing the audios from the first two weeks and the last two weeks, the results show that neither the accuracy nor the fluency was significantly improved. Yeh et al.

(2019) explored the potential of utilizing online blogs to enhance students' speaking performance by investigating the effects of blog-mediated peer feedback among 45 EFL college students. The participants were classified into two groups, labeled "More Progress" (MP) and "Less Progress" (LP), based on the scores from their first and final clips. The results showed that both groups displayed significant progress in their delivery except for vocabulary use and grammar. Nevertheless, only the MP group improved significantly in their video content consisting of introduction, supporting points, and conclusions. The researchers discovered that those responding more enthusiastically to peers' comments demonstrated more progress in the revised video. Recently, Çetin Koroğlu (2021) conducted a study with 52 English-major university students in Turkey and found that the digital formative assessment is more effective than a summative assessment to nurture language learners' speaking skills development. The researcher attributed the better speaking performance identified with the digital formative assessment to the opportunity of learner self-reflection, the switch of focus to learning goals rather than performance ones, and the provision of peer collaboration via task completion. Despite the general approval of the digital formative assessment, the students were dissatisfied with the technological challenges they endured during the assessment process.

This Study

The above studies on the ICT-enhanced assessments affirmed the effects of such assessment alternatives for the sake of testing and evaluating. However, very few addressed whether such assessment has enhanced language learning and nurtured learner autonomy. To fill this void, this study presents an empirical exploration of online self- and peer-assessment as a means to cultivating more proactive, self-aware learners. More specifically, this study explores the effect of using the online platform, VoiceThread, which allows for self- and peer-assessment to be done online, in an Oral Training course for college freshmen majoring in English. The effects to be analyzed are those on students' speech performance and learner autonomy, and on the students' views of using self- and peer-assessment and learner autonomy for their speaking development. Therefore, the following three research questions guided the data collection and analysis of the current study.

1. Are there any differences in the participants' speech performance between those who use VoiceThread for self- and peer-assessment in addition to instructor comments in class and those who only receive instructor comments in class before and after the intervention?
2. Are there any differences in the participants' learner autonomy between those who use VoiceThread for self- and peer-assessment in addition to instructor comments in class, and those who only receive instructor comments in class before and after the intervention?
3. What are the participants' general attitudes toward VoiceThread-mediated self- and peer-assessment?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This mixed-methods study involved one online-assessment group and one control group over the course of 18 weeks. The purpose of this 18-week study was to investigate the effects of online self- and peer-assessment on EFL college students' speech performance and learner autonomy. The design of this mixed-methods study included one experimental group (the online-assessment group), and one control group. The independent variable, or difference between the two groups, was the use of VoiceThread as an intervention. The experimental group used VoiceThread for retrospective assessments, and the control group did not. The dependent variable, or measured outcome, was to look at speaking proficiency, learner autonomy, and the participants' view of online self- and peer-assessment. For the latter, an open-ended survey provided qualitative data.

Pedagogical Context and Participants

This study was situated in two Oral Training I classes taught by the researcher herself. Oral Training I is a year-long, required course for college freshmen majoring in English at a university in central Taiwan. The class, which meets two hours per week, has the objective of developing confidence and skills in public speaking. Two classes

were randomly assigned to the online-assessment group and the control group with 18 in the former and 21 in the latter. Based on converting the participants' in-house placement exam scores to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), the average English proficiency of the 39 participants was between B1 and B2. Except for the integration of online self- and peer-assessment, both classes were kept parallel. Students in both classes were assigned the same speech topics to be delivered in the same weeks and evaluated by the same criteria.

Throughout the research period, the students delivered four speeches of various lengths in class, including a 3-minute speech about a meaningful object, a 4-minute speech about an exceptional experience or a memorable experience, a 5-minute speech about a personal opinion, and a 6-minute informative speech about a topic of student's choice. There were about two to three weeks between one speech assignment and another. During the weeks when speeches were not being delivered, the instructor lectured on the speech genre, addressed preparation tips, demonstrated good and poor examples of the speech, and explained the specific scoring criteria for each speech genre. The students presented their speeches on the speech delivery day, and the digital camera was set to record every student's speech. After every speech delivery, the instructor offered 2- to 3-minute comments on the individual speech and gave every student the same in-class evaluation rubrics.

Implementation of VoiceThread-Mediated Self- and Peer-Assessment

Following the in-class speech delivery, the students in the online-assessment class were required to complete their retrospective, VoiceThread-mediated self- and peer-assessment by the end of the upcoming week. VoiceThread was chosen as an online assessment platform due to its multimodality capacity and user-friendly interface. VoiceThread is a web-based, multimodal, collaborative presentation tool that language instructors can utilize to help students hone their speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills.

To complete the retrospective online self- and peer-assessment, the students in the online-assessment group were instructed to first review their own recorded speeches on VoiceThread, fill-out the written form, and video-record their self-evaluation based on the self-assessment rubrics for the given speech. This involved students talking to the camera about their own speeches and video-recording their oral comments. The peer-assessment was postponed until the

third speech when the participants became more familiar with the self-assessment procedures.

Data Collection and Analysis

To investigate the effects of online self- and peer-assessment on the participants' English speech performance and learner autonomy, both groups took pre-tests and post-tests of a descriptive speech and the Learner Autonomy Questionnaire (LAQ, Gholami, 2016) before and after the intervention. Thirty-nine students took the speaking pre-test and post-test on the same topic, "*The most memorable vacation.*" The participants were provided with the scoring rubrics (Appendix A) that consisted of four areas, including eye-contact (30%), body language (30%), opener (10%) and content (30%). These areas were chosen because they are not only fundamental to a good speech but also ones that beginners can quickly grasp, efficiently hone, and feasibly obtain results. Two graduate students completing eight hours of interrater training scored the 78 pretest and posttest speeches in the beginning and at the end of the study separately. An Intra-class Correlation Coefficient (ICC) of .87 was established to assure interrater reliability. To explore the effects of VoiceThread-mediated, self- and peer-assessment on learner autonomy, the LAQ was administered before and after the intervention. The original questionnaire by Gholami (2016) includes 44 statements based on nine dimensions related to language learning. To establish the validity of LAQ in the local context, two L2 educators in higher education were consulted to modify the original questionnaire. The finalized LAQ (Appendix B) consists of 42 items pertaining to four dimensions of learner autonomy. The LAQ was piloted to establish the reliability coefficient with the following Cronbach's Alphas for the overall LAQ (.95) and its four dimensions, including learner's self-direction (.81), learner's self-perceived responsibility (.90), extracurricular language learning activities (.76), and motivation (.92). A self-designed survey (Appendix C) was distributed to the VoiceThread (VT) participants to probe their views of VT-mediated self- and peer-assessment. To analyze the quantitative pre- and post-tests from the descriptive speech and the LAQ, two ANOVAs and multiple *t*-tests were performed on SPSS 23 to detect any statistical differences before and after the intervention between the VT and the non-VT groups. The VT group's responses to the open-ended survey were content-analyzed to identify any emerging themes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Quantitative data from the speech performance scores and the LAQ were analyzed to identify any effects of VoiceThread-mediated self- and peer-assessment on participants' speech performance and learner autonomy throughout a semester-long intervention. Besides quantitative analyses, responses to the open-ended survey were analyzed to understand the participants' perspective on the online self- and peer-assessment. Tentative answers to the three research questions will be presented below. Following the results, discussions on how the current findings contribute to the existing understanding of online self- and peer-assessment are delineated.

Results and Discussion of Research Question 1

The first research question aimed to determine if there is any difference in the participants' speech performance between those who use VT and those who only receive instructor comments in class. The results suggest that retrospective VoiceThread-mediated self- and peer-assessments have positive effects on the participants' speech performance. To investigate the effects of VT-mediated self- and peer assessment on overall English speech performance and its sub-skills, the mean scores of the pre- and post-speech scores from the VT and the non-VT groups are presented in Table 1. The results show that both groups' mean posttest scores from the overall speech and four sub-skills are higher than those from their pretest. The non-VT group started out with a slightly higher mean for the overall speech score ($M = 74.95$, $SD = 4.72$) than the VT group ($M = 74.56$, $SD = 4.29$). Nevertheless, after a semester-long intervention, the VT group's mean overall speech score ($M = 81.11$, $SD = 5.32$) rose above the non-VT group's ($M = 78.57$, $SD = 5.47$) with substantial differences.

Table 1

Results of Descriptive Statistics and Independent t-tests of Speech Performance and its Sub-Skills between the VT and the Non-VT Groups

	Group	N	Mean	SD	SEM	t	df	P
Pre Eye-Contact	VT	18	22.72	2.82	0.67	-0.52	37	0.60
	non-VT	21	23.14	2.20	0.48			
Pre Body Language	VT	18	22.22	2.41	0.57	0.39	37	0.70
	non-VT	21	21.95	1.88	0.41			
Pre Opener	VT	18	6.94	0.24	0.06	-1.42	37	0.16
	non-VT	21	7.05	0.22	0.05			
Pre Content	VT	18	22.67	1.94	0.46	-0.23	37	0.82
	non-VT	21	22.81	1.91	0.42			
Pre Speech Total	VT	18	74.56	4.29	1.01	-0.20	37	0.84
	non-VT	21	74.95	4.72	1.03			
Post Eye-Contact	VT	18	24.83	2.90	0.68	0.03	37	0.98
	non-VT	21	24.81	2.89	0.63			
Post-Body Language	VT	18	24.17	2.04	0.48	2.13	37	0.04*
	non-VT	21	22.81	1.94	0.42			
Post Opener	VT	18	7.61	0.61	0.14	2.58	37	0.01*
	non-VT	21	7.19	0.40	0.09			
Post Content	VT	18	24.50	1.42	0.34	1.42	37	0.16
	non-VT	21	23.76	1.76	0.38			
Post Speech Total	VT	18	81.11	5.32	1.25	1.46	37	0.15
	non-VT	21	78.57	5.47	1.19			

* $p < .05$.

First, multiple paired-samples t-tests were conducted to examine the simple main effect of time on speech performance for both groups. Table 2 shows that for the VT group, the scores from the overall speech ($t = -7.55, p = .00, d = -1.29$), eye-contact ($t = -3.34, p < .01, d = .82$), body language ($t = -2.34, p < .05, d = -.80$), opener ($t = -4.76, p = .00, d = -1.38$), and content ($t = -5.46, p = .00, d = -1.02$) were

increased significantly after a semester-long intervention. As for the non-VT group, significant differences were identified in the speech total ($t = -3.82, p < .01, d = .68$), eye-contact ($t = -2.63, p < .05, d = .62$), and content ($t = -2.32, p < .05, d = .50$) from the paired-samples t-tests. No significant differences were found in speech opener and body language for the non-VT group. It can be inferred that VoiceThread-mediated self- and peer-assessment considerably improved the participants' body language and speech opener.

Table 2

Results of Paired Samples t-Tests of Speech Performance and its Sub-Skills for the VT Group and Non-VT Group

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t	df	Sig. (two-tailed)
VTPreEyeCon- VTPostEyeCon	-2.11	2.68	.63	-3.34	17	.004**
VTPreBodyLang VTPostBodyLang	-1.83	3.33	.79	-2.34	17	.032*
VTPreOpener- VTPostOpener	-.67	.59	.14	-4.76	17	.000***
VTPreContent VTPostContent	-1.83	1.42	.34	-5.46	17	.000***
VTPreTotal VTPostTotal	-6.56	3.68	.87	-7.55	17	.000***
PreEyeContact PostEyeContact	-1.67	2.90	.63	-2.63	20	.016*
PreBodyLang PostBodyLang	-.86	2.03	.44	-1.93	20	.068
PreOpener PostOpener	-.14	.48	.10	-1.37	20	.186
PreContent PostContent	-.95	1.88	.41	-2.32	20	.031*
PreTotal - PostTotal	-3.62	4.34	.95	-3.82	20	.001**

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

A mixed ANOVA was implemented to investigate the effect of retrospective, VoiceThread-mediated self- and peer-assessment on participants' speech scores. The results indicate there was a significant interaction effect ($F(1, 37) = 5.09, p < .05$, partial eta squared = .12), suggesting that over the research period, the changes in speech performance scores differed significantly between the online-assessment group (VT) and the comparison (Non-VT) group. It can be inferred that the retrospective, VT-mediated self- and peer-assessment has positively influenced the overall speech performance of the online-assessment group. A significant main effect of time on overall speech performance ($F(1, 37) = 61.12, p < .0005$, partial eta squared = .62) was identified with both groups showing an increase in the overall speech performance across two time periods. Furthermore, the main effect of with or without online self- and peer-assessment didn't reach a significant difference in their overall speaking proficiency ($F(1, 37) = .54, p = .47$, partial eta squared = .01), implying no significant difference derived from the intervention with regard to overall speaking proficiency.

Furthermore, ten independent-samples t-tests were carried out to examine the simple main effect of the group (VT versus Non-VT) on the pretests and the posttests of speech performance and its sub-skills. No significant differences between the VT and the non-VT groups in their pretests of overall speech performance ($t = -0.2, p = .84, d = .09$) and its four sub-skills were identified, indicating that both groups started with similar speech performances at the onset of the study. Despite the fact that no significant difference was found in the post overall speaking ($t = 1.46, p = .15, d = .47$) between the two groups, significant differences were identified in the post body language ($t = 2.13, p < .05, d = .68$) and the post opener scores ($t = 2.58, p < .05, d = .81$) between the VT and the non-VT groups. The VT group outperformed the non-VT group in both.

The quantitative analysis indicates the positive influence of online self- and peer-assessment on shaping an L2 speaker's speech performance, which is partially similar to prior research (Çetin Köroğlu, 2021; Hsu, 2016; Yeh et al., 2019). Like the findings by Yeh et al. (2019), and the current participants advanced significantly in their speech delivery. Interestingly, both the MP group in Yeh et al. and the VT group excelled substantially in speech introduction (opener in the current study), body language, and eye-contact, as indicated in their paired-sample t-tests. This commonality suggests that ICT-mediated peer-assessment effectively enhances L2 speakers' speech delivery even though both studies adopted different feedback modes with written comments in Yeh et al. and video-recorded ones

in this study. However, unlike the participants in the LP group (Yeh et al., 2019) who did not show significant enhancement in their speech content as the study concluded, the current participants from both groups made significant differences in their post content scores, as shown in their paired-samples *t*-tests. Unlike Hsu's (2016) study where the Taiwanese EFL pupils did not enhance their speaking accuracy and fluency after taking part in blog-mediated peer feedback interactions, the current study saw total gains in the VT participants' speech performance. Two implementation procedures adopted by this study might contribute to its superior L2 speaking outcomes: adding self-assessment as an antecedent to peer-assessment and utilizing video-recording for self- and peer-assessment. The former familiarizes the L2 speakers with metalinguistic knowledge comprising exemplary speech performance and the latter offers visual representations of speech delivery. The provision of visual representation is particularly relevant and instrumental for developing L2 speaking.

Results and Discussion of Research Question 2

The second research question investigated the differences in the participants' learner autonomy between those who use VoiceThread for self- and peer-assessment and those who only receive instructor comments in class. A significant difference was identified in the paired-samples *t*-test of LAQ among the VT group participants, whereas no such difference was found with the non-VT group. To investigate if the retrospective, VoiceThread-mediated self- and peer-assessments have any effect on the participants' learner autonomy, the mean scores of the pre- and post-LAQ from the VT and the non-VT groups were calculated and are presented in Table 3. The non-VT group started with a slightly higher mean of LAQ score ($M = 2.81$, $SD = .24$) than the VT group ($M = 2.73$, $SD = .25$). Nevertheless, after a semester-long intervention of VT-mediated, self- and peer-assessment, the VT group's mean LAQ score ($M = 2.90$, $SD = .32$) rose slightly above the non-VT group's ($M = 2.89$, $SD = .33$).

Table 3

Results of Descriptive Statistics and Independent t-tests of Learner Autonomy and its Sub-Constructs between the VT and the Non-VT Groups

	Group	N	Mean	SD	SEM	t	df	P
Pre Self-Direction	VT	18	2.87	0.32	0.07	-0.43	37	.67
	non-VT	21	2.90	0.30	0.07			
Pre Learner Responsibility	VT	18	2.74	0.32	0.08	0.63	37	.53
	non-VT	21	2.68	0.25	0.05			
Pre Outside Activities	VT	18	2.52	0.40	0.09	2.59	37	.01*
	non-VT	21	2.82	0.33	0.07			
Pre Motivation	VT	18	2.71	0.38	0.09	1.25	37	.22
	non-VT	21	2.86	0.37	0.08			
Pre Total	VT	18	2.73	0.25	0.06	1.07	37	.29
	non-VT	21	2.81	0.24	0.05			
Post Self-Direction	VT	18	3.06	0.34	0.08	-0.07	37	.95
	non-VT	21	3.06	0.42	0.09			
Post Learner Responsibility	VT	18	2.87	0.34	0.08	1.54	37	.13
	non-VT	21	2.70	0.35	0.07			
Post Outside Activities	VT	18	2.71	0.37	0.09	1.24	37	.22
	non-VT	21	2.86	0.42	0.09			
Post Motivation	VT	18	2.90	0.52	0.12	-0.28	37	.78
	non-VT	21	2.95	0.48	0.10			
Post Total	VT	18	2.90	0.32	0.08	.08	37	.93
	non-VT	21	2.89	0.32	0.07			

* $p < .05$.

First, multiple paired-samples *t*-tests were carried out to investigate the simple main effect of time on LAQ for both groups. Table 4 shows that for the VT group, the ratings from the overall LAQ ($t = -3.01, p < .01, d = -.57$), self-direction ($t = -2.62, p < .05, d = -.55$),

learner responsibility ($t = -2.53, p < .05, d = -.38$), and motivation ($t = -2.31, p < .05, d = -.38$) were increased significantly after a semester-long online self- and peer-assessment. Outside class activity is the only construct that didn't show a significant difference from the paired-samples t-test. As for the non-VT group, no significant difference was identified from the paired-samples t-tests except for the sub-construct of self-direction ($t = -2.27, p < .05, d = -.42$). The results show that with the VT group, there was a significant difference in the pre- and post LAQ scores. However, no significant difference was reported with the non-VT group.

Table 4

Results of Paired Samples t-Tests of Learner Autonomy and its Sub-Skills for the VT Group and Non-VT Groups

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t	df	Sig. (two-tailed)
VT PreTotal-PostTotal	-.18	.25	.06	-3.01	17	.008**
VT PreSelf-Direction PostSelf-Direction	-.19	.31	.07	-2.62	17	.018*
VT PreLearnerRes - PostLearnerRes	-.13	.23	.05	-2.53	17	.022*
VT PreOutActivity - PostOutActivity	-.19	.40	.09	-2.03	17	.058
VT PreMotivation - PostMotivation	-.20	.36	.09	-2.31	17	.034*
PreTotal-PostTotal	-.07	.23	.05	-1.54	20	.141
PreSelf-Direction PostSelf-Direction	-.16	.31	.07	-2.27	20	.035*
PreLearnerRes - PostLearnerRes	-.02	.27	.06	-0.34	20	.74
PreOutActivity - PostOutActivity	-.02	.39	.09	-0.25	20	.81
PreMotivation - PostMotivation	-.20	.36	.08	-1.12	20	.28

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

A mixed ANOVA was implemented to investigate the effect of

with or without retrospective VoiceThread-mediated self- and peer-assessment on participants' scores from the LAQ across two time periods. The results indicate there was no significant interaction effect ($F(1, 37) = 1.56, p = .22$, partial eta squared = .04), indicating that over the course of one semester, the changes in the LAQ scores did not differ significantly between the VT and the non-VT groups. There was a significant main effect of time on LAQ ($F(1, 37) = 11.63, p < .01$, partial eta squared = .24) with both groups showing an increase in the LAQ across two time periods. In addition, the main effect of with or without online self- and peer-assessment didn't reach a significant difference in the LAQ ($F(1, 37) = .11, p = .75$, partial eta squared = .003).

Next, ten independent sample t-tests were carried out as follow-up tests to investigate the simple main effect of group (VT versus Non-VT) on the pretests and the posttests of LAQ and its sub-constructs. The results show no significant differences between the VT and the non-VT groups in their pretests of overall learner autonomy ($t = 1.07, p = .29, d = .33$), indicating that both groups began with a similar degree of language learning autonomy. A significant difference was detected, however, in the aspect of outside class activity between the VT and the non-VT groups ($t = 2.59, p < .05, d = .82$), indicating that the non-VT group started with a higher degree of engaging in outside class language learning activities than the VT group. However, no such difference was identified in the posttest of this sub-construct ($t = 1.24, p = .22, d = .37$), which implies that taking part in the self- and peer-assessment helps the online-assessment group become more attuned to outside class language learning activities. There is no significant difference in the posttests of the overall LAQ ($t = .08, p = .93, d = .03$) and the other three sub-constructs.

Similar to previous research findings that self-assessment has positive impacts on learner autonomy (Gholami, 2016) and motivation (Natri, 2007), this study also saw a significant difference in the participants' overall LAQ and its three sub-constructs (self-direction, learner responsibility, and motivation) after engaging in VoiceThread-mediated self-and peer-assessment. Self-direction is the only dimension in which the present study saw a significant difference, whereas Gholami's study did not. There are two plausible explanations for this difference. First, the adult EFL learners in Gholami's experimental group were asked to evaluate themselves and their classmates based on a 0 to 2 scale, which suffices as vague criteria and is uncondusive to self-direction. In contrast, this study offered detailed descriptions for various aspects of good speech along

with open-ended questions prompting L2 speakers to take remedial actions for the next speech. For instance, the post-speech reflection asked, “Which areas are your weakest?” and “What specific changes will you make to improve those weaknesses?”. When the students identified posture as one of the aspects to be improved, they stood in the mirror and monitored their posture during the speech preparation. Second, instead of implementing self-/peer-assessment following a traditional paper-and-pencil format inside the classroom, the present study situated self-/peer-assessment in an online interactive milieu where the learners carried out self- and peer-assessment outside of their class on their own time. The lack of clearly-stated self-assessing criteria/rubrics compounded with the assigned in-class assessment tasks may truncate the potentiality of cultivating self-directing L2 speakers.

Results and Discussion of Research Question 3

The last research question explored the participants’ general attitudes toward VoiceThread-mediated self- and peer-assessment and found positive feedback. To gain insight into how the VT participants perceived their semester-long engagement in the VoiceThread-mediated self- and peer-assessments, an open-ended survey was distributed to 18 students at the end of the semester. Most participants applauded the integration of VoiceThread-mediated self- and peer-assessment into their regular speech training course. They considered such intervention conducive to improving their English-speaking proficiency, especially in the anticipation that the pandemic might affect in-person classes. Pseudonyms are used when quoting the participants’ responses to illustrate the findings.

There were more benefits than drawbacks mentioned by the VoiceThread participants. On the one hand, the cohort applauded the convenience of engaging in self-reflection and peer-commenting without time and space limitation, the documentation of their developing speech performance, and the availability of a multimodal feedback format. For instance, Iris commented on how she could asynchronously interact with her teammates via VoiceThread when the semester was cut short, which also increased her speaking practice frequency. Paul mentioned that he had benefited tremendously from watching his own and his teammates’ speeches. He said, “I saw my flawed posture, intonation, and eye contact. Then, I noticed my teammates’ better performance and revisited their videos several times before my next speech. At the end, I think I did better than my

first speech.” Three quarters of the students acknowledged that recording their self-reflection and peer-commenting gave them additional speaking practice which was helpful. Some of them mentioned how the VT-mediated reflection was an instrumental part in helping them feel capable of self-improvement. However, the participants also identified some problems they had when reviewing the speeches of, responding to, and interacting with their teammates through VT. Technological pitfalls reigned as the foremost issue. Six students pointed out how slow the uploading and downloading speeds were. Eric even labeled VT “user unfriendly,” as he had to spend the entire evening finishing up reviewing and commenting on his own and his teammates’ recorded speeches. Technological drawbacks aside, some participants mentioned the time-consuming nature of video-recording their comments, the interruptions that would occur when recording in their dorm room where their roommates are roaming around, and the tug of war between being truthful or being friendly while evaluating/commenting on classmates’ speeches. For example, Jerry complained, “I don’t know if I should be 100% honest pointing out my friends’ many errors or just try to be gentle . . . Every time I recorded my comments, I deleted it so many times before submitting it because I wanted to do it perfectly.” However, this seemingly negative comment turned out to be the contributing factor for their sharpened understanding of a good speech and improved speech performance.

When asked whether online self- and peer-assessment can replace in-person and instructor assessment if they could only meet online, fourteen participants considered online self- and peer-assessment a practical complement but not an ideal substitute for in-person instructor feedback. However, they also acknowledged the viability of online assessment alternatives if the pandemic were to strike down in-person instruction. In addition, when asked to compare self-assessment with peer-assessment, eight out of 18 participants considered peer-commenting to be most helpful, whereas four regarded self-reflection as most helpful in enhancing their English-speaking skills. Six out of 18 participants deemed both equally helpful in improving their speaking proficiency. Those who voted for peer-assessment explained their rationales as follows: “Observing others’ mistakes reminds me of not making the same ones, and it’s difficult to pinpoint my own mistakes,” “It’s embarrassing to watch my own speech. I would rather watch my classmates’ and take some notes on it,” and “My teammates’ comments and suggestions are really helpful and objective. I also remain more objective when I evaluate other’s speeches than when critiquing my own.” Participants who considered

self-reflection/assessment most helpful believed that self-assessment forced them to face their own weaknesses bravely and propelled them to do something about them. They also considered it more truthful and practical. As for those who saw both equally important, they believed both self- and peer-assessment should go hand-in-hand as the one helps L2 speakers become aware of their own strengths and weaknesses and the other offers tips and suggestions from the audience's perspective for self-improvement. Many participants admitted the initial awkwardness in watching their own speech video for the first time. However, as time went by, they became more comfortable reviewing their own speeches. In sum, eighteen VT participants recognized the possibility of owning their language learning and benefitted from engaging in the formative process of improving their L2 speech via VoiceThread-mediated self- and peer-assessment.

Previous studies have reported positive attitudes toward ICT-mediated speaking (Sherine et al., 2020; Huang, 2015). Likewise, the current participants developed favorable opinions toward VoiceThread-mediated assessments. Most participants affirmed this ICT-mediated self- and peer-assessment to be helpful in overcoming time/space constraints, allowing multimodal feedback, keeping track of their language learning progress, and facilitating interactions between assessors and assessees (Chapelle & Voss, 2016). Topping (2017) pointed out that the effects of peer assessment depend on assessors' and assessees' investment of time, effort, and practice in tasks. The current participants invested extensively in giving their comments to their peers, which resulted in elevated speech performances and learner autonomy. Most participants watched their own recorded speeches at least twice. What is worth noting is that they usually video-recorded their feedback more than twice until they were satisfied with their suggestions. They also took the peer comments into serious consideration when preparing for the next speech. It is evident that the current participants' earnest investment in peer-assessment paid off as reflected in their significantly enhanced speech performances and their nurtured learner autonomy. Nevertheless, resonating with the technological glitches identified by the previous studies (Çetin Koroğlu, 2021; Wu & Miller, 2020), the current participants complained about the poor Internet connection and the prolonged uploading/downloading process. Technological prevalence with 5G might help alleviate the glitches and fully benefit language learners through ICT-mediated self- and peer-assessment.

PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The overall findings echo the initial postulation made by this study that nurturing learner autonomy via self- and peer-assessment can boost L2 learners' sense of autonomy by acknowledging that they can have control over their language learning process, which in turn offers them more cognitive capacity to tackle L2 speaking. The study results suggest that VoiceThread-mediated self- and peer-assessment helped the participants enhance their speech performance and cultivate their learner autonomy by having more opportunities to be reflective about their own learning than their peers in the control group. The statistical analyses show that the VT group's overall speech performance surpassed that of the non-VT group after the semester-long intervention. Such intervention is particularly beneficial in sharpening the participants' body language and speech opener, as shown in the significant differences identified in the post independent t-tests between the two groups. Moreover, the intervention helps cultivate the L2 speakers' learner autonomy. Although the results of a mixed ANOVA show no significant interaction effect of time and treatment on the LAQ, the paired-samples test of the VT-group indicates a significant difference in learner autonomy after a semester-long intervention, which was not found in the non-VT group. Despite some technological and logistical hindrances, such as time-consuming or unsuccessful uploading and Internet glitches, most VoiceThread participants commended VoiceThread as a useful platform for speech self-improvement.

Several pedagogical implications can be derived from the current findings. First, retrospective self-reflections/peer-feedback is as instrumental as on-the-spot instructor comments in enhancing adult L2 students' speech performances, as shown in the statistical analysis result. Instructor comments are usually the single source of feedback for many oral training courses in an L2 context. Present results indicate that given convenient access and proper guidelines, adult L2 students can provide each other with constructive comments. Second, allowing students opportunities to engage in self-reflection and peer-commenting paves the way for them to become autonomous language learners. Their confidence and motivation to sharpen their speaking proficiency skills were improved as a result of engaging in self- and peer-commenting via VoiceThread. Third, VoiceThread's multimodality offered many conveniences for such formative assessments. There are many other multimodal platforms available for L2 teachers' exploration. Finally, well-designed self-reflection and

peer commenting guidelines are the prerequisite for such intervention. The success of the current endeavor can be attributed to the carefully planned formative evaluation design throughout the semester.

Despite the positive findings in speech performance and learner autonomy, the current study is not without limitations. The generalizability of the current results to other L2 settings is not warranted due to the small sample size of 39. This study evaluated L2 speakers' speech performance instead of general English-speaking proficiency, which is a predominant indicator of L2 speaking and more applicable to general L2 learners. Using the speaking proficiency guidelines to gauge the effects on language may render more extensive applications. It will be informative to L2 instructors to investigate the effects of different online platforms suitable for self-/peer-assessing speaking.

Before closing, there are some questions for educators who see the positive influence of online self- and peer-assessment on cultivating learner autonomy but remain skeptical toward its practical implementation. How long will the project-conjured learner autonomy last? To what extent will the participants who took charge of their speech-making progress continue to proactively monitor, evaluate, reevaluate, and reorient their language learning journey? How many of them will be able to transfer their self-directing, self-monitoring, and self-motivating schemes to other language learning tasks at hand? In light of the positive findings from this study, the researcher advocates that reflective self-assessment becomes the standard formative assessment for language learning courses to continuously nurture learners' autonomy, especially when the current pandemic calls for evolutionary change in language assessment and feedback. These changes will require language learners to take on a more autonomous role and the teachers to remain as a guide on the side. It might be worthwhile to provide both learners and teachers with a new assessment/feedback literacy.

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APPENDIX

Appendix A. Speech Evaluation Rubrics

Aspect	Score	Comments
<p>Eye contact (30)</p> <p>24-30 Makes consistent eye contact throughout the speech</p> <p>21-23 Has eye contact but not consistently; looks down at paper or at something else besides audience somewhat often</p> <p>18-20 Makes some eye contact but not often; looks down or up frequently</p> <p>12-17 Almost no eye contact at all; may just be like reading from paper</p>		
<p>Body language (30)</p> <p>24-30 Looks confident, comfortable, and enthusiastic; uses gestures appropriately and naturally; looks like speaker wants to give the speech very much</p> <p>21-23 Looks somewhat stiff but still fairly comfortable; very few gestures, and they are somewhat unnatural; looks like speaker would like to tell audience about something</p> <p>18-20 Clearly nervous but still manages to give clear speech; no gestures; looks like speaker has very little energy</p> <p>12-17 Body language interferes with speech; no</p>		

gestures; looks like speaker feels giving speech is real torture; no energy		
Opener (10) 8-10 Interesting beginning; clearly attracts audience 7 Beginning is clear but not so vivid; 6 Simply announce the topic 5 No intention to draw in audience		
Content (30) 24-30 Vivid and memorable content; clearly spoken and easy to understand 21-23 Content is understandable but perhaps not so memorable or vivid 18-20 Parts of content are not understandable because it sounds written for eye, not ear, or the speech is a little short 12-17 Very short; content is hard to understand		

Appendix B. Learner Autonomy Questionnaire (Modified from Hamid Gholami, 2016)

Name: _____ Time of the Class: 10-12 noon

Age: _____ English Experience: _____

Direction: *Please check the one closest answer to the following questions according to your true cases. Thank you very much for your help and patience.*

4= Always True; 3= Mostly True; 2= Rarely True; 1= Never True

	Item Statement	1	2	3	4
	Self-Direction				
1.	I usually set my own goal for each semester.				
2.	I use other English books and resources on my own will.				
3.	When I hear someone talking in English, I listen very carefully.				
4.	I want to talk in English with my family or friends.				
5.	I enjoy learning a grammatical point on my own.				
6.	While learning English, I like activities in which I can learn on my own.				
7.	I like trying new things while I am learning English.				
8.	I am afraid that I won't learn a topic if the teacher doesn't explain it in the English class.				
9.	I learn better when the teacher explains something on the board.				
10.	I use my own methods to learn vocabulary in				

	English.				
11.	I feel confident when the teacher is beside me while I am learning English.				
12.	My teacher always has to guide me in learning English.				
Learner Responsibility					
13.	While learning English, I would like my teacher to repeat grammatical rules.				
14.	I feel happy when my teacher explains very detail of English.				
15.	In the future, I would like to continue learning English on my own/ without a teacher.				
16.	In the English lesson, I like projects where I can work with other students.				
17.	I can learn the English grammar on my own/ without needing a teacher.				
18.	If I cannot learn English in the classroom, I can learn working on my own.				
19.	I like learning English words by looking them up in a dictionary.				
20.	I like my teacher to correct my errors when I make a mistake.				
21.	I want the teacher to give us the words that we are to learn.				
22.	I would like to use cassettes/ video/ CD's in the foreign languages, outside of the classroom.				
23.	In fact, I like to listen and read in English outside of the classroom.				

24.	I would like to select the materials for my foreign language lessons.				
Learning Activities Outside Class					
25.	I would like to share the responsibility of deciding what to do in the English lesson.				
26.	I know how I can learn English the best.				
27.	If I haven't learnt something in my English lesson, I am responsible for it.				
28.	I would like to choose the content of what is to be taught in the English lesson.				
29.	The teacher should give me regular test.				
30.	I like English because I like it to speak English.				
31.	I know my weaknesses and go for it.				
32.	I believe that I will reach a good level in the English language.				
Motivation					
33.	Every time I have an assignment, the teacher should score or correct it.				
34.	I think that I learn English better when I work on my own.				
35.	My language learning success depends on what I do in classroom.				
36.	I find it more useful to work with my friends than working on my own for the English lesson.				
37.	I have my own ways of testing how much I have learned.				
38.	I can be a fluent English speaker in the future.				
39.	I try to understand the jokes and riddles of the				

	foreign language.				
40.	I also investigate the culture of the foreign language I am learning.				
41.	I also investigate the idioms and sayings of the foreign language I am learning.				
42.	I ask people who have lived abroad about the lifestyles of the people living there.				

Appendix C. Opinions on VoiceThread-mediated Self- and Peer-Assessment

I. Open-ended Questions

1. In general, what are the benefits that you saw in using VoiceThread in your oral class? Please name at least 3 things.

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

2. What do you find most difficult in using VoiceThread? Please name some difficulties you have encountered.

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

3. You had the opportunity to do both self-reflection and peer-commenting. Which one did you find most helpful in improving your English speaking ability? Alternately, you might find both equally helpful. Please explain your reasons.

4. How many times do you usually go back to watch your recorded oral assignments from VoiceThread? Would you say you now become more comfortable watching your own speeches? Please explain your answers.

II. Questionnaire: Please indicate your agreement or disagreement with the following statements

1: Strongly disagree; 2: Disagree; 3: Agree; 4: Strongly agree

Item	1	2	3	4
1. I find it interesting to use VoiceThread for English speaking activities.				
2. I find it hard to become familiar with using VoiceThread.				
3. I find it difficult to use VoiceThread for peer commenting task.				
4. I want to learn more about how to use electronic devices to learn English speaking.				
5. I want to carry out more English speaking practice activities on VoiceThread.				
6. I find the multimedia features on VoiceThread help me improve my speaking skills.				
7. Using VoiceThread is a convenient way to conduct peer commenting.				
8. VoiceThread provides me an opportunity to practice speaking English with my teammates.				
9. Using VoiceThread relieves my anxiety of giving peer comments.				
10. Using VoiceThread increases the effectiveness in practicing how to speak better.				