THE EFFECTS OF ASYNCHRONOUS ONLINE PEER-TEACHER FEEDBACK IN A THAI EFL PUBLIC SPEAKING CLASS

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Abstract

The teaching and learning of English speaking has recently posed several challenges due to the coronavirus pandemic. One of the challenges is that it is nearly impossible to conduct the teaching and learning in the physical classroom, affecting how students are given immediate feedback to. Teachers have to find different methods and techniques to use in their speaking classes during this situation, for example, giving live virtual presentations, pre-recording video clips and uploading them to online classrooms, giving online comments and feedback, and so on. In this mixed-methods study, the purposes were to investigate the effects of giving asynchronous online peer and teacher feedback to students after they had uploaded their three types of speech video clips, i.e., informative, persuasive, and entertaining, to the Google Classroom and to explore the students' attitudes toward the two types of feedback. Participants were 25 fourth-year undergraduate students, majoring in English for International Communication at a university in northeastern region of Thailand. It was found that although the second speech video clip scores were higher than the first speech video clip scores, students still had difficulties in providing sufficient and specific peer feedback on the areas of organization and research citations, impacting growth in their speaking skills. Moreover, findings from the semi-structured interviews revealed that students viewed the two types of feedback positively. It helped them to gradually develop thinking and critiquing skills, and they also demonstrated increased confidence in speaking after they had received both types of feedback. This study proposes opportunities for discussion, i.e., providing sufficient peer feedback training and meaningful writing assignments, to hone students critiquing skills, especially on the areas of organization and research citations.

Keywords: Peer feedback, teacher feedback, asynchronous feedback, EFL speaking.

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

The use of feedback in public speaking classrooms has been known to enhance students' English speaking performances. Whether the feedback is given to students immediately or later, it does help to sharpen their skills to revise and improve their future speeches as well as boost their confidence in learning and speaking (Smith & King, 2004). However, due to the coronavirus pandemic, giving face-to-face peer and teacher feedback has been switched to online to avoid students and teachers contacting with the disease. Although the feedback has to be given online, it still offers a number of benefits, for example, providing less threatening environments, overcoming time and place constraints, and reducing pressure from peers and teachers (MacLeod, 1999; Yeh, Tseng & Chen, 2019). Because of these benefits, it can be interesting to study the effects of giving asynchronous online peer and teacher feedback to students in an EFL public speaking class where students can take more time at their own pace to evaluate their peers' work, while the teacher can also provide additional feedback to students so that they can learn and benefit more from such feedback to help them improve their speaking skills.

1.2. Purpose of study

Giving either synchronous or asynchronous online peer feedback is beneficial to students when the feedback is given clearly and honestly (Ene & Upton, 2018). However, students may find it difficult to provide peer feedback that is specific, straightforward and clear on different areas and the feedback may not be much beneficial to their peers. Hence, the purposes of this study were to investigate the effects of giving asynchronous online peer feedback followed by teacher feedback to students after they

had uploaded their speech video clips to the Google Classroom and to explore the students' attitudes toward the two types of feedback so that it might help teachers to understand better of how to apply these two types of feedback in any public speaking classes.

2. Methods

2.1. Research design and participants

This research employed a mixed-methods design. First and second speech video clips of the three types of speeches, i.e., informative, persuasive, and entertaining, were utilized as tools to investigate the effects of the asynchronous online peer-teacher feedback given to the students. Moreover, a semi-structured interview was used to find out the students' attitudes toward the two types of feedback. The participants in the study were 25 fourth-year undergraduate students, majoring in English for International Communication at a university in the northeastern region of Thailand. The students had taken an English Public Speaking Course for a period of 15 weeks in the first semester of the academic year 2020. The participants were both male and female, aged 21-24. Their English abilities were mixed.

2.2. Data collection

To collect the data, the participants attended the 15-week course of study where the first week (3 hours) was devoted to training the students to give feedback. Peer feedback checklist, examples of peer feedback, and speaking rubric were introduced and given to the students to aid them during the training. The students then watched the three types of speech video clips and attempted to provide feedback along with the teacher's help. The following 7 weeks were devoted to learning informative, persuasive, and entertaining speeches. After the students had learned each type of speech, they were asked to make their first and second speech video clips. To make video clips, the teacher assigned the students to prepare each of their first speech video clips one week prior to uploading them to the Google Classroom. After uploading their first speech video clips to the Google Classroom for first evaluation, at least two students gave feedback to their peers and followed by teacher feedback. After receiving the feedback from both peers and the teacher, the students revised and improved their first speech video clips as well as their speaking scripts (if any) and re-uploaded them to the Google Classroom for second evaluation within the same week. The teacher marked the students' first and second speech video clips using an adapted speaking rubric from Rooney (1998). It was worth noting that not all of the students gave peer feedback and submitted their speaking scripts to the Google Classroom. For the last 7 weeks of the course were related to debating and interviewing, which were not included in this study.

Moreover, the semi-structured interview was conducted with 6 students including 2 high, 2 intermediate, and 2 low-proficiency students. The interviewees were asked to address about problems with giving asynchronous online peer feedback, methods to cope with problems when giving peer feedback, and attitudes toward using both peer and teacher feedback.

2.3. Data analysis

Descriptive statistics were employed to calculate the data obtained from the first and second speech video clips. The statistical methods used to analyze the data were percentage, mean, and standard deviation. The total score of each type of speech video clip was 10 points.

In addition, data obtained from the interviews were analyzed using content analysis. It was used to probe into three main areas as mentioned earlier. After that, data were transcribed, tallied, and reported.

3. Results

To determine the effects of asynchronous online peer-teacher feedback on students' speaking skills, the scores from the students' first and second speech video clips were analyzed and compared. The results showed that the students' average scores were increased after they had received asynchronous online peer and teacher feedback. Table 1 shows a comparison between the first and second informative speech video clip scores.

Table 1. Comparison between the first and second informative speech video clip scores.

Informative speech video clip scores	Mean	SD	Percentage
First speech video clip	5.36	0.74	53.60
Second speech video clip	6.46	1.13	64.60

From Table 1, it shows that the average score of the students' second speech video clips was increased 1.10 points (11%), from 5.36 to 6.46. Although the increased average score was not high, it shows that the feedback helped to improve the students' speaking skills.

As for the average score of the students' second persuasive speech video clips, it was also increased 0.98 points (9.8%). The average score of the first video clip was 6.52, while the average score of the second video clip was 7.50. It shows that the students slightly improved after they had received the feedback. Table 2 shows a comparison between the first and second persuasive speech video clip scores.

Table 2. Comparison between the first and second persuasive speech video clip scores.

Persuasive speech video clip scores	Mean	SD	Percentage
First speech video clip	6.52	0.91	65.20
Second speech video clip	7.50	0.83	75.00

Moreover, the average score of the students' second entertaining speech video clips was slightly increased 0.36 points (3.6%), from 7.60 to 7.96. Although the increased score was not very high at all, it was evident that there was an improvement in the students' public speaking skills because of the feedback. Table 3 shows a comparison between the first and second entertaining speech video clip scores.

Table 3. Comparison between the first and second entertaining speech video clip scores.

Entertaining speech video clip scores	Mean	SD	Percentage
First speech video clip	7.60	1.05	76.00
Second speech video clip	7.96	0.35	79.60

Regarding the results of the interviews, generally, the students viewed the asynchronous online peer and teacher feedback positively. The feedback was beneficial and essential as it helped them to develop thinking and critiquing skills. It also helped them to see their strengths and weaknesses which could boost their confidence to speak in public. The following are results of the interviews.

In terms of problems with giving asynchronous online peer feedback, the students, irrespective of proficiency level, addressed that giving online peer feedback was quite difficult. Although they were trained to provide peer feedback in the first week of the course of study, they revealed that they did not have enough experience and knowledge to comment and give feedback to others. It was difficult to detect errors and areas to suggest to their peers for improvement, especially on the areas of organization and research citations. Moreover, some of the students addressed that they did not want to offend their peers as giving peer feedback might cause loss-of-face. In some cases, the downside of peer feedback itself was that the feedback was not constructive and straightforward, making it too difficult for them to improve their speeches. The following are examples of the students' responses on giving peer feedback that could represent the majority of the students.

Giving peer feedback was difficult. I could not tell what areas that my friends should improve, especially on the areas of organization and research citations. (Student #1 – Low)

I think the problem of giving online peer feedback was that I did not dare to give honest feedback to my friends. They would know that I was the one who gave the feedback because they could see my name when I left comments. I did not want to hurt their feelings. (Student #2 – Intermediate)

I think giving peer feedback was not easy because I did not have enough experience and knowledge to comment others. It was difficult to provide feedback on the area of organization as I did not know the differences between the preview and the introduction of the speech clearly. (Student #3 – High)

Regarding methods the students used to cope with problems when giving asynchronous online peer feedback, they addressed that they re-watched the speech video clips, re-read the writing scripts, used peer feedback checklist, and asked their peers for content clarification directly.

As for the low-proficiency students, they revealed that they used peer feedback checklist to help them give feedback. They highlighted that the checklist was an essential tool for them to use to provide feedback, especially when they did not know what feedback they should give to their peers.

As for the intermediate and high-proficiency students, they revealed that they re-watched the speech video clips and re-read the speaking scripts several times. By re-watching the clips and re-reading the scripts a few times, they would be able to detect some problems on the areas of content and ideas and delivery in particular. However, they also revealed that if they still could not find any problems from the

clips, they would ask their peers for clarification directly. This would help them cope with problems with giving feedback better. The following are examples of the students' responses on how they coped with problems when giving online peer feedback that could represent the majority of the students.

I used peer feedback checklist that the teacher gave to me at the beginning of the course. It was a beneficial tool that helped me to follow and give feedback to my friends. (Student #4 – Low)

I usually re-watched the clips or re-read the speaking scripts several times to help me detect errors from my friends' work. But before I gave feedback to my friends, I would ask them for permission to give feedback first so that I did not upset their feelings. (Student #5 – Intermediate)

When I did not understand the video clips, I re-watched them a few times. If I still could not find any problems in the clips, I would ask my friends for clarification directly. This helped me understand the content and ideas in their work better and I could give feedback to them. (Student #6 – High)

In terms of students' attitudes toward using both asynchronous online peer and teacher feedback, the students, irrespective of proficiency level, reported that the combination of using peer and teacher feedback was useful. Giving peer feedback helped them to develop thinking and critiquing skills. They had to think carefully and critically to provide useful feedback to their peers. Moreover, with receiving peer feedback, which was most emphasized the areas of delivery and content, the students knew about problems with their performances and ideas, while additional teacher feedback helped them learn more about problems related to speech organization and research citations. This aided them to fix their problems occurred in their work more accurately and directly. Although the students revealed that teacher feedback was more valuable and trustable than peer feedback, the combination of the two types of feedback did help them see their strengths and weaknesses, which could boost their confidence to revise their work and to speak in public. The following are examples of the students' responses on using both peer and teacher feedback that represent the majority of the students.

I could see problems with my performances such as pronunciation and body gestures when I got feedback from peers. Besides peer feedback, I could fix my problems with speech organization from teacher feedback. The combination of peer and teacher feedback was useful because it helped me feel more confident to revise my work and to speak in public. (Student #1 – Low)

The combination of using peer and teacher feedback was useful. I had to think a lot to come up with useful feedback to give to my friends. Although some feedback that I received from my friends was useful too, I preferred feedback from the teacher because it was constructive and direct to the point. I was more confident when I received feedback from the teacher than peers. (Student #2 – Intermediate)

I think it was good to have both types of feedback. Giving peer feedback helped me learn to think and critique others. Although the feedback from peers might not be very useful, it helped us to be aware of the areas that might cause problems in the future. If I could not use feedback from peers, I could still use feedback from the teacher. Thus, receiving both types of feedback was good. (Student #6 – High)

In short, asynchronous online peer and teacher feedback were beneficial methods to employ in this public speaking class. The students could benefit from both types of feedback, leading to a slight improvement on their speaking skills and having more confidence to revise their work and to speak in public. Although, in some cases, students might find it difficult to provide constructive and straightforward peer feedback on the areas of organization and research citations in particular, peer feedback was still necessary and should be employed in any public speaking classes as it helped students to develop thinking and critiquing skills, which would benefit them more in the long-run.

4. Discussion

This study investigates the effects of asynchronous online peer-teacher feedback on students' speaking skills in the EFL Public Speaking Class as well as their attitudes toward the combination of the two types of feedback. Results from the students' speech video clips indicate a slight improvement on their speaking skills. Results from the semi-structured interviews also indicate positive attitudes of the students toward the combination of the two types of feedback. This suggests that asynchronous online peer-teacher feedback should be employed in any public speaking classes.

4.1. Exposing to sufficient peer feedback training

Evidence from the students' scores indicated a slight improvement on the students' speaking skills. This suggests that the students might not have exposed to peer feedback training long enough. Despite being trained, the training period might not be sufficient to help them feel confident to give constructive and straightforward feedback to their peers on the areas of organization and research citations in particular. Studies (Min, 2016; Weerathai & Belardo, 2020) revealed that students should be exposed to sufficient and explicit peer feedback training in order to be confident and have experience in giving feedback to their peers. Although they did not state clearly for how long the training should be

given to students, it is suggested that the students should be given explicit and sufficient peer feedback training long and early enough to hone their critiquing skills so that they would be able to provide more honest and explicit feedback to their friends.

4.2. Providing sufficient and meaningful writing assignments

Regarding the evidence from the interview where the students revealed that, although they coped with the problems by using different methods, they still had difficulties in providing feedback on the areas of organization and research citations suggests a need for providing sufficient and meaningful writing assignments to students. As writing speaking scripts, in this study, was one of the tasks that the students had to prepare before speaking, this suggests that the students might not have been exposed to enough writing practices that enabled them to learn to organize and cite their work effectively, affecting how they provided feedback on these particular areas. Research on enhancing undergraduate students' research and writing (Lumpkin, 2015) found that students demonstrated enhanced research and writing skills when they were exposed to sufficient writing assignments in a continuous period of time. Hence, providing sufficient and meaningful writing assignments, especially on research writing is essential as it is prone to improve on the areas that the students are weak, i.e., organization and research citations.

4.3. Renewing the belief of collaborative learning

Evidence from the interview where most students revealed that feedback from peers was not very useful and they preferred feedback from the teacher because it was constructive and straightforward. This shows that the students might have improper understanding that the teacher was the only center of knowledge where they had to depend on the teacher support all the time. In fact, the students could learn from each other to improve their speaking skills as well. Research on the effects of using collaborative learning to enhance students' English speaking achievement (Pattanpichet, 2011) found that the students demonstrated speaking improvement from the use of collaborative learning activities including receiving peer feedback. This suggests that renewing the belief of collaborative learning to students is very important. Students can actually learn from one another to improve their speaking skills without depending on the teacher support all the time.

5. Conclusion

This study has shown that asynchronous online peer-teacher feedback slightly improved the students' speaking skills. Although the feedback somewhat improved their speaking skills, the students were satisfied with coupling peer with teacher feedback in general. Despite the several challenges when coupling the two types of feedback in the classroom, where the students could have been exposed to sufficient peer feedback training and meaningful writing assignments and where the students' beliefs of collaborative learning should be renewed, combination of peer and teacher feedback should be introduced to students in any public speaking classes to help them improve thinking and critiquing skills and to boost their confidence in speaking and revising their work.

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