

# **Assessing the Response of Chinese Students to Self and Peer Evaluation of Oral Presentation Skills**

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Research on assessment of oral presentation skills has shown that reliability of marks and grades can be obtained if self, peer and single teacher assessments were used. This survey was undertaken to gauge the response of Chinese postgraduate students to self and peer evaluation, an aspect of participant characteristics in an English medium university, that has not been investigated before. These Chinese doctorate students at the National University of Singapore read a course called ES5002(B) which required them to do an oral presentation on their research topics. Students were given training sessions on evaluation of delivery techniques and a rehearsal of oral presentation skills which was videotaped. A set of questionnaire was given to these students at the end of the exercise. The findings show that foreign doctorate students from the People's Republic of China had a positive attitude to this kind of assessment as they felt a sense of honour for being given responsibility for their final grade contribution. They showed less apathy compared to students in previous semester in feedback exercises, learned to give more constructive and accurate comments in peer feedback, and realised the importance of collaborative learning.

## **BACKGROUND & REVIEW**

Self and peer assessments have been used as measures of improving students' grades through students' motivation to learn. Research has shown peer and self assessments are vehicles to improve learning especially in tertiary institutes (Boud, 1981; Falchikov, 1986, 1988; Race, 2001). In peer assessment, peers assess the learner, with or without prior discussion, while self assessment is where the learner judges own performance and products against own assessment criteria (Falchikov, 1986). But according to Boud,

self assessment means more than students grading their own work; it means involving them in the processes of determining what is good work in any given situation. It requires them to consider what are the characteristics of, say, a good essay or practical report, or performance skills in a practical exercise.

(Boud, 1995: 12)

Thus self and peer assessments should enhance learning particularly if learners take responsibility for their grades (Boud, 1995). It encourages critical thinking and critical assessment which is more objective as opposed to subjective assessment made by a single assessor. Also, it motivates students to learn if students' assessments, both peer and self, contribute to the final grade. The question raised on peer and/or self assessment is the reliability of the scores. Reliability of peer assessments had been made through measures of agreement between peer and teacher (Topping, 1998), and this was done mainly by correlating teacher marks with the averaged marks awarded by peers; but with many studies on reliability of scores, there were variables such as using professional markers rather than peers of the same group or other groups (Topping, 1998: 257). Furthermore, students' assessments, whether on peer or self performance, may not be accurate (Roach, 1999). However, Magin argues that such impediments can be overcome or have minimum impact with assessment of performance skills such as students' oral presentations by using the same criteria of evaluating such a performance skill by all teachers and peers trained over a set period to achieve reliability (Magin & Helmore, 2001).

Assessment of oral presentation skills has yielded quite accurate scores, which means there is less deviation of marks awarded by teachers and peers (Falchikov, 1994). Peer assessments of oral presentation skills were considered to be reliable in studies made by Falchikov (1995) and Reizes and Magin (1995). Although there remain some doubts about the accuracy of such an assessment it was generally felt that the advantages of enhancing learning through critical assessment were more important than the numerical scores. Magin (2001) observes that teacher assessments are accurate but if a single teacher rating were used, using multiple peer assessments could offset the inaccuracy of a single teacher's rating. In a later survey Magin and Helmore (2001) confirm that teacher assessments are more accurate than peer assessment, but a single

teacher's ratings of oral presentation skills are clearly inadequate as reliable assessment measures. They suggest that in oral presentation skills where there is a single teacher rating, peer assessment should be included to act as a benchmark upon which a more accurate (reliable) overall rating can be obtained.

Overall, research has shown that peer review of oral presentation skills led to significantly improved performance (Mitchell & Bakewell, 1995). William's survey (1995) showed that participants' response to peer assessment was positive, that the learning was enhanced and the experience would be relevant to peer appraisal skills in future work settings. Gains in trust and confidence in self and others were also identified, together with a greater sense of responsibility.

### **Rationale for study**

These advantages of peer and self assessments are justifications for carrying out the same exercise with Chinese doctorate students at the Centre for English Language Communication. This study aims to find out the response, especially in attitude, towards self and peer assessment. Most Chinese postgraduate students from the People's Republic of China continuing their education in an English-medium university, often find it difficult to adapt to a different system of teaching style, for instance, in communication skills and language teaching – “the informal setting of most language classes is alien to these Asian pupils, immersed from an early age where the ‘the teacher talks, the students listen’.” (O'Halloran, 2002). Although postgraduates are older and more mature, they are more used to “listening” and are more comfortable with passivity on their part and activity (transmission of knowledge) on the teacher's part (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996). This passivity has often been observed of Chinese students (postgraduates and pre-matriculated Chinese senior high school students) taught by the tutors at this Centre since 1996. This passive behaviour could be attributed to the education system in China, where the teacher is in sole control of classroom activities and the students learn by rote, even for language acquisition (Dzau, 1990; Feng, 1999, 2000, 2003). For these reasons, it would be important to review the examination process by involving students in assessing themselves, and to find out if peer and self assessments would be as beneficial to Chinese students

who had been through a different style of education and experienced different forms of assessment. Although there have been investigations into self and/or peer assessment in the literature, so far there has been no study on Chinese (EFL) doctorate students studying in an English-medium university (Topping, 1998). This variable on geographical and cultural origin needs to be researched.

The instrumentation used in this study is different from others, for example, Magin & Helmore, (2001) as the students' oral presentation skills were videotaped and then played back for the individual students to self evaluate their performance for an accurate assessment. Additionally, this videotaping facilitates as a revision exercise for peer assessment so that peer marks could be moderated.

### **Background of research participants**

In order to understand why this survey was conducted it is necessary to have some understanding of the background of the research participants. Foreign doctorate students at the Centre for English Language Communication read an English course called ES5002 English for Graduates (Advanced level) which has two modules: the first module (A) teaches research paper and thesis writing and the second module (B), oral presentation skills. It was not viable to conduct a self assessment or peer assessment exercise for the first module as foreign students are not proficient in language skills nor are they sufficiently knowledgeable or interested in their peers' research topics. Thus, they had always been given an exercise in peer feedback on oral presentation skills. However, in the semesters over the past five years, it was noticeable that Chinese students had the tendency to give positive feedback to their peers regardless of how ineffective or poor the oral presentation skills were. This could be due to the culture of Chinese students who probably were more used to praise than criticism in their schooling.

From the tutors' observation over the past six years of teaching ES5002, Chinese students were noticeably polite in past oral feedback, such as giving compliments for all speakers in peer feedback of oral presentations. Queried by the tutors over the feedback, they explained that they would refrain from giving

negative criticism as they felt that good comments were more helpful in spurring their colleagues and peers to perform better. Thus, on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 as Excellent, students would give mostly 4 or 4 or above, even for an average performance. Although this “face-saving” tactic had good intentions, it failed to help students to improve. Consequently, many students felt that they had done all the “right” things, as perceived by their peers, and therefore felt they had been unfairly assessed by their tutor when given their oral presentation grades which were usually lower than their peers’. Also, some of the students might have felt they could accept their peers’ assessment rather than their tutors’, on the principle that multiple assessments are better than one. This perception was made because the same evaluation form using the same criteria of assessment was used by students and tutor. It was therefore necessary that such a misconception be redressed by giving these students a chance to evaluate their own performance.

Additionally, Chinese students whose self-perception of their public speaking skills as less competent than students who had studied in an English-speaking environment, quite often did not make a lot of effort to better their oral presentation performance. A few students were motivated enough to attempt an improvement but it was noticeable that the majority made no effort to improve at all. This lack of motivation was quite obvious among the Chinese doctorate students who have few opportunities to practise their English speaking skills as most of the postgraduate students in this university come mainly from the People’s Republic of China, and they did not have the habit of communicating in English to Chinese-speaking people because of their lack of adequate proficiency in English (Goh & Tan, 2003: 62).

Student behaviour on peer feedback exercise normally borders on apathy as research has shown, and these foreign graduates were no different from students elsewhere (Pond et al, 1995). Thus giving students the chance to self-assess themselves and contribute to their final grade should change an apathetic attitude to oral presentation skills performance. Finally, Chinese students need to be able to perceive this exercise as learner-centred from the learner’s perspective, and learn to become more invested in their own learning and more motivated to achieve at high levels (McCombs, 2001). However, in order to carry out this self

assessment (and peer) exercise it was necessary to train the students well so as to minimise unreliable results arising from students' lack of experience and confidence (Hanrahan & Issacs, 2001).

### **Purpose of study**

The purpose of this study was to find out the response of Chinese doctorate students to three kinds of assessments – self, peer and tutor - of their oral presentation skills in a 100% continuous assessment of the second module of their English course. Such a study would lead to a better understanding of Chinese students and their attitude/behaviour towards a less tutor-dominated assessment and a more democratic type of assessment in which they have a contribution. Such an assessment would also be seen by both students and teachers as an implementation of a fairer and more reliable examination process. It would have pedagogic application for this Centre for English Language Communication which offers not only English proficiency courses but also communication skills. This study may also have pedagogic implication for teaching communication skills (oral) to other institutes in the ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations) regions.

### **RESEARCH DESIGN**

This survey was conducted in two semesters in 2002 with 30 foreign doctorate students reading ES5002(B) English for Graduates (Advanced Level) The average age of these students was 27. Table 1 shows the different faculties of these 30 students.

**Table 1. Number of students from faculties**

	Engineer- ing	Science	Computer Science	School of Business	Real estate	Econo- -mics	Medicine
No. of students	15	3	3	1	1	1	6

All students had graduated from a university in China before undertaking a postgraduate programme at the National University of Singapore. All had read ES5001, the Intermediate level of English for Graduates during their Masters programme at the same university. They had at least two lessons of taking part in public speaking in the ES5001 course but their assignments were short

oral presentations lasting no more than 5 minutes and they did not talk about their research topics.

For ES5002(B) the oral presentation module is a 100% continuous assessment course as shown in Table 2:

**Table 2. ES5002(B) course assessment**

ES5002(B)	Class Participation	5-minute Oral Presentation	20-minute Oral Presentation	Final marks
Continuous Assessment	10%	10%	80%	100%
Assessment and requirements	Attentiveness, Peer evaluation, Attendance	Any topic in student's discipline	Research topic	

For both the 5-minute and 20-minute oral presentations, each speaker was video-taped and the tape then played back so that students could view their performance on the television monitor. For this exercise in self and peer assessment there were 7 steps:

### ***Step 1***

Students were asked to design their own portfolio, which would be submitted at the end of the course for the final grade calculations. In this portfolio they designed three columns for the scores obtained – self, peer and tutor, and a fourth column for the average mark of the three rating. This portfolio was to file the feedback forms and record the scores for both the 5 minute and 20-minute oral presentations.

### ***Step 2***

Students were given training in assessing oral presentation skills using a set of criteria as follows:

#### ***Delivery Techniques***

- Voice clarity (Is the speech clear, can you understand what the speaker is saying?)
- Voice variety (Is the speech monotonous, or has good intonation?)

- Eye focus (Is the speaker looking at the audience most of the time, or is s/he looking at the wall and elsewhere?)
- Posture/Gestures (Does the speaker stand in the same spot all the time or is s/he moving? Does s/he have any hand gestures for emphasis or are her/his hands making awkward movements or doing unnecessary things?)
- Facial (Is the speaker looking bland, too serious, deadpan, unsmiling?)
- Enthusiasm (Is the speaker an energetic, lively speaker?)

*Contents & Organisation*

- Does it have an effective, interesting introduction?
- Are the main points clear and coherent?
- Does it have an effective conclusion?

These criteria were used in the training tutorials whereby the students were shown videotaped recording of previous students who had read the ES5002(B) course. Samples of three speakers were shown:

- (1) Sample A - a below average performance
- (2) Sample B - an above average performance
- (3) Sample C - an excellent performance

Students were asked to rank the different aspects of delivery techniques after a lesson on what constitutes a good and poor performance. They were told to rank each of the *Delivery Techniques* as well as the *Contents & Organisation*. Students were told to tick against the column for ranking, on a scale of 1 to 10, with 9 and 10 as excellent and 1 and 2, as very poor performance and, 5 as a benchmark for a pass. They had to give one mark for the overall performance of each speaker. They were encouraged to write comments for each of the delivery techniques, or a general comment. This evaluation exercise of the previous students' performance shows that students did not have any problem in rating very good or very poor performance but with average performance. They were then shown how to rate average performance by matching their marks with the tutor. The benchmark of an average performance score was obtained from the averaged marks of multiple assessments made by all the tutors teaching this course. (Note: The students were not asked to assess the audio-visual aids as these were vetted by the tutor before presentation)



### ***Step 3***

Students watched a commercial videotape on professional oral presentation, called *Effective Presentation Skills* (Calbom & Davies, 1993). This video-recording aims to help speakers organise their talk, prepare their talk and important tips on *Dos* and *Don'ts* on delivery techniques, such as gesture, posture, eye contact and maintaining calm.

### ***Step 4***

Assessment of the 5-minute Oral Presentation skills

This exercise gave student a rehearsal for their oral presentation skills as well as a practice on self and peer assessment, matching the average score of this with the tutor. The same evaluation criteria and form in Step 2 was used (and in Step 5). The videotape was played back to give students a chance to assess themselves and another chance for peers to re-evaluate their assessment as this presentation was very short and they could have missed out a few of the criteria for assessment.

### ***Step 5***

Evaluation of the 20-minute Oral Presentation skills

Students were staggered over a period of 3 tutorials, spanning over one and a half weeks. Each student was allowed a speaking time of 18 minutes with Questions and Answers, altogether approximately 20 minutes for each student. During each oral presentation, peer and self assessment was done, the tutor assessment was withheld until the last tutorial. Self assessment was done during the video playback when the oral presentations were completed for that tutorial.

### ***Step 6***

Students would already have their self and peer assessments in this last tutorial. After receiving the tutor's assessment, they calculated the final mark by averaging all the three scores. The final marks for both the 5-minute and 20-minute oral presentation were entered into their portfolios.

### ***Step 7***

In this last tutorial a set of questionnaire was given to gauge their response to this exercise. See Appendix 1 for a sample of the Questionnaire.

## **FINDINGS**

Table 3 shows that, in general, the graduate students who participated in this exercise seemed to find it motivating as a novel way of contributing towards their final grade. This observation concurs with most research (Boud, 1995; Combs, 2001) and there is therefore no difference in response from students who had gone through a different education system in non-English medium universities with students who are more familiar with a Western-style education. We can therefore assume that foreign students in this university would be equally receptive to undertaking such an exercise in self-assessment.

### **Important role of self and peer assessment**

Specifically, this study shows that the Chinese graduates responded positively to three types of assessment – self, peer and tutor. The most significant aspect of this exercise is that students understood the important role of self assessment in their oral presentation skills. Previously, they had never been asked to assess themselves, only others, and assumed that the tutor's assessment was the most accurate and reliable. On the other hand, there were students who had always thought they were very good at oral presentation skills but were chastised by the lower peer marks that were substantiated by the tutor.

There was thus less resentment for tutor grades, a behaviour that was observable with some students in the previous semesters. This change of attitude came about because students realised that peer feedback was a means of helping them improve their skills, that their peers were more careful and genuinely concerned about giving constructive comments. They learned too that the critique exercise became more meaningful because the comments made were not meant to hurt individual speakers but to encourage better peer performance. Students' response to the questionnaire shows that 75% of students had become more aware of the importance of oral presentation skills as a result of this exercise (see Table 3).

**Table 3. Student responses (in percentage) from questionnaire.**

	Strongly agree	Agree	Slightly agree	Do not agree
	%	%	%	%
1. I find having a portfolio useful.	41	53	6	0
2. The portfolio has helped me greatly to set my target.	17	65	17	0
3. I find feedback from my peers useful in helping me improve my delivery techniques.	53	35	11	0
4. I find the tutor's feedback useful in helping me improve my delivery techniques.	59	41	0	0
5. The quantitative assessment from my peers is more helpful than their qualitative assessment.	11	11	30	47
6. The quantitative assessment from my tutor is more helpful than the qualitative assessment.	11	18	35	35
7. I find I have improved overall in my performance based on peer feedback.	30	35	30	5.8
8. I find I have improved overall in my performance based on tutor feedback.	17	76	5.8	0
9. From the feedback I have managed to improve very substantially in my O. P.	5.8	0	0	0
10. From the feedback I have managed to improve substantially in my O.P.	17	64	5.8	0
11. This exercise has made me more aware of the importance of oral presentation skills.	52	23	0	0
12. This exercise will be more accurate and fair in assessing oral presentation skill in 100% CA.	17	53	5.8	0

Out of 30 students only three in their questionnaire response did not think that this exercise in peer and self assessment was

useful. Two had pronunciation problems and one did not like any assessment to be done by peers. The two male students with poor pronunciation realised that no matter how hard they tried they could still be downgraded because of their pronunciation which was quite often unintelligible. However, one of the students attempted to improve on his delivery techniques and earned better marks as a result of his efforts and gung-ho attitude than the other who made no attempt at all.

The problem of poor pronunciation encountered by teachers in a communication course is acknowledged because there is little time spent on intensive speech training. At the time of this study the teachers who taught both English courses for graduates in this Centre had proposed an extension of the Intermediate English Course for Graduates (ES5001) to another module which will be offered in the coming semester, named ES5001(B), a listening and speaking skills module, for all graduate students in this university. This module aims to help student to improve clarity in speech and public speaking. The problem of poor pronunciation in an oral presentation skill course could be minimised, and these two students could take this new module to improve their speaking skills.

The third student, who did not like this self and peer assessment exercise, had good voice clarity and variety and though she made some attempt to improve her delivery techniques such as eye contact and gestures, she did not think her peers could be as reliable as the tutor in assessing her performance. As she was the only student with a negative response to this exercise it could be assumed that she was possibly conditioned to receive feedback from her supervisor, in a situation where a student is doing research in a new field or is unfamiliar with the topic; hence the hand-holding supervision. However, this is only a conjecture, but from Module A, an assessment of her writing assignments shows that she followed strictly all advice from her supervisor.

Overall, the majority of graduate students felt that they had benefited from this exercise and were motivated enough to attempt to improve.

## **Better response to qualitative feedback**

This exercise shows that although on the whole, students found feedback from peers (88%) and tutor (100%) helped them improve their delivery techniques, they responded better to qualitative feedback (35% tutor, 47% peer) than quantitative feedback (11% tutor, 11% peer). This is not surprising as Chinese students find it difficult to interpret marks in language learning and communication skills courses. As a rule they rely very much on marks which are the norm in assessment in Chinese universities. Here, they realised that performance skills assessment would be more self-informative if comments were made instead. This observation concurs with that of Falchikov (1995). They found the tutor's qualitative feedback more useful in helping improve their delivery techniques. One reason for this could be that peer comments may not be comprehensible as EFL students are quite weak in written linguistic skills to be accurate. Thus, these remarks may be ignored, but the numerical marks may be taken as more accurate feedback from peers, and the tutor's comments as comparatively more important. While tutor's comments aimed to encourage below average and poor performance in some of the delivery techniques, peer comments sometimes bordered on acute bluntness. It would have been interesting to find out their response to some peer comments that were more critical than the tutor's. A few examples:

- Lethargic, no enthusiasm
- No smile, like plain water
- Should practice before presentation, to avoid looking at the slides all the time
- Eye contact: most time not see
- Too nervous, more practice before OP
- More like remembering the presentation sentence
- Lack of movements, a boring face

This merits further research as this exercise has shown that the few students who were not very receptive to tutor's suggestions for improvements could be more receptive to peer feedback and, debunks the notion that the majority of Chinese students are contented with the sole teacher's rating.

## **Accuracy in the grading system**

This exercise also shows that Chinese students who were used to tutor grading only and who accepted such grading without questioning the criteria or standard of assessment, as for instance in Chinese universities, now appreciated their own and peer contributory marks with the realisation that they were responsible for their final grades. They could see that peer marks and tutor marks do not deviate much from self assessed marks and that there was even less deviation of self mark from the final (see Table 4. This data is obtained from the scores of the 20-minute presentation only as this has a higher impact and is more significant in the final 100% continuous assessment).

Although this study does not aim to check the deviation of marks from the three kinds of assessments, interestingly, the above data shows that peer and tutor assessments are quite accurate, that is, the deviation is minor. This concurs with other investigations which show that the older the students are, the more accurate their assessment when compared to the tutor (Filene, 1969; Falchikov, 1986). Also, self assessment marks deviate minimally from the final marks. Only Student 8 (Table 4) seems to have given himself a higher mark than peer and tutor. This could be due to his perception that his talk was well organised and his visual aids were impressive. But he seemed not to realise that the evaluation of visual aids does not have a heavy mark weightage.

Out of 30 students 12 students gave themselves lower marks than peers and tutor, while 17 rated themselves higher than peer and tutor with the remaining student rating himself accurately with peer and tutor marks. However, this higher self rating is not overly high, which shows that Chinese graduates realised the limits to an excellent performance improvement within such a short time.

**Table 4. Marks from 20-minute oral presentations**

Student	Self	Peer	Tutor	Final (average of self + peer + tutor)	Peer + Tutor	Deviation Self from peer + tutor	Deviation Self from Final
1	6	6.1	5.7	6.1	5.9	+0.1	-0.1
2	7.1	7.4	7	7.1	7.2	-0.1	0
3	7	6.9	7	6.9	6.95	+0.05	+0.1
4	7.2	7.3	7.8	7.4	7.5	-0.3	-0.2
5	7.2	7.4	7.7	7.4	7.5	-0.3	-0.2
6	6.8	6.5	6.3	6.5	6.4	+0.4	+0.3
7	7	7.2	6.9	7	7.05	-0.05	0
8	6.8	6.2	5.8	6.1	6	+0.8	+0.7
9	6.5	6.7	5.9	6.3	6.3	+0.2	+0.2
10	7	7.2	7.3	7.1	7.2	-0.2	-0.1
11	7.2	7.4	7.5	7.3	7.4	-0.2	-0.1
12	7.1	7.2	7	7.1	7.1	0	0
13	6.5	6.8	6	6.4	6.4	+0.1	+0.1
14	6.7	6.1	6.4	6.4	6.4	+0.3	+0.3
15	6.8	6.5	6.8	6.7	6.6	+0.2	+0.1
16	7.5	7.5	7	7.3	7.2	+0.3	+0.2
17	7.2	6.7	6.7	6.8	6.7	+0.5	+0.4
18	6.4	6.7	6.5	6.5	6.6	-0.2	-0.1
19	7.2	7.2	7.5	7.3	7.3	-0.1	-0.1
20	7	6.9	6.8	6.9	6.8	+0.2	+0.1
21	6.2	6.7	6.6	6.5	6.6	-0.4	-0.3
22	6.6	6.8	6.9	6.7	6.8	-0.2	-0.1
23	6.3	6.5	6	6.2	6.2	+0.1	+0.1
24	6.8	6.7	6.8	6.7	6.7	+0.1	+0.1
25	7	7	6.9	6.9	6.9	+0.1	+0.1
26	7	6.8	6.9	6.9	6.8	+0.2	+0.1
27	6.5	7	6.5	6.6	6.7	-0.2	-0.1
28	7.3	6.8	7	7	6.9	+0.4	+0.3
29	6	6.4	6.2	6.2	6.3	-0.3	-0.2
30	6.4	6.5	6.2	6.3	6.3	+0.1	+0.1

Deviation of marks: the + sign shows overrating, the - sign shows underrating

Given more time, it could be predicted that the majority of the students would see a substantial improvement in their oral presentation skills. This is because graduate students learned very quickly the merits of good oral presentation skills although only

one videotaped rehearsal was given. They learned from watching previous videotaped performances that it was easy to improve on certain delivery techniques such as posture/gestures, eye contact, facial expressions and enthusiasm, and they strove to improve on these. On the other hand, they realised that voice clarity would take time and were therefore realistic about improving this oral skill in the time they had now to the time when they would have to present their research orally to the examiners in their final oral defense examination. This is also confirmed in Table 3 which shows students' acknowledgement in improvement in their delivery techniques, i.e., 81% improved substantially, 5.8% very substantially.

The participants saw this exercise as a unique way of assessment unlike their other graduate modules assessments. They accepted it as a means of increasing their perception of teaching and learning not the sole responsibility of the tutor but their own. They also had a sense of fulfilment when they had attempted to achieve their target marks, and a sense of honour to be given some responsibility for the grading system. Thus, 75% of the students agreed that this type of assessment would be fair and accurate in a 100% continuous assessment module (see Table 3, item 12). Finally, this exercise has shown that self assessment was a good way of reinforcing assessment procedures and patterns, particularly for foreign students, by "providing an opportunity to renegotiate, in a controlled way, certain aspects of the marking process" (Taras, 2001: 611).

### **Importance of constructive feedback**

Finally, Chinese students were less afraid to comment more critically on peer performance as anonymity was retained in all the evaluation forms. Thus they could be as "frank" as they wished, but the sole desire was to help rather than impede improvement. This exercise shows that Chinese students could learn to criticise constructively if they were trained properly and if they realised the end results to be beneficial to the learner. Thus, the dictum of "saving face" by given excellent comments when not justified does not work in this exercise of self, peer and tutor assessment. This should be encouraging for ELT specialists who teach students whose culture hinges on this dictum. On the other hand, there was



no noticeable effort to “penalise” peers as observed by Li (2001) and it could be assumed that Chinese students on the whole, show more camaraderie because of sharing the same language problems. Besides, this exercise has fostered critical self assessment thereby helping them to adopt this skill elsewhere, mainly in their research projects.

### **Accuracy of single teacher’s grading**

On the tutor’s part, this exercise has shown that a single tutor grading can be moderated if calculated with the self and peer marks. Thus, the deviation of tutor marks from the final is minimal. It also helps the tutor to minimise the problem and uncertainty of an assessment that can be subjective because it is performance-based.

This exercise has also motivated Chinese students in a way that tutor’s advice/comments could not because they saw the importance of improvement to achieve better marks. Previously many students would not have the interest or inclination to watch good speakers whose talks are archived and accessible at this university’s website unless the topic was relevant and important to their own research. But this exercise seemed to convince them that oral presentation skills are integral in a communication skills course and, in particular their performance for their final defense examination should be impressive. Thus, though previously they were not much concerned with whether, for instance, their eye contact was good or not, they now had to get it right because it affected their final grading.

### **CONCLUSION**

Overall, the majority of Chinese postgraduate students who are not familiar with self and peer assessment show they are responsive to this novel system of grading as they become aware of the enrichment in learning and self-improvement as a motivation factor. The reliability of the grading system could be obtained because graduate students are older and more discriminating. They learn to take responsibility for their learning and should be able to transfer this independent learning to their research projects, with less reliance for guidance from their supervisors.

However, it must be acknowledged that in carrying out such an exercise training sessions have to be provided, in addition to the time and labour efforts, as well as ensuring that there is availability and back-up of audio-visual equipment. All this is money-costing and may not work for every communication skills course, especially in tutorial groups of large enrolments. Also, there could be resentment on the part of a few graduate students for spending so much time and effort on such an exercise as they may be under a lot of stress to finish their research and complete their degree on time. Despite these problems, it is possible in some communication skills courses to use peer assessments only, without the hassles of several training sessions and videotaping, to attain accuracy rather than relying solely on a single teacher's assessment. The logistics could be simplified for large tutorial groups and various methods could be adopted or modified to prevent feedback fatigue and subjective assessment, or innovated whenever and whatever problems arise. What is important is the positive role of self and peer assessment in enhancing learning. If students could see that they have a role in contributing to their final grade, they would then realise how important feedback is, and become motivated to improve and be more critical in feedback exercises. This should pave the way to enhanced learning, as has been surveyed among first year undergraduates undertaken by Pond et al, (1995).

Though this study was conducted with a small number of Chinese graduates, the favourable response to self and peer assessment shows that it is possible to use the same assessment with other students who take a language and/or communication skill course. If students are shown that they are responsible for their learning and assessment it should generate a great deal of motivation. This is an important point to note as this Centre has a large enrolment of EFL students who though not very proficient in the English language, would have made very good oral presenters if they were given the incentive and strategies and shown an awareness of how assessment is conducted. Further studies on self and peer assessment should be done on a larger group of participants, and in particular with the foreign undergraduates and pre-matriculated students at this university, whose response may yield more interesting results. Other variables which may be equally important for pedagogic applications are response to qualitative feedback from peers, the degree of improvement from

the first oral presentation to the final, gender difference in peer and self assessment, and a research design that is less time-consuming and labour-intensive but which could be as effective in learning motivation and reliable scores.

Finally, foreign students like these from the People's Republic of China, have become less concerned about very critical comments, as is their practice and culture, and can therefore learn to be more discriminating not only in this oral presentation assessment but probably in future workplace or academic skills.

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## Appendix 1. Questionnaire

Centre for English Language Communication  
NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE

### ES5002 (B) Oral Presentation Skills

The objective of this questionnaire is to help redesign and restructure the tutorial activities for PE5002 (B) so that learning for students can be enhanced. Students will be responsible for their performance by a self-assessment exercise with input of evaluation from peers and tutor.

Department:

Gender: Female/Male

1. I find having a portfolio for each student useful:

(A) Strongly agree (B) Agree (C) Slightly agree (D) Do not agree

Questions 2- 6 refers to the **5 min Oral Presentation**

2. I find the feedback from my peers useful in helping me improve my delivery techniques

(A) Strongly agree (B) Agree (C) Slightly agree (D) Do not agree

3. I find the tutor's feedback useful in helping me improve my delivery techniques

(A) Strongly agree (B) Agree (C) Slightly agree (D) Do not agree

4. The quantitative assessment (marks) from my peers is more helpful than their qualitative assessment (comments)

(A) Strongly agree (B) Agree (C) Slightly agree (D) Do not agree

5. The quantitative assessment from my tutor is more helpful than the qualitative assessment

(A) Strongly agree (B) Agree (C) Slightly agree (D) Do not agree

6. The 5 min Oral Presentation is a good practice for the final presentation

(A) Strongly agree (B) Agree (C) Slightly agree (D) Do not agree

Question 7- 18 refer to the **20 min Oral Presentation**

7. I find that I have improved overall in my performance based on the previous feedback from my peers.

(A) Strongly agree (B) Agree (C) Slightly agree (D) Do not agree

8. I find that I have improved overall in my performance based on the previous feedback from my tutor

(A) Strongly agree (B) Agree (C) Slightly agree (D) Do not agree

9. The portfolio has helped me greatly to set my target.

(A) Strongly agree (B) Agree (C) Slightly agree (D) Do not agree

**Questions 10 -12** Answer only **one** of these three questions. Do not answer all three, only the one that reflects your performance.

10. From the feedback and my own self-assessment I have managed to improve overall **very substantially** in my delivery techniques.

(A) Strongly agree (B) Agree (C) Slightly agree (D) Do not agree

11. From the feedback and my own self-assessment I have managed to improve overall **quite substantially** in my delivery techniques.

(A) Strongly agree (B) Agree (C) Slightly agree (D) Do not agree

12. From the feedback and my own self-assessment I have managed to improve overall only **slightly** in my delivery techniques

(A) Strongly agree (B) Agree (C) Slightly agree (D) Do not agree

**Skip Questions 13 and 14** if not applicable.

13. Please tick the items below. You tick those that you think have a **substantial** improvement, i.e. an increase of 2.5 marks or 2 . For example from 5.6 to 7.5

- (a) voice clarity
- (b) voice variety



- (c) eye contact
- (d) gestures
- (e) posture
- (f) facial expression

14. Why do you think you could improve *substantially* in these areas of delivery techniques?

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15. If you have not improved substantially in the above delivery techniques, but quite substantially, please tick the following items which show an increase of 1 to 1.5 marks.

- (a) voice clarity
- (b) voice variety
- (c) eye contact
- (d) gestures
- (e) posture
- (f) facial expression

16. Why do you think you could improve **quite** *substantially* in these areas of delivery techniques?

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17. Are these improvements what you would like to see in your performance for the presentation in your Oral examination for the degree of Ph.D?

- (A) Yes, very much
- (B) Yes, but can still be much better
- (C) Not sure

18. If you have not made any improvement (to your satisfaction and assessment) in any of the above delivery techniques items, what do you think are the reasons? Please write down the item/s of delivery techniques and explain why.

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.....  
.....

19. On the whole, having the feedback match my own target, this exercise has made me more aware of the importance of oral presentation skills.

- (A) Strongly agree (B) Agree (C) Slightly agree (D) Do not agree

20. This exercise on self-assessment for students will be a more accurate and fair method of assessing oral presentation skills in a 100% CA.

- (A) Strongly agree (B) Agree (C) Slightly agree (D) Do not agree

Thank you for your cooperation