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Improving ESL Formative Assessment Practices and Student Learning via Multi-Staged Peer
Assessment of Oral Presentations

Eric Lok Ming HO

A dissertation submitted to the University of Bristol in accordance with the requirements for
award of the degree of Doctor of Education in the
Faculty of Social Sciences and Law in October 2017.

(46,423 words)

Abstract

In an examination dominated educational culture such as that in Hong Kong, university students' experiences with multiple forms of assessment is somewhat limited. It is understandable, therefore, why not only students, but teachers as well, remain skeptical when confronted with new approaches to assessment. This study set out to challenge the 'conservative' nature of assessment that characterises Hong Kong and to engage students with assessment practices that involved them in not only being assessed, but in taking on the role of the assessor as well.

The research study portrays how a sample of Hong Kong university students undertaking an English as a Second Language (ESL) course used oral presentations as a vehicle for peer assessment. This is an under-explored area for Hong Kong tertiary students', but this study showed that students can learn and then improve their oral presentations at different stages of peer assessment by providing feedback, receiving feedback and revising oral presentations. Such findings challenge the stereotypical views of Hong Kong's learning culture and contributes to a new dimension on peer assessment, especially in the context of the ESL classroom by focusing on the learning processes rather than the outcomes.

Twenty-eight Engineering and Physiotherapy first-year undergraduate students participated in this research study. They were chosen as verbal communication is the main communication mode in their workplaces. At the beginning of the semester, being new to peer assessment, they attended training sessions, in which they were given opportunities to discuss assessment rubrics and evaluate two speakers' performances before the actual peer assessment.

A mixed methods approach was adopted. The instruments' utilised were peer written feedback, semi-structured interviews and students' reflections. The findings indicated that students, through different means, were able to evaluate, revise and reflect on their own learning processes during the three stages of peer assessment. Instead of the traditional top-down information transmission, they also found that different tasks, including conversations with the peer assessors, in peer assessment were helpful to improve their oral presentations throughout the semester.

This research study has shown that when presented with new learning opportunities, Hong Kong students can not only engage with them, but become active learners who can improve their understanding, skills and values. This suggests that peer assessment as part of oral presentations is a promising alternative to more traditional modes of assessment. At the

practical level, this research also provides ESL teachers with some useful pedagogies and techniques that can both positively engage students, and ultimately improve their learning.

Author's Declaration

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the University's Regulations and Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes and that it has not been submitted for any other academic award. Except where indicated by specific reference in the text, the work is the candidate's own work. Work done in collaboration with, or with the assistance of, others, is indicated as such. Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author.

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This research study could not be completed without my active and sincere participating students. I am blessed to have them in my teaching career. Moreover, I am thankful to my fellow colleagues, especially Dennis Fong and Eric Tindall, who have supported me a lot along this journey. Their friendship, encouragement and help were much appreciated. I would also like to thank my friends, particularly Sammy Ming and Beatrice Dang, who were kind to listen to me and gave advice when necessary.

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In loving memory of Siu Pak. Enjoy all the precious moments in life, the good ones and the bad ones, then we will end up with a great album to look back on.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

This research study aims to investigate how students learn and improve their oral presentations at different stages of peer assessment. In order to accomplish this, thesis uses the current education system within Hong Kong as the primary case study. In doing so, this research seeks to investigate how students learn and improve during peer assessment in an ESL classroom and examine how peer assessment can be integrated into the university curriculum. Chapter 1 provides the background information of this research study and explain how it is significant and relevant in tertiary education in Hong Kong. Chapter 2 presents the literature regarding peer assessment in higher education and oral presentations. Chapter 3 elaborates the research design which was adopted to examine and interpret the data collected from this research study. In Chapter 4, the findings from the three stages of peer assessment are presented and discussed based on the three research questions. The implications are highlighted for teachers who would like to implement peer assessment in ESL classrooms. Chapter 5 shows the limitations of the research design and suggests some way for improvement. The final chapter will offer a conclusion with an overall summary of the findings.

1.1 Teaching and Learning in Hong Kong

The education system in Hong Kong is unique in comparison to other systems and has long been criticized for its examination-oriented culture (Carless, 2011). This emphasis on examinations has led the education system as whole to service one single purpose; certification (Berry, 2011). This has been deemed as undesirable by many critics, and yet this policy continues to dictate the practice and the content of education in Hong Kong. With such restrictions on curriculum, how educators teach and how students learn is greatly affected. It is therefore reasonable to suggest that the main reason for students to study in Hong Kong is to pass the public examinations.

This situation is particularly evident within secondary schools. The curriculum of secondary education in Hong Kong is prescribed by the Education Bureau, while the content of various subjects is devised by the Curriculum Development Council. Since there is a public examination at the end of secondary education in Hong Kong, the curriculum is tailored to meet those requirements. The overall education system then emphasises “obedience to school authority, regulations, and success in examinations” (Yee, 2001, p.73). With such a highly centralised authority producing identical curriculum and examinations, it results in a system

which overlooks the needs of the students. Students must then fit themselves into a system which is confined to master a prescribed set of knowledge (Cheng, 1995, Forestier & Crossley, 2015). This case was observed by Biggs and Watkins (1993), by stating that teachers and students worked together to demand good examination performances. This has resulted in a spoon-fed education system with a banking approach to teaching and learning (Tang, 2016; Adams, 2016). In such an instance, students are reduced to containers in which teachers fill with knowledge of different subjects. Consequently, a major concern within the education system is revealed; students are lacking critical thinking skills and possess insufficient knowledge ownership (Kong, 2014; To & Carless, 2016).

Following from this, issues in educational assessments arise. With the wide distribution of model answers to the examinations, Hong Kong classrooms have been greatly impacted. It has become commonplace for teachers to instruct students on how to gain marks in order to simply survive Hong Kong's pyramid assessment system (Berry, 2011; Carless, 2011). Helping students to survive in the system, students are tested restlessly in order to familiarise them with the subject knowledge (Biggs, 1996). As a result, classroom teaching is highly examination-oriented. Students' abilities to generate answers by themselves and produce creative ideas would be hindered.

Throughout the entire pre-tertiary education system, Hong Kong students have been exposed to this teacher-centred teaching and learning environment. There are doubts that arise about students' dispositions of learning would be carried over to tertiary education, where the learning environment is more liberal. Biggs (2011) suspected that students would still adopt a surface learning strategy, guessing what answers that the teachers desire instead of creating their own knowledge for future career needs. Subsequent researchers studied the relationships between assessment and learning strategies as well as the methods to enhance knowledge ownership in the classroom.

1.2 Assessment in Hong Kong Education

The concept of assessment itself must be reviewed in general before discussing the concepts of peer assessment. The role of assessment has been identified as an indicator to determine if students achieve learning success (Carless, 2005). Due to the hierarchy in the education system, teachers traditionally are the highest authority in the assessment process. Leach, Neutze and Zepke (2001), however, emphasized that changes are needed to develop assessment partnership, especially in tertiary education. While student-centred teaching and learning and criteria-referencing marking have been adopted, all the assessment tasks and

related assessment criteria are still designed and decided by teachers (Carless, 2005). Involving students in the assessment process has received considerable attention. Peer assessment, self-assessment and collaborative assessment have all been recognised as promising alternatives (Carless, 2011; Chan, 2013; McDonough & Foote, 2015).

As indicated by Huba and Freed (2000), focusing on learning processes rather than outcomes, especially in higher education, has been advocated since the mid-1980s. While it is common for students to consider assessments as the end of the learning process, Dochy (2001), in contrast, stressed that assessment should be used to help students move forward. Involving students in the assessment processes can shift the teacher-centred paradigm to the student-centred paradigm. By doing so, students would learn how to use assessments as a tool to help them monitor and then improve learning. According to Huba and Freed (2000, p.8), assessment is defined as:

The process of gathering and discussing information from multiple and diverse sources in order to develop a deep understanding of what students know, understand, and can do with their knowledge as a result of their educational experiences; the process when assessment results are used to improve subsequent learning.

The consequences of Hong Kong's system can follow students long after graduation. To enhance employability and competitiveness in the job market, students are also encouraged to learn independently in order to develop both academically and professionally (Orsmond, Merry & Callaghan, 2004). In other words, spoon-fed education in Hong Kong is unlikely to help achieve such goals. Although students are able to complete different examinations with satisfactory results, Law and Meyer (2011) also emphasised that graduates in Hong Kong have relatively weak employability-related skills. Having a closer assessment relationship between teachers and students can empower students and develop skills in both academic communities and professional areas. In view of this, Falchikov (2013) suggested that peer assessment, self-assessment and collaborative assessment are feasible ways to empower students regarding academic and professional knowledge in higher education.

When these concerns are applied specifically to language learning in Hong Kong, the link between assessment and learning is further strengthened and highly recommended. A major problem that Hong Kong students face in language learning is the teaching of formulaic expressions which do not sync into daily verbal communications (HKEAA, 2009). Shohamy (1992, p.11) suggested three strategies to enhance students learning in ESL classrooms. These

strategies are “integration of assessment and teaching”, “student involvement in the assessment process” and “use of multiple assessment sources”.

First, she believed that teaching and assessment should be interactive in nature, which means the assessment results should inform and improve teaching. Second, instead of teachers having absolute authority, teachers and students should cooperate to plan, design and analyse the assessment processes and outcomes. Third, to counter-balance the dominance of traditional summative assessment in an ESL classroom, portfolios, peer assessment, self-assessment, observation and the like should be promoted to cater for different language learning styles and needs. Different stakeholders pay close attention to assessment because it “can create winners and losers, successes and failures, the rejected and accepted” (Shohamy, 2001, p.374).

This problem is particular serious in Hong Kong due to the dominance of examination-oriented culture and outcome-based teaching and learning (Carless, 2012). In spite of the fact that assessment has great impacts on students, students in Hong Kong are unlikely to participate in the assessment processes. They have no participation in assessment construction and the decision-making processes. While having no contribution to the assessment processes to fit themselves into the assessment system, they, even worse, need to change their learning behaviours in order to fulfil the assessment requirements. In this case, the current assessment system is unlikely democratic.

A similar phenomenon was observed by Johnston (2003, p.77), who introduced “test subjectivity and the paradox of necessary evil”. Assessment construction is a complicated procedure with many items to consider including assessment tasks, assessment methods and assessment criteria. While making decisions on these items, it is unavoidable that values and human judgements, which are subjective in nature, become involved. It is moral for teachers to place value on students, especially in Hong Kong, as teachers have absolute authority on subject assessment matters (Yee, 2001). Broadfoot (2005) also agreed that values and judgements are necessarily placed on different assessment stages. Accepting that assessment may be unwanted by both teachers and students, assessment tasks are nevertheless still required in order to obtain specific data such as student rankings and the relations between expectations and students’ actual performances. Different stakeholders in education use the data for different purposes. To change the current drawbacks of the assessment system in Hong Kong, the origins of the problems should be understood.

1.3 Peer Assessment in Hong Kong Educational Context

In 2001, the Curriculum Development Council (thereafter, CDC) introduced “Learning to Learn” to reform teaching, learning and assessment. In this reform, assessment for learning was promoted with three purposes. They were reducing the amount of tests and examinations, providing more information to students to improve learning and teachers to adjust teaching and making students to be life-long learners and independent learners. Consequently, alternative assessment methods, for example, observation, discussion, portfolio assessment, peer assessment and self-assessment, were suggested in order to meet these purposes (Tudor, 1996; Brown and Hudson, 1998; Topping, 1998). These alternative assessment methods are student-centred and formative in nature.

One purpose of adopting formative assessment in Hong Kong is to counter-balance high-stake summative assessments and improve students’ learning capacity by taking formative feedback into their learning processes. “The role of students in improving their learning is central to formative assessment” (Carless, 2011, p.9). They should be engaged with processes, criteria and standards of the assessment because students will be clear about the criteria of a high-quality performance (Liu & Carless, 2006). Among all formative assessments, peer assessment has been increasingly used in education because students will be the assessors and, at the same time, the assessed (Lew, Alwis & Schmidt, 2010; Carvalho, 2013). Topping (1998, p.250) defined peer assessment as “an arrangement in which individuals consider the amount, level, value, worth, quality of success of the products or outcomes of learning of peers of similar status”. Students are responsible to give feedbacks on the work quality of their peers (Davies, 2006) and they will understand more about a good quality performance by being engaged in the assessment process. Carless (2011, p.9) agrees that the formative feedback from peers is helpful, particularly in Hong Kong, to make students more aware about possible ways for improvement due to the “symmetric power relations”. While teachers are considered the highest authority in Hong Kong, peer assessment is considered to be student-centred by reducing teacher’s responsibility in assessment and dragging students into the assessment process (Topping, 2003; Davis, Kumtepe & Aydeniz, 2007).

The literature above suggests that peer assessment contributes to the development of student learning and promotes ownership of assessment processes. Despite the good intentions of peer assessment, these claims emerge from research conducted primarily in Western contexts (Bryant & Carless, 2010), this idea was not well received in Hong Kong and peer assessment is less likely to be conducted in Hong Kong schools (Berry, 2011). Frontline teachers often have wrong beliefs or misunderstanding of peer assessment as a technical skill which needs to

be mastered. Smyth (2015a) reminded all the teachers that peer assessment is an approach to develop students' independent learning skills. Besides, teachers encountered resistance from parents in Hong Kong (Berry, 2011). Parents believe that assessment is always the sole responsibility of the teachers because teachers are the people who "have necessary knowledge and expertise to conduct reliable assessment" (Liu & Carless, 2006, p. 284). Parents trust the grades given by teachers. While outcomes are more important in Hong Kong, teachers also find that there are not enough guidelines, training and support for the implementation (Mok, 2011). In addition, the implementation is unsystematic which creates more unfairness (Brookhart, 2010). From students' perspectives, feeling uncomfortable when giving a grade to their peers and being afraid of making others feel humiliated are major barriers for the implementation (Phuong-Mai, Terlouw & Pilot, 2006; Sluijsmans et. al., 2001). However, Smyth (2015b, para. 1) argued that "assessments means grading seems to be unique in education". In reality, there are some assessments without grading and these assessments will make people focus on the feedback and do better in the future, for example, job interviews and presentation of honours project. This thinking, however, is relatively uncommon in Hong Kong. "Viewing learning in this more 'constructivist' light blurs the lines between feedback, learning and assessment and should make us question what feedback is for (Smyth, 2015b, para. 3).

To integrate peer assessment in the Hong Kong curriculum, peer assessment should be considered as a part of teaching and learning in order to create a climate in which students give and receive feedbacks naturally (Boud, 2000; Winne, 2004). There is a lack of local research about preparing teachers and students methodologically or psychologically for peer assessment in the Hong Kong educational context. Furthermore, due to the competitive nature and selection purpose of the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (thereafter, HKDSE), there remains a question of whether university freshmen who come from this education background are ready to respond to peer assessment in particular.

1.4 Latest Development of Peer Assessment in Hong Kong Educational Context

The potential of peer assessment to support improved student achievement has been a major focus of research in English-speaking countries over the last decade (Gardner, 2006; McMillan, 2007), has attracted significant interest internationally (OECD, 2005) and is increasingly on the policy agenda in the Asia-Pacific region (Kennedy & Lee, 2008). In Hong Kong, as a part of wide-ranging reforms intended to promote life-long learning, educational authorities have articulated the need to develop a new culture of assessment less reliant on traditional one-off examinations. Included in this agenda are calls for more peer and self-

assessment to promote reflective thinking, self-improvement and independent learning in the existing local curricula (CDC, 2001, 2004). It seems that, however, the implementation is unlikely a successful one because the associated pedagogy is rooted in constructivist learning principles originating in the West (Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall & Wiliam, 2003). Given that these practices differ markedly from the traditional model of education practiced in Hong Kong (Walker, 2007), questions arise regarding the extent to which formative assessment, including peer assessment, may be successfully implemented without adaptation to local contexts (Kennedy, Chan, Fok & Yu, 2008). Exacerbating these challenges is a history of reform efforts in Hong Kong marked by rhetorical or symbolic purposes, with a concomitant lack of commitment to addressing the challenges of supporting changes at the school frontline (Morris & Scott, 2003). The implementation of formative approaches to assessment faces multiple challenges that have been well-rehearsed in the international literature (Tierney, 2006) and with respect to Hong Kong (Carless, 2005; Kennedy et al., 2008). A key challenge relevant to this research study is the dominance of summative assessment and the focus on academic outcomes in Hong Kong. Hong Kong teachers seem to view formative approaches, such as peer assessment, as a Western innovation not necessarily practical in a Chinese setting (Carless, 2005), whereas summative assessment is deeply rooted in the local educational culture and generally understood and valued by the society at large (Biggs, 1996; Poon & Wong, 2008). A reverence for examination-oriented education in Hong Kong is combined with predominantly teacher-centred instructional styles focused on textbook coverage and heavy doses of homework supplemented by drill and practice tests (Kennedy et al., 2008). Indeed, the dominance of summative assessment has impeded previous attempts at assessment reform (Morris, 2000). Given the challenges of implementing assessment change, Kennedy et al., (2008) have warned against assumptions that the promotion of peer assessment somehow solves problems inherent in summative assessment and have suggested a need to focus on broader local cultural contexts. They also point to a dearth of research related to peer assessment in local classrooms.

1.5 Educational Context in Hong Kong and its Problems

Being an international language, English is used around the world in different aspects on a daily basis. The value and importance of English should receive significant attention, especially in an international city like Hong Kong. In order to enhance the recognition of the qualifications and the competitiveness of graduates, all universities in Hong Kong, both subsidized and private, adopt English as the medium of instruction. Students who want to study

in a university must obtain at least Level 3 English Language for the HKDSE. This policy is intended to further develop students' English capacity however, it causes classrooms in secondary schools to be dominated by daily drills aimed at obtaining good results in the public examination (Carless, 2005). Although students may indeed obtain good results in the HKDSE and show satisfactory academic competence, the results are unlikely to reflect students' actual English language proficiency in real life context (Carless, 2012).

The expectations of different stakeholders such as principals, teachers, students and parents in regard to the HKDSE are immense. Due to these expectations, the nature of teaching and learning in Hong Kong has become examination-oriented, with the purpose of receiving an offer of admission from a university. If the primary goal of secondary education has become to prepare for the HKDSE, instead of enlightening students, it seems the true value of education has been lost.

Higher education, it seems, is no exception to this trend in Hong Kong. There are two major reasons to support this continuance into university (Carless, 2012). First, first-year undergraduates in universities are well conditioned to having passive learning styles which are contradictory to autonomous and independent learning in higher education. Second, for certification purposes, summative assessment also remains dominant in higher education, in order to measure learning achievements. In university ESL classrooms, it is deemed necessary to safeguard the qualities of the graduates and promote standardization across institutions. Therefore, the use of multiple sources assessments, for example, portfolio and learning journals appears to be unpopular in universities.

The use of summative assessment for quality assurance has been manifested with the introduction of 3-3-4 curriculum in 2012. For example, The Education University of Hong Kong, formerly known as Hong Kong Institute of Education, adopted Language Exit Requirements (hereafter, LERs) in 2012 to ensure graduating students to be equipped with bi-literate and tri-lingual proficiencies in English, Putonghua and Cantonese. For English language, final year students are sponsored to take IELTS and they are required to attain a minimum band score of 6.0 in order to fulfil one graduation requirement. This is done in order to recognize that graduates are able to function in English Language in relation to their needs (Kirkpatrick, 2014). The rationale behind the LERs is to ensure that graduates can excel in these languages in everyday tertiary and business sectors. Several different preparation classes and online courses are organised for such summative assessments. Requiring graduating students to reach certain level in an international test makes the summative assessment culture more predominant.

According to Gan (2012), the lack of focus on language improvement in the curriculum is one of the contributing factors to explain the discrepancy between the tertiary education and employers' expectation. The emphasis on language system instead of the ability to use English in daily conversations fails to improve students' language proficiency. Apart from the problem of knowledge-based ESL curriculum, students' assessment grades are mostly decided by teachers, leaving students with no voice in their assessment results. With such a focus on outcomes, peer assessment, self-assessment and collaborative assessment have become unusual practices in classroom teaching and learning. In this sense, the assessment culture has become so narrow that, as suggested by some researchers (Huba & Freed, 2000; Shohamy, 1992, 2001), collecting multiple and diverse sources appears impossible. In tertiary education in Hong Kong, assessment of learning is still predominant. It is unlikely to help undergraduates transfer skills from classroom to workplace (Lee & Coniam, 2013; Lam, 2015). Many undergraduates and graduates, including myself, have found it difficult to use English Language naturally in workplace communication.

1.6 The Researcher's Experiences

Recalling my own personal experiences within the Hong Kong education system may be of value at this point in the study. I view myself as a typical 'product' of the examination-orientated system because I have received my primary, secondary and tertiary education in Hong Kong. Looking back at my secondary school life, I can clearly see the analogy I put forth earlier in this study; that of being like a knowledge container. Day after day, different subject teachers poured considerable amounts of subject knowledge into me. This is akin to Freire's (1970) 'banking' model of education rather than its 'liberatory' potential. It was a teacher-centred, not student-centred education.

After completing the prescribed textbook contents a year before the public examination, my classroom began practising past examination papers day after day. My achievement in learning was solely determined by how well I did in the past papers. If I had had no target of studying at a university in Hong Kong, I would not have been motivated to get drilled every single day. While preparing for the public examination, there was no need to do reflection on what I learnt or how I did in the past papers. Where there were mistakes, I only had to memorise the model answers again. With this style of study as my only means of reference, I found myself applying similar learning strategies to the English language. I needed to memorise the meaning of new and unfamiliar words, use set phrases for writing and speaking and practice different

grammar items. My English proficiency, as indicated by Shohamy (2001), was determined by my examination results.

After entering university, I came across different assessment methods in three English courses. They included portfolios, presentations, debates and group projects. I realised that my English improved significantly through the preparation work involved in these assessment methods. I came to understand that more effort should be paid to the processes and, most probably, the outcomes would become better. When I submitted my work to the teachers, the conversations between us allowed me to clarify my doubts in the assessment tasks and receive suggestions for improvement. I enjoyed seeing improvement and realised the importance of soft skills in assessment tasks.

When I became an English teacher in a tertiary institution in 2012, I found that the examination was still dominant form of assessment and it occupied 80% of the subject score. One reason for that was the introduction of the new 3-3-4 curriculum. The university management favours formal and summative assessment to ensure the language proficiencies of the students. Although I wanted to involve students in the assessment processes, the students themselves seemed hesitant to participate. From the point of view of the students, it was the teachers' responsibility to decide how they were assessed and getting involved in the assessment processes was a 'foreign' concept to them. Before the examination, I attempted to discuss the assessment rubrics with my students, however it failed to yield any benefits. Most students expressed that they could approximately know what grades they received in the examinations but not be able to reach higher. They saw assessment rubrics as an indicator telling them where they were, rather than seeing it as a piece of information to know how to reach higher.

As a result, I took my first attempt at getting the students on-board to be a failure due to the lack of work samples and suggestions. Learning from this attempt, I then modified the classroom activities by breaking down the writing task into smaller tasks. Students were asked to write a paragraph of introduction, an affirmative argument, a negative argument and conclusion at different times of the semester. Having limited class time, students wrote outside the classroom and brought their work back the following week. We looked at the samples and the rubrics together. After that, we discussed the grades and how the writers could improve the writing. Since it was a voluntary exercise, only a few students took it seriously. Also, these students felt it to be unfair to have their work shown in the classroom, as they considered their classmates to be competitors.

My second attempt, therefore, was also not as successful as I would have liked, but some students indicated the value of looking at samples and discussing the rubrics together in the teaching evaluation exercise. These students also mentioned how they were scaffolded throughout the process. Furthermore, I found that writing tasks tended to make students more passive. With the value of hindsight, perhaps focusing on speaking tasks would have been more beneficial, knowing the needs of the students and their future employers.

With reference to my previous experiences with involving students in the assessment process, one important step was brought to light. This step is to let students realise the benefits of receiving formative feedback, in relation to their final results, in order for them to be more willing to participate. Furthermore, although a teacher-led discussion may be more time effective, it has the negative effect of leaving students in a passive state. They are confined to listening to the teacher's explanations, instead of exploring the rubrics by themselves.

Another unsatisfactory issue was the scaffolding process itself. In order to attain more samples for discussion, the use of Web 2.0 seems a possible and feasible way for students to share their work. The accountability of individual contributions can also safeguard the fairness issue in the exercise. While graduating students want to be competent in job hunting, improving oral English, which is also demanded by employers, can make the exercise practical.

In light of my experiences as a student and as a teacher in Hong Kong, I have become motivated to explore the means by which undergraduates can maximise their learning outcomes and transfer their university knowledge into their future workplaces. Breaking the traditional assessment routines and more high stakes models and finding alternative assessment methods seem to be required. My personal experiences indicate that the use of peer assessment to involve students is one feasible option.

However beneficial the inclusion of peer assessment may be, it still leaves questions and issues concerning how to help students improve their oral presentations. It is this very question which prompted me to conduct this entire study, so that more information may be added to the current literature regarding peer assessment on oral presentations in the ESL context.

While presentation skills are considered the most important employability-related skill (Kerby & Romine, 2009; Biggs, 2011), the objectives of this research study are understanding how different methods improve their performances in different stages of peer assessment. Furthermore, in doing so, the aim was to provide pedagogical insights on oral presentation task designs, teachers' scaffolding and students' self-reflection on spoken English during presentations.

1.7 Chapter Summary

In Hong Kong, written assessment remains the dominant assessment method in schools of all levels. Moreover, summative assessment is still the dominant assessment method. Teachers are unable to collect multiple sources to help students improve during the learning process and students are unable to receive feedback during the learning process. Students also pay less attention to the post-assessment feedback while assessment tasks are irrelevant to each other.

Regarding the curriculum in tertiary ESL classrooms, in order to reach a certain result in examinations, the emphasis on knowledge outweighs the use of English Language in a daily life setting. Upon graduation, students finishing their tertiary education have low employability. This is because oral English and effective use of English in communication are more important in the workplace. The different practices in education and workplace should be bridged. To achieve this, there is a need to revise the curriculum and change the existing teaching pedagogy with reference to the needs of the workplace. While acknowledging peer assessment is able to help students improve their presentation skills, this exploratory study investigates how students can benefit in each stage of peer assessment through collection of formative feedback. The value of the research lies in adding insights to the existing literature and supporting curriculum design and teaching pedagogy with regards to peer assessment in ESL classrooms where examinations have always dominated.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

In tertiary education, assessment allows both teacher and student to monitor progress towards achieving learning objectives, and can be approached in a variety of ways. Summative assessments evaluate student learning, knowledge, proficiency, or success at the conclusion of an instructional period, like a unit, course, or programme. Summative assessments are almost formally graded and often heavily weighted. One reason is the recognition of the professional qualifications. Summative assessment, however, has received criticism. Despite the fact that graduates are knowledgeable, employers complain about them being unable to perform their tasks at work and solve problem independently. In contrast, formative assessment refers to tools that identify misconceptions, struggles, and learning gaps along the learning journey and assess how to close those gaps. It includes effective tools for helping to shape learning and can even bolster students' abilities to take ownership of their learning when they understand that the goal is to improve learning, not apply final marks (Trumbull & Lash, 2013). These tools are highly valued upon graduation when independent learning is emphasised. It can include students assessing themselves and their peers. In short, formative assessment takes place throughout the course, and seeks to improve student achievement of learning objectives through approaches that can support specific student needs (Theal & Franklin, 2010). Formative assessment can be used to great effect in conjunction and alignment with summative assessment, and instructors can consider a variety of ways to combine these approaches. While these two assessment methods are not mutually exclusive and summative assessment is dominant in Hong Kong educational culture, the benefits of formative assessments to students learning should receive more attention.

In order to counter-balance the traditional regulative function of assessment, this chapter will review the contemporary literature on peer assessment and oral presentations in the higher education context. Through a critical analysis of the available literature, this chapter aims to achieve two overall goals. First, an examination of the numerous research studies that have been conducted around the world on the issue of how peer assessment can improve students' learning. The first part of the chapter is organised to discuss how peer assessment, an alternative assessment method, can supplement the traditional assessment methods in Hong Kong. The second objective is to situate this research study within that research tradition and lay the foundation for the theoretical framework. In doing so, it highlights student voice and agency.

Section 2.1 deals with the challenges that this form of assessment presents for top down performative oriented summative assessments. This will introduce student-oriented forms of peer assessment as an important strategy that can enhance more traditional forms of summative assessment in Hong Kong. Section 2.2 describes the knowledge structure and the theoretical framework grounded on peer assessment. Section 2.3 highlights the challenges of the implementation of peer assessment in an ESL context in Hong Kong. Section 2.4 elaborates on the importance of oral presentation skills in tertiary education, in contrast to Hong Kong's continued reliance on written assessment. Section 2.5 introduces the development of the peer assessment model which triggered a new focus and role for oral presentations within the assessment process. Section 2.6 discusses why peer assessment is conducted online and how the online platform can facilitate peer assessment for ESL students. Section 2.7 looks at some relevant theoretical and conceptual frameworks for this research study.

2.1 Peer Assessment in Higher Education

For any educational environment, conducting assessments is not only unavoidable but is one of the most important aspects. This is especially true within the higher education sector since assessment is able to confirm that students have reached standard levels against their future job requirements and to satisfy measures of quality (Boud, Cohen & Samson, 1999; Price, Carroll, O'Donovan & Rust, 2011). However, it would seem that Hong Kong has gone well beyond this in its use of assessments. The knowledge economy (Forestier & Crossley, 2015) and the emphasis on grading and certification purposes (Berry, 2011) has allowed the Hong Kong education system to become dominated by a culture of assessment.

The education system in Hong Kong has been recognised worldwide for its students' ability to obtain high levels of achievement in international standardised testing (Sweeting, 2004) such as Trends in Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) (Alexander, 2008; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2010; Martin, Mullis, Foy & Stanco, 2012; Watkins & van Aalst, 2014). Ho (2005), however, argued against the merits of these high levels of achievements, stating that Hong Kong students have less interest in the learning process because of the emphasis on learning outcomes. Students have to deal with difficult and overwhelming syllabuses within a limited time. Since assessment questions are content-based, students in Hong Kong are likely to spend their class time focusing on the subject content that will be assessed, in order to pass the examination (Boud & Dochy, 2010). This results in a student

population that is primarily relying on memorisation of content, rather than seeking a greater understanding of knowledge in a holistic manner (Johnston, 2003).

Gibbs and Simpson (2004) articulated this concept by emphasising that the key purpose of assessment tasks is to stimulate students' interests in learning. Post-assessment results are also important as these results should be able to inform instructions (Marsh, Bertrand & Huguet, 2015). Therefore criterion-referencing should be adopted since it demonstrates how a student might improve and also ensures the assessment tasks are representative of real life settings (Carney, Moree & Kennedy, 2017). Having challenged the dominance of summative assessment, it is then necessary to offer alternative assessment methods, for example, debates, forums, portfolios, self-assessment and peer assessment (Brown & Hudson, 1998). For this reason, Johnston (2003) advocated the replacement of traditional summative assessments with alternative methods. He argued that alternative methods were especially important in tertiary institutions since students are expected to be employable upon graduation.

When confronting traditional assessment methods, four elements become apparent which favour alternative assessments (Johnston, 2003). First, alternative assessments can facilitate students to understand subject knowledge holistically instead of adopting rote memorisation. Second, alternative assessments can shift the purpose away from administrative functions and towards the catering of the interests and needs of the students. Third, students' motivation may increase as the stress of traditional methods decrease. Demands on students could be spread throughout the term with the alternative process, rather than focusing on one summative assessment at the end of the term. Lastly, alternative assessments are more authentic indicators that students are able to apply their knowledge in real life situations. Traditional methods are very limited in this respect and may only indicate the students' ability to take an examination on paper.

The same reasoning may also be applied to ESL education. Focusing specifically on ESL classrooms, Bailey (2017) and Matsuno (2017) agreed that students' English proficiency can be enhanced when alternative assessments are adopted. This enhancement occurs because, instead of receiving the usual post-assessment feedback, classroom activities designed for alternative assessments allow evaluation to take place throughout the process. Other researchers have also demonstrated some advantages of using alternative assessments in an ESL classroom. First, the assessments are more authentic since there are more interactive activities which are contextually relevant to the student's a real-life. Second, instead of assessing language skills individually, the four macro language skills can be integrated in a social setting, thereby creating a holistic approach of language. Third, alternative assessments

allow students to learn from different perspectives by getting exposed to different circumstances. Fourth, by overcoming the one-size-fits-all approach in an examination-oriented learning environment, students can better understand what their needs are and make the necessary adjustments. Finally, alternative assessment can inform teaching and instructions by collecting different sources of learning.

It is also important to include alternative methods when designing new tasks. Any assessment task should be both challenging but achievable, but when incorporating alternative methods, it must also be considered how feedback will be offered (Price et al., 2011). Among the alternative assessment methods, peer assessment is likely to be the most feasible method since it involves criteria-referencing and feedback (Falchikov, 2005). Boud (1995) also highlighted that involving students in the assessment task is one of the ways to maintain students' interests in learning. Peer assessment, therefore, has received considerable attention in recent years because of the increased amount of feedback and a growing focus on learner independence and learner autonomy (Patri, 2002). Peer assessment is defined as the educational process by which students evaluate and grade the works or performances of other comparable students by providing either written or oral feedback (Topping, 1998).

One distinctive feature of higher education is the learning and assessment of higher order thinking skills, including assessing and evaluating (Heywood, 2000). The implementation of peer assessment, on one hand, allows students to receive more detailed, positive and timely feedback for improvement purposes (Carless, 2011). On the other hand, it allows students to become a part of a scholarly community since they are required to critically judge the work of their peers by referencing the commonly agreed assessment rubrics (Rowland, 2000). This practice could develop students' critical judgements, which are highly valued in higher education (Savery, 2006). If one accepts these concepts and compares it against the traditional assessment methods prevailing in Hong Kong, the shortcomings of the tradition methods are clear. Several researchers have concluded that undergraduate students in Hong Kong are unlikely to demonstrate critical thinking in learning (see for example Chan, 2013; Cheng, 2014; Kennedy, 2002, Ku, Ho, Hau & Lai, 2014; Yuan & Lee, 2015).

Alternative assessment methods also offer a broader range of skills to students. With reference to Zariski's (1996) study, there are four major pedagogical skills that need to be developed in tertiary education. The first skill, life-long learning, is a concept in which students should understand that university degrees are a part of learning, and not the end of their intellectual development. To become a life-long learner, students must learn how to study independently and be able to evaluate their own progress and performances. The second skill,

metacognition, allows students to enhance their problem-solving skills when they face problems alone. Peer assessment may involve discussions with peers which will stimulate metacognition skills. Students should develop the ability to plan, monitor and evaluate in the process of problem-solving which involves their existing knowledge and control of one's thinking. The third skill is acquired when students take responsibility for their own learning. Student role in learning is absent in traditional assessments and that contradicts with the ideas of independence, thoughtfulness and critical analysis in higher education. Peer assessment can eliminate passive reception and is further able to provide channels for students to actively participate in the learning process. The last skill involves the developing of expertise across the professional, business and academic fields. Peer assessment requires students to assess the work quality of their peers and provide feedback. This exercise is especially important to students in professional disciplines, such as law and medicine (Memon et al., 2010) because fair and accurate peer assessment is an important attribute of a successful practitioner in a self-governing body.

To prepare students for future workplace, these four major skills are expected to be integrated into the curriculum at the higher education level. Students' perceptions towards education, due to a predominate focus on learning outcomes, has erected artificial barriers for them to develop such skills. Teachers and employers in various disciplines, for example, healthcare, engineering and marketing, believe that higher-order thinking skills are crucial skills. When joining the workplace, students are expected to know how to make reasoned arguments through various problem-solving activities (Fung, 2014, Kong, et. al., 2014; Kwan & Wong, 2015; Chan et. al., 2017; Ko & Chan, 2017). The traditional summative assessments, focusing on results, are unlikely to develop students' higher-order thinking skills. Apart from academic knowledge, professional skills should be taken into account when designing a curriculum.

After understanding how peer assessment can benefit students, it must now be shown what students are doing in peer assessment exercises that makes it such a promising alternative. First, if students still remain focused on outcomes, the enhanced feedback in alternative assessments would likely help students do better in the traditional summative assessment (Falchikov, 2015). Second, clear rubrics must be present when it comes to assessing peers. This avoids excessive personal opinions and allows students to discuss performances with an agreed upon rubrics (Ashton & Davies, 2015; Reinholz, 2016). Peer assessment allows for a deeper learning experience and students will become more engaged and self-directed in their learning processes (Sivan, 2000; Falchikov, 2005).

Through evaluation, students are able to gain a comprehensive understanding of the subject content. To achieve this, students must produce work to be discussed collaboratively at a later stage. Once their work is ready for discussion, students may assess each other's work and consider it through the rubrics. The assessor will then give a score and comments on their classmates' work, giving the assessed student an opportunity to review the comments. Finally, students can also review their own work by independently referring to the same rubrics. Throughout the process, this peer assessment exercise can help students think about what they have done and how they accomplished it, as they should be more receptive to peer feedback (Mills, Dalleywater & Tischler, 2014; Kamp et al., 2014). In contrast, when students read the teachers' comments, under traditional methods, they tend to accept what the teacher says without analysing the feedback. With alternative methods, however, students will often analyse peer feedback to see if it is valid. (Bettis III, 2016).

In recent years, some research studies have been showing that the curriculum in the tertiary education is probably irrelevant and insufficient enough to prepare graduate professionals for today's workplaces (Andrews & Higson, 2008; Jackson, 2010; Deeter-Schmelz, 2015). Learning hard subject knowledge seems insufficient within the university curriculum as the world is full of complexity and uncertainty and also is constantly changing. Although students are able to pass different professional exams, some employers have expressed their dissatisfaction with the graduates' application of discipline knowledge while at work (Joughin & Collom, 2003; Spike & Jolly, 2003; Joughin, 2010). Graduate professionals may not own the knowledge due to the style of learning – drilling of subject knowledge. This can also explain why certain graduate skill gaps exist (Jackson & Chapman, 2012). There is a need to develop students' critical thinking skills before they complete their university if they are to meet these goals (Appendix I).

One challenge for teachers is how to best equip students with soft skills. These are often not taught explicitly to undergraduates but are very necessary in order to function optimally in their future work or study environment. McKenna and Williams (1997, p.35) also emphasised that “the goal of tertiary education should be to change students' interpretations of their world by increasing their understanding of it”. This is unlikely to happen in an examination-oriented education system where students merely memorise the subject content. To promote student-centred learning, different group activities have been adopted by some institutions to facilitate interactive and self-directed learning among students (Keppell & Carless, 2006). The outcomes, however, were unsatisfactory as students tended to remain passive. The common scenario was that only one student was engaged in the group activity while others remained

silent or off-task (Galton & Pell, 2010). It was further discovered that traditional Confucian values, rooted in the Chinese society, contributed to this scenario (Carless, 2008). Students appeared uncomfortable to engage in argumentative discussions, especially when conflicting personal opinions were involved (Biggs, 1996; Kennedy, 2002).

Although peer assessment could improve students' academic performances and develop their critical thinking skills, the effectiveness of peer assessment has been questioned. Providing an assessment to a peer may be perceived as competitive in nature, causing problems for a face-saving subculture within a Chinese community (Morrison, 2006). Furthermore, Hong Kong students are used to studying in teacher-centered classrooms and the education culture is examination-driven (Carless, 2011). Instead of learning from the process, students may find it more realistic to focus on the final outcomes. Due to the ever-changing society, Hong Kong undergraduate students must be motivated and need to develop a learning style that will continue to exist in the workplace and foster life-long learning (Biggs & Tang, 2011). Both teachers and students, therefore, should identify the value of the peer assessment process.

Since university students are expected to be equipped with independent and life-long learning skills upon graduation, peer assessment has received increased attention recently. If based on a commonly agreed assessment criteria, peer assessment can allow students to critically evaluate their peers' performances and ultimately their own performances (Patri, 2002). Students would be able to develop some qualities that help them to learn on their own and after graduation. Involving students in assessments is crucial because students can understand the underlying rationale and they are likely to increase their autonomy and motivation in learning (Brown, 2004; Cheng & Warren, 2005). Beyond academic learning, university students can be equipped with skills for the twenty-first-century workplace (EDB, 2005). With more institutions advocating for these qualities and skills to be instilled in graduates, it would seem that peer assessment offers the greatest potential for systemic change.

2.2 Peer Assessment in the Hong Kong Tertiary ESL context

As stated above, the instances of qualified research projects in Hong Kong are few. However, a qualitative study was conducted by Cheng and Warren (2005) regarding the reliability and potential advantages of peer assessment. In this research, 51 electrical engineering undergraduates, from the University of Hong Kong, were required to do a group project and conduct peer assessment on their classmates' English language proficiency. One of the tasks for the group project was to complete an oral presentation. Students had the opportunity to assess their classmates' performances with reference to some agreed assessment

rubrics, which focused on content, lexical sources, pronunciation and delivery. The entire research study lasted for 14 weeks with students being provided with a 3-hour training session. While peer assessment was a new concept to these students, the training session sought to introduce the rationale of using peer assessment, discuss assessment rubrics, practice assessing peers' oral presentations and to explore problems that students encountered. The instruments being used in this research are peer assessment forms, pre- and post-surveys, peer feedback forms and semi-structured interviews. Students' attitudes towards the assessment criteria were analysed with the use of ANOVA.

Although most of the students scored 500 on the TOEFL, they were not confident about their linguistic competence in the peer assessment exercise. They felt that their limited linguistic competence made them unqualified to be a peer assessor. Therefore, the number of comments on the non-language criteria, including content and delivery, was considerably different from the language criteria. Cheng and Warren (2005) believe that peer assessment can significantly help lower achievers to improve their language proficiency because the scoring range is narrower than if a teacher was marking the exercise. In other words, the lower achievers became motivated to obtain a higher score by learning from good presentations. With regard to the validity in peer assessment, Cheng and Warren (2005) found that students did satisfactorily in assessing peers' oral presentations. Both teachers and students who participated in this research study concluded that students' higher cognitive thinking was developed, and a deeper learning approach was scaffolded.

While some of the points from their research study are useful, there are also some limitations. The insufficiency of training and discussions prior to the peer assessment exercise made students less confident to assess their peers' linguistic competence. As a result, the peer assessors selectively gave feedback to the assessed and could not give comments on each item equally. The results of their research study are unable to be generalised because only electrical engineering undergraduates participated in this study. Students from different disciplines are needed in order to see if there are different perceptions about language. Although this study mentioned the validity of peer assessment, more attention should be paid to the learning process which is arguably more important (Suen, 2014; Tighe-Mooney, Bracken & Dignam, 2016).

Patri (2002) conducted a quantitative research study on peer assessment to investigate if peer feedback would be similar to teacher feedback and investigate the impact on their peers' works and their own works. The study was conducted at City University of Hong Kong with 54 undergraduate participants, of different majors and all enrolled in a remedial English course. A 2-hour training session was conducted where both teachers and students discussed the

assessment rubrics and understood how a good presentation was produced. In the peer assessment exercise, students were required to assess their peers' oral presentations with reference to the agreed rubrics which included organisation, language use and interaction. The instruments of analysis were questionnaires and peer feedback forms. Students were divided into two groups for this research study. The experimental group was allowed to discuss with and provide feedback to the assessed before filling out the peer feedback forms. The control group could only fill out the peer feedback forms immediately after the oral presentations.

The results of the t-tests concluded that how students assessed their peers' performances and their own works were different. Moreover, the amount of feedback was enhanced after the discussions among peers. The low level of students' English proficiency, however, created a problem in data interpretation. Students with more advanced English language abilities should be invited to confirm the results. Although there are limitations, Patri's (2002) study, similar to Cheng and Warren (2005), proved that peer assessment was more or less the same as the teachers' assessment. Falchikov and Goldfinch (2000) further argued that once the assessment task and the assessment rubrics are understood, students should be able to assess their peers. In other words, training and practice sessions are essential (Patri, 2002), and students need to discuss and negotiate the assessment rubrics and reach an agreement for marking (Race, 2014; Cheng & Warren, 2005; Patri, 2002; Falchikov & Goldfinch, 2000). Furthermore, peer assessment should be followed by collaborative assessment and self-assessment (Race, 2014; Shohamy, 1992). Peer discussions are necessary for better feedback (Nicol, Thomson & Breslin, 2014; Patri, 2002) and peer assessment exercises need to be carefully planned and designed (Falchikov, 2005). Although the abovementioned studies do possess some minor flaws, the positive evidence provided by their results is sufficient to accept that peer assessment, as an alternative assessment method, could be successfully instituted into Hong Kong's higher education system.

2.3 Importance of Oral Presentations in Hong Kong Higher Education

In 2012, after the implementation of the new senior secondary school curriculum, the English oral assessment included an 8-minute group discussion and a one-minute individual response. This component only occupies 10% of the subject score, which when compared with other assessments, this oral assessment occupies the lowest percentage. Reading, writing and listening occupy 20%, 25% and 30% respectively. As a result, in such an examination-oriented learning environment, teachers will spend more time on writing but relatively less time on speaking. Due to the influence of the public examination, speaking proficiency is relatively

weaker than the other three skills (Sung, 2017). Since much attention is paid to paper tests, Hong Kong students' oral English remains a problem after the HKDSE (Hyland, 2014; Evans & Morrison, 2016). In regard to the university curriculum, besides ensuring discipline-specific knowledge, universities have been urged to put more effort into developing students' "key", "core", "transferable" and/or "generic skills" which are related to high-level employment (Universities UK, 2002). It was concluded that graduates should be readily employable (Lindberg, 2007) and one of the most significant employment skills is the ability to give oral presentations (Kerby & Romine, 2009; Biggs, 2011).

In Hong Kong, due to the examination-driven culture, students have become very practical in their study style. A majority of students tend to learn English with reference to the course syllabus and to fulfil the examination requirements (Carless, 2011). Therefore, the English language that the students use is formulaic and lacks the capability to converse in a more natural English (HKEAA, 2009). Before graduating from universities, students are required to improve their English-speaking skills (Hill & Storey, 2003), make their English language more communicative (Carless, 2004) and be equipped with a "whole range of communication and presentation skills" (Wong, 1994, p.14). There are reports affirming the importance of oral presentation skills, allowing students to "demonstrate higher levels of cognitive thinking and development" (Kerby & Romine, 2009, p.172). Moreover, Alshare and Hindi (2004) indicated that graduates with good presentation skills will have more employment opportunities. They should be able to "defend their ideas and work in verbal exchanges" (Huxham, Campbell & Westwood, 2012, p.126). Development of oral presentation skills, as a result, has been an important objective in higher education (MacAlpine, 1999; Kehm, 2001; Joughin, 2007; Kerby & Romine, 2009; van Ginkel, Gulikers, Biemans & Mulder, 2015). Wisker (2004) suggested that these skills should be purposely taught and assessed.

Despite the fact that developing oral presentation skills has become crucial in tertiary education, it has received relatively insignificant research attention. Whilst there are research studies which focus on the construction of evaluation instruments (Conor, 2006), anxiety in relation to oral presentations (Behnke & Sawyer, 2000), as well as the use of self and peer assessment (Patri, 2002; Cheng & Warren, 2005; Langan et al., 2005). These studies, however, concentrate on the learning outcomes only. The issue of cognitive processes in learning is detached. In other words, most research studies show what students need to learn to achieve better outcomes in oral presentations and there is little research on how students explore their learning process and determine their learning styles. In addition, at any rate, it has been put

forth that students in Hong Kong seem unable to be in charge of their own learning (Kember, 2016; Tang, 2016). Consequently, in speech production, “the conceptual and linguistic representations are not the same” (Dipper, Black & Bryan, 2005, p.418). Comments on students’ speaking abilities have been disappointing (HKEAA, 2003, 2004, 2005). Examiners reported similar problems in previous years, for example; inaccurate grammar, difficulties asking and responding to questions, repeating information, hesitations, producing unnatural speech, and using frequent formulaic expressions (Hamp-Lyons, 2016; Lee, 2016). In defense of the students’ unsatisfactory mastery of speaking skills, Lee (2016) explained that this is not reflective of what the curriculum covers. Yang et al. (2000) went further by proposing that linguistic input contributed to this problem and that a heavy reliance on textbooks for teaching speaking is ineffective. Ellis (2002) then argued that textbooks are mostly offering highly controlled activities and adopt a disjointed approach, which is divorced from speaking. Although students are able to complete the exercises without much difficulty, they are unlikely to communicate the same information in real life situations. Lee and Collins (2009) also criticised that the textbooks in Hong Kong emphasised mechanical drills and encouraged students to memorise set patterns. This is further evident by the research study conducted by De Grez, Valcke and Roozen, (2009), indicating that teachers concentrated on formulaic expressions and set language patterns but did not provide instruction on how to learn speaking. Lee (2016) argued that there was an urgent need to sensitise speaking lesson materials, adopt a more authentic approach and design activities to cater for students’ learning needs, in order to be competitive after graduation.

By taking an international perspective, some relevant context information becomes important. Stray (2001) indicated that oral assessment has been a dominant assessment form at Oxford and Cambridge since the 18th Century. Moreover, in general, there has been an increasing trend of incorporating oral forms of assessment for checking students’ knowledge and understanding of subject content throughout the world. Although Hong Kong's education system has been considered to be providing a global outlook to students and is internationally competitive (University Grants Committee, 2015), surprisingly, the University Grants Committee (hereafter, UGC) has not emphasised the importance of oral presentation in Hong Kong tertiary education. For most of the programmes in higher education, written assessment, for example, essay writing and written examination, is a dominant format of assessment (Joughin, 2007; Huxham, et. al., 2012). Different forms of oral assessment are often observed to substitute traditional written assessment in some disciplines, for example, viva of doctoral

dissertation, mock trials in law schools, design presentations in architectural studies and clinical assessment in medical schools (Joughin, 1998). This idea, however, was opposed by some educators because they thought that the idea of developing communication and presentation skills was less likely to meet the aims and objectives of different content-based courses (Cunnington et. al., 1997; Spike & Jolly, 2003). Despite this value judgement, the benefits of oral presentation for the students in higher education should be addressed (Habeshaw, Habeshaw & Gibbs, 1994) and rectified if graduates are expected to perform better in the workplace.

Joughin (2010) introduced three reasons for placing more emphasis on oral presentation in higher education. First, oral communication tends to be a dominant mode of communication in the world of work and professional practice. Second, students should be able to express their ideas to their peers and teachers through speaking and be confident to speak in work-like environments. Lastly, oral presentation helps teachers to prove student's work is original, maintaining academic integrity. In addition, oral presentation allows teachers to assess two different qualities of students. The first is student's communication and language skills and the second is student's command of subject knowledge through a presentation (Joughin, 1998; Memon, Joughin & Memon, 2010). Memon and his colleagues (2010) also identified that the weaknesses of both more-able and less-able students could be identified through oral presentations.

Despite the cumulative evidence of the benefits brought by oral presentations, it is still an unusual format of assessment in tertiary education in Hong Kong. One obvious reason refers to reliability and individual bias (Wakeford, 2005). Furthermore, a change to oral assessment leaves the schools without having written evidence which serves the purposes of school accountability and evidence for external review (Joughin & Collom, 2003; Carless, 2011). Student stress is another issue as oral presentation can cause students to worry about expressing themselves and making mistakes (Habeshaw et. al., 1994; Wisker, 2004). Some students might also see oral presentations as being unfair since "extravert and confident students" would perform better (Huxham et. al., 2012, p.126). These are legitimate concerns and do allow teaching staff to fear using oral presentations as an assessment format. However, as there is a considerable amount of literature on oral presentation in tertiary education, for the teaching staff to gain an independent perspective (Joughin, 1998). Likewise, there is a value in studying oral presentations from the student's point of view in order to provide a similar level of independent perspective. Further investigation about the students' experience in oral

presentations may explore how they control their learning and help them to improve. At this point in time, time this specific area has been greatly under-researched in Hong Kong.

2.4 Peer Assessment of Oral Presentations

In this section I look closer at the individual segments of an oral presentation. A successful assessment task should consist of three elements. They are educative (Brookhard, 1999), relevant (Meyers & Nulty, 2009) and authentic (Hristova, 2014). An educative assessment task would help students understand the real working environment, whereas a relevant and an authentic task would “stimulate the kinds of work performed by practitioners in a discipline” (Hristova, 2014, p.74). Since oral communication is an important skill at the workplace, Boud and Dochy (2010) believed that oral presentations are authentic assessment tasks which help students to develop their skills in communication.

In order to develop students’ oral presentation skills, students should receive continuous feedback through formative assessment, before the summative assessment, which is usually the final assessment. According to Black and William (2009, p.6), a formative assessment is:

An assessment functions formatively when evidence about student achievement elicited by the assessment is interpreted and used to make decisions about the next steps in instruction that are likely to be better, or better founded, than the decisions that would have been made in the absence of that evidence.

To summarise, the feedback generated during the formative assessment process is helpful to improve students’ learning. In contrast, summative assessment, for example, routine tests and examinations, is relatively formal ways of evaluating students’ learning performances at the end of a defined instructional period (Carless, 2005; Fung, 2007). Formative assessment is commonly known as “assessment for learning” because students can use the feedback and see how they performed, compared to the ideal. Summative assessment, on the other hand, is known as “assessment of learning” since students will receive a score or a grade, which will tell them what they have learnt. Although summative assessment has been a dominant form of assessment in Hong Kong’s education context (Carless, 2011), formative and summative assessments are not mutually exclusive. They can both be useful as they each collect different kinds information (Johnston, 2003). The tension between these two forms of assessment should be handled carefully in order to provide students with a positive learning environment.

Referencing this within the Hong Kong context, there is a need to see how likely Hong

Kong is to adopt oral assessment methods. It has already been demonstrated that examination-oriented culture and teacher-centred classrooms are two main characteristics of Hong Kong's education system (Lam, 2003). And that the overall education system emphasises "obedience to school authority and school regulations, and success in examinations" (Yee, 2001, p.73). Moreover, it has also been shown that students themselves are unlikely to use feedback for personal improvement, since Hong Kong students are very pragmatic and typically will only study what is to be assessed (Carroll, Diaz, Meiklejohn, Newcomb & Adkins, 2013). Even when students do receive feedback, it is likely to be disregarded. This ambivalence to feedback may occur because each assessment task is most likely an individual task and irrelevant to the next task (Carless, 2011), and/or the giving of feedback may be delayed, to the point where it then becomes disassociated with the prior task.

Feedback, as a result, is not valuable to these students (Hristova, 2014). Richardson and Harley (2012) also reported that students were difficult to convince of the benefits of formative feedback for improving performances. Hattie and Timperley (2007), however, identified the most important factor in relation to student achievement was feedback. If the feedback is timely and specific, student performance could be significantly improved (Gibbs & Simpson, 2004). Crisp (2012) believed that one of the goals of using formative feedback is to help learners better perform in the summative assessment tasks. Once students understand the connection between these two items, they should be more proactive towards receiving feedback. Furthermore, students should receive feedback at the appropriate time, so that they would know what skills they have to improve before the next assessment task (Brophy, 2004). In light of this, the usefulness of the formative feedback should become obvious to students and should embrace the alternative method, if given a proper introduction to it.

In Hong Kong, generally speaking, teachers have a central role in the judgement of students' assignments. Feedback and course grades are decided by teachers only because of the hierarchical relationship between teachers and students, and that teachers are considered to be the "source of authority and wisdom" in Hong Kong (Carless, 2011, p.69). This practice, however, has insignificant impact on student improvement (Crisp, 2007; Wingate, 2010). Rust (2002) reported that, without "emotional and psychological investment" from students (p.153), they would make the same mistakes even though the mistakes have been mentioned in the feedback. Active engagement in feedback is highly encouraged and peer assessment should be considered, since it allows students to "actively engage with marking criteria" (Rust, p.153).

"Peer assessment is regarded as a specific type of collaborative learning" (Panadero, Romero, & Strijbos, 2013, p.195) and can be very useful in both oral and written tasks. Peer

assessment of writing tasks has been observed in Hong Kong's tertiary ESL context (Cheng & Warren, 2005), in which peers give feedback and help each other to revise their written work. Bostock (2001) and Parti (2002) believed that this peer assessment in writing could help students develop their writing abilities, produce more quality written work and enhance autonomy in learning. Research studies about peer assessment of oral presentations, however, are rare. Only a few studies have reported that students show significant improvement in oral presentations after conducting peer assessment (Parti, 2002; Cheng & Warren, 2005; Falchikov; 2005, Doree, Jardine & Linton, 2007). These research studies, however, did not investigate how students learn at different stages in peer assessment.

Some students tend to hesitate to receive peer feedback because they find it less accurate and less reliable. Gibbs and Simpson (2004), however, claimed that students could benefit from the immediate feedback being provided during the formative peer assessment of oral presentations. Students and their peers could work together and understand what would constitute a good performance. Students may also compare the feedback for others with their own performances. Ramsden (2003) also believed that this practice would strengthen a student's sense of responsibility in learning. It may also be able to eliminate some misconceptions about teaching and learning materials, that students may hold. By doing so, students are encouraged to participate actively in classroom learning, which would result in developing higher order thinking skills and better oral presentation skills (Pearce et al., 2009).

In the academic community, the introduction of "Speaking Paper", which is oral presentation, in Internet-based TOEFL reflects the current trend in education that more attention is being paid to spoken English proficiency and the importance of verbal expression. Furthermore, students are required to conduct oral presentations in most of the curriculum. As a result, a backwash effect has been created to motivate students to improve their presentation skills. From the perspective of the business environment in Hong Kong, the presence of a multitude of international corporations, has placed a high premium on verbal skills for its Hong Kong staff. This business environment requires graduates to have proficient oral English ability for daily operations. A new emphasis on presentation skills in higher education has come about because these skills are especially important to prepare students for future careers (Hill & Storey, 2003). Since Hong Kong education is internationally recognised, the English ability of undergraduate students is, at least, equivalent to 6.5 in IELTS. However, it would seem that most of these students are anxious about oral presentations (Hristova, 2014) and uncomfortable to evaluate their peer's performance, as they feel they are unqualified to do so (Cheng &

Warren, 2005). In this repetitive scenario, it is essential to help the Hong Kong students rise to meet employers' expectations.

The use of peer assessment in oral presentations is valuable in solving this problem because it provides a new layer of evaluation to the students. It is believed that peer assessment could empower students in learning, gaining a deeper learning and opportunities for self-reflection (Langan et al., 2005). The skills they learn in the peer assessment tasks would be also helpful to them after graduation. It could help learners to review their own performances in oral presentations, developing similar qualities required in life-long learning (Pearce, Mulder & Baik, 2009). A successful peer assessment programme could break the cycle of student anxiety and avoidance regarding oral exchanges and finally offer Hong Kong students what they deserve.

2.5 Peer Assessment Online

There is little doubt that e-learning has found a solid foothold in Hong Kong's education system. This new trend in education has been warmly welcomed by the bureaucracy and its constituent institutions. Programmes such as "Flipped Classroom" and "Massive Open Online Courses" (hereafter, MOOCs), which are providing peer assessment elements in their online content, has received significant attention (Chew, Snee & Price, 2016; Demir, 2017). In fact, dozens of different electronic platforms have been established relatively recently to facilitate peer assessment (Davies, 2006). While feedback is the major competent in any peer assessment exercise, it is also possible to receive timely feedback from an online platform. With the advancement of technology, peer assessment will enter a new stage by incorporating multimedia elements. Tsai et al., (2001) investigated the effectiveness of conducting peer assessment online and discovered that, apart from having a satisfactory correlation between teacher marking and peer marking, more students, i.e. more than 80%, seemed to enjoy doing peer assessment online. Participants themselves were more likely to recognise and accept the benefits of peer assessment in an online environment. Furthermore, these students also recognised that a deeper learning had taken place throughout the online peer assessment exercise. They agreed that peer feedback was "corrective, reinforcing, didactic and suggestive" (Tsai et al., 2001, p.228). This study, however, focused only on how the assessed benefited from the feedback. There was a lack of information how the peer assessors provided feedback in the online environment and how the assessed revised their works after peer feedback.

2.6 Sight Structure Model of Peer Assessment

While there is no systematic approach for the implementation of peer assessment in Hong Kong higher education, to understand how formative feedback can benefit students in a multi-staged peer assessment, a sight structure model of peer assessment (Oser & Baeriswyl, 2001), which is a cognitively toned process model, needs to be introduced. While this research is an exploratory study, this model is useful to illustrate the four typical activities during peer assessment. They are task performance, feedback provision, feedback reception, and revision. Subsequently, the cognitive and discursive processes needed to occur during these four overt activities to make peer assessment a successful event will be sorted and how more interactive variants of peer assessment may be useful to evoke these processes will be illustrated.

2.6.1 Task Performance

Task performance is typically the first activity in peer assessment. Students receive a task from teachers, based on the subject matter. The particular task could be either an individual (Gielen et al., 2010) or a collaborative activity (van Gennip et al., 2010). McDonough and Foote (2015) concluded that students working collaboratively would produce a higher quality of work than that produced in individual reasoning. This is accounted for by the necessity of participating students to express their arguments and reasoning within the discussion group. In this research study, task performance which was academic presentations had mainly been realised as an individual task, that is, each individual learner was asked to deliver an academic presentation. However, students were encouraged to interact and collaborate with peers in order to lead to higher learning gains.

2.6.2 Feedback Provision

The second step in peer assessment is feedback provision, during which a student would assess the performance of his/her peers. There are two issues to consider in feedback provision. The first concerns the object for feedback provision. Students need to know whether their feedback should be given based on the outcomes of the peers or the process through which their peers arrive at that performance. In most of the research studies, the object for feedback is mainly the final products instead of the processes (Kollar & Fisher, 2010). As previously mentioned, the assessors would benefit from observation and providing feedback, however, there remains a question of how the assessors decide what is important in the stage of feedback provision. In this exploratory study, it was up to peer assessors to provide feedback on performances or on processes. By reading peer feedback, it would be able to investigate how peer assessors' cognitive processes are evoked at this stage of peer.

The second issue is about how students should give feedback to their peers. For example, students may use a 5-point Likert scale to rate their peers' products (Cho & MacArthur, 2010), or students can identify their peers' weaknesses during the task learning processes and then give written feedback (Gielen et al., 2010). Another variation might be to ask students to discuss and negotiate the task performances with their peers (Bull & Al-Shanfari, 2015). Although peer assessment is likely to improve learning outcomes, allowing participants to clarify comments or justify evaluations would lead to higher learning outcomes (Kollar & Fisher, 2010). In Hong Kong, students are used to studying in teacher-centered classrooms (Carless, 2011) and are conditioned to view assessment as the sole responsibility of the teachers (Berry, 2011). They may therefore feel uncomfortable when giving a grade to their peers (Sluijsmans, Moerkerke, van Merriënbor, & Dochy, 2001).

The very concept of issuing a grade as an assessment has also been contested. Smyth (2015, p.1), argued that the idea of "assessment means grading seems to be unique in education". In reality, there are plentiful assessments that do not require any grading. Grade-less assessments can allow people to focus on the feedback and to do better in the future, for example, job interviews and presentation of honours project. As a result, "viewing learning in this more 'constructivist' light blurs the lines between feedback, learning and assessment and should make us [learners] question what feedback is for" (Smyth, 2015, p.3). Herein lies the need to investigate how peer assessors are thinking while providing feedback.

2.6.3 Feedback Reception

In a typical assessment discussion, a student would both give feedback to others and receive feedback on their own work. If there is no direct exchange between two parties or students are kept anonymous, feedback receivers could only read the written feedback on the task performances and have no opportunity for discussion and negotiation. As mentioned earlier, direct exchange between two parties would lead to better learning outcomes. Peer assessment in this research, therefore, should be conducted in a more interactive manner where direct exchange should be "allowed or even demanded" (Kollar & Fisher, 2010, p.346).

The research study conducted by Gielen et al. (2010) allowed students to question and clarify the written comments. The purpose of discursive activity was to give opportunities to the feedback receivers to understand their peers' comments through further conversations and clarification. Kollar and Fisher (2010) believed that such feedback dialogues may involve high-level cognitive processes, benefiting students from peer assessment activities. Then, the

assessed who know how to respond to their peers' feedback would provide more understanding in the cognitive aspect.

2.6.4 Revision

Revision is typically the final activity in the peer assessment process. In a less interactive setting, students would edit their work or modify their performances based on the given comments. If interaction is allowed, feedback providers and receivers could work collaboratively. This is adopted in this exploratory research. With reference to Social Constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978), students would have a common goal to improve the products or the processes. van Steendam et al. (2010) concluded that collaboration would produce a higher quality of work during the revision stage. No matter if the revision task is individual or collaborative, Bostock (2001) and Parti (2002) have proved that students' products become better after peer assessment. There are, however, insufficient research studies discussing how the feedback received by students influence the way they revise their work, and such studies are even rarer in the Hong Kong context where education is more outcome-oriented (Carless, 2011).

2.6.5 Task Design

At different stages of peer assessment, students will be involved in different activities which enhance their cognitive development. These activities are supported by Information-processing Theory and Social Constructivism.

Regarding the role of the peer assessors, while generating peer feedback, they need to read their peers' works and provide comments based on the assessment tasks and rubrics. They also must ensure that the elements that they identify, in their peers' works, are legitimate mistakes and that the feedback will not be misleading. During this process, assessors are not permitted to list all of the mistakes and ask their peers to revise the work. Consequently, the peer assessors need to consider which mistakes are more important and worth reminders or immediate revision. After that, they have to tactically inform their peers of the mistakes and suggest what should be improved in the next draft.

As the peer assessors provide feedback, Information-processing Theory applies. It simultaneously offers the opportunity for them to retrieve the relevant knowledge, i.e. oral presentation skills in this research study, from their memory (Adam et al., 1988). Therefore, it falls upon the assessors to solve the problems that they have raised, suggest ways to tackle them, and provide sufficient explanations so as to effectively guide their peers' understanding. With this responsibility, assessors may need to re-visit the learning materials in order to judge,

correct and elaborate in this process. When encountering new knowledge, the peer assessors may also need to compare the newly learnt knowledge to the previously acquired knowledge in order to make judgements in line with the requirements.

During then entire peer assessment, students are encouraged to cooperate with each other. This cooperation is supported by Social Constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978). While peer assessment has been a major focus of research in English-speaking countries over the last decade, this exploratory study recognizes the importance of culture and society, language, and interaction in the Hong Kong tertiary educational context. The application of Social Constructivism is able to show how students cooperate with each other under a particular cultural environment. In line with this thinking, peer assessment is ideal as its educational approach encourages collaborative learning. Schunk (2008) also mentioned this in his work, and continued that students learn directly through interaction and that they will know what is appropriate in that particular culture. However, there has not been the necessary research or testing in Hong Kong in order to implement such a peer assessment programme (Phuong-Mai et al., 2006). As a result, in this exploratory study, understanding how students think, speak and argue can represent the shared knowledge of the Hong Kong tertiary educational culture (Li & Lam, 2005).

It has been argued by some authors that of all the different elements involved in facilitating learning, perhaps practice is the most important (Gagne, Wager, Golas, Keller & Russell, 2005). Dick, Carey and Carey (2001) drew on this theory and claimed that students' performance in learning could be strengthened if the activities are drill-and-practice based and are relevant to the learning objectives. Following this line of theory, several different assessment systems have since been established to support this type of learning process (Zhang, Cooley & Ni, 2001). This is certainly the case in Hong Kong, where the assessment systems are usually based on a question and answer format; i.e. students responding to teacher questions.

With the inadequacies of the above system, combined with the needs of graduating students, there is unquestionably a need to develop a theory and system that encourages students to assess peers and review peers' learning tasks (Yu, Liu & Chan, 2005). Some previous research studies have already proven that teachers could help students' cognition grow by engaging them in the process of questioning and peer assessment (Purchase, 2000; Topping & Ehly, 2001, Pearce, Mulder & Baik, 2009). As previously mentioned, the research studies related to peer assessment in the Hong Kong tertiary educational context have focused on the improved results. There is a lack of information with regards to how peer assessment is

implemented, how students benefit from providing and receiving feedback, and how students revise their works. Situating the Sight Structure of Peer Assessment, a process model, as the centre of the framework for the implementation, and applying Information-processing Theory and Social Constructivism to inform the design of different activities, this study should be able to explore and illustrate how students learn from the two roles and how they revise their presentations through collection of formative feedback in peer assessment.

2.7 Chapter Summary

Although there is an increasing amount of literature on peer assessment, there is still relatively little information in relation to the Hong Kong tertiary educational context. Despite the few research studies undertaken in Hong Kong, most of these examined the outcomes and showed the students' improved results. In contrast to the outcome-based research, investigating how students learn and improve themselves at different stages of peer assessment and revise their presentations in the Hong Kong tertiary educational context is certainly under-explored.

This study aims to contribute to the peer assessment literature, regarding tertiary ESL learners, by exploring and illustrating how students learn at different stages of peer assessment and how they revise their oral presentations after providing and collecting formative feedback from peers. Peer assessment was adopted as the focus because it is expected to suit the needs of the university students in Hong Kong. On one hand, Hong Kong students are deeply concerned about grading. The emphasis on grading has hidden the development of skills that graduating students are supposed to master. On the other hand, in contrast to the competitive learning environment in secondary education, this formative assessment gives university students an opportunity to learn from group mistakes before they attend their summative assessment. The increased amount of feedback can motivate students to produce better presentations since they can improve along the process through collection of formative feedback. The collaborative activities included in peer assessment also allow students to achieve a better outcome.

Of all the macro skills involved in studying the English language, special attention was paid to speaking and oral presentations in this research. This is because English speaking proficiency has become such an important issue in Hong Kong recently. Negative data in examination reports, the disappointment expressed by employers, and the apparent need for authentic speech productions have all emphasized the importance of students to master oral English. As Hong Kong is an international city, business leaders have demanded that prospective employees possess a considerable level of English proficiency. The English

proficiency of the graduating professionals, as a result, needs to be enhanced and they should know how to improve themselves in the future with no support from teachers.

The combination of peer assessment and oral presentations attempts to encourage university students to get involved in the assessment processes and to encourage teachers to adopt a non-traditional approach in the classroom. Thereby giving students more opportunities to develop and own their oral English skills, rather than memorising set phrases. While independent and autonomous learning remains dominant in Hong Kong education, the research literature examined above, appears to support the theory that peer assessment is a sustainable alternative which enhances students' learning at the tertiary level. With sufficient evidence found within the literature review, an open assessment culture must be nurtured in Hong Kong. It is recommended that second language learners be empowered by granting them a larger involvement in the assessment process.

In view of these gaps in the literature, this thesis aims to cast light on the implementation of peer assessment in Hong Kong by exploring and illustrating how students learn from the two roles in peer assessment as well as revise their oral presentations in an ESL classroom. As this research study is relatively new in Hong Kong tertiary educational context and evaluating peer assessment tasks to promote engagement with peer assessment, a process model, the Sight Structure Model of Peer Assessment, is adopted for examining the following three research questions:

1. Being a peer assessor, how did a student providing feedback consider what was important regarding oral presentations?
2. As the assessed, how did a student react upon peer feedback?
3. How did the feedback received by students influence the way they revised their oral presentations, i.e. closing the feedback loop?

Chapter 3

Methodology

This chapter aims to re-introduce the research questions and explain the background of this research study. It also provides information on the research setting, methodology and methods of data collection and analysis.

3.1 Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

Although peer assessment has received increased attention, there is little research being conducted in the Hong Kong tertiary ESL context. Peer assessment of oral presentation skills is even considered an under-explored area (De Grez, Valcke & Roozen, 2012), especially conducted by Hong Kong ESL learners. There are few studies about peer assessment of oral presentations in Hong Kong. These studies, however, investigated the learning outcomes. Instead of looking at learning outcomes, it is more worth investigating the learning processes that are activated while the first-year students are engaged in peer assessment activities. Year 1 students were selected for this research study because, firstly, they only had to take English language subjects in the first year of their university studies. Secondly, the skills they learnt in the peer assessment exercises were expected to be transferable to other subjects that they would take in the later years. The skills included “dealing with complex arguments, evaluating evidence, making balanced judgements and communicating their ideas clearly, both verbally and in writing” (Tighe-Mooney, Bracken & Dignam, 2016, p.2832). In Hong Kong, there is a considerable number of students in the first year of the university study who are unlikely to be familiar with peer assessment. The purpose of introducing such exercise to the first-year undergraduates in this research study seemed to be a way to develop their skills for such learning style. Echoed by Beaumont, O’Doherty and Shannon (2011), university students should develop self-reflective learning in the higher education curriculum as early as possible. This could enhance their learning success and competitiveness upon graduation. The overall aim of this research was based on an evaluation of peer assessment tasks to promote engagement to formative feedback with peer-assessment. The ways that they evaluated evidence and contributed to academic discussions in an objective and appropriate manner were examined.

Feedback is an important component in peer assessment. Since there is sufficient research showing the positive impacts on students’ learning outcomes through peer assessment, this study utilised the Sight Structure Model for Peer Assessment as the conceptual framework,

including three stages: providing feedback, reacting to feedback and closing the feedback loop. The following questions frame the investigation:

1. *Being a peer assessor, how did a student providing feedback consider what was important regarding oral presentations?*
2. *As the assessed, how did a student react upon peer feedback?*
3. *How did the feedback received by students influence the way they revised their oral presentations, i.e. closing the feedback loop?*

3.2 Research Design

Being relatively new and there is no systematic approach in the local ESL context, peer assessment in this research study was conducted following the peer assessment planning framework introduced by Boud and Falchikov (2005). There were eight elements while implementing peer assessment, as shown in Figure 1.

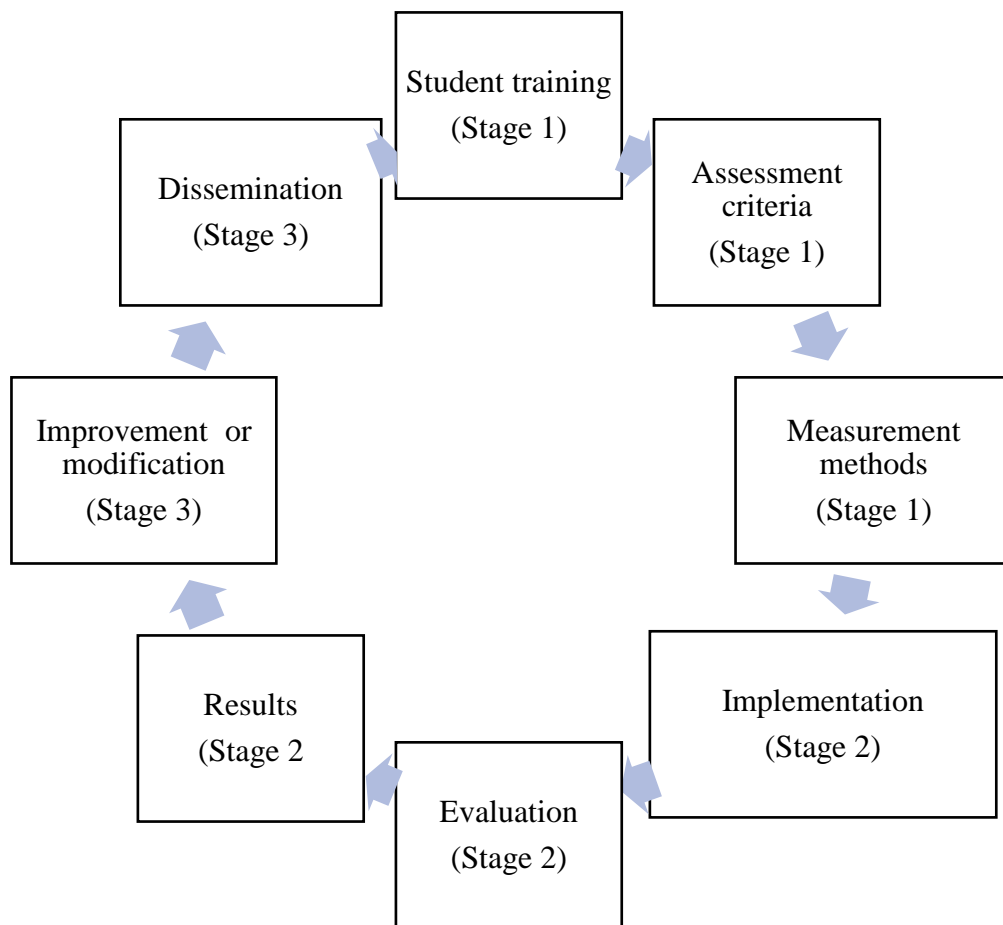


Figure 1 Cyclic scheme for peer assessment

The implementation was divided into three stages. They were pre-assessment stage, assessment stage and post-assessment stage.

Stage 1 (Pre-assessment Stage)

Step 1: Training sessions were offered to the participating students. Students were able to know the rationale and the purpose of using peer assessment in the course. Students had opportunities to study the assessment guidelines and the assessment rubrics. Issues related to fairness and bias needed to be emphasised since they were new to the peer assessment (Sivan, 2000).

Step 2: Assessment criteria were focused in this step. Students got opportunities to discuss and clarify the assessment criteria with me before the oral assessments. This step was essential since the rubrics were teacher-facing. They had responsibility to identify the criteria, especially the terms used, if they were clear and appropriate to be applied in the oral assessment (Orsmond, Merry & Callaghan, 2004). They also knew the percentage of each criterion. The use of rubrics in this peer assessment could pull the students in the assessment process in which they could better understand the expectations and components of the oral presentation assessment, have a higher awareness about their learning process and know what they needed to improve after getting timely and detailed feedback (Reddy & Andrade, 2010; Timmerman, Strickland, Johnson & Payne, 2011).

Step 3: Students were informed of the measurement methods, for example, checklists and scale. A peer feedback form (Appendix II) was provided to students to ensure an objective assessment (Patri, 2002). Students also received training by me on how to give constructive feedback to enhance collaborative learning and how to use feedback for self-improvement. They were able to identify the differences between conventional feedback and sustainable feedback. They should avoid conventional feedback which focused “predominantly on errors, and responding to errors comprehensively” (Lee, Mak & Burns, 2015, p.141). Sustainable feedback was encouraged since it provided “dialogic processes and activities which can support and inform the student on the current task, whilst also developing the ability to self-regulate performance on future tasks” (Carless, Salter, Yang & Lam, 2011, p. 397). Boud’s (1991) materials (Appendix III) regarding giving and receiving feedback

were adopted for the training purpose. Students were able to look at different feedback and discuss with their classmates and me.

Stage 2 (Assessment Stage)

- Step 4: A peer assessment trial was conducted using a Centre's sample oral presentation video. The purpose was to make the participating students more confident and less anxious when they were doing the peer assessment tasks on their own. The process was monitored by me. Students were reminded of providing sustainable feedback. I was responsible to handle any problems or difficulties that students may encounter during peer assessment. We read through the assessment task and the assessment rubrics together. We also went through each assessment item one by one to make sure students understood all assessment items. They were also welcomed to raise any problems they encountered during the trial.
- Step 5: After the trial, students got opportunities to share problems or difficulties that they had encountered in the lecture. I had to solve the problems and minimize the difficulties that students would encounter in the future peer assessment tasks by encouraging them to discuss with classmates, having further explanations and using the sample video again as a reference. Students then went back to the assessment rubrics and see if they had to further clarify any terms based on the experience in the trial (Sivan, 2000; Miller, 2003).
- Step 6: The first actual peer assessment was conducted. Students were put in groups of three and listened to their peers' presentations on e-portfolio. Students had time to provide comments and assign grades with reference to the agreed assessment rubrics. At any time during the assigned period, students were able to raise question and seek help from classmates or me in order to develop an ability to judge (Orsmond, Merry & Callaghan, 2004). Peer assessors were reminded of offering sustainable feedback while writing feedback on the e-portfolio system. There were two different ways to give feedback on the e-portfolio system. Firstly, for overall performance, peer assessors could use *CheckMate* which allowed them to give simple rating, i.e. inadequate, good, satisfactory and excellent, on content, interactive strategies, register, accuracy of grammatical structures and vocabulary, range grammatical structures and vocabulary, comprehensible pronunciation, fluency of speech, use of

PowerPoint and evidence of research. *CheckMate*, however, was not recommended since the items were different from those on the assessment rubrics. Students were suggested to use the tailor-made Peer Assessment Form with reference to the assessment rubrics. To provide detailed comments, peer assessors had to use *ChatBox* in which they could type freely. With the use of the e-portfolio system, students could read and provide feedback anytime anywhere.

Stage 3 (Post-assessment Stage)

Step 7: The assessed presenters received two peer assessment forms from the peer assessors. They could check the grades of different components first. Later, they could read the detailed feedback given by two peer assessors on their own e-portfolio accounts.

Step 8: Although students provided and received feedback online, time was given to them in the lecture, so that students who had questions about the feedback could approach the peer assessors for further explanation. They could also discuss the performances with their peer assessors in order to know and explore ways for improvement.

Step 9: Both the assessed and the assessors would reflect on the peer assessment processes (Hwang, Hung & Chen, 2014). The enhanced exposure in the assessment would allow them to understand their strengths and weaknesses towards the assessment requirements and perform better in the next performance.

Step 10: Steps 5 to 9 were repeated for the second peer assessment task.

The duration of data collection was 14 weeks while the length of the teaching semester was 13 weeks. The timeline for data collection was as follow:

Table 1 Timeline of the research study

Week	Tasks	Remarks
0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepared consent forms • Prepared documents for the Director's approval 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussed with the course coordinator about the research study • Finalised the assessment details 	
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduced the research study to the students • Introduced the research activities and students' rights • Distributed consent forms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students had a week for consideration.
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collected consent forms • Reminded students of the three oral presentation dates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Although peer assessment was not compulsory in this course, the participation rate was 100%.
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Studied the oral presentation assessment guidelines with the students • Studied the assessment rubrics with the students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students had a week to think about the rubrics after discussion.
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conducted a trial using a sample video • Conducted feedback quality training • Finalised the rubrics with the students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students had a week to think about the rubrics after the first trial.
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reminded students of the importance of sustainable feedback • Identified the roles of the assessed and the assessors • Studied the assessment rubrics with the students • Further revised the rubrics, if necessarily 	
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepared for the first presentation • Put students into their peer assessment groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Putting students in groups of three randomly for the peer assessment exercise. Each student got two peer assessors. This made the tasks fair to everyone, for

		example, receiving similar amount of feedback.
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conducted the first presentation • Uploaded the recording to their e-portfolio system • Asked students to fill in the peer assessment form and provide feedback with reference to the rubrics • Identified some good feedback providers for the semi-structured interviews 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students had one week for this task.
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Studied comments on e-portfolios • Allowed students to discuss with their peer assessors • Shared difficulties and raised questions • Interviewed focus groups to see if peer assessment helped them improve 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The peer written feedback as quantitative data was categorised using the pre-set codes based on the assessment rubrics.
9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revised the first presentation • Filled in the reflection paper to show the major changes after receiving feedback • Prepared for the second presentation • Studied rubrics with the students • Further revised the rubrics, if necessarily 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The reflections as quantitative data were coded.
10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conducted the second presentation • Uploaded the recording to their e-portfolios • Asked students to fill in the peer assessment form and provide feedback with reference to the rubrics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students had one week for this task.
11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Studied comments on e-portfolios • Allowed students to discuss with their peer assessors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The peer written feedback as quantitative data was categorised using the pre-

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviewed focus groups to see if peer assessment helped them improve 	<p>set codes based on the assessment rubrics.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews as qualitative data investigating how students revised their second presentations based on the previous feedback.
12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revised the second presentation • Filled in the reflection paper to show the major changes after receiving feedback • Prepare for the final oral presentation assessment • Studied rubrics with the students • Further revised the rubrics, if necessary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The reflections as quantitative data were coded.
13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conducted the final assessment 	
14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviewed focus groups to see how peer assessment helped them improve 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews as qualitative data investigating how students revised their final presentations based on the previous feedback. • No student withdrew in this peer assessment exercise

3.3 Two Pilot Studies

There were two pilot studies before the actual research study. In the first pilot study which was conducted in the first semester, tasks from week 0 to week 5 were the same. In week 6, while students were allowed to form their own groups in order to conduct peer assessment exercise, some problems started to occur. Students tended to, firstly, stay with their friends. Secondly, they appeared not to write much in the *ChatBox*. Because of their close friendship, they could actually discuss more open-minded and they discussed face-to-face when they met each other. Without the written feedback, some of them, however, could not remember the feedback or make sure they followed the peer feedback. This showed that written feedback

would still be required. Another problem was related to fairness. Although all students received the same HKDSE result in the English Language Subject, some of them were considered stronger in speaking. These students were popular and approached by other classmates for the peer assessment exercise. The reason behind was that they wanted to learn from stronger classmates. Especially for those who were not confident in speaking, they were eager to get more exposure to good presentations. They liked to imitate how the stronger students conducted their presentations. In this scenario, passive and quiet students were isolated, and they appeared not to have an opportunity to learn from those they wanted. Fairness became a problem. One good phenomenon was that students seemed to like to learn from observation. Once they were provided with enhanced exposure, they would go ahead and strive for better performances. The last problem that deserved attention was the file size. To make the peer assessment more authentic, students were told to take videos and upload the files to the e-portfolio system. Some of the students found this task annoying since they needed to find an empty classroom for recording purpose. While this peer assessment exercise was not a compulsory component in the course, some of them did not take videos but they could still watch their classmates' videos. Fairness issue, again, was a problem. In the second task, some students did not want to share their videos on the e-portfolio system since they only contributed without any returns. Since students lacked opportunities to use peer assessment in their previous learning processes, the education context of Hong Kong should be considered for the implementation. Hong Kong students like to avoid uncertainty and prefer structured tasks and step-by-step guidelines in education (Phuong-Mai, 2006). The second pilot study was conducted in the following semester.

With reference to the above problems and suggestions given by students in the interviews, second pilot study was revised and conducted in the second semester. Regarding the grouping problems, students were not allowed to form their own groups. All students were randomly put in groups of three. In this case, each of them was able to have at least two peer assessors. Students were reminded that they could also learn from the negative elements in the videos, instead of only positive elements. In this case, passive and quiet students could also be grouped. Each student received fair treatment in this peer assessment exercise. Furthermore, since the other group members might not be their close friends, peer assessors were more conscious and careful while providing feedback. They tended to avoid comments being too personal and give more explanations in order to clarify their judgement. This detailed written peer feedback helped the assessed to remember what they needed to pay more attention while revising their presentations. They could always go back to the *ChatBox* to see what needed to

do. While the peer feedback was more detailed and explanatory, the assessed realized the usefulness of the peer feedback. Students reacted upon peer feedback more seriously. Although students knew that I was the assessor in the summative assessment, they felt like they were disadvantaged if they did not read this formative peer feedback. Some of students were proactive to tell the peer assessors to focus on certain aspects in their oral presentations and hoped to receive some feedback for improvement. This random grouping, therefore, seemed promising in this peer assessment exercise. Students could be more observant while watching videos, looking for strengths to learn and avoiding making similar mistakes. For the file size, students found that audio recording was more convenient. They could simply make recording with less physical environmental constraints. Moreover, it was faster for them to upload the file to the e-portfolio system. Some students, however, would like to practice oral presentations more. They still liked doing video-recording. As a result, both audio and video recording remained options for students.

These two pilot studies informed the overall design of the research study. The training materials, sample video, assessment guidelines and assessment rubrics could remain unchanged. The changes were mainly about grouping and softcopy upload. The training session, trials, and discussion activities in the early stage of this research study aimed to develop students' abilities to conduct open group discussions throughout the exercise. This allowed students to adopt collaborative learning. These activities were important in collaborative approach which emphasized on learning process and allowed students to be more open to new ideas and willing to take risks (Strijbos, 2000; Phuong-Mai, 2006).

3.4 Research Setting

First year undergraduates taking my English for Academic Purpose (EAP) course were selected for this research study. This EAP course is a compulsory 3-credit semester-long, i. e. 13 weeks, course which has 3 hours of contact every week. The EAP course was selected because students were required to conduct oral presentations as a routine assessment task in this course. This summative oral presentation assessment was scheduled in the final week of the semester. In other words, there was sufficient time, approximately seven to eight weeks, for students to receive and learn from the formative feedback in order to perform better in the summative oral presentation assessment. Furthermore, in this EAP course, students got to work on one research topic across the semester. The implementation of the peer assessment in this course could make the assessment tasks continuous and allow students to focus on the learning process (Shepard, 2008).

In this EAP course, students of the same major and with the same English language result in the public examination would be assigned in the same class. The main objective of this course was teaching students research skills and the development of academic arguments. Throughout the semester, each student had to work on one research topic of his/her own interest, producing two pieces of writing and conducting an academic oral presentation. The first written task which occupied 30% of the subject score was the first draft of the essay. It was 600 words long and should have an introduction, one positive argument and one negative argument. The second written task which occupied 30% was the 1,200-word complete essay. There should be an introduction, two positive arguments and two negative arguments and one conclusion. The last assessment task which occupied 40% was oral presentation. Students, in a group of four, were required to present their research topics to their classmates. Besides showing their position arguments, they must refer to sources and provide critical analysis. Since there was only one research topic during the semester, it was possible for the students to use the formative feedback from peer assessment to improve their next performances. The disconnection between assessment tasks could be avoided.

Each presentation lasted for 10 minutes. The assessment criteria consisted of content (20%), delivery (30%), language (30%) and, pronunciation and fluency (20%). This oral presentation occupied 35% of the subject score. While explaining the assessment task in lessons, teachers told students the required elements and the structure of an academic presentation. Students were also told what constituted a good presentation. Before the implementation of peer assessment exercise, what students had received in the lessons was only the hard knowledge of an academic presentation. Regarding their presentation skills and performances, there had been no support from teachers or classmates. The grade and feedback before this exercise had only been summative in nature.

In this EAP course, each student was assigned an e-portfolio account at the beginning of semester. This e-portfolio was supposed to encourage students to share their research results with their classmates who did similar research topics. Since this e-portfolio was an optional platform for students, in the past, only few of them had accessed and shared their research articles and findings. In this research study, the e-portfolio was made mandatory, but it still carried no score for whatever they put onto the system. After explaining the implementation of peer assessment on oral presentations and having consent from students, each student was asked to upload two audio/video files onto the e-portfolio system. With the softcopy being available in the system, students had two opportunities to receive feedback from their peers before the summative oral presentation assessment to be held at the end of the semester.

Students also had opportunities to discuss their performances with the peer assessors, including the provision of further comments and the ways for improvement. These peer discussion and negotiation processes could increase the validity of the peer assessment exercise (Falchikov & Margin, 1997; Patri, 2002). Before the implementation of this peer assessment exercise, students had had no formative feedback on their oral presentations. The only feedback was the teacher's post-assessment feedback. With the use of e-portfolio, students had more flexibility of accessing the audio files. They could listen to the files when they were ready to conduct the peer assessment. The audio files could also be played as many times as they wished. This allowed students to feel comfortable while listening and provide more constructive feedback.

Since students used assessment rubrics provided by the university, the peer assessment tasks in this research study came with a grade. Students were reminded that the grades received from peers would be used for their reference against the assessment rubrics only and would not affect their final grades of the course. They were encouraged to focus on the feedback process and see how the formative feedback could enhance and improve their learning processes towards and performances in the summative assessment.

3.5 The Role of the Researcher

I occupied three roles in this research study. They were *teacher*, *researcher* and *counsellor*. As a teacher, to help students better learn in the course, I decided to adopt peer assessment and designed different course materials, for example, feedback training materials, peer assessment forms and peer assessment guidelines. This idea was discussed and negotiated with the subject leader beforehand, ensuring that my course delivery could still meet the learning outcomes. As a researcher, I provided peer assessment training to the participating students, facilitated discussions among students in relation to the assessment rubrics. I also offered support and solutions when students encountered any difficulties during the peer assessment exercise. As a counselor, I made myself always available when students got emotional issues in this peer assessment exercise. They were encouraged to come for consultation once they felt down after receiving feedback. I would also explain the value of having critical feedback and its impact on their work, this was a form of pastoral care.

According to Greene (2014) the advent of professional doctorate qualifications has seen an increase in “[t]he amount of insider research being conducted” (p. 1), especially “within the field of education” (p. 1). In positioning myself within my own research I acknowledge my own assumptions and biases in this thesis as well as the theoretical and cultural viewpoints that might influence that positioning. In addition, Griffiths (1998, p.96) noted that researchers

needed to be “reflexive about their own socio-political position and interests” and that reflexivity is also about the researcher’s own understanding and values.

In terms of reflexivity, Finlay (2002) refers to this a form of ‘confessional account’, which enable researchers to critically examine their own positionality, perspectives and responses (Pillow, 2003; Berger, 2013). This is done by explicitly self-analysing one’s own personal responses and potential biases to the research processes (Berger, 2013; Finlay, 2002; Pillow, 2003).

I am an *insider* researcher researching my own organisation. This brings both some benefits and disadvantages. The advantages of conducting this type of research include the prior knowledge and experience that participating practitioner/professionals afford concerning the setting and its context. They bring ‘insider’ knowledge to bear; they initiate easier access; provide improved insights into the situation and critical perspectives about the people involved; they contribute familiarity with situations and informants because of their history of personal relationships with contributing participants, e.g. with teaching/researching colleagues or students (see for example, Mutch, 2013; Wellington, 2015). Smith (1999, p.10) argues that:

Insider research has to be as ethical and respectful, as reflexive and critical as outsider research. It also needs to be humble. It needs to be humble because the researcher belongs to the community as a member with a different set of roles and relationships, status and position.

This insider status has some ethical and methodological implications such as me researching the students from my own organisation, issues to do with power and status, and the need to unpack some of my own reflections and biases about assessments. These are discussed in more detail in sections 3.10 and again in 6.1.

3.6 Training Materials

Materials were prepared to help student to get familiar with peer assessment. Three 2-hour training sessions were held. The first session focused on the quality of feedback. Boud’s (1991) (Appendix III) documents regarding providing and receiving peer feedback were adopted to help students understand the role of feedback in this peer assessment exercise. While providing feedback, students got to ensure feedback is quality and explanatory. While receiving feedback, students got to be critical of feedback and see how the feedback can help them learn. Students also received training on assessing peers’ oral presentations by using the university assessment rubrics and sample oral presentation videos. Students watched two sample videos and assessed the performances of the speakers with reference to the rubrics. Since students

were new to peer assessment and they may be inexperienced in assessing oral presentations, the following questions, recommend by Parti (2002, p.115), were used as an entry point for the purpose of assessment:

- Fluency: Is the student pausing in the middle of his/her presentations because he/she cannot think of the right word or does not know what to say?
- Pronunciation: Does the student have problems pronouncing even the most common words?
- Confidence: Is the student nervous? Is the student looking at his/her notes all the time or simply reading it aloud?
- Eye Contact: Is the student looking at the ceiling or the floor? Is he/she looking at one person?
- Non-verbal Communication: is the student using hand gestures as a natural means of conveying his/her message? Does the student maintain a pleasant facial expression?
- Verbal communication: is the student involving the audience in the presentation by asking questions? Are the members actively participating in the presentation?

With the help of these general questions, after each video, students were given time to discuss the rubrics with peers and rate the speakers in the sample videos. When they had doubts, they were encouraged to discuss with their classmates first. After that, I facilitated a whole class discussion, in which students were welcomed to share their views and ask for clarification, if any. The discrepancy between students was tackled by encouraging students to explain how they rated with the use of rubrics. The negotiations among students were able to ensure that every single student in the peer assessment exercise was clear with the descriptions in the rubrics and then the agreed rubrics could be used for the actual peer assessment exercise.

3.7 Philosophical Perspective and Research Approach

A mixed methods research methodology was adopted in this research. According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2007, p.5), mixed methods research includes “philosophical assumptions as well as methods of inquiry”. Philosophical assumptions guide researchers to collect and analyse data, and to mix qualitative and quantitative approaches in different research stages. Methods of inquiry refer to how researchers collect, analyse and mix qualitative and quantitative data in a study. In short, mixed methods research is “the use of both quantitative and qualitative approaches on one or more of the levels of epistemology, methodology and methods. This rests on the logic that methods, methodologies and paradigms are strongly linked” (Symonds & Gorard, 2008, p.4). Some benefits of using mixed methods

research have been mentioned in different research studies, for example, providing a more complete understanding of a problem by merging quantitative and qualitative data, compensating the weaknesses of quantitative and qualitative research, viewing problems from different perspectives, and triangulating results (Plano Clark, 2010; Creswell, 2014; Punch & Oancea, 2014). The convergent mixed methods approach (Creswell, 2014) (Figure 2) was particularly applied in this research study. To examine the impacts of peer assessment on students’ oral presentations, the frequency of feedback related to different assessment items was counted and ranked. On the other hand, the qualitative research method was adopted to reveal why and how students changed their behaviour. The different but complementary information provided by qualitative and quantitative data was used for triangulation purpose. This allowed researchers to have a better understand of the phenomenon being investigated, i.e. the behaviour of the peer assessors and the assessed (Creswell, 2014). Since this research tended to conduct quantitative phase first and then qualitative phase, appropriate questions could be set further investigation behind the quantitative results (Plano Clark, 2010).

Pragmatism and transformation are the philosophical assumptions of mixed methods research (Mertens, 2009; Punch & Oancea, 2014). Pragmatism focuses on the feasibility of research methods. In this research, using mixed methods was able to discover the students’ cognitive processes during the peer assessment tasks. In addition, “pragmatism offers philosophical tools and insights that can help sharpen the discussion about the rationale, claims, strengths and weaknesses of different varieties of mixed methods research” (Punch & Oancea, 2014, p.340).

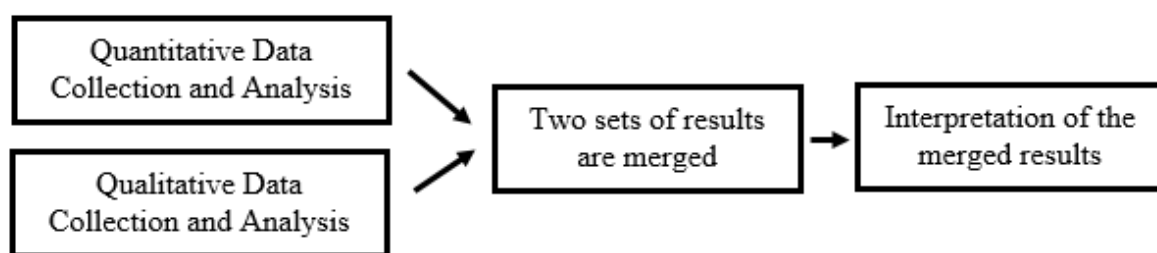


Figure 2 Convergent mixed methods approach

The impact of peer assessment on students’ final performances and the development of cognitive awareness were investigated through the use of mixed methods research. Quantitative data were collected from the items being quantified in both the written peer feedback and students’ written reflections; whereas qualitative data were collected from the semi-structured interviews as well as students’ written reflections. Morgan (2007) agreed that mixed method research could give primacy to the importance of research questions, and value both subjective

and objective knowledge. In this EAP course, teachers had been the major feedback providers. Teachers probably provided comments based on their expertise and students' performances. Feedback was unlikely to be personalised. Since students got different learning styles, this kind of feedback may not be helpful. To better understand how students learnt with peers and on their own, transformation in mixed methods research could give voices to students. In this way, the hierarchical between teachers and students could be addressed, and a positive social change could be brought (Mertens, 2009).

3.7 Methods of Data Collection: Quantitative Method

3.7.1 Peer Written Feedback

During the peer assessment exercise, students provided written feedback to their peers in both weeks 7 and 10. With the use of e-portfolio, peer assessors could access their peers' works more through repeated access. This platform allowed students to review their peers' performances as many times as possible while providing feedback. By doing so, students were able to view and criticise a range of presentation styles, skills, content and language (Hovardas, Tsivitanidou & Zacharia, 2014). The practice of being an assessor would encourage students to learn from their peers' mistakes or take their peers' good work as exemplary performances (Race, 2014). In order to provide written feedback, peer assessors would write their comments in the *ChatBox* built in the e-portfolio platform. The time flexibility allowed students to have more opportunities to get engaged in important cognitive activities (Lin, Liu & Yuan, 2001). For example, they had more time to decide what made that presentation a good or a bad one; they could also plan, monitor and regulate their feedback. In addition, the feedback will often be found more accurate and constructive (Topping, 2009).

After students had finished writing their feedback in the e-portfolio, all the written feedback was then downloaded from the system after each peer assessment task, i.e. weeks 8 and 11, for research purpose. All the comments, later, were categorised based on the assessment rubrics. The frequency of each category was counted. By doing so, the norm of students' feedback provision was identified, knowing which items that students liked to give feedback on.

3.7.2 Students' Revised Items

After each peer assessment task, all participating students were required to write a short statement saying how they had revised their oral presentations. The purpose of quantifying the revised items was to triangulate the data collected in the semi-structured interviews (Johnson & Bytheway, 2001; Crosbie, 2006). Students got to write what items they had changed during

the revision process. Similar to the data collected in the peer written feedback, the items they had changed were then categorised based on the assessment rubrics and the frequency was counted. By doing so, it was able to see how students responded to feedback and closed the feedback loop.

3.8 Methods of Data Collection: Qualitative Method

3.8.1 Semi-structured interviews

The purpose of having semi-structured interviews was to discover, firstly, how students provided feedback during the peer assessment tasks and, secondly, how students receiving feedback responded to close the feedback loop. More in-depth information could be obtained from students in order to know their cognitive processes in the peer assessment tasks. Semi-structured interview was able to supplement the data collected from the peer written feedback. Legard, Keegan and Ward (2003) have identified some benefits of semi-structured interviews for data collection, for example, allowing researchers to be responsive, being interactive in nature, receiving more in-depth answers, creating new knowledge and providing physical encounter context to achieve detailed meaning. These interviews also allowed the selected students to discuss in their preferred directions and, as a result, shape the interview agenda. I could also organise the interviews around my research concerns (Kvale, 1996).

Interviewees were selected following the rationale of psychological homogeneity. This method is considered the best to study “a particular mental ability, attitude or trait” (Robinson, 2014, p.26). Participants who showed relatively constructive feedback with the required features were considered suitable for a small-scale in-depth study (Mason, 2002; Ritchie, Lewis & Elam, 2003; Robson, 2011). Data collected from the *Chatbox* were used for selecting interviewees (Coleman, 1996). After reading the feedback, students who had relatively quality feedback would be invited. The feedback quality was able to indicate if the students had self-evaluated, corrected, adjusted and reflected while being an assessor and the assessed. Researchers and the questions being used in the interviews have to encourage a true response from the interviewees (Ritchie et al., 2003). Table 2 shows the profiles of the interviewees. The selected interviewees had had no experiences in peer assessment before this research study. Also, they received their secondary education in Hong Kong, which could assume that they came from an examination-oriented study environment. Their insights towards peer assessment were supposed to be developed from this research study.

Table 2 Interviewees' profiles

Groups	Interviewees	Gender	Age	Location and Level of Secondary Education	Major	Peer Assessment Experience
1	NSK	M	18	HKSAR/HKDSE	Physiotherapy	No
	LYN	F	18	HKSAR/HKDSE		No
	WKI	F	18	HKSAR/HKDSE		No
	YCLY	F	18	HKSAR/HKDSE		No
2	TSYC	M	19	HKSAR/HKDSE	Engineering	No
	HYK	M	18	HKSAR/HKDSE		No
	ICY	M	18	HKSAR/HKDSE		No
	CCM	M	18	HKSAR/HKDSE		No

These semi-structured interviews also included stimulated recall (Dempsey, 2010) with other interviewees in order to elicit reflection and insight. Stimulated recall helped to provide information related to participants' thinking. Although the interviewees were able to be more rational after the peer assessment tasks (Calderhead, 1996) and the reflection might not be the same as what they were thinking during the tasks, quantitative data, their feedback to peers and reflections were provided to overcome such issue. By interviewing students, this research study could be input with data which had been rarely heard in the literature on peer assessment.

Interviews were conducted in groups because interviewees would feel more comfortable and they represented their classes (Cheng, 2014). This could prevent any negative feelings while sharing opinions. All interviews were held in the evening after school time when students finished their classes. They then had more time to chat and interact with me. Most importantly, more time could be given to students to add their own insights.

The interviews were nearly conducted in students' first language, i.e. Cantonese, despite there was code-mixing in the interviews, and were translated into English. Students appeared to be more relaxed and willing to share ideas when they were allowed to use Cantonese in the interviews (Watkins & Cheung, 1995). With the use of Cantonese, students might be more confident to express their feelings and thoughts (Spradley, 29016).

3.8.2 Students' Reflections

Qualitative data were also collected from the students' reflections. Students were asked to share how they felt and learnt from the peer assessment exercise. They could write anything about the peer assessment. Some questions were provided if they had no idea about what to write. For examples, "What benefits have you gained through peer assessment?", "What were the problems that you encountered during peer assessment?" and "What are the differences between peer assessment and teacher assessment?". Also, due to the limited class time, it was only able to afford time to for students to discuss with their peers in the lectures. Using reflective journals allowed generation of substantial amount of data and served as the written authorisation when direct observation was impossible (Robson, 2011).

3.9 Methods of Data Analysis

Since this research study adopted the mixed methods research approach, both quantitative and qualitative methods were applied to collected data for different purposes. The following table shows how each research question was analysed by the two data collection methods:

Table 3 Instruments and Related Research Questions

Method	Means	Research Questions
Quantitative	Peer written feedback	1 and 3
	Students' reflection	2 and 3
Qualitative	Semi-structured interviews	1, 2 and 3
	Students' reflection	2 and 3

3.9.1 Quantitative Analysis Procedures

The use of quantitative analysis aimed to draw meaningful results from a significant amount of qualitative data. The major benefit was providing the means to "separate out the large number of confounding factors that often obscure the main qualitative findings" (Abeyasekera, 2005, p.1). The results were in the form of numbers in order to provide a general picture of the peer assessment exercise being investigated. In this research study, quantitative data were collected from the peer written feedback and students' reflection.

For peer written feedback, participating students had to provide comments to their peers in week 7 and week 10. The comments of each stage were then categorised using pre-set codes with reference to the assessment items and then the frequency of each item was counted

(Appendix IV and Appendix V). This frequency aimed to understand how the students looked at oral presentations from the perspective of an assessor. It was able to see what items were important to students while listening at different stages along the peer assessment exercise. This exposure was expected to inform how students revised their oral presentations later.

Regarding students' reflection, participating students had to tell what they had revised their presentations with reference to the peer feedback at different stages (Appendix VI). The frequency of the items they had revised was recorded. It was essential to see how students responded to the peer feedback and then understand how they closed the feedback loop.

After the second peer assessment tasks, the quantitative results of the first and the second peer assessment tasks were then compared in order to see the differences. The comparison and contrast between the two peer assessment tasks could be more obvious for this research study.

3.9.2 Qualitative Analysis Procedures

3.9.2.1 Interview Data

In order to maintain the authenticity of what was mentioned, all the interviews in the actual research were conducted in Cantonese, which is the mother tongue of the participants. The interviews were then transcribed. As most of the interview data were indeed translated from Cantonese to English, some approaches to discourse analysis, such as critical discourse analysis, which “strongly relies on linguistic categories” (Meyer, 2001, p.25) with its operationalisation depending mainly on linguistic concepts, such as actors and tense became inapplicable. As noted previously as the data in this study were on the whole translated the participant perspectives have already been shifted in some way by reporting the “gist” of their interviews in a translated text. In the data, although the intended meaning of the participants was remained true, the transcripts and thus data were seen through an additional filter. Therefore, a discourse analytical approach to the data would be unable 100% accurate. Instead, inductive progressive coding and content analysis of the interview transcriptions were conducted with reference to the insider knowledge I possess after working as a frontline teacher for 10 years.

At the beginning of the data coding, organisation and analysis processes, I listened to the interviews again and again and read through the transcriptions with the primary aim to immerse myself in the data (Palinkas et al., 2015). Adopting primarily a progressive focusing approach in this exploratory study, I started “taking a wide-angle lens to gather data, and then by shifting, sorting, reviewing and reflecting on them the salient features of the situation

emerge” (Parlett & Hamilton, 1976, p.148). It was able to observe if there were new phenomenon being emerged in the interviews Some repeating patterns and themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994) related to the eight participants’ critical selection of presentation issues and strategies to react upon peer feedback became evident. The data were then reviewed and recorded until a final set of coherent and representative themes were reached. The eight participants were asked to correct errors and challenge what are perceived as wrong interpretations (Martens, 2005). In this playing back process, the interviewees were also welcomed to provide additional information to supplement the preliminary findings (Thomas, 2017). The interviewees were asked to email me or call me if there were necessary changes. All of them emailed me confirming the accuracy and the interpretations. The salient patterns included prioritising the importance of problems while providing and receiving feedback and adopting different strategies while revising the presentations.

Inductive progressive coding of the interview data began with the writing up of individual case reports for each of the eight participants. Coding is defined as the translation of “respondent information of specific categories for the purpose of analysis (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000, p.283). Codes were ascribed to the data to create some units of analysis through a “unitizing” process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.203). The codes ascribed were mainly descriptive (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992) capturing the perspectives the eight participants held about providing peer feedback, receiving peer feedback and revising their oral presentations. Through a vigorous process of clustering, eliminating, modifying and refining (Hycner, 1985), different patterns of providing feedback, reacting upon feedback and revising presentations were identified.

Providing peer feedback

- Content versus presentation skills
- Speakers versus audience
- Fluency versus comprehensibility

Reacting upon feedback

- Referring to the peer assessment form
- Reading peer feedback on e-portfolio
- Referring to the assessment guidelines and rubrics
- Initiating dialogues with the peer assessors

Revising presentations

- Content versus presentation skills
- Rehearsal versus task completion
- Selection of peer feedback

The coding of the interview data was repeated and revised over three months taking into consideration the overall context in which the data were found. Regarding the coding criteria, the driving motive of the researchers plays a considerable role in the coding process:

The criteria for determining which fragments of data are selected will always be as subjective as all the other aspects of qualitative research. The major driving motive will be that selected fragments contain in the elements that have been recognized during analysis, which generate the thematic organisation. Another factor is that the fragments which are chosen are likely to be the ones which are rich in the sense of containing as many of the key elements as possible within a short space (Holliday, 2002, p.119).

In terms of data organisation and presentation a number of spidergrams showing how the patterns and themes were connected were drawn and revised during the long data reduction and organisation processes. The themes and patterns were refined again and again so as to capture a more complete picture of what was happening in the eight participants' EAP classrooms and their perceived reality.

The data analysis was conducted drawing from my understanding and knowledge as an insider who implemented inductive progressive coding of the interview data mediated through the medium Cantonese. The data coding, analysis and interpreting processes were conducted vigorously and seriously always placing the identified themes “back within the overall contexts or horizons from which these themes emerged” (Cohen et al., 2000, p.286). I believe that the ultimate aim of the analysis process was in line with that of the data collection process, i.e. collect and report faithfully the voices of the eight students, without misinterpreting their ideas or imposing an idea on them. As a research, I adopted a critical perspective and practiced critical thinking throughout the research and writing up processes using basically a questioning stance to look at everything I observed. I am aware that:

reality is a multiple set of mental constructions, to demonstrate “truth value” researchers must show that their reconstructions in the form of findings and interpretations re

credible to those being researched – credibility becomes the salient test of reality (Davis, 1992, p.605).

Inter-rater reliability was adopted to ensure the validity of the coding process and to avoid personal judgement that might interfere the research study (Creswell, 2014). This procedure could make the results more objective (Morse, 2015). A colleague who is a PhD holder and did not teach this EAP course was invited as a second coder to review and analyse the data. Two methods were used. Firstly, the transcripts of the interviews were given to the second coder and he was asked to code 2 pages. The second coder and I had our own codes while doing coding. The purpose of this procedure was to check if my codes had similar meanings to his codes. Table 4 shows all the codes were in agreement.

Table 4 Codes between the researcher and the second coder

Research's codes	Second coder's codes	Agreement
Peer Assessment Form	Peer Assessment Form	✓
e-portfolio <i>ChatBox</i>	<i>ChatBox</i>	✓
Assessment Rubrics	Rubrics	✓
Dialogues	Conversations	✓

The second method being used for inter-rater reliability was to test the effectiveness of my codes. The second coder was provided with the codes and he had to match the codes to the data in the interview transcripts. Two different pages of the transcripts were used. Calculations were done to check the agreement between the codes and the coding of the transcripts. Table 5 shows the calculations and the overall agreement percentage between the second coder and I was 92%. With such percentage, the codes being used in this research study were appropriate.

Table 5 Agreement between codes and the coding of text

Code	Researcher	Second coder	Calculation	Percentage
Peer Assessment Form	2	2	4/4	100%
e-portfolio <i>ChatBox</i>	5	4	8/9	89%
Assessment Rubrics	4	4	8/8	100%
Dialogues	3	2	4/5	80%

3.9.2.2 Students' Reflections

The students' reflections were coded and double-coded with the use of pre-set codes (Appendix IV). The process of creating codes was pre-set (Hsien & Shannon, 2005). There were pre-set codes before beginning data collection and the coding process. The pre-set codes for the peer written feedback and students' reflections were created with reference to the assessment items in the assessment rubrics. There were totally 11 items under four categories. Coding was important for qualitative analysis in this research study because it provided "foundation for what comes later" (Punch & Oancea, 2014, p.225). All the written feedback in the e-portfolio *ChatBox* was coded against the assessment rubrics. Issues that students encountered during the peer assessment exercise which were mentioned in both semi-structured interviews and students' reflection were also coded. Coding scheme aimed to "attach meaning to the pieces of data" (Punch, 2009, p.176) collected from the *ChatBox*, and the reflections by putting different pieces of data into similar themes and identify different patterns from the collected data.

3.10 Ethical Considerations

The purpose of this exploratory study was to examine the implementation of peer assessment, and how formative feedback improved students' presentation skills. To answer the research questions, collection of students' presentations and interviews occurred. Before the start of this research study, approval was obtained from the University of Bristol's School of Education (formerly known as Graduate School of Education) (Appendix VII). The Research Committee of the home institution was then contacted to develop documents such as consent form (Appendix VIII) and obtain permission. The consent form explained the purpose of the study, the process for its distribution, and how data were protected, stored, analysed, and reported. It also explained the handling of the participants' confidentiality and anonymity. After six months of the completion of this thesis, all information will be destroyed.

In a chapter on ethics, Busher and James (2012) argued that constructing ethical collaborative culture amongst research project participants is vital. In summing up ethical conduct in research, Lichtman (2010) stated the following series of bottom lines:

- It is best to safe guard against doing anything that will harm the participants of your study.

- Remove identifying information from your records. Seek permission from participants if you want to make public information that might reveal who they are or who the organization is.
- It is your responsibility to keep all information you learn confidential.
- Your responsibility is to make sure that participants are informed, to the extent possible about the nature of your study.
- Researchers should make sure that they provide an environment that is trust-worthy.
- You have the responsibility to interpret your data and evidence so that others can decide to what extent your interpretation is believable.

Standard ethical information from most research methods texts refer to the following principles:

- Informed and voluntary consent;
- Respect for rights of privacy and confidentiality;
- Minimisation of risk;
- Truthfulness, including limitation of deception;
- Social and cultural sensitivity;
- Research adequacy;
- Avoidance of conflict of interest.
- Respect for vulnerability of some participants.

These broad ethical considerations and the University's Ethical Guidelines informed my decisions when working with participants. Participant safety and also researcher safety were addressed. The participants were also informed of the dissemination procedures for the research findings (Mutch, 2013).

Trustworthiness of the data was also an important consideration. Throughout the research and with participants I clearly documented the research techniques and processes, research decisions, research design, data-gathering and data-analysis techniques and demonstrated an ethical approach (Mutch, 2013).

Positionality was important in this research, as of course the issue of power was ever present. I had to ask myself: Did the students conform and agree to the interviews and be involved in the other research activities because I was, or had been their lecturer? Did they participate because they liked me, or out of a sense of duty? Were they genuinely interested in the research, or its outcomes? Whilst there was no hint of coercion in the process, and no ramifications for their marks and futures at university and beyond, I was mindful that Hong Kong students are quite passive in many ways, despite the nature to the research being highly co-operative and wanting positive outcomes for them and their peers.

I started with organizing data such as *ChatBox* on e-portfolio, peer evaluation and feedback forms, interview transcripts and written reflections into different folders. The data were classified by the participants' pseudo names. They were numbered and all identifiers were removed to protect confidentiality. I read through the data and had a general sense of how they looked like. I then tallied the responses trying to determine the top five most frequently mentioned steps for providing feedback as well as receiving feedback and revising their presentations. I modified Falchikov's (2005) benefit categories and wrote brief descriptions for them to fit the research context. Due to the unavailability of the weakness category descriptions, I came up with my own descriptions. I then classified the reported benefits and weaknesses according to these categories and descriptions.

3.11 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is a major concern in mixed methods approach. It was crucial to develop a trusting relationship with each participating student and at the outset I offered each participant a detailed introduction to this research study to ensure they all understood the reason and the ways this study was implemented. Students should not be afraid or anxious although this peer assessment exercise only happened in my EAP classes (Shenton, 2004). While students were given time for discussions in class, I only observed. I did not participate or provide guidelines. No feedback was given to their discussions in order to minimise the potential risk of data contamination (Luttrell, 2005). With reference to Stake (1995), member checking was advocated while collecting interview data in this research study. This process was important because the interviewees had a chance to clarify if the interpretations of the interviews were accurate and if the conclusion summaries could reflect their thoughts and opinions (Lodico, Spaulding & Voegtler, 2006). Besides, the triangulation was to check the evidence consistency across data (Mertens, 2009). The validity of transcriptions was also

achieved by the interviewees who read and approved after receiving the transcriptions. All participating students would remain anonymous in this research study.

There may have been some ‘perceived’ potential researcher bias in collecting and analysing and reporting evidence in this study. Some of this could have been related to the multiple positioning of the researcher, as teacher, researcher and counselor, all as an ‘insider’. Whilst performing these roles, having an awareness of what they all were is covered earlier in 3.10. I had previously been a teacher, but I tried as much as possible to retreat from that role when wearing the other two hats and roles. Different roles and functions were performed throughout the research.

3.12 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, while mixed methods study was adopted, instruments in both quantitative and qualitative were introduced. Methods being used for both quantitative and qualitative data analysis, including categorisation, semi-structured interviews and coding scheme were explained. To enhance the reliability and validity of the data, member checking and inter-rater reliability were adopted. Besides, the impact of the previous pilot studies on this research study was mentioned to indicate how this research study was informed. Information included peer assessment procedures, student grouping, feedback monitoring process and selection of interviewees. Ethical procedures were also mentioned.

Chapter 4

Results

In this chapter, the results from both the quantitative data, i.e. peer written feedback in the *ChatBox* and students' written reflections regarding revised items, on the e-portfolio system and qualitative data, i.e. semi-structure interviews and students' reflections regarding the peer assessment exercise were presented and discussed. The three research questions were:

1. *Being a peer assessor, how did a student providing feedback consider what was important regarding oral presentations?*
2. *As the assessed, how did a student react upon peer feedback?*
3. *How did the feedback received by students influence the way they revised their oral presentations, i.e. closing the feedback loop?*

4.1 Participant Demographics

Tables 6 to 9 show the participant demographics. Both year one males and females majoring in BSc (Hons) in Physiotherapy and BSc (Hons) in Engineering participated in this research study. There were 28 participants. The age of participants ranged from 17 - 19 years old. There was no significant difference between genders with an average age of 18.2 years old. All of the participants were Chinese and received their entire secondary education in Hong Kong.

Table 6 Participants by Gender

Programme	BSc (Hons) in Physiotherapy		BSc (Hons) in Engineering	
Gender	Male	Female	Male	Female
Number	6	10	7	5

Table 7 Participants by Age

Age	16 or below	17	18	19 or above
Number	0	1	21	6

Table 8 Participants by Ethnicity

Ethnicity	Chinese	Others, please specify
Number	28	0

Table 9 Participants by the Location of Secondary Education

Location	Hong Kong	China	Others, please specify
Number	28	0	0

4.2 RQ1: Being a peer assessor, how did a student providing feedback decide what was important regarding oral presentations?

Each student had to upload their oral presentation files in week 7 and week 10 to the e-portfolio system along the peer assessment exercise. The two assigned peer assessors then provided feedback with reference to the agreed rubrics. Since there were different assessment items in the assessment rubrics and the peer assessors were unlikely to provide comments on all items, it was important to examine the intentions of the peer assessors at different stages and understand the reasons behind.

4.2.1 First Peer Assessment Task

28 students participated in the first peer assessment task. The participation rate was 100%. After collecting the peer feedback from the e-portfolio system, there were totally 183 comments related to different assessment items. Table 8 shows the number of comments related to each assessment item during the first peer assessment task.

In the first peer assessment task, students liked giving feedback on style and tone the most. The second most popular item was the quality of speech and the third one was the quality of arguments. Each of these three items received more than twenty comments. The three least popular items were quality of evidence, grammar and interaction, receiving ten, nine and one comment respectively.

Table 10 Numbers of comments in the first peer assessment task

First Peer Assessment Task (n=28)	
Item Category	Numbers of Comments
Content	
Task Requirements	24
Coverage of Topic	17
Quality of Arguments	14
Quality of Evidence	10
Delivery	

Organisation	21
Interaction	1
Language	
Grammar	9
Vocabulary	18
Style and Tone	27
Pronunciation and Fluency	
Pronunciation	16
Quality of Speech	26

After showing students the above table in the interviews, both groups said they had expected similar results. Of all the comments collected, most were about style and tone. It was probably because of the nature of oral presentations. Students expressed that the speakers' voices would give audience the very first impression, for example:

"This is an oral presentation. First of all, I would definitely see if the speakers got good intonation that could attract me. With good intonation, I will be more willing to listen" (NSK)

"Intonation is the only element you can find in speaking. If the speakers got improper intonation, I'd like to read but not listen" (HYK)

From the students' experiences, the contrast between the written and oral assessments made them first notice the voice of tone. Students generally would judge the speakers' attitude first. Being the audience, they believed that it should be the speakers' responsibility to attract them and get them engaged in oral presentations. Monotone or bad intonation were the two major issues. Students, however, considered that monotone is better than bad intonation because the audience would not be able to catch the key information in a bad-intonation presentation. Furthermore, having up and down too much in a presentation and ending every sentence with a high pitch were annoying to the audience. An oral presentation like this would be unnatural and unfriendly to the audience As the following responses show:

"The presentation that I have listened to was so boring. She got a very flat tone. Most properly she was just reading from the script directly. She would bore the audience to death" (LYN)

"My friend was too nervous that he couldn't maintain a proper intonation. I think he was not familiar with the content and, therefore, he didn't know when to pause."

Throughout his presentation, he got very unusual ups and downs. Sometimes I didn't know he had finished" (ICY)

Students agreed that proper intonation had always been trivial in their minds. Intonation, especially in the introduction, should be the most important element in oral presentations, as these comments highlight:

"Actually we have been paying little attention on intonation. We usually focus on grammar and content. After listening two presentations, intonation must go first. Furthermore, we all know how to do better intonation in speaking. It's just a matter of doing it or not doing it" (CCM)

Having a significant amount of feedback on style and tone was probably because the peer assessors, being the audience in this stage, were concerned about the enjoyment. They hoped to get impressed by the speakers and know what mood the speakers would like to make on them in the introduction.

The second item that students noticed the most was the quality of speech, which would be determined by the comprehensibility and the fluency. Students observed that most of their classmates, especially those who had native-like fluency, would speak fast. The speech could be fluent, but it was unlikely to be comprehended by the audience, who were the second language learners. Students mentioned that presentations would only have values when the audience could take away some parts of the content, as these examples show:

"The audience could only listen to your speech. If they come to listen to you and they could not understand you just because you speak fast, what's the point of doing oral presentations?" (LYN)

"Speaking too fast commonly happens when the speakers are very confident. My classmates are native-like speakers. They got perfect pronunciation but they speak too fast. In fact I was not able to follow the content" (WKI)

Apart from the speed, hesitation would also influence the comprehensibility and negatively affect the fluency of the presentations. Students expressed that the hesitation in presentations was normal. Too much hesitation, however, would give a bad impression to the audience. Hesitation could also indicate that the speakers lacked confidence and they were not familiar with the content, these are evident in the quotations below:

"I am sorry but I have to say the expressions like 'um' and 'er' is quite annoying to the listeners. We want to listen to a fluent presentation. However, too much hesitation is quite distracting and I can't follow the content" (WKI)

“Hesitation is absolutely understandable. We also hesitate while speaking Cantonese. Some of my classmates, however, keep using ‘so’ and ‘and’ in their speeches without any function. It’s quite tiring to the audience. We must improve this first, otherwise the content would be a waste” (CCM)

The peer assessors provided feedback on quality of speech was based on their experience as the audience. They believed the speakers should consider the diverse background of the audience. Even though all the students obtained the same English language result from the public examination, there was still a significant difference in terms of the speaking and listening abilities. This phenomenon was probably the result of the dominance of the written assessment culture in Hong Kong.

The third item that students commented the task requirements. Students expressed that the task requirements came third because it was considered a relatively easy assessment item to the peer assessors. The first recording was supposed to have an introduction and one or a couple of arguments. Students mentioned the lecture notes provided information what an introduction and an argument had to include and how to make these two components academic. Peer assessors, therefore, could check the recording against the lecture notes, two pertinent examples were:

“Academic presentation is very new to us. We didn’t have many presentations to do, let alone academic presentations. The lectures notes are clear enough telling us what needs to be included. If you make everything like a formula, you can tell what has been missed. You can simply tell your friends what he/she has to add in the next recording” (YCLY)

“With reference to the notes, I could tell that the introduction lacked beginning. This is an academic presentation and there is a standard structure or organisation that we need to follow. It’s important to make sure all components are there. Missing one component may make the presentation incomplete” (HYK)

Generally speaking, students believed that the introduction of the presentations is like a foundation of everything, explaining the purpose and preparing the audience for what aspects they would cover in the body sections later. Without this foundation, the arguments and elaboration may be considered weak, as the following examples highlights:

“As an audience, I need to know what will be included in the presentation and how he/she is going to organise the ideas. I think I will be more ready if I got this information. I think most of us are new to this. We could not provide a focus for the audience” (WKI)

“This is just the first half of the entire presentation. If there are still missing components in this half, it means, firstly, the speakers are not following the guidelines and, secondly, the later sessions would be difficult to get built up. A good beginning is half a success” (TSYC)

Peer assessors tended to follow the structure of an academic presentation guidelines as suggested in the notes since they believed that all the stated components would help them justify if the presentations were academic. The lecture notes were like a checklist to them. Furthermore, the assessors also thought the introduction was important for the speakers to continue developing the whole presentations. Any missing components in the beginning would make the remaining sections difficult to continue.

Of all the comments, there was only one related to interaction. The peer assessors explained that it was because of the technical issue. Due to the time limitation, students participating in this research study were required to record their presentations and upload the files to the e-portfolio system. While listening to the recording, they felt strange and unnatural if the speakers applied any interaction strategies. They were unable to judge the impact of the strategies such as asking a rhetoric question and using a quote. Two quotes show this:

“I totally understand why my friends would interact with audience during presentations. Without audience in the recording, I can never tell if these interaction strategies work. Honestly speaking, these strategies are all theoretically feasible and workable. We, however, also understand the speakers would adjust the interaction strategies while looking at the audience faces. I was not able to react to the interaction without seeing the speakers’ faces either” (TSYC)

“I found the strategies good but I couldn’t tell if they worked for all the audience. I am unable to represent the audience. The speakers have to adjust while speaking in front of the audience” (CCM)

The peer assessors explained that it was inappropriate to assess the interaction through the recording. Oral presentations, in contrast with reading essays, are a two-way communication process between the speakers and the audience. While giving information to the audience, the speakers also receive information from the audience at the same time through, for example, facial expressions and note taking. The lack of face-to-face communication in the recording would make the effect of the interaction strategies unknown. The peer assessors, therefore, were unable to comment on the interaction.

Grammar came second last. It was interesting that students did not pay much attention on grammar in a language subject during the first peer assessment task. Students believed that

grammar mistakes in oral English were unavoidable in spite of learning grammar for many years. Peer assessors believed that the experience was relatively new and it was still the first half. Speakers could do self-correction once they were familiar with the content and assessment format. Language might need to be revised when the presentation developed. Furthermore, students expressed that it was acceptable to have some minor mistakes since doing presentations is a real time language production. As a result, improving grammar mistakes was not that urgent, as the following quotations reveal:

“What I did was just reminding him of a repeated tense issue in his presentation. I believe it was a careless mistake only. He said he had not got enough time to do the recording again, Mistakes were very minor” (HYK)

“I think it is too mean to correct all the mistakes in a presentation. We all make mistakes, especially in speaking. We are second language learners and minor grammar mistakes should be forgiven. We should focus on fluency rather than grammatical accuracy” (CCM)

“What we say this time may be very different from what we say next time. The purpose of presentations is to deliver your message to the audience. As long as we could present comfortably and attract the audience, some grammar mistakes should be no problem” (WKI)

Peer assessors were confident about their peers' English abilities. They admitted that there were mistakes made by the speakers but the mistakes did not negatively affect the presentation content. Instead of improving accuracy, peer assessors appeared to focus more on the fluency which could be improved as speaker's progress. Grammatical accuracy was considered less important in oral presentations and the fluency should be increased to make a balance.

Quality of evidence received 10 comments only. Students mentioned that they might not be familiar with others' writing topics and, therefore, they were not able to comment on the sources. Students could only tell if the sources were academically appropriate. Examples of these points are provided by the two participants ICY and TSYC:

“My topic is very different from my classmate's. I couldn't tell if the sources were good. However, I could tell if the sources are inappropriate. My classmates used Wikipedia and data which were 10 years ago. They really need to find better sources” (ICY)

“I am sorry I couldn't tell if the sources were good. However, I would take a look at the reference list. If the references were not up-to-date, I would ask him if he got any new data. If it was from a website, I would tell him to check the reliability” (TSYC)

Although the peer assessors were required to evaluate the reliability and credibility of the evidence, there were several types of evidence and students writing different topics might not be able to make judgement. Because of the different topics and sources of information, the peer assessors could only trust the sources, for example, the expert evidence and corroborative evidence, being used in the presentations. Peer assessors thought that checking the quality of the evidence would be time-consuming. They, as a result, could only give feedback on the years and the names of the organisations of the information.

4.2.2 Second Peer Assessment Task

Three weeks after the first peer assessment task, students upload their second recordings in week 10. After the second peer assessment task, there were totally 205 comments related to different assessment items. Table 11 shows the distribution of comments related to each assessment item during the second peer assessment task. Since it was the second time and students were more familiar with the assessment, peer assessment tasks and the assessment rubrics, the number of comments increased by 30.

Table 11 Numbers of comments in the second peer assessment task

Second Peer Assessment Task (n=28)		
Item Category	Numbers of Comments	+/-
Content		
Task Requirements	32	+18
Coverage of Topic	5	-12
Quality of Arguments	10	-14
Quality of Evidence	6	-4
Delivery		
Organisation	14	-7
Interaction	2	+1
Language		
Grammar	4	-5
Vocabulary	19	+1
Style and Tone	48	+21
Pronunciation and Fluency		
Pronunciation	26	+10
Quality of Speech	39	+13

In the second peer assessment task, the most dominant three assessment items were still the same. They were style and tone, the quality of speech and task requirements. The number of comments related to these three items also increased relatively significantly. Style and tone received more than 40 comments whereas the quality of speech and the task requirements received more than thirty comments. One of the three least popular items was different, replacing quality of evidence with the coverage of topic. The other two, grammar and interaction, were still the same.

Similar to the first peer assessment task, the same students were also invited for the interview. The above table was given to them and they, again, showed no surprise. The peer assessors still mentioned that style and tone was still the most important element in oral presentations. Students expressed that after understanding the nature of oral presentations, the only way to make a successful presentation was not only including intellectual information, but, more importantly, emotions. Even though the content needed to be well organised and structured, gaining and retaining audience attention was the main task throughout the entire presentations. Since the audience probably could not maintain attentive at all times, speakers should help the audience refocus periodically by adopting different styles and tones. Style and tone, however, was still one of the challenging tasks for the year 1 students since they lacked such training in secondary education. More effort should be paid for improvement. They, therefore, thought style and tone was the most important item for the speakers to improve in oral presentations.

“We haven’t got opportunities to speak in front of so many people. Even though we got speaking assessment in HKDSE, I focused on the content more. I didn’t care if other candidates understood. The story here, however, is totally different” (NSK)

In the HKDSE speaking assessment, candidates are required to do a group discussion based on given prompts and then individually answer a question from an examiner. Due to the examination-oriented culture in the secondary education, students seem to lack experience in conducting and listening to oral presentations. Besides knowing the practice of appropriate intonation in oral English, the peer assessors, as the audience for the second time, appeared to understand how they could get connected with the speakers through voices. The peer assessors, therefore, provided feedback to let their friends know the importance of the connection between the speakers and the audience in the second peer assessment task. The following are examples of this:


“You could actually feel the enthusiasm of the speakers. Enthusiastic speakers could make the presentations more enjoyable. You could feel how much they want to pass the

messages to you. The audience would be easily connected with the speakers who got an enthusiastic attitude. Conversely, you could also feel if the speakers are doing the presentations for assignment purpose only. The style and tone of a presenter could actually reflect everything. I got to remind my friend that he is speaking to the audience” (LYN)


“The more I understand the assessment, the more I know how important style and tone is. I didn’t think of connecting with the audience in any presentations that I did in my secondary school. Nobody, except teachers, would listen. What I did in the past was simply memorizing the content and present. However, in university and I guess probably in the future, your audience will listen to you since there will be a Q and A session. To make your presentations professional, you got to maintain their attention throughout the presentations. Their facial expressions could reflect your presentation quality, and then would also affect your presentation performances. I believe my friends would have underestimated the need to connect with the audience” (CCM)

Besides considering style and tone as a feature in oral presentations, students also found the functions of style and tone which are connecting speakers and audience together. Starting high and ending low would be unable to do enough for style and tone. Having organised content would not be enough to make presentations effective. Speakers, most importantly, got to share their emotions with the audience in the presentations and connect with the audience emotionally. Instead of paying effort on content and formulaic expressions, the assessed should work harder on intonation. LYN and CCM believed that this purpose could be achieved by style and tone. The focus on formulaic expressions for the oral examination purpose made students become a machine with automatic responses. The enhanced amount of peer feedback on style and tone indicated that intonation was a critical element in a successful oral presentation. While a speaker is sharing ideas in an oral presentation, probably there will be a lot of information. The audience may not be able to follow if English is not the first language (Wallwork, 2014). LYN and CCM might also have realised this problem while listening to their peers’ oral presentations. As a result, listening for essential clues for understanding was the top priority. They emphasised the importance of connection between the speaker and the audience. They believed that audience could be easily connected when the intonation could help distinguish if that piece of information was important and when the emotions of the speaker could be felt through the voice. While an oral presentation is supposed to be conducted face-to-face, the speaker should go beyond the basic meanings of words and connect audience with the speaker’s feeling about the topic he/she is sharing.

Comparing with the reasons given on style and tone after the first peer assessment, it was noticed that students had a deeper understanding towards the assessment guidelines, assessment rubrics and the oral presentations. Table 12 shows the contrast of comments related to style and tone in these two peer assessment tasks. During the first peer assessment task, students were trying to strictly follow the assessment requirements and the assessment rubrics. Although students found that style and tone were the most important elements in oral presentations, the comments related to style and tone were superficial, for example, reminding their classmates of stressing key words and not to have monotone. These comments were speaker-oriented. It was probably because the peer assessment task was relatively new to them. They were not familiar with the processes. Assessment guidelines and rubrics were something they could follow since the teacher was not with them while they listening to the audio files. In the second peer assessment, the highest number of comments, again, reflected the importance of style and tone in students' mind. This time, they could provide a more in-depth explanation towards this phenomenon. They believed that fulfilling the assessment requirements and following the rubrics strictly would not be enough to make the presentations effective. There must be something that a speaker should achieve by using appropriate style and tone. To recap some of the LYN and CCM's explanations, they saw the criticism as allowing feedback to be focused on students' intentions and what they needed to achieve through their presentations. The focus on each student's intention could bring a more personal nature to the feedback. CCM saw himself having two different roles of a teacher and an assessor. While the main duty was assessing their classmates' presentations, CCM would also make his/her comments objective by looking at the presentations with a neutral stance from the outside. This job was relative easy since students got different research topics. Looking at the feedback provided by CCM, he could make related distinctions between the micro and the macro in feedback (Cole, 2006). The micro was like concrete advice. The peer assessors told the assessed what needed to be improved in the presentations. The macro aimed to stimulate speakers to think about wider issues, particularly on generic skills for oral presentation improvement. The macro was more personalised. Figure 3 shows how the peer assessor stimulated the assessed in the *ChatBox*. According to Carless (2015), it is ideal to see this kind of feedback. The macro in feedback would be more sustainable for students since the assessed could not rely on the feedback. The assessed had to interpret and discover the meanings behind the feedback in relation to their presentations. Feedback focusing on the process and then self-regulation would be the most valued feedback strengthening students' learning (Hattie and Timperley, 2007).



The topic is quite interesting as I think that people usually believe that soda tax could avoid people from drinking those unhealthy soft drinks. But you suggest a new perspective to discuss this issue. In fact, the imposition of soda tax may eventually encourage people to switch to other substitutes which are even more unhealthy. This argument is strong and convincing.



In the aspect of speaking, there are some understandable pauses which can be further improved and the tone of the whole speaking period has seldom changes, making the audio hard to be finished listening.

In the aspect of content, I think that the introduction part is too long and has no exact centre, containing a lot of unnecessary things. It doesn't elicit the centre question of the essay and fails to reveal the controversy of different arguments and show the attitude of the essay. Compared with the first paragraph? the latter introduction of main argument is more persuasive. But it still seems a little muddled and doesn't systematically show one opinion. At last, I want to ask a question referring to the end of the speaking: why does apple not adopt such measure such as yet it still attracts tens of thousands of fans?

Figure 3 Two samples of the macro in feedback

Since presentations would be conducted in front of the audience, speakers should connect with the audience in order to pass them the messages more effectively. Intellectual connection was the basic, but the emotional connection was also essential. Without an emotional connection, the audience could choose to read the text versions but not listen to presentations. Emotional connection could also make the ideas more convincing. As a result, peer assessors emphasised the importance of having improved style and tone in oral presentations.

Table 12 Comments related to Style and Tone in the Peer Assessment Tasks

	First Peer Assessment Task	Second Peer Assessment Task
Orientation	Speaker-oriented	Audience-oriented
Reasons	It is natural to have intonation while speaking. Students tended to read the script directly, resulting in an improper intonation.	Audience could receive the messages more effectively with proper and various intonation.
Rationale	Peer assessors considered the importance of enjoyment of the audience. Retaining audience attention was important.	Besides intellectual connection, speakers should also connect themselves with the audience emotionally.

Similar to the first peer assessment task, the quality of speech came second in the second peer assessment task. The explanation was similar to style and tone. Students took a step further that they tried to connect with the audience and enhanced their understanding towards the presentation topics. Table 13 shows how the feedback on the quality of speech was different between the first and the second peer assessment tasks. Fluency could reflect the result of learning since students believed that a good fluent presentation should come after sufficient repetition and practice. The whole speech production was expected to be like an automatised activity. Content at that moment was less likely to influence the fluency because, through the research processes, speakers should have been familiar with their own topics. These are highlighted in the following two examples:

“Before listening to the audio file, I was expecting a fluent presentation. After eight weeks of research and topic development, speakers should have understood the topic very well. With an in-depth understanding of the topics, speakers should be able to present the information without hesitation. I believe that how much effort speakers have paid could be reflected by the fluency. I, therefore, could tell him/her how he/she could improve the fluency” (LYN)

“If you have been seriously doing research and selecting relevant information, you should be able to do a fluent presentation. This is because you have been learning that particular topic and you set the scope for how you will address the topic. There is no excuse to say you are not familiar with the information or arguments. The whole argumentation is in your hand. As a result, you should be able to produce a fluent

presentation because you are digesting information but not just memorizing. Now my friend was only reading information to the audience. He/she probably doesn't understand much" (TSYC)

After digesting the content from the research processes, speakers should internalise the knowledge and process language for meaning. The peer assessors mentioned that speakers should have abilities to communicate meanings at all times with the audience verbally in oral presentations. To achieve this, speakers should absolutely understand the topic knowledge. Otherwise, it would be difficult to convey the knowledge to the audience. Since different students were doing different topics, speakers should also consider the background of the audience, for example, their familiarity of the topics and their expectations. The audience were critical determinants towards what and how information was presented. Speakers needed to present the knowledge that could be understood by the audience of different backgrounds. The responses below from WKI and HYK show examples of these points:

"To achieve a good result in this subject, I think all our classmates would do their best in the final presentation. Please allow me to share one thing that I have observed in the second peer assessment task. I am happy to see that my friend has revised his/her presentation based on some of my comments. However, his/her presentation was still too difficult to understand. I could tell he/she absolutely understood his/her topic but he/she didn't think about the audience. Although he/she could speak fluently, I still couldn't manage to catch the ideas because there were so many jargons" (WKI)

"I got to say we have been lacking presentation experience. I think most of us have not taken the audience into consideration. It's good to feel the confidence of the speakers because it shows their passion and knowledge towards the topics. He/she was presenting confidently and I enjoyed listening to his/her speech. Unfortunately, I could only understand parts of his/her ideas. Some of the words he/she used were too technical and new to me" (HYK)

In the second peer assessment, it was believed that the speakers were relatively familiar with the content, but they got to revise the content to make it more understandable to the audience. While providing feedback, the peer assessors did not only focus on the speeches, like telling the speakers what they should revise. Instead, the comments were less likely to be instructional but were more process-oriented. Peer assessors tended to provide feedback as an audience and tell the speakers how they should change in order to make their presentations more understandable and effective. The feedback given was more explanatory. It was probably because, after the first peer assessment task and continuous understanding of the assessment

guidelines and rubrics, students found that the oral presentations would only be valuable if the messages could be taken away by the audience. All the changes that the speakers make should be able to entertain the audience needs and expectations. After attracting the audience attention through voices, good fluency and the comprehensibility would be required.

Table 13 Comments related to Quality of Speech in the Peer Assessment Tasks

	First Peer Assessment Task	Second Peer Assessment Task
Orientation	Fluency-oriented	Comprehensibility-oriented
Reasons	Fluency indicated the speakers' confidence. The audience tended to believe in what a confident speaker said.	The audience were the people who were going to take away the messages. Speakers should avoid jargon and make audience understand the presentations.
Rationale	The speakers could only produce a fluent presentation after internalising the knowledge.	After the content was set, the speakers should make the presentations comprehensible to the audience. Otherwise, the presentations would be no value.

The third item that received most feedback in the second peer assessment task was also task requirements. Students explained that content parts and the content quality were two different issues. Although some of the content might need further revision, in the second peer assessment task, the peer assessors mentioned the essential for having all parts completed. Students emphasised the need of rehearsals before this final assessment and this could only be done with completed content. The following two examples by WKI and HYK represent these positions:

“It was almost the final version and there are only two weeks left. If we could not finish all the tasks, we could not practise. Last time was like a taste of the oral presentations. This time is going to be the final preparation. Missing any parts means an incomplete presentation” (WKI)

“I think the final preparation should be only practicing the delivery skills. Throughout the course, I believe that we all know what makes our content academic. The remaining thing we need to do is to make our presentations effective and convincing. If you still

spend time doing the content, you wouldn't have sufficient time for the rehearsals. If there is any missing part, it's our responsibility to tell them" (HYK)

Towards the end of the course, students got more ideas what constituted an academic presentation. This was probably because the peer assessors understood the assessment guidelines more clearly. They could tell if the required parts existed in the audio files. This feedback was enough to support students to make their content more complete. As a result, they could focus on the delivery parts in this stage. The peer assessors believed that comments related to the task requirements could provide a secure feeling before they moved on practising the presentations, as this example shows:

"I think that her content should be okay since she revised. She should not worry about the task fulfillment. What she needs to do now is to think how she could make the presentation delivery better. Otherwise, the content will be wasted. What we are going to do is oral presentations and, therefore, oral English should be the focus in the final review" (LYN)

It was believed that the students took the peer assessment seriously since they mentioned they got responsibilities in the feedback provision stage. The students must have found the value being an assessor in this exercise. They also understood that language would only come with content. Consequently, they provided relatively more feedback on the task requirements and hopefully their classmates could have time for practices before the final assessment.

While interaction, grammar and quality of evidence were the three least popular items in the first peer assessment task, interaction, grammar and coverage of topics were the three least popular items in the second peer assessment task, receiving two, four and five comments respectively. Of all the comments, interaction, again, received the least feedback. Students mentioned the absence of the audience would make the interaction unable to assess. Since students only uploaded their audio files to the e-portfolio system, there was no way to assess the effectiveness of different interactive techniques in oral presentations. The audio file was a one-way communication.

"I couldn't say whether the interaction was good or bad in the file. She used some questions to interact with the audience but you never know if the questions work without the real audience. Theoretically, it was a kind of interaction. Practically, it is still unknown" (YCLC)

Some of the interviewee students also expressed the doubt of providing feedback on interaction because the audience would be different, as the following two examples reveal:

“I was unable to give feedback on his interaction. What if I said good but then the audience were silent? This is too uncertain and I really could not assess” (CCM)

“I am not sure about the usefulness of my feedback on interaction. Speakers really have to be flexible and make changes based on the environment at that time. No matter what my feedback was in the first and second peer assessment tasks, he still needs to adjust on the spot that day” (ICY)

The absence of audience throughout the entire peer assessment exercise was unable to help improve interaction in oral presentations. Peer assessors expressed that presence of the audience was required for assessing interaction.

The second last item that received least feedback was the coverage of topic. Students expressed that the second peer assessment task was close to the final assessment and, therefore, the presentations were supposed to be completed. It would be time-consuming if the speakers were asked to change their scopes for how the topics would be addressed. A small number of comments were found because of some minor issues, one example is provided below:

“My friend chose to investigate her topic from the perspectives of nurses and patients. Although I think the management people should be mentioned in this aspect, I didn’t ask her to change since this was his/her decision to cover his/her topic like this. Having a new perspective means doing the research all over again. This is not what we should do now” (NSK)

Besides the time issue, students also expressed that they were under-qualified to assess the coverage of topic. Different students got different topics, which means different students got different expertise. Two participants responses WKI and HKY were:

“Since I am not familiar with the topics, I couldn’t say the angles are not appropriate. She usually would explain why these angles in the introduction. We all have different values. It seems not good to judge others’ values” (WKI)

“I have to say I am not an expert to my friend’s presentation topic. I actually got no idea about her topic. Anyway, I won’t spend time doing research for her. What I could do was providing comments based on the existing information. All my feedback was from the audience perspective. If I don’t understand, I would tell her in the ChatBox and see what extra information she could provide to make her ideas more complete” (HYK)

The peer assessors seemed timid to judge the content since the topics were different from each other. They could maintain the ‘objectivity’ while providing feedback on the existing content

but not telling the speakers what additional content they thought important or should be covered in the presentations.

Grammar was, again, one of the items that received less feedback. The peer assessors mentioned that speakers might do self-correction in the first interview. In the second interview, however, they expressed that it was acceptable if the mistakes were still there. This was probably because the mistakes being made in the oral presentations were minor and they did not affect the understanding of the audience. Responses from NSK and TSYC provide examples of these issues:

“Who doesn’t make mistakes? We are second language learners and it’s normal making some mistakes in the English language, especially in oral presentations which require us to have real time language production. As an audience, honestly, I couldn’t catch every single word. I would try to catch the main ideas only. As long as the grammar mistakes do not affect the meaning, they are totally fine, Mistakes about tenses are common” (NSK)

“I think we are all fairly advanced. The grammar mistakes are so minor. As an audience, I didn’t find the mistakes significant. The purpose of oral presentations is about communication. Fluency should be the main focus” (TSYC)

Some students also expressed that they had been learning grammar for years. If they make a mistake and they do not know, they could not change in a short period of time because that mistake has become a habit.

“How we speak is actually a habit and we don’t have time to change our habits before the final assessment. What I have noticed so far are only minor grammar mistakes, for example, prepositions and tenses. I think these mistakes are normal because of the way we speak. Making changes deliberately may affect the fluency and comprehensibility of the speech. It’s not worth. We are all second language learners” (CCM)

Students tended to be generous about the grammar mistakes. Peer assessors agreed that a more communicative approach would allow speakers to converse at length. More consciousness on grammar may negatively affect the quality of the presentations.

4.3 RQ2: As the assessed, how did a student react upon peer feedback?

Besides providing feedback, receiving feedback from peers is one of the most important parts in the peer assessment exercise. Students, generally speaking, would revise their work with reference to the feedback. Some students, however, were unlikely to follow the comments

and make changes. It was, therefore, worth investigating how the feedback recipients responded. Eight students participated in the interviews voluntarily.

4.3.1 First Peer Assessment Task

In the focus-group interviews, students shared how they responded to the peer feedback after the first peer assessment task.

4.3.1.1 Reading Peer Assessment Form in the First Assessment Task

After everything had got ready for students to check out, they expressed that the first piece of information they read was the peer assessment form. It was because the peer assessment form could tell them the grades of different assessment items and know how their performances were described with reference to the assessment rubrics. Although the purpose of this peer assessment was encouraging students to focus on comments and improve their oral presentations for the summative assessment, students still wanted to know the grades first.

“The first thing I read was the peer assessment form. This was because the grades could give me a general picture of my performance” (NSK)

They believed that they would know what needed to be improved immediately by looking at the grades. For example, students would firstly plan to improve C-grade item first instead of the A-grade item. The grade letters were not only performance indicators. Students prioritised the assessment items for improvement purposes.

“I guess I don’t have to focus on the fluency now because I got an A. However, I think I need to find some reliable sources of information. I got a C for the evidence quality” (ICY)

It is no surprise that, in the Hong Kong education context, students have been studying in an examination-oriented culture and focusing on results. In this peer assessment exercise, students however, did not stop after receiving the comments. They continued by looking at what they needed to improve because they might have found the association between the tasks.

“It was just the first time and there is one more practice before the final assessment. I hope I could know my weaknesses and improve my performance before the next recording” (HYK)

It seems that the students found the value of feedback and the association between assessment tasks and comments. Through the peer assessment process, they wished to use the feedback to improve their presentation performances.

4.3.1.2 Reading feedback on e-portfolio *ChatBox* in the First Assessment Task

After studying the peer assessment form, the second thing that the student did was reading the comments in the e-portfolio system. Students believed that they could find more information or tips from the *ChatBox* for improvement, as the following two examples show:

“I got a C in tone and style. I was a bit upset but I also needed to know why I got C. Moreover, I also needed to know how I could improve. I expected that the peer assessors would explain and suggest in the ChatBox” (ICY)

“I believe that my friends would have told me the reasons and some tips for improvement in the ChatBox. If he thinks I didn’t do well, he got to let me know why and how I could improve” (LYN)

They assumed that their peer assessors were responsible and would be able to provide explanations and suggestions for improvement in the *ChatBox*. Compared to the grades, they showed more desire to know the reasons, and most importantly, methods for improvement. In the first peer assessment exercise, students were likely to take the peer feedback as information. Carless (2015, p.191) concluded that “this is a natural and conventional way of thinking about feedback”. This was probably because students used to receive feedback after assessment tasks and they got no chance to improve their performances in the same subject. Carless (2015, p.191) also called this “old paradigm of thinking about feedback” since taking feedback as comments would be less likely to help students improve their performances.

Some students expressed that submitting multiple drafts could help them receive more details on performances and the peer feedback could be easily interpreted. Students considered teachers’ feedback as “cryptic academic discourse” (Carless, 2015, p.218) which would be difficult to be interpreted. Therefore, students could not apply the feedback to regulate their work.

“I don’t challenge teachers. After looking at the feedback, I just take it. In fact, I don’t see where is not satisfactory. He just told me that the elaboration was not enough. I got no idea what means by enough. I need detailed feedback” (HYK)

HYK did not understand the feedback but was not motivated to engage any further conversations with the teacher. External regulation like this would make students difficult to judge the quality of the revised work based on teachers’ feedback. They would feel frustrated and the feedback could become counterproductive. In other words, students found peer feedback more connected and they could internalise the peer feedback. This internal regulation could help them judge the quality of their revised work.

In students' reflections, a small number of students mentioned that they welcomed peer feedback. They would like to improve their learning processes in order to achieve a better result, which meant a better presentation performance during the final summative oral presentation assessment. The strong desire to improve their own performances made the formative feedback in the *ChatBox* useful to the students. Students who valued peer feedback could take feedback as a process and use the feedback to develop their learning. They started to believe that the improved performances would be resulted from the improved learning processes. Since the implementation of peer assessment was still a new experience to the students, after assessing each other's presentations, only a few of them could go beyond the outcomes and start thinking of how to improve instead of what to improve. While this peer assessment exercise carried no mark and peer assessors would not assess in the summative assessment, most students tended not to make use of peer feedback at this stage.

4.3.1.3 Use of Assessment Guidelines and Rubrics in the First Assessment Task

Although students had studied the guidelines repeatedly while providing feedback, they would still refer back to the guidelines and rubrics after receiving comments from their peers. They wanted to check the feedback against the guidelines and rubrics. They believed that this action could help them make sure that they had not missed anything in the guidelines and they could understand why the assessors had given such comments.

"I thought I was clear about the assessment guidelines and rubrics. After receiving the feedback, I still found that I had missed something on the checklist. I couldn't believe that I was not careful enough" (HYK)

With reference to the assessment guidelines and rubrics, students could also check the 'objectivity' of the feedback. For example, if the feedback was about coverage of the topics, they would check the comments against the rubrics' descriptors and see if the peer assessors followed them. An example of this was provided by CCM:

"I just wanted to make sure the feedback was relevant to the assessment requirements. Checking the feedback against the rubrics could make me understand more the requirements and have more ideas about my performances from the audience perspective" (CCM)

This respondent believed this action could help them understand what the assessors wanted from the presentations.

“Checking the feedback against the rubrics could let me further understand the rubrics more. Although we had a trial before, I think there must be some slight differences after all these experiences” (CCM)

This finding reinforces the ideas suggested by Torrance (2012) that the descriptors should be contingent and they could be readjusted in order to make the quality evident. The existence of difference was probably because each individual student would have his/her own focus in the rubrics. Shifting the role from the assessors to the assessed in this stage seemed to provide students a better understanding towards the rubrics. This experience could help them further understand and advance the rubrics before the final assessment.

“I thought I was careful while giving feedback but I didn’t. I remember that I gave comments on the range of vocabulary only. Now, my friend said I had not used appropriate vocabulary in an academic presentation. I totally forgot the vocabulary appropriateness. This comment made me revisit the rubrics again” (LYN)

Receiving the increased amount of feedback for each individual student reflected the students’ enhanced responsibility in the assessment processes. Even though there were training sessions before the first peer assessment task, the feedback recipients could have a better understanding towards the rubrics by reading the increased comments of different varieties. Besides improving performances from the written feedback, this process could also let students realise where they were unconscious about in the assessment guidelines and rubrics. Through this realisation, students could enhance their internalisation of all the assessment requirements and rubrics descriptors.

4.3.1.4 Dialogues with Peer Assessors in the First Assessment Task

As mentioned in the Chapter 4, students were put in groups for the peer assessment tasks. Students knew their peer assessors since grouping was done beforehand. After logging into the e-portfolio, students could then identify who gave what comments. Since all the names were disclosed in the system, it facilitated conversations between the assessed and the assessors. However, not every single student would have dialogues with their peer assessors. They would only initiate the conversations if they needed further clarification, as the following two examples show:

“I quite liked the e-portfolio since I could know who gave me comments. I know it’s not good to write paragraphs in the ChatBox and that’s why information might not be complete. In this situation, I had to talk with that peer assessor and clearly understand what and how I could improve” (WKI)

“I started a conversation with my assessor because I thought he had misunderstood me. He said I didn’t have the definition in the introduction. Actually, I had put it just before the first position argument. I thought the organisation would look better this way. That’s why I had to clarify and see if it was appropriate to have the definition there from the audience perspective” (TSYC)

Even though there was feedback given by peers, students were unlikely to take all the comments without thinking. They would consider the accuracy and the quality of feedback first. If they felt being misunderstood, the dialogues could help them discuss with the assessors and look for further guidance, if necessarily. The conversations being conducted in this stage were related to the presentation performances. WKI and TSYC were concerned about themselves, checking if they had finished the tasks and fulfilled the assessment requirements. It seems that peer feedback being similar to the rubrics descriptors and vague would discourage student engagement. Figure 4 shows two samples of peer feedback which could not encourage engagement.

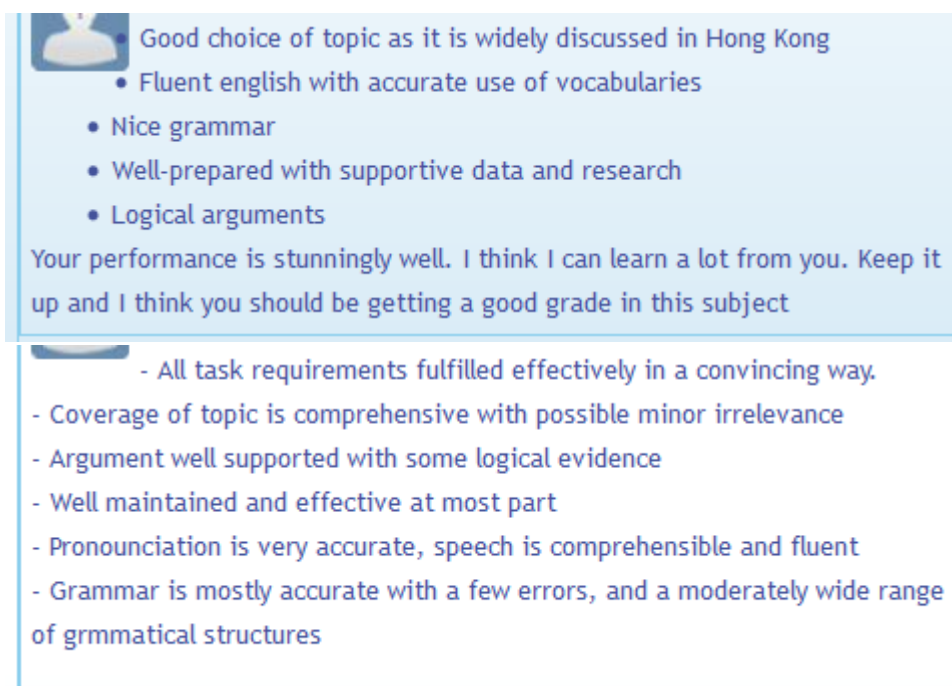


Figure 4 Two samples of vague peer feedback

The above samples show that the peer feedback was not elaborated with explanations. The peer assessors simply copied the descriptors and put them down in the *ChatBox*. Even though one peer assessor said, “*you should be getting a good grade in this subject*”, there was not

information telling the assessed how to get a good grade. This feedback was unable to facilitate discussions.

Regardless the conversation content, it was noticed that students were more willing to have conversations with the peer assessors after receiving feedback. This phenomenon would be unlikely to happen if the feedback was given by teachers. This finding reflected the impact of social and affective issues on how students responded to feedback. This feedback-initiated conversation was mediated by “emotion, identity, power, authority, subjectivity and discourse” (Huggins, Hartley & Skelton, 2001, p.272). Discussing performances with teachers might be far beyond students’ comfort zone. The assessed, however, felt more comfortable with the peer assessors since they were more approachable. Peer assessment seemed to be able to take students outside their comfort zones within an acceptable level. This could make the peer assessment exercise more sustainable (Carless, 2015). At the same time, in the first peer assessment task, what students were cautious was those assessors who gave grades without adequate justification. Students emphasised the importance of grades in their learning processes (Orsmond, Merry & Reiling, 2005). In the first peer assessment exercise, the main purpose of the conversation between the assessors and the assessed was about clarification and grade justification.

4.3.2 Second Peer Assessment Task

Again, students received the second feedback from peers after the feedback provision process. The way that they revised their work and adjusted their performances were a bit different from what they did in the first peer assessment.

4.3.2.1 Reading Peer Assessment Form in the Second Assessment Task

The peer assessment form was still the first item they would like to look at. In addition to knowing their performances in general, they also wanted to know if they had made any improvements in certain aspects. They were eager to know if they had used correct measures to make improvements. They focused more on the grade change this time, as the two respondents NSK and HYK note:

“I wanted to know how much I have improved. We got different methods for improvement. Although I think this method is good and I feel like I have improved, I still need to get that confirmed by the audience. In this case, my peer assessor” (NSK)

“It’s not me to say whether I have improved or not. Knowing what the audience think is more important. A better grade would mean that I have improved” (HYK)

Table 14 shows how students saw the purposes of the peer assessment form throughout the peer assessment process. In the second peer assessment task, the assessed wanted to know their performances from the audience perspective. They considered the recognition from the audience more important than the effort they had paid for improvement. They believed that the improved grades could reflect the satisfaction level of the audience.

This finding is partly in line with what Lipnevich and Smith (2009) concluded in their research stud. Lipnevich and Smith found that students would improve better if they did not know their grades. The education system in Hong Kong, however, has shaped the students' grade-oriented learning styles since they were young. Participating students believed that the improved grades were something measurable and could reflect their effort. Despite students wanted to know their grades, they used the grades to 'prove' what they had done was effective. This indicated that students focused more on the learning processes in the second exercise.

Table 14 Use of the Peer Assessment Form in the Peer Assessment Process

Peer Assessment Form	
First Peer Assessment Task	Second Peer Assessment Task
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Considering grades as references to their performances • Pritorising the items needed for improvement • Focusing on their own performances 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hoping to know if they had improved • Wishing to be recognised by seeing higher grades • Checking if they had applied a better strategy in presentations

4.3.2.2 Reading Feedback on the e-portfolio *ChatBox* in the Second Assessment Task

Similar to the first peer assessment task, students read the comments in the e-portfolio *ChatBox* after studying the peer assessment form. Through reading the comments in the *ChatBox*, students hoped to know what they needed to improve further, especially comments related to the feelings of the audience. Students believed that the enjoyment of audience was the main issue in oral presentations, as the flowing too quotations reveal:

“I was quite nervous reading comments in the ChatBox this time. Of course I wanted to know why I got those grades, but I also wanted to know if my assessors enjoyed my presentation. If the audience didn't get interested in my presentation, what I did was just a waste” (NSK)

“I really couldn’t predict the audience feelings towards my presentation. I think I have made improvement in the second task, but it doesn’t mean what I did was enough. I wanted to know how they felt” (ICY)

In the second peer assessment task, instead of having comments on their performances, students wished to see comments related to the assessors’ feelings towards the presentations, LYN and CCM provide examples of these trends:

“I think what I have improved would be appreciated by the assessors. I hope they could see my changes and consider the changes are positive” (LYN)

“The assessors will also be one of the audience. We should know how they feel towards our presentations. What we are going to change should entertain the needs of the audience” (CCM)

In this practice, how students looked at the feedback was different from the first exercise and the feedback got re-conceptualised. While referring the feedback in the *ChatBox* as comments in the first exercise, the assessed might consider the feedback as dialogue in the second exercise. This was probably because they wanted to know more from the audience perspectives. This finding is encouraging since the university students could shift along the Hattie and Timperley’s (2007) four levels of feedback. Of these four levels, the feedback at the task level tends to be the least effective feedback, while feedback supporting self-reflective learning the most effective. Instead of fulfilling the requirements of different assessment items, students also critically evaluated their own performances with the supportive feedback. Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006) also mentioned that the feedback should be able to allow students to monitor, evaluate and regulate their own processes. In the second exercise, instead of following the feedback blindly, students looked at the feedback and discussed with the peer assessors for improvements. This finding is also consistent with Anderson’s (2014) study that the feedback could promote student thinking but not limited to judgements and instructions. CCM also found the feedback useful and commented on the feedback while reading it.

“More feedback could help me get a fresh perspective about my presentation. My peer assessors could give me a viewpoint which is different from the teacher’s. Major problems usually appear more often in the feedback. Other than that, peer assessors tend to provide different ideas” (CCM)

Traditionally, feedback would be provided by teachers after the assessment. During the peer assessment exercise, in addition to individual feedback, peer assessment could expose students to more than one view. Receiving feedback from different peer assessors might confuse the assessed. The assessed needed to decide what feedback was useful and then had discussions

with the peer assessors for presentation revision. In Hong Kong, there is a considerable number of students in the first-year of the university study who are unlikely to be prepared for independent learning. The purpose of introducing peer assessment exercise to the first-year university students in this research study seems to be a way to develop their skills for such learning style. Beaumont, O’Doherty and Shannon (2011) also emphasised the importance of self-reflective learning in the higher education curriculum. Table 15 shows what students wanted to obtain from the *ChatBox* in both peer assessment tasks. Instead of looking for explanations and suggestions in the *ChatBox*, students would like to see the feedback related to the feelings of the assessors while listening. They believed that all the changes they made were not only making their performances better, but also making the presentations friendlier to the audience.

Table 15 Items Wanted from the *ChatBox* in the Peer Assessment Process

e-portfolio <i>ChatBox</i>	
First Peer Assessment Task	Second Peer Assessment Task
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Looking for explanations for the given grades on the peer assessment form • Receiving suggestions that could help them improve the performances • Being speaker-oriented 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hoping to receive appreciation from the assessors • Making sure the changes follow the audience wants and needs • Being audience-oriented

4.3.2.3 Use of Assessment Rubrics in the Second Assessment Task

In the second peer assessment task, students tended to refer to assessment rubrics only while reading the feedback from peer assessors. The following respondents considered the assessment guidelines were not that helpful.

“When it comes to almost the end of the assessment, the guidelines won’t be useful anymore. This is because we have been following the guidelines to structure our presentations. At this point of time, the entire presentations should be there. We should focus on skills more now” (LYN)

“The guidelines are like a checklist, telling you that what you have to finish. Since I am confident about what I have done, any comments related to the content could be ignored” (CCM)

Before the final assessment, students wanted to improve more on their presentation skills instead of the content. Referring to the rubrics could let them know how they could improve by at least one grade upwards.

“Rubrics are used to show us how to get a certain grade. It describes my performances and is agreed by everyone in the class. I have to know what I should do in order to be observed and reach my target grades. There would not be enough time to revise the content, like changing angles or having a better coverage. We should make the existing content meaning to the audience through our presentation skills” (TSYC)

Table 16 shows how the assessed used the assessment guidelines and rubrics in both peer assessment tasks. Instead of checking if the explanations followed the rubrics ‘objectively’, students tended to trust their classmates and hoped to improve their presentation skills after reading the feedback. This was probably because knowing what the audience wanted was the first priority in oral presentations.

Table 16 Use of the Assessment Guideline and Rubrics in the Peer Assessment Process

Assessment Guidelines and Rubrics	
First Peer Assessment Task	Second Peer Assessment Task
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using both assessment guidelines and rubrics • Checking the feedback against the guidelines and rubrics • Knowing what content was being missed in the guidelines 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using assessment rubrics only • Knowing how to perform better in the final assessment with reference to the descriptors • Ignoring the guidelines due to time limitation

4.3.2.4 Dialogues with Peer Assessors in the Second Assessment Task

Similar to the first peer assessment task, those assessed would also like to have conversations with their peer assessors if they wanted to. This time, however, the assessed would initiate the conversations with peer assessors not because of misunderstandings. Instead, those assessed wanted to know more details so that they could improve before the final assessment. This phenomenon resonates the finding of Barnett (2007) that there is a constant influence from other parties through questioning. The demand for improvement facilitated the process of dialogic feedback. The assessed could make use of the feedback to raise questions in order to know how they could improve some skills in their presentations. By improving

skills, students may obtain a higher grade. Carless (2015) noted that students with greater intensity of grade-related desire are more likely to engage actively, or even proactively. The desire for skill improvement would help students go beyond the feedback as final words (Willingham, 1990). Participants YCLY and HYK provide useful information on the effects of peer assessment, as in the quotations below:

“I did have a talk with one of my peer assessors because I wanted to know how I could improve my intonation. This was the problem I needed to fix urgently. She recommended me to stress some keywords and I thought I did. We listened to the recording again and he asked me what words I should stress for the audience. Even though it was just a comment from one person, I still trust him because we all got comparable English language abilities and I have been impressed by his responsibility” (YCLY).

“I think my peer assessor has somehow misunderstood some of my content, but I didn’t care because I could tell by myself. I don’t mind because it’s not his expertise. It is not necessary to discuss that again. The first priority should be the enjoyment level of my presentation. Questions from my assessors could let me know what they want and how I should perform” (HYK)

YCLY seemed to have developed her judgement and knew when to accept or reject feedback. HYK realised that revising the presentations blindly based on the feedback given would be a mistake. Reflecting ‘critically’ was required after receiving feedback. Through this, it was observed that students were developing their self-regulation ability of feedback. Both YCLY and HYK were able to demonstrate the connection between the peer feedback and their own internal feedback to improve their work and progress. Besides critical reflection, students seemed to use the feedback to make their presentations better in ways they found more substantial. While students were preparing for the final version, they appeared not to follow all the feedback given by peers. They were able to find their own paths for revision. For example, YCLY talked about achieving better intonation among all aspects and HYK only listened to the advice he found useful. HYK raised the issue of when to adopt the feedback and when it would be better not to follow the advice. There was a commonality that some students were able to develop an ability to judge their performances and make individual decisions.

Up to this stage, more students were able to make use of the dialogic nature of feedback. Peer assessors and those assessed had different ideas and messages to negotiate. This phenomenon was positive since students in the past mostly received post-assessment feedback and they got little chance to close the feedback loop. They could not make any changes and see

any improvements. Feedback seemed to become embedded within regular classroom interaction. YCLY enjoyed discussions with her peer assessors. She found that the discussions could allow both parties to go into more depth and get enlightened. Two other positive examples came from YCLY and WKI who observes:

“Peer feedback allows me to reflect on my performance faster. The earlier reflection could help me understand and then apply standards on the next assessment task. I really know how they work for improvement. This opportunity is appreciated, especially when I am a freshman now. I didn’t know how to make presentation academic. Talking with my classmates can let me better understand the standards and requirements” (YCLY)

“Faster feedback allows me to correct my mistakes immediately before they got deeply rooted in my mind” (WKI)

According to Carless (2015), this kind of interaction between the peer assessors and those assessed is a new paradigm of feedback. Students reconceptualised the feedback along the peer assessment processes. In-class interactive questioning and dialogic feedback were evident within classroom processes and supplemented by online participation in the e-portfolio. The feedback was not only information-based, but also a message for students to negotiate. During the dialogues, the assessed could raise questions and listen to what they wanted to hear. Both YCLY and WKI mentioned standards and agreed that the peer feedback could clarify issues. The discussions between those assessed and the assessors provided a context to both to apply and evaluate knowledge. Based on the agreed rubrics, the assessed could have their answers tailored in order to meet the assessment criteria. The assessed being proactive in dialogues could indicate the trusting relationship between the two parties (Carless, 2015). Those assessed were positively engaged and challenged in conversations. This practice was different from the ‘traditional’ transmission of feedback. This peer assessment exercise could engage with students’ needs in the oral presentations and, therefore, lead to improvement in performances (Nicol, 2010; Carless, 2013). Barker and Pinard (2014) explained that the negotiation was due to the students’ commitment in the assessment tasks and their learning processes. The willingness of students to interact with each other resonated with the conclusion made by Nicol (2010) that students’ interaction should be emphasised more than the quality of comments.

Table 17 shows the different purposes of having conversations with the peer assessors in both peer assessment tasks. Besides learning from peer feedback, students also had opportunities to develop insights to improve their skills required in the oral presentations from the conversations with the peer assessors (Carless, 2015). In the first peer assessment tasks, students clarified and negotiated with the peer assessors if they were misunderstood. In the

second peer assessment task, students, however, were unlikely to do that and they would justify the comments by themselves. After justification, they would select the relevant and useful feedback for improvements. Students tended to focus on the ways of improvement instead of knowing why they received certain grades.

Table 17 Purposes of Dialogue with Peer Assessors in the Peer Assessment Process

Dialogue with Peer Assessors	
First Peer Assessment Task	Second Peer Assessment Task
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hoping to know more details about the presentations performance • Clarifying the misunderstandings • Negotiating the grades given by the peer assessors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hoping to know some suggestions to improve some particular items • Wishing to know if the peer assessors enjoyed the presentations • Knowing more about the needs and wants of the audience

4.4 RQ3: How did the feedback received by students influence the way they revised their oral presentations, i.e. closing the feedback loop?

Between the end of each peer assessment task and the following presentations, students would have time to revise and continue developing their presentations. To produce a better ‘product’ and outcome?, students needed to develop a sense of what a good academic presentation looked like. In this research study, participants were asked to fill in a form indicating what changes they had spent most of the time on. Students could write down some examples of changes or describe the changes they had made as evidence.

4.4.1 After the First Peer Assessment Task

After the first peer assessment task, students were given four weeks to revise their first draft and prepare for their next presentations. After collecting all the forms from students before the second presentation, the data shows that students made an effort to improve both their content and their intonation after receiving the first peer feedback. Table 18 shows the number of changes that students made for each assessment item.

Table 18 Changes students made after the first peer assessment task

First Peer Assessment Task (n=28)
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Item Category	Numbers of Changes
Content	
Task Requirements	21
Coverage of Topic	0
Quality of Arguments	15
Quality of Evidence	14
Delivery	
Organisation	10
Interaction	0
Language	
Grammar	4
Vocabulary	5
Style and Tone	26
Pronunciation and Fluency	
Pronunciation	5
Quality of Speech	5

Most of the changes that students made were related to the content. This was probably because students were unable to pay attention to every single detail and fulfil all the requirements stated in the assignment guidelines. From the interviews with students, peer assessment exercises was clear for them to know what items were missing in the presentations. After being an assessor and receiving feedback from peers, the increased participation in the assessment process and the increased amount of feedback could help them more aware of what needed to include or finish in the first presentations. The items they revised included definitions and the overview of their presentations, as the following two examples highlight:.

“I felt very bad since I missed a number of elements in the first recording. Luckily I could know what other classmates included their first recording. I really appreciate this peer assessment exercise” (HYK)

“I have become more aware of the content of an academic presentation by listening to others’. I didn’t realise I missed the purpose in the introduction. The experience can remind me of the content” (CCM)

Their peer assessors checked the introductory part of the presentations against the guidelines while listening. The peer assessors, therefore, could tell the speakers what they had missed, or

was incomplete in the first recording. Besides, after listening to their peers' presentations, they would have realised they might have missed something in their own presentations as well. Both HYK and CCM could know the missing components in their own presentations by listening to the presentations or checking carefully against the guidelines for other classmates. Another reason for students to revise their content was probably wanting to confirm the first stage was satisfactory before they proceeded to the second recording. The mistakes or errors made in the first recording should be avoided in the future presentations. Students tended to need to feel secure before the next step. The first peer assessment task gave students more exposure in the assessment processes, knowing and understanding more about the contents requirements of the assessment.

Even though the peer assessors commented on the quality of speech a lot, just a few students focused on that relatively. The focus on revising the content could be explained by the lack of the relationship of trust between the peer assessors and the assessed. Since this peer assessment experience was new to students and the peer assessors were not the ones who assessed the summative assessment, students tended not to trust their comments on skills. Furthermore, comments related to the quality of speech appeared 'subjective'. As a result, students might not want to take risks (Carless, 2013). The revision on contents could make students feel more comfortable since the items of the task requirements could be checked against the assessment guidelines. The low trust between the parties may make those assessed rely on something seen as more 'objective' in relation to their performances.

Apart from the contents, students also expressed that they spent some time and effort improving their language skills, particularly both style and tone. Style and tone were considered a bridge connecting the contents knowledge with the audience emotions. The experience of the both roles seemed to help students tailor the contents to the audience. They gained more understanding about the audiences needs and desires while listening to a presentation. After having the content, speakers got to make the messages more meaningful to the audience. One of the ways to do this was using appropriate style and tone to trigger the emotions of the audience. Students believe that showing an energetic and enthusiastic tone could get the audience engaged in the presentations because the audience, in addition to listening to the ideas, would respond to the way the speakers use their voices. It was what speakers have to take care of beyond a written assignment in order to make an impact. Using appropriate tone and style could make the presentations more lively and interesting to the audience. After the first peer assessment task, most students tended to adjust the pace and pitch of their voices. Some of them realised that they spoke too fast in the first recording and could not convey the messages

effectively. Students started adjusting the pace after receiving the feedback. They made the introduction a bit faster to show enthusiasm, while contents were a bit slower to show emphasis and caution to the audience. Besides pace, the students also adjusted the pitch. They wanted to make it as natural as possible by varying the pitch. They hoped to connect with the audience like having a day-to-day conversation. They mentioned one major change was selecting important information from the contents and using a lower pitch to indicate the importance, making the key messages more transferrable to the audience.

Adjusting the pace and pitch were the two main amendments that students made in the aspects of style and tone after the first peer assessment task. They explored different ways of saying the same script to signal the main ideas to the audience. The participants believe that the appropriate use of their voices could also convey enthusiasm to the audience.

Students generally lacked confidence and, therefore, treasured the increased comments provided by their peers. They believed that having more feedback would better understand their weaknesses in oral presentations. Furthermore, understanding more what the audience wanted in an ‘objective’ way would hopefully result in a better grade in the final assessment. After knowing what needed to be improved in the next recording, students would then think of some strategies for the revision aspects. In this revision, students appeared to put the comments into two different categories. They were “Now” and “Later”. Students tended to put contents-based feedback in “Now” category whereas skill-based feedback in “Later” category, as the following two comments highlight:

“I basically put the comments into two categories, some parts that I could change now and some I have to do later. Since I only got limited time before the next recording, I had to see what I needed to do first to make obvious improvement. Usually I would improve some items that require more time later, for example, pronunciation and intonation” (LYN)

“An oral presentation consists of content and skills. After reading the assessment guidelines carefully, I would definitely think how I should improve skills first, but it is more time-consuming. We all know that it always takes time to change our habits. Therefore, I have decided to revise the definitions and find more up-to-date journal articles to support my arguments now” (HYK)

Students agreed that it was more important to build up the contents in the first stage than polishing the presentations skills. Even though both the contents and skills are essential in oral presentations, students expressed that contents should come first. This was because

contents were supposed to be completed first and the revised contents might show a large improvement to the peer assessors in the next recording.

“Content is like the framework of the research study. You got to make the framework strong before you develop further. Right now, there are some issues with my definitions. If I don’t revise it now, the arguments in the body paragraphs may collapse” (NSK)

“I am sorry I am not able to improve my intonation within limited time. I know this is what I need to improve but I am afraid I couldn’t show my improved intonation in the next recording. I need to finish the whole presentation content first. Otherwise, I couldn’t practise. Once the content is done and recognized by my peer assessor, it’s still not too late to practise” (TSYC)

It is believed that students would like to follow the assessment guidelines first, ensuring what they have revised would fulfil the assessment requirements, before they improve their presentation skills. This is because students can ‘measure’ what they have completed and not completed. Presentation skills, however, were considered difficult to measure since it was relatively ‘subjective’ and depends on if students were familiar with the contents, as ICY reveals below:

“We are going to do the second recording and it means we are going to add new content. I don’t think I can make my presentation better if there are still changes in my presentation. I think I would only start practising my presentation skills once the content is set. Of course I will bear in mind what my peer assessors have told me in this exercise while practising my presentation skills in few weeks’ time” (ICY)

To sum up, after receiving the first peer feedback, students tended to revise the contents mostly. They were also aware of the need to improve the style and tone in their presentations. The focus on the task requirements was students’ first priority in the revision. The measurable items on the assessment guidelines could provide students a sense of security by fulfilling the required tasks before improving their presentation skills. Students could also show the improvement more easily to the peer assessors. Since it would take time to make presentation skills better and the contents was not completed, students knew they needed to improve but were less likely to spend time polishing their presentations skills at this point of time.

4.4.2 After the Second Peer Assessment Task

After the second peer assessment task, students were given three weeks to finalise their presentations and get prepared for the final oral presentation assessment. After the collection of peer assessment forms, the data shows that students mainly made efforts to improve their

style and tone and in order to make the presentations a higher quality. Table 19 shows the number of changes that students made for each assessment item.

Table 19 Changes students made after the second peer assessment task

Second Peer Assessment Task (n=28)	
Item Category	Numbers of Changes
Content	
Task Requirements	8
Coverage of Topic	0
Quality of Arguments	0
Quality of Evidence	3
Organisation	
Organisation	2
Interaction	0
Language	
Grammar	5
Vocabulary	4
Style and Tone	38
Pronunciation	
Pronunciation	4
Quality of Speech	25

Even though there were an increased number of comments related to task requirements in the second peer assessment exercise, students tended not to revise the contents after shifting the role from the assessors to the assessed. This was probably because of the limited time before the final assessment. Students expressed that the whole research processes were quite time-consuming. Instead of looking for new sources of information, or reading journal articles, they preferred to spend time practising and improving their oral English. They considered the enjoyment of the audience more than the contents. Some students mentioned that the audience at that time would also be busy preparing their presentations. They might not be that attentive. Their voices, therefore, were considered important than the contents, as the two quotes from YCLY and TSY show:

“Honestly speaking, I don’t want to do the research all over again. We couldn’t cover everything. The feedback is good but I don’t have time to find new information. I have spent more than enough time finding, reading and digesting journal articles. It also took me time to organise and get familiar with the content. I think I should focus on the delivery more at this stage. (YCLY)

“You could only use your voice to bring the content to life, keeping the audience attentive and raising to a higher degree of the enjoyment. Your voice could give your content a lift which could enhance the richness of the entire presentation. Changing intonation and pace are relative easy for us in the final stage and these changes could make a big difference” (TSY)


While taking the feedback and revising the presentation, YCLY understood that there were two types of feedback. The first one was to facilitate some adjustments to make the presentation better, whereas the other one was to encourage a more fundamental change to the presentation. TSY also noticed the distinction between micro and macro feedback. She felt glad that her peer assessors did not focus too much on specific details such as what a presentation should include. After revisiting the guidelines, a good oral performance should be able to engage the audience, but not simply by presenting arguments. The macro feedback was a more holistic approach and she could then think of her own ways for revision. Both of these participants indicated the enhanced awareness of the feedback implications. Echoing the findings of Carless (2015), this peer assessment exercises could integrate the three elements of learning-oriented assessment, being: the interconnections between feedback; task design; and evaluative expertise. The cumulative e-portfolio tasks encouraged students to engage with feedback and develop self-evaluation ability which was a positive outcome.

Students could only get familiar with the contents after it was set. The next thing they mentioned they should do was making the presentations as fluent as possible. This seems to indicate students’ distributing efforts while producing an oral presentation through consistent intellectual engagement and having two roles of disciplinary participation (Gibbs, 2006). They believed that fluency was positively related to confidence. Through practices, students could further improve their presentation skills. In addition, most importantly, after being confident with the skills, the interviewees expressed that they were also confident in the materials they were presenting, as can be seen in the two quotations below:

“I’ve realised that I feel more confident after practising for a few times. My delivery was more fluent. I recorded my voice and then listened. I hope that my confidence could make my ideas more convincing” (LYN)


“It’s important to let the audience know you have prepared well and know the content insider out. You got to know ... 100% familiar with every single part of your presentation, for example, sources of information, authors and data. You would speak more comfortably and fluently when you have more confidence. These good feelings should be able to get passed along to the audience, making them more to get persuaded a bit easily” (HYK)

Approaching to the final assessment, both LYN and HYK focused more on the delivery of the presentations. Although they could realise that some parts of the contents could have been better, students would still want to pay more effort on the delivery. Some students found this challenging since they got to change their speaking styles within limited time. The additional peer feedback was easy to understand and able to provide more guidance on this aspect. Furthermore, students who had less confidence in oral presentations were proactively seeking support by having conversations with peers and getting exposed to the enhanced number of exemplars in order to improve performances and develop self-assessment skills. These processes resonated with the notion of spontaneous collaborative learning (Tang, 1993). Figure 5 shows how a student provided feedback and learnt from others at the same time. This phenomenon of benefiting ‘lower’ achievers was also found by Orsmond and Merry (2013). Peer samples helped students to understand expectations and the nature of good performances, and they were considered more useful than looking at assessment criteria. Students could develop their own self-evaluative expertise by gaining insights from peer exemplars.

 Hello I'm Sandy. I am glad that you invite me to write a feedback for your recording!

I've already listened to your recording, i think you do very well in pronouncing very words in your presentation! I am able to listen very words clearly and this definitely grab the attention of your listeners.

Besides, you have turned the written English in your research into spoken English. For instnce, you expressed your opposition to some opponent opinions by using phrase like " However, this is not necessarily true!". I've learned how i can improve my presentation after listening to your recording!:)

 • Good choice of topic as it is widely discussed in Hong Kong

- Fluent english with accurate use of vocabularies
- Nice grammar
- Well-prepared with supportive data and research
- Logical arguments

Your performance is stunningly well. I think I can learn a lot from you. Keep it up and I think you should be getting a good grade in this subject

Figure 5 Two samples showing how a student benefits from peer's work

Similar to the previous task, after receiving feedback, students also thought of some strategies to improve their presentations. The strategies this time, however, were different. In this revision, students seemed to put the comments into two new categories. They were "Go" and "No go". Students only selected 'some' feedback for revision. They had these two categories because they were concerned about the time left before the final assessment. They also thought that it was a bit late to revise the contents. Students appeared able to move forward with the feedback at this stage. While being unable to make all the changes, they chose to adjust how the way they presented the contents. The selection was probably based on their understanding of the nature of a quality presentation and the feedback received on their presentations in progress, WKI and CCM provide good examples of this:

"I am happy to have received some useful feedback but unfortunately I couldn't revise all the suggested things. There are only 3 weeks left and I could only revise some of them. I am not going to revise the content again. New information would make me speak less fluently" (WKI)

“I feel sorry to my peer assessor since I couldn’t follow all his advice. I won’t have enough time before the final assessment. I got to give up some of them. What I have decided to revise are those I must do to make my presentation connected with the audience. I think thinking how I can make my presentation lively” (CCM)

Both WKI and CCM became engaged with the feedback and seemed to learn how to critique and evaluate their presentations. They, however, also expressed some difficulties in following it. They both found the contents might have little impact on the performances. This timely feedback seemed to be useful to remind students that they were doing oral presentations – the nature of the assessment itself. Knowing the nature of the task should be the central to their work. The more critical selection of feedback was brought by this dialogic approach of feedback. The reflection on feedback also indicated that students appeared to be engaged in self-regulation. Both students seemed to understand the feedback, acknowledge the value of feedback, and identify the major limitations in their presentations. Students’ pragmatism in relation to the uptake of feedback for a higher grade could be indicated by the feedback selection. This finding also echoed Willingham’s (1990) research that hierarchy of feedback was formed. Students could discern so that they could focus and pay more effort on comments which helped them improve, instead of being overwhelmed with numerous comments. This phenomenon could show that some students, after having the experience of double feedback duty (Li & De Luca, 2014), were able to do self-reflective learning.

Students also mentioned that the audience were passive. As a consequence, they should consider the frame of mind of the audience while thinking how to make their presentations more effective. This was related to the delivery more than the contents themselves. Furthermore, key messages could be made impressive to the audience through their voices, as the three quotations illustrate:

“I think the content is controlled by us. We need to make our content logical and I believe that this is not difficult to us. The challenge is making our content receivable by the audience. Once they enjoy and get interested, everything will be fine. I think audience enjoyment is related to our presentation style” (LYN)

“Now I think we should connect with the audience with our voice during our presentation time. I am sure the content should be okay, but we need to verbally convey the content to the audience. This is also why we do oral presentations but not writing essays to let them read” (TSYC)

“Oral presentations are different from essay writing. Readers could move back and forth through the essay for better understanding. For example, you won’t repeat

yourself in an essay, but you may repeat some key words as you go along. We also have to make these messages stand out by stressing and varying intonation. This could help your presentations to stay in the minds of the audience” (CCM)

During the revision before the summative assessment, students were more conscious about what they had to revise. The nature, sequence and cumulative aspects of peer assessment tasks could, I believe, offer opportunities for a dialogic form of feedback and promote intertwining of both feedback and instruction. The experience of being an assessor and receiving formative feedback from peers allowed students to be more aware of the nature of quality presentations, or what the audience were looking for while listening to presentations. More understanding towards the assessment items enhanced students’ cue-consciousness in relation to the feedback. The participation in the peer assessment tasks provided modelling and guidance on how to use feedback in the learning processes (Price, Handley & Millar, 2011). After understanding the purpose of feedback, cue-conscious students were able to identify the major areas for revision, whereas the cue-deaf students, who found the feedback difficult to understand, could talk with their peer assessors and make the feedback more implicit. After being an assessor and being the assessed twice, students developed their reiteration skills gradually. Peer assessment appears to promote linkages and student progress over time in analogous ways, these findings are similar to those of Molloy and Boud (2013).

To sum up, in the second peer assessment exercise, instead of prioritising the items that needed to be revised, students tended to select what they had to revise in the second peer assessment task. All the selected feedback appears to provide an overall positive impression to the audience.

4.4.3 Overall Observation: How Students Closed the Feedback Loop

Students tended to take the peer feedback and revise their presentations seriously in the entire peer assessment exercise. Students had different foci and diverse revision strategies at different stages in the assessment. Breaking the assessment processes into three stages could let students become more aware of different assessment items. Generally speaking, students got a better picture of the assessment in the end. Table 20 shows the contrast between the first revision and the second revision.

Table 20 Major Changes and Strategies throughout the Assessment Process

	First Revision Stage	Second Revision Stage
Major Changes	<p>Most changes were content related:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • definitions • topic sentences • year of journal articles • relevance of the content • logical analysis • word choice 	<p>Most changes were skills related:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • intonation • stress • pace • pauses • fluency • pronunciation
Strategies	<p>Two categories were created:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Now • Later <p>Revising content was the first priority whereas presentation skills were not considered urgent. Fulfilling the task requirements was more important than polishing presentation skills.</p>	<p>Two categories were created:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Go • No go <p>Students would still give up some due to time constrain. They paid more effort to improve their presentation skills. Connecting with the audience was more important than further revising the content.</p>

During the first half of the assessment process, students would like to revise the contents based on the feedback, as well as the assessment guidelines and the rubrics. It seemed that students considered the contents more important than the delivery at that time. Since the next submission date was fixed and the presentations were not completed yet, students would like to finish all different parts in the presentations first. While working on the remaining parts, they also revised the existing contents, including definitions, contents organisation and evidence quality.

In addition to comments related to contents, there was also a substantial amount of feedback on style and tone, and quality of speech. Students, however, appeared not to pay attention on these in the first revision stage. Although they understood they had weaknesses in language, at that moment, they believed that fulfilling the required sections was the first priority. In order to achieve the purpose of the presentations, all the contents must be

‘academic’ and ‘correct’. It would be of little value if the presentation was only about a topic with information. Instead, the contents should be made noteworthy to the audience in order to both gain and maintain their interests. Moreover, the revision on contents could also show an obvious improvement to the peer assessors. It was worth paying more effort on the contents. If the contents were not sufficient and accurate as the presentation foundation, improving the delivery skills would be merely a waste of time.

Taking feedback as information appeared to be having little impact on students’ improvement in the oral presentations (Carless, 2015). Students still tended to rely on the ‘objective’ information, for example, the assessment guidelines. Students seem to doubt the usefulness and transferability of the peer feedback, due to the low trust between the two parties. The reaction could be negative since their peers would not assess the summative assessment of oral presentations at the end of the semester. This situation changed dramatically to the opposite in the second peer assessment task when students were more familiar with the peer assessment exercise and there was much more communication.

After receiving peer feedback from the second peer assessment exercise, students were unlikely to revise their content. This time, in contrast, students focused on three factors: the style; the tone; and the quality of speech. They made this decision, firstly because, of the time limitations. They felt it acceptable to have minor changes. If the changes were big, they tended not to follow them. This was because these changes would negatively affect their delivery. Students believed that the contents are the foundations of their presentations. Key messages could only be accentuated by delivery skills. Students, therefore, wanted to focus on the delivery skills, only once the contents had been sorted out. Without much revision, they could gain more confidence through repeated practices before the final presentations. Furthermore, students wanted to use their voices to appeal to the emotional nature of communication, since audiences tended to ‘believe’ the tone of their voices.

The strategies in this process were very different from the first revision stage. Students either followed or gave up in the second revision stage after their own critical thinking. Because of the limited time and the time-consuming research process, they tended to give up revising the contents. They decided to adjust their voices with reference to the feedback. Towards the final stage, they hoped to deliver the messages effectively with confidence and also emotional variation. The focus on skills in oral presentations could change how students viewed feedback. The participants took feedback as telling and guiding in the first peer assessment task and took feedback as developing understanding and opening up a different perspective in the second peer assessment task (McLean, Bond & Nicholson, 2015). While developing more

understandings and opening up a different perspective were more towards the new paradigm of feedback (Carless, 2015). Students appeared able to interpret the feedback by themselves, even though some written feedback could be seen as cryptic. In this sense, the findings were the opposite of some previous studies (see for example Poulos & Mahony, 2008; Price, Handley & Millar, 2011). Students might find feedback easy to act upon and, more importantly, there were guidelines for development. This kind of feedback took care of both the assessment tasks and skills. Students treasured this kind of feedback because it was sustainable (Hounsell, 2007).

In the second peer assessment task, the students' reaction was different from the first task. Students focused more on skills instead of the contents of their oral presentations. After receiving feedback, there was still communication. The contents, however, was more about the skills development. The main task that students had to revise was to narrow differing presenters and audience expectations. To achieve this purpose, students took feedback more proactively that feedback was like a dialogic interaction. Some previous research studies (Nicol, 2010; Price, Handley & Millar, 2011) also highlighted that such dialogic approaches to feedback could help students develop skills in oral presentations. These approaches could also suit their individual learning needs. I believe the improvements were because of the students' enhanced engagement in the assessment processes. Such verbal interaction with the peer assessors could deal with the quality and the standards of the oral presentations. Moreover, some specific individual requirements could be further discussed at later stages. The better understood expectations and the assessment requirements through conversations could help students view feedback as an integrated element in the feedback loops (Hounsell, McCune, Hounsell, & Litjens, 2008).

From these two revision stages, it was observed that both contents and delivery skills are important to students. They, however, would make sure the contents were finished before working on the delivery skills. Contents development coming before the presentation skills would make students feel more secure in the assessment since the contents aspects are within their control, whereas, presentation skills may not become improved by the time of final assessment. With a feeling of security, students would start adjusting their presentation skills thinking from the perspective of the audience. While allowing students to manage few things at a time, their efforts could be spread more evenly over the semester. During the revision, students also took feedback more critically. Since they knew what they had to do better, they looked for particular comments that helped them do well in the actual assessment. Irrelevant comments would be ignored. If there were doubts, students would initiate conversations with

the peer assessors and they discussed the ways for improvement together. Conversations occurred more in the second peer assessment task than in the first one. The more conversations between the peer assessors and those assessed was a positive sign to see the students' overall engagement in the assessment processes. This phenomenon was also in line with Carless (2015) that the combination of in-class discussion and the online participation is useful to cater for both written and verbal feedback. The feedback loops were able to be closed by the dialogic nature of feedback. When students were revising their oral presentations, no matter whether on contents or skills, they got to work things out for themselves. Even though peers were seen to be more approachable than their teachers, students still needed to analyse their own presentations when their peers were busy. This changing ability was gradually developed while accumulating the experience of double feedback duty. The implementation of peer assessment could link feedback to self-evaluative ability development. The closing of feedback loops could also indicate that students found peer feedback both useful and sustainable.

4.5 Chapter Summary

RQ1: Being a peer assessor, how did a student providing feedback consider what was important regarding oral presentations?

This research question explored the pattern of peer feedback provision in an EAP course. Providing peer feedback was a core part of this study, which began at the start of the cycle of peer assessment. After providing 'training' and practice in this course, students better understood the role of a peer assessor in the peer assessment tasks. In the two stages, while acknowledging the importance of the presentation contents, the peer assessors also expressed the importance of competent delivery. By being a peer assessor, this relatively new practice in the Hong Kong context, gave students an alternative perspective on what constitutes a good presentation. Overall, students were engaged in the feedback provision processes and they understood the 'traditional' practice, i.e. content memorisation, would not be sufficient to positively connect with the audience during oral presentations. They tended to encourage their peers to improve relevant skills more than the contents.

RQ2: As the assessed, how did a student react upon peer feedback?

This research question was explored to see if there was a pattern when ESL students reacted to peer feedback. In the two stages, students would look at the component grades first. Then they preferred to know the explanation by looking at the peer feedback. Before clarifying or asking for more information with their peer assessors, they would look for the answers by

themselves by checking out the assessment guidelines and rubrics. The last step they took was having a dialogue with the peer assessors. Although the pattern was the same in the two stages, the purposes were very different. The purpose of checking out the component grades in the first stage was to know how well they performed, and initiating dialogues with the peer assessors was mainly because the assessed disagreed with the grades allocated. On the contrary, in the second stage, they checked out the component grades because they considered a good presentation should be recognised by the audience and they talked with the peer assessors because they wanted to know how they could perform at a higher level. Students were engaged in the assessment processes by being involved in iterative cycles of drafting and redrafting their presentations. They also appeared to get engaged in formative feedback, which they found to be more useful than post-assessment feedback.

QR3: How did the feedback received by students influence the way they revised their oral presentations, i.e. closing the feedback loop?

Closing the feedback loop has not been a common practice in Hong Kong due to the students' grade-oriented attitudes, in an education system that tends to reward such behaviours from pre-school to higher education. This question explored how ESL students closed the feedback loop in order to achieve better results/outcomes in their oral presentations. In the first stage of this study, although there were a large number of comments on style and tone and quality of speech, the students tended not to pay much attention to these aspects. Instead, they wanted to complete the contents first. In the second stage, they spent considerable effort to improve their presentation skills, including pronunciation, fluency and intonation. Splitting peer assessment into different phases allowed students to focus on particular items for improvements. They were motivated to close the feedback loop by applying different strategies when they realised they could afford to change and bring the feedback forward for favourable outcomes.

Chapter 5

Discussion

The purpose of this research was to explore how students can learn and improve their presentation skills by becoming engaged into the three stages of peer assessment. This chapter will further discuss the findings based on the data collected and their future implications.

5.1 RQ1: Being a peer assessor, how did a student providing feedback consider what was important regarding oral presentations?

Most research on peer assessment has either examined the specific learning benefits that result when students receive feedback from peers, or the general benefits derived from peer review implementations. Few studies have directly investigated the learning benefits that might result from having students produce feedback reviews for their peers. Although there have been a some relatively recent exceptions (Cho & MacArthur, 2011; Cho & Cho, 2011), these studies tended to ascertain the effects of peer assessment on students' performances. Understanding how they peers provide feedback is worthy of investigation. In this study, specifically, different comments that peer assessors gave to peers were examined. Comparing the peer feedback in the two peer assessment tasks, the peer assessors tended to shift the focus from the results to the processes. Feedback looked more comprehensive in the second task. The participants might have found the value of feedback which could show their peers how to improve instead of saying why that grade was given.

Assessing others' oral presentations was made mandatory in this research. This experience was new to all participating students. Due to the teacher-student hierarchy and teacher's authority in Hong Kong's education culture, students seldom get involved in the assessment processes. Students in this study, instead of being passive feedback recipients, gained additional peer assessment experiences in explaining and justifying their comments in the *ChatBox*. They tended to provide comments which they felt satisfied. While providing comments, they also had to understand the assessment tasks, assessment guidelines and assessment criteria clearly. They received more opportunities to gain insights from providing feedback on others' presentations. These additional experiences could help students be more aware of the assessments, as well as other generic issues related to oral presentations. Future-altering on skills feedback and scaffolding may enhance students' abilities to self-regulate their learning. Timely feedback given by peers could also assist students to reflect more critically and thereby more effectively. The use of e-portfolio may well help peer assessors express their thoughts by unlimited access to the audio files. Consistent with a previous study (Beason,

1993), peer assessors tended to provide comments from the audience's perspectives, particularly when commenting on peer presentations, peer assessors focused on presentation skills rather than on contents. Presentation is an orchestration among various components (Ockey, Koyama & Setoguchi, 2015), so peer assessors might consider the dynamics operating among the presentation components when giving peer feedback.

Looking at the feedback in the two peer assessment tasks, it was observed that more feedback related to the oral presentation skills was provided. In reference to the Chetwynd and Dobbyn's (2011) feedback taxonomy, there are four categories. These are retrospective on content, future-altering on content, retrospective on skills and future-altering on skills. It is believed that future-altering feedback is considered the most useful feedback to move students forward in their assessment tasks, whereas retrospective feedback would help students to understand the assessment requirements, the strengths and weaknesses of their work and the reasons for the grades they receive. One reason for the implementation of peer assessment was to improve learning (Shute, 2008), i.e. the oral presentation skills in this research study. Although there was a summative oral presentation assessment at the end of the semester, the participating students seemed able to focus on the learning processes. The formative peer feedback appeared to support learning and improve their peers' future performances. Peer assessors, in the second task, provided more personalised feedback on their peers' oral presentations. This peer feedback looked more organised and helped those assessed better understand what important qualities looked like in the final assessment task. This feedback went beyond mere grade justification. It appeared constructive to let the assessed know what they needed to pay more attention on. Comparing the feedback in the first and second peer assessment exercises, more feedback appeared to help students to improve skills more than just understanding the assessment items. There was a large number of comments related to both style and tone, and also to pronunciation and the quality of speech. These items could not be improved by only understanding the requirements of the assessment tasks. Students needed to master the skills and perform these in order to achieve a better grade. This strategy may also let the participants move away from the current norm-referencing assessments to criterion-referencing ones. Most importantly, the skills gained could be transferred and not only be limited for this assessment task or subject.

In this study, involving students in the assessment processes and allowing them to assess others' oral presentations offered two benefits. The first one was that students gained more understanding towards the assessment requirements. As a peer assessor, he/she had a responsibility to understand the assessment tasks, assessment items and the assessment rubrics

before providing any feedback. This responsibility made students know more about what they needed to do in the assessment. The second benefit was that students knew the changes should be based on skills in oral presentations. The feedback being focused on skills could move their peers' presentations forward and, ultimately, move their own presentations forward as well in terms of raising the quality

5.2 RQ2: As the assessed, how did a student react upon peer feedback?

Throughout the peer assessment exercises, the students gained more opportunities to receive feedback on their presentations in progress. The ratio of peer assessors and those assessed was more ideal than that of teachers and students. Moreover, the e-portfolio system, with time and location flexibility, and the availability of *ChatBox*, seemed to be able to make the feedback more dialogic in nature (Barnett (2007; Carless, Salter, Yang & Lam, 2011). The use of the e-portfolio system could help students receive individual feedback for revision. Furthermore, while revising the presentations, they could learn from others by listening to others' recordings. This raised generic issues which initiated new experiences or knowledge to them into the discourse of oral presentations. As explained by the participating students, using the feedback in the *ChatBox* as a foundation, the dialogues with the peer assessors could provide more effective advice. The research revealed that students recognised the value of peer feedback in improving their learning, but their comments imply that only relying on written feedback was not as effective as it could be. Students were advised that the written feedback might vary in quality, and if they obtained conflicting reviews, or if they received comments contradictory to their understanding, they should go back to study the content area and rubric until they figured out what was right and what was wrong. What they learnt about the presentation might have allowed them to better improve their performances. This process may have engaged students in an active learning mode.

During the first peer assessment exercise, students were concerned about the grades and the explanations of the given grades. The examination-oriented attitude remained unchanged. Also, the lack of oral assessment experience made the students focus on their own performances without understanding the nature of the assessment itself. They tended to read all the feedback and negotiate with the peer assessors if they disagreed. They were more concerned about presentation contents rather than the presentation skills. This was probably due to the previous content-based assessments in secondary education (Carless 2011).

After receiving feedback there was more interaction between peer assessors and those assessed. This was not common since students seldom questioned the feedback given by

teachers (Carless, 2012). Two possible reasons are suggested as to why this might be so. Firstly, the limited length of feedback provides few clues to the assessed about the features of their presentations that met assessment criteria and those which may have fallen short. Secondly, it appears that a number of peer assessors were not yet providing specific assessment criteria, or information on how the grade was given. Incomplete written feedback that is vague and does not refer to specific criteria is unlikely to match expectations of the assessed. Consequently, those assessed will not receive full beneficial information about their progress. To better understand their performances and the ways to improve them, those assessed would like to have a conversation with the peer assessors if there is a chance. The initiation of conversations among peers is supported by other research. As discussed in Miller, Imrie and Cox (1998), when the peer assessors and the assessed further discussed the performances with reference to the agreed rubrics, those assessed can benefit from understanding both the reasons for the grade and also both the good and the weaker aspects of the presentations. The ‘atmosphere’ of peer support and commitment to peer assessment also appeared to facilitate positive dialogic feedback. The trust relationship between the students tended to become established through conversations. Those assessed took the feedback seriously and questioned their assessors if there were issues they were not happy with. This positive relationship may assist making the peer assessment exercises more effective and the participants would possibly have lower anxiety towards feedback.

In the second peer assessment task, the accumulated experience of the two roles seemed to provide a more complete picture to the participants when they were assessed. Instead of knowing the reasons for the grades given, they were more likely to spend more time discussing with peer assessors in order to know the ways which that could improve their presentation skills. This shift in focus indicated students could better understand the nature of the assessment tasks. This time, they would like to receive more ideas from the listener’s perspective. They properly understood that oral presentations should be audience-oriented. The conversation initiation reflected that the students trusted their peer assessors and treasured the increased amount of timely feedback. Students could also select relevant feedback congruent with their own reflections for improvement instead of blindly following all the feedback. Students could also shift the focus from the expected outcomes to the processes. The content of the conversations were mostly about the way for improvements could be achieved. Mostly likely that students knew they could have a higher grade by advancing their presentation skills. The involvement in the iterative cycles of drafting and redrafting their presentations, plus self-evaluation of their presentations in progress, and both the individual feedback and public

discussions through critique supported students in engaging with the nature of increasing quality in their oral presentations

In terms of the educational context, this research has highlighted some justification for the trend towards providing formative feedback throughout the semester, thus enhancing its usefulness (Wolf, 2004). Ensuring that assessment is aligned to the curriculum is the main principle behind encouraging deeper learning (Biggs, 1996; Miller et al., 1998). The peer assessors can ensure that their feedback is constructive and clearly set in the context of enhancing learning outcomes and assessment criteria, which guides the students on how to improve their performances. These strategies may help to improve the communication between the peer assessors and those assessed, and go some way towards developing a more student-centred approach to learning and teaching.

Students tended to trust the peer feedback because they found the feedback useful. They appeared to remember peer feedback clearly and internalise the feedback. Compared with teacher feedback, peer feedback is more concise, simpler and clearer, contributing to student engagement (Tsai et al., 2001). Through conversations, those assessed could raise questions based on their own interests. Students believed that the revision could be more effective after conversations since the dialogues could focus on the ways for improvements instead of only explaining the reasons behind the awarding of certain grades. These conversations may be less likely to happen between teachers and students due to the undesirable ratio. The revision based on what the audiences may have wanted could cast a new light on the presentation contents and skills for improvement. The implementation of peer assessment is one difference in modular and course design which resulted in a divergent response. There were indications that, traditionally, students received feedback too late to be helpful on a number of occasions, although they maintained that comments were still read and suggestions for improvement remembered. Assessment practices in Hong Kong which focus on summative assessment and post-assessment feedback are less likely to effectively assist students develop knowledge and skills, as previously discussed (Bailey, 2017; Matsuno, 2017). In this peer assessment exercise, the dialogical feedback that helped students to focus on the processes was very different from the traditional post-assessment feedback given by teachers. Students' uptake of peer dialogic feedback seemed more important than that of teachers' post-assessment feedback. Students were more willing to close the feedback loop after discussions with their peer assessors. Peer exemplars were useful to prompt student's engagement to raise quality. Due to the proximity to the oral presentations, this study could show that peer feedback was more treasured by students and those assessed who took on board peer feedback more than merely advice. They

made efforts to act upon the feedback when they discovered new ways to improve their presentations. The stronger engagement and higher motivation in the assessment processes could be a reflection of the changes made. Students' positive reaction towards feedback in this study is in line with the research results of McLean et al., (2015).

5.3 RQ3: How did the feedback received by students influence the way they revised their oral presentations, i.e. closing the feedback loop?

Closing the feedback loop is an important issue in assessment processes and this issue is relative under-explored in the Hong Kong context due to the examination-oriented culture. In Hong Kong's education system, students usually receive post-assessment feedback. Furthermore, the disassociation between the assessment tasks discourages students to close the feedback loop since they may find it difficult to bring the post-assessment feedback forward (Ellis, 2002; Carless, 2011). With this peer assessment exercise, the experiences of being an assessor and those assessed helped students to evaluate their oral presentations. When students were revising their presentations, they could identify how the feedback could inform their views in positive ways. Students appeared to be willing to close the feedback loop by identifying certain feedback they would like to receive and could then action in their revisions. In the interviews, students described how they reflected on the feedback they had given to peers as they formed their own responses to discussion questions. Moreover, some interviewees discussed specifically how the process of providing peer feedback increased their own learning in positive ways.

The analysis of the data suggested, when 'controlling' for the quality of the initial project, that there was a important relationship between the quality of the peer feedback the students provided for others and the quality of the students' own final projects. This finding is congruent both with assertions in the literature that active involvement in the peer assessment processes improves learning, and studies reporting student perceptions that reviewing peers' work facilitated their learning (Rust, 2002; Pearce et al., 2009; Kollar & Fisher, 2010). This finding also supports the idea that the more constructive feedback students are able to give their peers, the better they will perform on the tasks (Bostock, 2001, Parti, 2002; van Steendam et al., 2010).

Peer assessors might undergo the speaking-as-the-speaker experiences while listening to peers' presentations (Hollaway, 2004). Commenting on peers' presentations helps the peer assessors to anticipate how an audience would interpret their presentations and what would make it difficult to comprehend the meanings of the presentations. In addition, peer assessors

may gain knowledge of effective presentation strategies by listening to peers' presentations (Chi, 2009). For instance, reviewers can elaborate or improve their own knowledge of writing criteria by applying those criteria to peer drafts and when justifying their comments (Althausen & Darnall, 2001).

Furthermore, students improved presentation quality by not only providing comments, but also by observing the strengths and weaknesses of peers' presentations. This finding is consistent with previous research showing that students can learn by analysing 'weak' examples (Braaksma, Rijlaarsdam & van den Bergh, 2002; Siegler 2002). By commenting on the strengths and weaknesses of peers' presentations, peer assessors can develop a knowledge of presentation constraints that may then help them to monitor and regulate their own presentations. In addition, providing peer feedback may be beneficial in gaining knowledge on what makes good presentations. However, giving comments on surface features, for example, grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation would also influence the revisions of the peer assessors' presentations. Therefore, commenting on the strengths and weaknesses is a crucial element in learning and improving oral presentations through peer assessment.

In short, while being a peer assessor, the students gained opportunities to observe peers' oral presentations. This may enhance a student's existing presentation skills and linguistic knowledge. Moreover, when a peer assessor needs to evaluate an oral presentation, he/she has a responsibility to provide feedback based on the agreed assessment rubrics. The process of evaluation and feedback provision can help him/her to be more familiar with the assessment criteria too. Knowing the strengths and weaknesses of their peers' oral presentations can help the assessors to better understand what makes a presentation of high quality and what mistakes can be avoided. With these assessing experiences, students should be able to monitor their own work and regulate their own learning too.

Regarding the role of the assessed, which is different from teacher feedback, the students seem to process the peer feedback by thinking about the usefulness of the comments. They may consider carefully about how the useful feedback could be integrated into the current oral presentations, or what feedback is inappropriate and may need to be rejected. With this critical thinking towards peer feedback, students' existing knowledge base will be challenged. Based on the information processing theory and social constructivism, deep learning, better understanding of the required skills and cognitive restructuring, for example, self-evaluation and reflection, are positive outcomes. Students appear to be more engaged in revising their oral presentations with the help of peer feedback than that of teacher feedback. This perception is similar to that reported by a number of researchers (Mills, Dalleywater & Tischler, 2014; Kamp

et al., 2014) who have noted that students often believe that their peers are careful in peer assessment, or that peer feedback is more valuable than teacher feedback. As Careless (2012) suggested, if learners perceive peer feedback to be valid, they may end up valuing the entire peer feedback process and revise their work with more motivation. This suggests the importance of explicitly addressing students' perceptions up-front and taking steps to counter their strong preconceived ideas of the relatively stronger value of peer feedback. Peer assessment can serve as an external motivator to encourage students to revise their work and therefore produce better quality oral presentations.

The peer assessment exercises provide more opportunities and support to students, so that they could share their work in progress, gain practice in oral presentations and receive more feedback from their peers for overall improvements. The availability of e-portfolio could make students' presentations openly evident to peers, allowing students to engage with, discuss and learn from others' presentations. This provided more opportunities for them to appreciate quality and develop self-evaluative expertise. More importantly, students found the peer feedback more useful and understandable than teachers' feedback. One reason was that the feedback could be that it is timelier. Students could still remember how they had performed. Another reason could be the spreading effort indicating something of what that effort entailed. Moreover, the principle of peer instruction seemed to help students understand how they should revise their oral presentations. The less academic discourse feedback was easy to be understood.

Students tended to act upon peer feedback and make revisions. This was probably because peer feedback involves higher immediacy and students could overcome their main problems while their memories were still fresh. They could apply insights from clear, concise and task-specific criteria feedback which supported their self-evaluative expertise. By dividing the presentations into smaller tasks, these were more manageable, and this could facilitate regular intellectual participation which required them to express their views on different aspects. The delayed teacher feedback usually receives little attention since students could not absorb and apply. Students also found teacher feedback more challenging since teachers tend to use questions to guide students. This could explain why peer feedback was more valued by students. Similarly, Carless (2015) notes receiving feedback close to the submission date could make assessment more learning-oriented.

5.4 Significance and Implications of the Research Study

Unfamiliar assessment tasks can make students perform less satisfactorily, leading to a lower score. This study attempted to address issues related to peer assessment which can be viewed as an alternative assessment method in tertiary education. When a web-based collaborative learning platform is available, in addition to the positive outcomes and students' improved results which have been the focal point of most peer assessment research in Hong Kong. Learning from the peer assessment stages, i.e. providing feedback, receiving feedback and revisions are an essential perspective deserves our attention. With reference to this, the findings of this research study provide some empirical evidence to show that peer-assessments work, and had positive outcomes for those participants involved. Furthermore, these in turn may have implications for instructional design in terms of assessment implementation.

While a number of studies have found that peer feedback can lead to students' improved academic performances (Zariski, 1996; Topping 1998; Sivan, 2000; Bostock, 2001; Ashton & Davies, 2015; Evans, 2015), this research adds to the rather more limited literature investigating the cognitive dimensions of students while providing and receiving feedback. The focus on oral presentations can also add new literature to the related under-explored field. The investigation of the cognitive behaviours of both the peer assessors and those assessed, along with students' justifications for such behaviours, by means of a mixed methods approach, can provide more information to educators in higher education on the design of the curriculum that allow the integration of peer assessments. The data presented in this thesis, from both quantitative and qualitative perspectives, provide some valuable evidence, albeit preliminary and small-scale, that may assist educators and researchers to more fully understand this complex peer assessment exercise regarding oral presentations.

In most peer assessment studies, students play the roles of assessor and the assessed, and although learning gains have been reported in literature, it is not clear how these two roles contribute to the student learning processes. This study may have helped to explore this phenomenon more in the ESL context. Students' effectiveness in assessing their peers is derived from an understanding of the contents area and marking criteria, both of which contribute to performance issues. On the other hand, receiving unclear peer feedback may not adversely impact students' performances unless students do not rely solely on peer comments as resources for the improvement of presentations. This study suggests that students' active involvement in assessing their peers' presentations and in evaluating peer feedback is closely related to improving learning outcomes, and also how to engage students may warrant further attention in the implementation of a peer assessment system.

Although the findings remind teachers that the enhanced amount of feedback can lead to improved students' oral presentation performances, the feedback should be quality-oriented and can facilitate further ongoing dialogues. More time and effort are required to spend on 'training' in this area for both teachers themselves, but more importantly students as peers. Teachers need to encourage peer assessors to go beyond simply judging their peers' presentation performances. Peer feedback should be more personalised for the assessed. If the feedback is about judging and explaining a student's performances against a certain grade, the assessed may think the peer feedback is no different from teacher's feedback. This kind of feedback is unlikely to be helpful, nor sustainable and students are unable to receive more information on improvements and thereby having less than positive learning experiences.

This research offers the following implications and suggestions for implementation of peer assessment of oral presentations. First, since this study found that enhanced amount of discussion time has considerable effects on students' engagement, teachers may redesign the class activities and allow more time for interactions among students. The interactions can also enhance the peer feedback quality and the understanding of the peer feedback. With the ensuing revision, this may consequently, allow for better quality.

Second, as indicated by Ediger (2006), every single student has his/her own motivations, interests, expertise, and preferences in learning. As revealed in this research study, the peer assessors provided feedback based on their own choice of assessment items. Instead of asking peer assessors to comment on all items, which seems to be the common practice for peer assessment, teachers are advised to consider offering freedom to the peer assessors in this regard. Also, teachers can encourage those assessed to be more proactive. The assessed can inform their peer assessors what aspects of oral presentations they consider they require more support in order to enhance the quality of their oral performances, thereby potentially improving their grades, and ultimately their learning. In this sense, the peer assessors have more concentrated and specific items to look for, and comment upon. The focus on particular assessments can make the peer feedback more personalised and arguably raise quality.

Finally, as shown in the students' reflections, they valued peer assessment because of the relevance of each assessment task and the timely feedback which can help them improve before the summative assessment. Teachers are encouraged to make the assessment tasks connected to each other and ensure the peer feedback is formative in nature so that students can bring forward any learning in an ongoing way.

Since most local first year students come from an examination-oriented culture, in English language, they focused significantly on reading, writing, grammar and vocabulary. The

peer assessment exercises seemed to be able to allow them to realise their own speaking strengths and weaknesses. This would enable each student to provide a strong foundational base before they have to endure other oral assessments in the following years. While oral presentations are considered one of the most important skills at workplace, before they graduate, the peer assessment exercises provide alternative opportunities for them to become exposed to different exemplars and evaluate their own learning performances. The post-assessment feedback may fail to facilitate improvement and hinder students' acquisition of presentation skills and linguistic knowledge.

According to the present findings, students see the peer assessment as a learning pedagogy to help them perform better in oral presentations. The roles of both peer assessor and the assessed seem to assist students to bridge the gap between their existing and new knowledge. The availability of discussions between peer assessors and those assessed facilitated the learning processes, leading to better understanding of the tasks, criteria and expected outcomes. When teachers are preparing to implement peer assessment in an ESL classroom, the activities should be able to meet the purposes of the above-mentioned ideas. As indicated by respondents in the semi-structured interviews, to better focus on oral presentations skills and the peer assessment processes, it is better to use topics with more flexibility. The topics would be useful if they are connected with the students' majors and interests in particular. In this case, students will feel more comfortable to conduct oral presentations which help them to focus on essential presentation skills, in their studies and on into their careers post-university.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

The chapter concludes by presenting both the strengths and limitations of the research, plus suggestions for further research, and finally the implications of this study.

6.1 Limitations

6.1.1 Unsatisfactory Peer Feedback

Student participation in this research was voluntary. Although the participation rate was 100%, there were students who did not conduct the peer assessment tasks seriously. Some of them did not follow the feedback provision guidelines and, therefore, those assessed could not benefit from the written feedback. Figure 6 shows some samples of I regarded as unsatisfactory peer feedback.

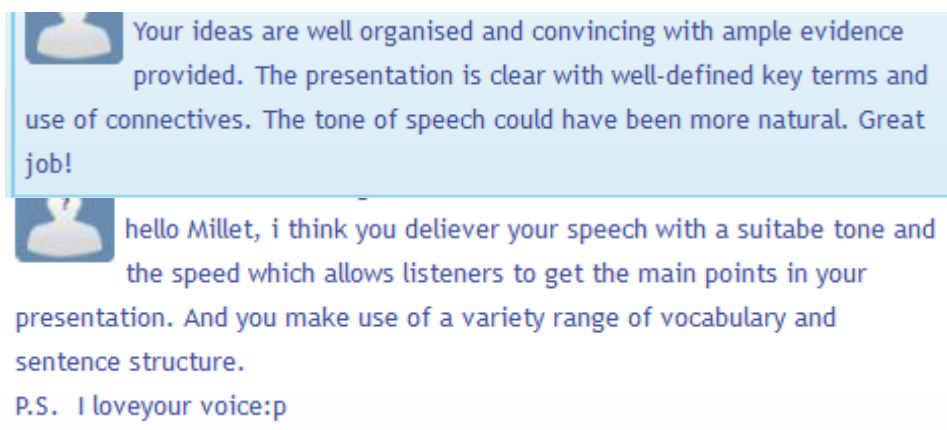


Figure 6 Two samples of unsatisfactory peer feedback

Since Hong Kong students are grade-oriented, Carless (2013) suggested that, instead of the drafts, the peer feedback should be assessed. Peer assessors would then tend to take the feedback provision more seriously. Similarly, some of the assessed were not engaged sufficiently in the feedback process since they probably took the feedback as an additional reference only. To encourage students to be more engaged in the feedback processes, each stage of the peer assessment should be weighted (Court, 2014). For example, the summative assessment may occupy 50% of the assessment score only. The remaining 50% could come from the provision of feedback. Since Hong Kong students emphasise outcomes more and it seems that this deeply rooted concept is difficult to change, this weighed task could motivate them to act on feedback. This practice was regarded as effective by Carless (2015). He found

that weighted feedback could get students involved, and make them more prepared for feedback provision, make them articulate their views with sufficient explanation, and get them participating in disciplinary dialogues with their peers. Likewise, the 50% could go to the revised drafts. In other words, before the final assessment, students could submit drafts, receive feedback, then revise and resubmit their drafts. Furthermore, students could also state in their revised presentations how they took and addressed the feedback. This additional workload particularly focusing on the uptake of feedback could be able to develop students' engagement and commitment towards feedback.

To make the assessment predicated on the development of processes, the assessment of participation is seen to be more appropriate. Since grading participation is difficult to 'measure' and the reliability is low (Carless, 2015), from a quality assurance perspective, it has remained a controversial issue. However, if stakeholders can realise that assessing participation encourages student engagement and active learning, a different position may emerge. As long as the students' contributions and participation can be assessed by well-defined criteria, it will then become a useful part of an overall assessment design.

6.1.2 Restrictions of the Curriculum

Apart from making peer assessment weighted, classroom teaching needs to be restructured in order to facilitate effective feedback processes and to encourage the uptake of feedback. Although the lessons were shifted along the continuum from the feedback as comments, to feedback as information, an open classroom atmosphere and trusting relationship between students were insufficient. Due to the packed syllabus, more lesson time was spent on teaching content. Without the balance between process and content, students would have less time to discuss learning strategies, i.e. peer assessment in this research study, and learning to learn. They are considered essential while formative assessment is emphasised (Carless, 2015). Although students were more engaged with the feedback dialogue after the second peer assessment task, feedback was not able to be embedded in the classroom activities. When time was not given for the peer assessment exercise, students would not proactively clarify expectations for quality oral presentations by initiating interactive and interrogative feedback. To reduce the dominance of subject-content in class time, teachers should raise issues at macro level for students to reflect on. This strategy could help balance the subject- content and involve students in questioning on developing their sense of quality in, oral presentations which is the focus of the current study.

Although the use of the e-portfolio systems could provide a good platform for multimedia resources to be stored and accessed, it might take a while for students to learn a new system. Using some other platforms that students are already familiar with would further encourage them to post their work (Carless, 2015). For example, Facebook and YouTube are some common platforms that students often use for entertainment purposes. Since peer assessment is relatively uncommon in Hong Kong and different stakeholders tend to believe in teachers' authority, the implementation would be more likely on a voluntary basis. Therefore, some students would be active whereas, some are less enthusiastic. One advantage of adopting Facebook or YouTube, as opposed to an e-portfolio, is that students have already positive feelings towards these forms of social media. They can access these platforms more frequently and would welcome this learning method since it could align with their interests and lifestyles. Using these social media platforms for education purposes would, however, need further research.

6.1.3 Organisation of the Peer Feedback

The participating students should be encouraged to signpost their feedback in the *ChatBox*. Willingham (1990) believed that signposted feedback could help the assessed understand the hierarchy of importance in written comments. Evans (2015) suggested that feedback should start with an overall comment. Then, the assessed should be told what has been done well in the drafts. Finally, the feedback should tell the assessed what needs to be improved upon. While there are three components in the feedback, more emphasis should be placed on the last component. Since students in Hong Kong are pragmatic that they focus on grades, Carless (2015, p.215) proposed that the feedback could start by saying "To achieve higher grades in future assignments, you may consider the following points". On one hand, the assessed should know exactly what they need to do to achieve higher grades. On the other hand, they should also get feedback on generic skills which are not assignment-specific, so that they could transfer the skills to other assignments in the future. Encouraging signposted feedback allows the assessed to receive feedback being "retrospective on content" and, more importantly, feedback being "future-altering on skills" (Chetwynd & Dobbyn, 2011, p.68).

6.1.4 Psychological Concerns

Another limitation is the potential impact of receiving negative feedback. Some students expressed that this timely peer feedback gave them more anxiety and stress. They were afraid of knowing what had gone wrong after putting effort on the presentations. They indicated that the amount of time between drafts might be insufficient to make changes and might

negatively affect their next recordings. In this sense, while peer feedback was supposed to be anodyne, it failed to challenge students to make improvements. If any students had unpleasant experiences while receiving feedback, the first strategy for teachers is to encourage the students to think critically towards the peer feedback. Hong Kong students are used to receiving teachers' feedback and they basically will follow the feedback and make revisions accordingly since teachers are the 'authority'. The story is different in peer assessment exercises, where peer assessors do not have the same authority. Those assessed may be discouraged and become emotional. They should be reminded that they also have the power to both accept and reject feedback offered. They are also advised to discuss with their peer assessors if there are any doubts and concerns. To encourage discussions, Bryant and Carless (2010) suggested that a collaborative learning environment should be established, and collaborative activities should be embedded in curriculum. Having collaboration or peer assessment in one subject is insufficient to make peer assessment successful. A whole-school approach should be adopted. The development of assessment literacy should be emphasised. Once students realise that they could use the skills they learn in the peer assessment exercise for self-assessment, then peer assessment will be likely to become the mainstream of classroom practice. Since the education system in Hong Kong is examination-oriented, 'training' students skills for peer and self-assessment and asking them to compare with fellow classmates will likely remain a challenge. In Chinese culture, this issue may be more significant due to the face-saving culture. Teachers should remind peer assessors of the balance between hard-hitting and encouraging feedback (Molloy, Borrell-Carrio & Epstein, 2013).

6.1.5 Multiple Researcher Roles

There were also some potential ethical implications and methodological consideration of multiple researcher roles. It was hard to try to remain 'objective' because of the three roles I played in the research as: teacher, researcher and counsellor. There was overlap and the issue of power was ever present, as noted in section 3.10. The ethical implications that I considered were around the student's participation as former students of mine, and the multiple hats I played. These were alleviated by the students themselves being co-creators of the knowledge as peer assessors.

I was a reflexive in research process (see Finlay, 2002) and I was mindful that the *insider* research (Mutch, 2013; Smith, 1999) was ethical, and also done in a way that was trustworthy putting the rights of the participants to the fore.

6.2 Overall Conclusions

This research study sought to investigate how ESL students learn from the roles of peer assessor and those assessed, as well as to revise their oral presentations through the implementation of peer assessment which can be considered as an alternative assessment method. The way of achieving this was asking students to make audio files for their oral presentations. Participating students got to provide peer feedback, receive peer feedback and revise their oral presentations throughout the entire peer assessment exercise.

The implementation of peer assessment could help students focus more on the work in progress and enhance their awareness in closing the feedback loop in order to achieve a better performance. Providing feedback, reading feedback and closing feedback loop could enhance students' expertise in assessment and ultimately help them develop skills to evaluate their own work in the future. Replacing teacher feedback with peer feedback as an alternative can allow students to receive more and timely feedback. The introduction of an e-portfolio could be a pragmatic tool for peer assessment since students may have different timetables and class time is very limited. This form of learning tool is also suited the needs of the Internet generation of students who appear to demand both immediacy and interactivity. The availability of the files also promoted students' self-reflection after receiving the feedback. While understanding the importance of discussions and negotiations among students in peer assessment, some class time was assigned to allow students to share ideas with each other. This interaction could help the assessed to better understand the feedback and help the assessors to make more powerful and sound explanation. Students could be scaffolded by filling up the knowledge gap between existing and new knowledge. This peer assessment exercise mainly focused on the processes of making better oral presentations. The explicit focus on collaborative learning in the process suggests the peer formative feedback promoting learner independence and autonomy carry most potential for sustainability.

This peer assessment exercise was able to make feedback dialogic, facilitating the negotiation processes between peer assessors and those assessed. The assessed believed that the drafts were able to display their understanding of the assessment tasks and confirm the direction they were moving in was right. The participants were first-year students who were not familiar with the assessment tasks in tertiary education. They could use the feedback as a means of guiding themselves to the unfamiliar academic oral presentations in this research study and receive feedback for improvement. A sound basis for their work could be facilitated. While students aimed to get a higher grade by advancing their skills, taking this prompt feedback as advice could make the assessment more learning-oriented.

Although previous research studies claimed that higher achievers were able to understand and act upon feedback, it is believed that peer assessment could also benefit 'lower' achievers. Based on the agreed rubrics, students could understand how they are given grades. The performance description for each grade could let the students realise the shift from norm-referencing to criterion-referencing. In other words, 'lower' achievers would be able to obtain a higher grade if they could fulfil the performance descriptions. With the help of peer feedback and a clearer picture of the assessment tasks, 'lower' achievers may be more likely to be motivated to make improvements. Dialogical feedback could help them to understand the feedback and act upon it. The data indicated that 'weaker' students would like to receive more peer feedback. This is probably because teacher feedback is difficult for them to understand and not specific enough. They can potentially receive more support in peer assessment exercises and it is less high stakes. The dialogic nature of feedback seems to provide 'lower' achievers with more opportunities to interpret and understand feedback. Dissatisfaction or frustration in the assessment grades may be reduced. Furthermore, the potential misunderstanding of teachers' feedback could be reduced since there will be less technical language in the feedback. The general feedback would be more helpful for students to apply their skills across courses. Students tend to welcome the time and effort invested on peer feedback and self-evaluation. The old paradigm of feedback as comments, for example, students simply following teacher's feedback and making revision, is unlikely to suit the needs of all university students. The new paradigm of feedback as information, for example, feedback requiring students to think critically, but not just simply follow, can help students become familiar with the assessment criteria and potentially produce better quality oral presentations.

While identifying the benefits of peer assessment on students' learning performances, more attention and effort should be paid to the integration of peer assessment into regular curriculum which could repeatedly encourage students' uptake of feedback. With clear guidelines and practices, first-year university students could use feedback on the drafts as a means of guiding themselves. They could know if the direction was appropriate and were provided with some suggestions on their oral presentations. When the rubrics were understood and agreed by every participating student, each student would be able to provide appropriate feedback. The implementation of peer assessment could act on the principle of timeliness and, therefore, students could improve their performances before the summative assessment. This research study blurred the boundaries between formative and summative assessment in the way that the process of developing presentations through criticism, discussions and feedback was integrated into the final summative oral presentation assessment.

Asking participants to write a critical reflection could extend the feedback practice. They could mention how they would use the feedback to inform other similar assignments in the future. Encouraging students to close the feedback loop and reinforcing the dialogical nature of feedback could benefit students from the peer assessment exercise. Provided that many students find the post-assessment feedback less useful, this strategy could also help students focus more on formative feedback and skills improvements in the process. Students would feel that all the assessment tasks are connected. Furthermore, the feedback on skills could be applied to other assignments. For example, the feedback on research skills in this study could be used on other subjects in the university study. Peer feedback, in this study, is considered the most effective feedback since the focus on the process can help students build on comments from one assessment task to the others.

In Hong Kong, students seem to fail to engage with teacher feedback. The high teacher-student ratio and delayed feedback are probably the two reasons behind the situation. This introduction of peer assessment can help students use feedback as a tool to improve their performances and overall make learning more beneficial. The availability of peer assessors, with proper training, can increase the amount of feedback and feedback can be given in a more timely fashion. Since students feel comfortable to learn from each other more than getting advice from teachers, discussions being pursued among students can help students to bringing the conversation content into the feedback process. Students receiving this timely post-task peer feedback has potential to carry the feedback forward to future tasks. As the assessment rubrics are complicated and open-ended, students are able to uncover the unfamiliar aspects through discussions. The willingness to seek further explanation and support would encourage students to critique the feedback.

Although those assessed may criticise the feedback, conversations among students can bring collaborative dimensions to the assessment process. They can co-construct an answer together. This experience can help students to continue evaluating their learning processes and, at the same time, build on their learning experiences while moving to the next task or level. While students are acknowledging the uncertainties and constructing understanding towards the assessment task, this collaboration could develop students' responsibility and ownerships during the assessment process. Further support is required to facilitate this collaboration however. Teachers play an important role to help students to become familiar with this new learning approach. Teacher development in assessment and development of assessment literacy are needed. Policies and curriculum need to be revised, otherwise, the introduction of peer

assessment under a formative assessment environment will have little impact on the classroom and students.

In Hong Kong's tertiary education environment, the practice of peer assessment on oral presentations should needs further investigation. Issues arising from this study requiring further research include balancing the potentials and challenges between peer assessment and oral presentation skills, ways of making peer assessment a mainstream practice in classroom in an examination-oriented culture, and, particularly, evidence showing how peer assessment supports students' performances in summative assessment would be helpful. The students' responses in the interviews also suggested that they were position about integrating peer assessment in the curriculum. This new experience allowed them to learn and showcase different abilities. Also, they agreed that peer assessment was more interesting than examinations which had overrode their learning needs. It is believed that peer assessment has potentials to cater for different strengths of students in relation to oral presentations, written and verbal communications, individual and collaborative skills, and the use of technology. Although students may need to take more time to get familiar with peer assessment, like familiarising themselves with the tasks and understanding the requirements, these small tasks can help students contribute and get involved regularly over the whole period of the assessment task. This is especially the case when the assessment task is not a familiar one, i.e. academic presentations in this study, they will be able to receive more support and develop their presentations steadily. Small tasks seem to benefit students when each task is linked with each other, or when the whole task is developed slowly and incrementally. A critical factor appeared to be the teachers' determination to overcome challenges in the interests of furthering the student experience.

To conclude, this research study explored how first-year students learnt from peer assessment and improved their oral presentations in an ESL context. It focused mainly on oral presentations because of the emphasis on skills and the social communication during university study and after graduation. Throughout the research, peer assessment was the fundamental teaching pedagogy. Oral presentations were audio-taped and used as exemplars for analysis based on the agreed rubrics. The discussions allowed students to share ideas about the nature of what a good presentation looked like. The additional and timely feedback indicated the feasibility of moving along the continuum from traditional post-assessment feedback, to sustainable formative feedback. Instead of being passive to feedback, students were encouraged to become engaged with the feedback which they found more valuable than traditional teacher's post-assessment feedback. The two roles – assessor and the assessed – gave a better

picture of the assessment processes to the students and enhanced students' awareness of the assessment task. Despite its time-consuming nature, it provided more ideas to students on the nature of a quality presentation to be aired. Overall, there was a coherence between the e-portfolio oral presentation assessment task and the interplay between student self-evaluation and dialogical feedback.

This study makes an important contribution in research scholarship by providing empirical data **on how the roles of assessor and those assessed impact student learning.** There are a number of strengths to this research and what it can potentially add to new knowledge in this field. In this study, I took a somewhat novel approach to peer assessment as an 'insider' drawing upon the work of my own students. This allowed me to interact and gain intimate knowledge of how peer assessments actually worked in practice, and as a pedagogical approach. This study offered the students new ways to gain critical feedback and insights and also to give student's 'voice' on this important, yet somewhat emergent topic. Furthermore, as I have observed throughout the thesis peer assessment is a relatively new concept in higher education in Hong Kong, thus this research may add to the paucity of studies in this domain. Last, but certainly not least the study was overall well planned, with instruments trialled, and conducted in ethical ways which hopefully both supported and enhanced their learning. Appropriate methods were employed, and the mixed methods approach elicited a raft of information that either solely qualitative, nor quantitative approaches would be unable to do. There were advantages in taking this research position and there was a congruence in the findings from both perspectives in that the data revealed similarities.

Although a number of researchers claim that the process of giving and receiving feedback in peer assessment process fosters students' cognitive development, statistical evidence demonstrating the value of this process on student learning is scarce. This study suggested that the quality of feedback students provided in reviewing the work of peers correlated positively with the quality of their own work. However, there was no evidence of a direct link between the quality of feedback students received and the quality of their projects overall. These findings provide evidence for a theoretical explanation of the value of active engagement in peer assessment. At the same time, this study shows the importance of students' assessment capability in formative peer assessment activities, that is, students' ability to judge the quality of their own work may have more influence than feedback from peers, particularly if the feedback may be of variable quality.

As I get to the final paragraphs I am reminded of the power that both university teachers and students as peers can exercise upon each other. These power bases may be viewed in a

multitude of ways, positively, 'neutrally' (if there is such a position), and negatively. We remember with fondness the educators that nurtured and encouraged us (at all levels of the education system), and peers that supported and went that extra mile in group activities – or lifted our spirits. Conversely, we recall, and may be even recoil at those educators and peers that did not treat us with respect, or maybe have even viewed as distant and even hostile in some cases. If we as individuals and groups are to move forward in an unknown, uncertain and ever-changing educational landscape, which may reflect the wider societal values, we need to move with the times to remain both educationally and also economically viable. This is especially true for Hong Kong and its vibrant and colourful history, colonised past and adherence more traditional approaches to educational pedagogy.

It is my hope that others can utilise this thesis as a resource, to consider how individual teachers, clusters of teachers, programmes, departments and universities as whole educational entities can transform the curriculum by utilising peer assessments more fully. Thereby unleashing the creative collective endeavours of our students to be self-determining. This research has shown amongst many other things, that peer assessment has a remarkably positive influence to transform the minds and deeds of this generation and into the future.

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Appendices

Appendix I – Mission Statements of Universities in Hong Kong

Mission statements of different higher education institutes in Hong Kong related to critical thinking and life-long learning.

Hong Kong University of Science and Technology

- To give all students, undergraduate and postgraduate alike, a broadly-based University experience that includes: superior training in their chosen fields of study; a well-rounded education that enhances the development of their creativity, critical thinking, global outlook, and cultural awareness; a campus life that prepares them to be community leaders and lifelong learners.

Lingnan University

- Our University makes the best effort to help its students achieve whole-person and all-round growth. All students strive for: independent and critical thinking; creativity and innovation; excellent communication skills including a high level of literacy; social responsibility; personal virtue; cultural accomplishment and passion for lifelong learning.

The Hong Kong Institute of Education

- The primary mission of The Hong Kong Institute of Education is to promote and support the strategic development of teacher education in Hong Kong, by preparing quality educators, supporting them in their lifelong learning, and leading in education innovation and reform.

The Hong Kong Institute of Vocational Education

- The mission of VTC is to provide a valued choice to school leavers and working adults to acquire the values, knowledge and skills for lifelong learning and enhanced employability, and also to provide valued supports to industries for their manpower development.

The Hong Kong Polytechnic University

- To nurture graduates who are critical thinkers, effective communicators, innovative problem solvers, lifelong learners and ethical leaders.

The University of Hong Kong

- To provide a comprehensive education, developing fully the intellectual and personal strengths of its students while developing and extending lifelong learning opportunities for the community.
- To produce graduates of distinction committed to lifelong learning, integrity and professionalism, capable of being responsive leaders and communicators in their fields.

Appendix II – Peer Assessment Form

Peer Assessment Form

Presentation Title:
Presenter:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess the presenter’s performance according to the criteria below. Tick (✓)one box for each of the criteria with reference to the rubrics. • On e-portfolio, please write some brief comments in the chat box: identify the most positive features of the presentation and suggest how the presenter might improve it.

Content	A	B	C	D	F
Task Requirements					
Coverage of Topic					
Quality of Arguments/Opinions/Analysis					
Quality of Evidence					
Delivery	A	B	C	D	F
Organisation					
Interaction					
Language	A	B	C	D	F
Grammar					
Vocabulary					
Style and Tone					
Pronunciation and Fluency	A	B	C	D	F
Pronunciation					
Quality of Speech					

Peer Assessor: _____ Date: _____

Appendix III – Peer Training Materials

Giving and Receiving Feedback: A Guide to the Use of Peer in Self Assessment (Boud, 1991)

Giving and Receiving Feedback: A Guide to the Use of Peers in Self Assessment

Introduction

One of the most valuable contributions anyone can make to another person's learning is constructive comment. Whether as a student or as a teacher each one of us has the capacity to provide useful information to other people that will help them to learn more effectively.

To bother to offer another person feedback about their work indicates both that you care enough about them to spend your time considering their situation and that their work is worthy of your attention. You are both affirming the worth of the person and offering them your views on something into which they have put some effort.

Everyone has the capacity for giving useful feedback and some people use it to more effect than others. The skills of giving and receiving feedback can be developed if attention is given to some of the attributes of worthwhile feedback and how it can be given in ways which enhance its contribution to learning.

Good and Bad Feedback

Before looking in detail at useful feedback it is important to distinguish it from those types of feedback which can be unhelpful and sometimes positively harmful.

We all know what it is like to be on the receiving end of bad feedback: we feel 'got at', 'attacked', 'put down', 'damned' and generally invalidated as a person. Some of the basic characteristics of bad feedback are that it is directed globally at the person; it is unhelpful, that is, it does not suggest what otherwise might be; it is ill-judged, it comes from the needs of the critic rather than the needs of the person receiving it; and it can provide a weight of destructive comment from which it is difficult for a person to surface: it is dehumanising.

Useful feedback, on the other hand, affirms the worth of the person and gives support whilst offering reactions to the object of attention. Thus the person providing the feedback shows that he or she values the person who is receiving it and that the provider is sensitive to their needs and goals. This does not mean that only praise should be given, in fact phoney or contrived praise or praise directed at the person rather than what they have done can be quite counterproductive—it can feel patronising or controlling. Any critical matters though should be raised in an overall supportive context in which the parties can trust one another.

Helpful feedback makes a conscious distinction between the person—who is always valued—and particular acts or specific work—which may be subject to critical comment. This distinction emphasises that the person is not identical to what he or she does, and their work or actions are not the same as the person, though this should not be taken as justification for a person abrogating responsibility for his or her behaviour. No matter how distasteful a person's acts might be, feedback will only be effectively communicated if the person's common humanity is respected.

Offering Feedback

In the discussion below the term 'work' or 'contribution' is used to describe the matter on which feedback is given. This 'work' may be of any type: an essay, a class contribution, a design, some behaviour, a project in any form: written, oral, graphic, etc.

There are many characteristics of worthwhile feedback but the most important is the way in which it is given. The tone, the style and the content should be consistent and provide the constant message: 'I appreciate you and what you have done and whatever else I say should be taken in this context'. If you wish to give helpful feedback, you should:

Be realistic

- direct your comments towards matters on which the person can act. Don't make suggestions which are entirely outside the scope of what the person can do. Constructive comments can be helpful so long as they respect the other person's individual way of doing things.

Be specific

- generalisations are particularly unhelpful. Base your comments on concrete observable behaviour or materials. Always check your general impressions or inferences against the particular and use the particular in your response. Focusing on behaviour implies that it is something related to a specific situation that might be changed. The person should be given sufficient information to pinpoint the areas to which you are referring and have a clear idea of what is being said about those specific areas. Provide examples.

Be sensitive to the goals of the person

- Just because the other person's contributions have not met your goals doesn't necessarily imply that something is wrong. The person produced the work for a specific purpose and you should be aware of that purpose and give your views accordingly. This is not to say that you can't make comments from your own perspective but that you should be clear when you offer views in terms of your own goals and you should say that is what you are doing. Link your comments to their intentions; listen carefully to what they have to say. If there is a common task goal be careful to ensure that you have a shared interpretation of what that means.

Be timely

- time your comments appropriately. It is no use offering feedback after the person receiving it has put the work aside and moved on to other things. Respond promptly when your feedback is requested: to be effective feedback must be well-timed.

Be descriptive

- describe your views. Don't be evaluative or say what you think the person should feel. Don't be emotionally manipulative: you are offering your considered views which should have the characteristics described here; it is up to the other person to accept or reject them as he or she sees fit.

Be consciously non-judgemental

- offer your personal view, do not act as an authority even if you may be one elsewhere. Give your personal reactions and feelings rather than value-laden statements. One way of doing this is to use comments of the type 'I feel ... when you ...'.

Don't compare

- treat each person's work as their own, not part of some supposed competition with others. Be cautious about giving feedback in a context in which the comments which you give one person will be compared with those of another. Such comparisons undermine intrinsic motivation.

Be diligent

- check your response. Is it an accurate reflection of what you want to express? Have you perceived the contribution accurately. There is nothing more annoying than to receive criticism from someone who clearly hasn't bothered to pay attention to what you have done.

Be direct

- say what you mean. Don't wrap it up in circumlocution, fancy words or abstract language.

Be positive

- say what you appreciate. Don't just focus on what you react negatively towards. Try to find something which is genuinely felt, rather than being positive because you feel it is required.

Be aware

- note your own emotional state before you give feedback. If you are anxious or defensive you may well distort otherwise helpful comments. Feedback is never a time for you to relieve yourself at the expense of the other person. Move to a focus on the person to whom you are relating and their needs, not yourself before responding in any way Don't overload them just because you have a lot to give.

Receiving Feedback

There is no point in asking others to give you feedback unless you are prepared to be open to it and to consider comments which differ from your own perceptions. As receiver:

Be explicit

- make it clear what kind of feedback you are seeking. If necessary indicate what kinds you do not want to receive. The feedback from others is entirely for your benefit and if you do not indicate what you want you are unlikely to get it.

Be attentive

- concentrate fully on what is being said. Focus on what the person wants you to know, not on what you would like to hear.

Be aware

- notice your own reactions, both intellectual and emotional. Particularly notice any reactions of rejection or censorship on your part. If the viewpoint from which the other is speaking is at variance with your own do not dismiss it: it can be important to realise the misapprehensions of others. Some people find it useful to partially dissociate or distance themselves in this situation and act as if they were witnessing feedback being given to someone else.

Be silent

- refrain from making a response. Don't even begin to frame a response in your own mind until you have listened carefully to what has been said and have considered the implications. Don't use the excuse of correcting factual errors to avoid hearing and resonating with the substance of what has been said. Don't be distracted by the need to explain: if you continue to feel that you need to give an explanation do it later after the feedback session once you are sure you have attended to all that has been said.

Written versus face-to-face feedback

There is no difference in principle between feedback given in written form and that in person. However, with written feedback there is normally no opportunity to resolve misunderstandings and it is necessary to be very explicit in specifying what types of feedback are desired and in formulating responses. In the written form more attention needs to be given to tone and style, as there is no opportunity to adjust your response in the light of the immediate reactions of the other person.

updated from Boud, D. (1991). *Implementing Student Self Assessment*. HERDSA Green Guide. No. 5. Second Edition. Sydney: HERDSA. Revised October 1994.

Appendix IV – Peer Feedback Categories

Peer Assessment Task (1/2)			
Criterion	Items	Frequency	
Content	Task Completion		
	Coverage of Topic		
	Quality of Arguments/Opinions/Analysis		
	Quality of Evidence		
Delivery	Organisation		
	Interaction		
Language	Grammar		
	Vocabulary		
	Style and Tone		
Pronunciation and Fluency	Pronunciation		
	Quality of Speech		

Appendix V – Categorisation of Peer Feedback

Quality
of speech



Student [redacted]

Your recording have a very strong start by first defining what the internet is. The recording is also quite well-organised. Your arguments are supported by strong evidence which make it very convincing. You could clearly tell me that the internet regulations only make my privacy at risk. The tone of the recording is also very confident and convincing. There are a few stops within the recording that seems to be a bit too long, but overall, this is a very convincing recording.

Quality
of speech



Student [redacted]

I believe that you have a really strong introduction with the two definitions of the internet. Your organization is good as it follows the logic of point, evidence and evaluation. You have a good stress for the important ideas and words and your ideas are developed well. I think the stop after a sentence is good, however the stops that I heard might be a little long. For me I think you already have good content and understanding of your topic and are able to persuade others to believe in what you are saying. Just be careful on the pronunciation of words as I heard some words pronounced in an awkward manner. Keep up with the good work

pronunciation

Appendix VI – Categorisation of a Student’s Reflection

Student’s reflection / progress report

o My reflection / progress report:

This is the first time I introduce and also elaborate on my research topic “

home schooling, a better way for Hong Kong students to learn?” I think that I can make improvement in the following aspects.

Style & Tone

Firstly, improvement can be made in intonation. When I played back the recording, I found that I present the main argument in a flat tone with neither soaring nor falling intonation. And therefore, I think I can add in more intonation, for instance, using a soaring intonation when addressing the supporting argument for my thesis statement and using a falling tone to express some opponent ideas. In this way, I can make the speech more dynamic as well as energetic.

Quality of speech

Secondly, adjustment to the speaking speed is needed. In the recording, I only present one of the argument in my research but it has already taken up almost three minutes! The time allowed for each student to introduce their topic is five minutes. In order to tackle the problem of insufficient time, I would better not to introduce every detail and only include the main idea of each argument and the reference. Perhaps this can help me complete the introduction within the time frame.

Coverage of topic

Appendix VII – UoB Research Ethics Form

GSoE RESEARCH ETHICS FORM

It is important for members of the Graduate School of Education, as a community of researchers, to consider the ethical issues that arise, or may arise, in any research they propose to conduct. Increasingly, we are also accountable to external bodies to demonstrate that research proposals have had a degree of scrutiny. *This form must therefore be completed for each piece of research carried out by members of the School, both staff and students*

The GSoE's process is designed to be supportive and educative. If you are preparing to submit a research proposal, you need to do the following:

- 1. Arrange a meeting with a fellow researcher**
The purpose of the meeting is to discuss ethical aspects of your proposed research, so you need to meet with someone with relevant research experience. A list of prompts for your discussion is given below. Not all these headings will be relevant for any particular proposal.
- 2. Complete the form on the back of this sheet**
The form is designed to act as a record of your discussion and any decisions you make.
- 3. Upload a copy of this form and any other documents (e.g. information sheets, consent forms) to the online ethics tool at:** <https://dbms.ilt.bris.ac.uk/red/ethics-online-tool/applications>.

Please note: Following the upload you will need to answer ALL the questions on the ethics online survey and submit for approval by your supervisor (see the flowchart and user guides on the GSoE Ethics Homepage).

If you have any questions or queries, please contact the ethics co-ordinators at: gsoe-ethics@bristol.ac.uk

Please ensure that you allow time before any submission deadlines to complete this process.

Prompts for discussion

You are invited to consider the issues highlighted below and note any decisions made. You may wish to refer to relevant published ethical guidelines to prepare for your meeting. See <http://www.bris.ac.uk/education/research/networks/ethicscommittee/links/> for links to several such sets of guidelines.

1. Researcher access/ exit
2. Information given to participants
3. Participants right of withdrawal
4. Informed consent
5. Complaints procedure
6. Safety and well-being of participants/ researchers
7. Anonymity/ confidentiality
8. Data collection
9. Data analysis
10. Data storage
11. Data Protection Act
12. Feedback
13. Responsibilities to colleagues/ academic community
14. Reporting of research

Be aware that ethical responsibility continues throughout the research process. If further issues arise as your research progresses, it may be appropriate to cycle again through the above process.

Name(s): HO, Lok Ming Eric

Proposed research project: An investigation of peer assessment in a dual cultural context

Proposed funder(s): Self-funded

Discussant for the ethics meeting: Prof. Richard Smith

Name of supervisor: Dr. Guoxing YU

Has your supervisor seen this submitted draft of your ethics application? Y/~~N~~

Please include an outline of the project or append a short (1 page) summary:

Since university students are expected to be equipped with independent and life-long learning skills upon graduation, peer assessment has received increased attention recently. Based on a commonly agreed assessment criteria, peer assessment allows students to critically evaluate their peers' performances and ultimately their own performances (Patri, 2002). Involving students in assessments is crucial because students can understand the underlying rationale and they are likely to increase their autonomy and motivation in learning (Brown, 2004; Cheng & Warren, 2005). Beyond academic learning, university students can be equipped with skills for the twenty-first-century workplace (EDB, 2005).

This research hopes to contribute to the peer assessment literature in relation to oral presentations in the higher education context. The introduction of speaking paper in Internet-based TOEFL reflects that more attention has been paid to the spoken English proficiency and the importance of verbal expression. Furthermore, oral presentation is also included in most of the curriculum. As a result, a backwash effect has been created to motivate students to improve their presentation skills. From the perspective of the business environment, due to

the active international trade in Hong Kong, many multi-national corporations require graduates to have proficient oral English ability. Emphasis has been paid on presentation skills in higher education because these skills are especially important to prepare students for their future careers (Hill & Storey, 2003). Even though the freshmen in Hong Kong are expected to have English language proficiency equivalent to 6.5 in IELTS, most of them are anxious about oral presentations (Hristova, 2014) and uncomfortable to evaluate their peer's performance because they think they are not qualified (Cheng & Warren, 2005).

Although peer assessment has received increased attention, there is little research being conducted in the ESL context. Peer assessment of oral presentation skills is even considered an under-explored area, especially conducted by ESL learners. There are few studies about peer assessment of oral presentations in Hong Kong. These studies, however, investigated the learning outcomes. Instead of looking at learning outcomes, it is more worth investigating the learning processes that are activated while year 1 students, who come from an examination-oriented education background, engage in peer assessment activities. The aims of this research study are to discover the cognitive processes which are resulted from the receipt of feedback from peers and provision of feedback for peers, and also gain a deeper insight on how students revise their presentations after the peer assessment tasks. The following questions frame the investigation:

1. What aspects of student learning was peer feedback designed to influence (e.g. content, organization, language and pronunciation or fluency) and how did the student providing feedback decide what was important?
2. How do students receiving feedback respond?
3. How does the feedback received by students influence the way they revised their oral presentations?

Ethical issues discussed and decisions taken (see list of prompts overleaf):

1. Research access and exit
Since this research study is a mixed-methods study, personal approach will be adopted. Potential and appropriate research targets will be invited to participate in this study in order to gain access to the research site. All targets' names and institutions' names will be kept confidential.
2. Information given to the participants
An informed consent form will be given, in which the participants are able to know the objectives, data collection methods and procedures, timeline and potential risks of this study. All aspects of the study that may influence willingness to participate will be explained. They should also know that their participation is voluntary and has nothing to do with the course grades. They have the right to quit the study at anytime without giving any reasons if they wish. Researcher's contact information will be provided too.
3. Participants right of withdrawal
At the onset of the investigation, participants should know their right to withdraw from the study at any time. It is recognised that this may be difficult in certain observational settings, but nevertheless attempts should be made to ensure that participants know of their right to withdraw. If the participants wish to withdraw, they have the right to withdraw retrospectively

any consent given, and to require that their own data, including recordings, be destroyed.

4. Informed consent

Whenever possible, all participants should be informed of the objectives of the investigation. The investigator should, normally, explain all other aspects of the study or intervention about which the participants enquire. Failure to make full disclosure prior to obtaining informed consent requires additional safeguards to protect the welfare and dignity of the participants.

5. Complaints procedures

All participants should be informed of the complaints process of the university. They will be provided instructions of making complaints. The key point contact will be the Ethics Co-ordinator.

6. Safety and well-being of participants

This study is going to adopt non-invasive research methods, for example, interviews and reflective journals. Interview questions may raise confidential personal issues which make the participants feel uncomfortable. Attention should be paid to the participants' psychological conditions since they may receive negative feedback during the study. There is no foreseeable physical risk to the participants.

7. Anonymity/confidentiality

For each participant, there should be a link between a code and the name of the participant. This link should be kept confidential and separated from the collected data. The name of the participants should be removed from the collected data and replaced by pseudonym. Besides the names, other information may be also able to identify the participants, for example, age, gender and strong opinions. The participants' privacy should be promised. Since this study involves face-to-face interviews, the participants should understand that anonymity is unable to be promised.

8. Data collection

Interviews in this study will be audio-recorded with the permission from the participants. All black and white data, such as reflective journals will be properly documented.

9. Data analysis

Miles and Huberman's (1994) interactive model for qualitative data analysis will be introduced. The three main components for qualitative data analysis are data reduction, data display and, drawing and verifying conclusions. These three components are "interwoven and concurrent throughout the data analysis" (Punch & Oancea, 2014, p.225).

10. Data storage

Hard copies – interview notes, reflective journals and thumb drive containing audio files need to be kept securely locked away - for example in a locked filing cabinet.

Soft copies – all electronic files come under the terms of the Data Protection Act. These files need to be encrypted or password protected, and only accessed by the researcher.

11. Data Protection Act

Data Protection Act of the University of Bristol will be adopted. The Act gives individuals rights over their personal data and protects individuals from the erroneous use of their personal data. The Act also requires anyone who handles personal data to comply with a number of important principles and legal obligations. Information can be found at <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/secretary/data-protection/>

12. Feedback

In order to make this research study credible, reliability test will be introduced. All the interview transcripts and conclusion summaries will be sent to the interviewees for member checks. Member checks can help the study to establish credibility (Mertens, 2005). This process is important because the interviewees will have a chance to clarify if the written version of the interviews is correct and if the conclusion summaries can reflect their thoughts and opinions (Lodico, Spaulding & Voegtler, 2006).

13. Responsibilities to colleagues/academic community

This research study will be finished while obeying the research ethics policy issued by the University of Bristol. Research integrity and honesty will be promised.

14. Reporting of research

APA referencing style will be used in this research study. All cited work will be properly documented to avoid plagiarism. All data will be used carefully to avoid false or misuse.

If you feel you need to discuss any issue further, or to highlight difficulties, please contact the GSoE's ethics co-ordinators who will suggest possible ways forward.

Signed: (Researcher) Signed: (Discussant)
Date:

Appendix VIII – Consent Form

Title of the Study

Improving ESL Formative Assessment and Student Learning via Oral Presentations through the Multi-Staged Peer Assessment

Purpose of the study

This study is an exploratory study which examines the implementation of peer assessment and how students improve their presentation skills by engaging in formative feedback.

Procedures

You will be invited to upload your presentation audio/video file and provide peer feedback to two of your classmates. In addition, some of you will be invited to participate in focus-group interviews. The research study will last for one semester.

Potential risks

You may find providing peer feedback and receiving peer feedback during the procedure somewhat uncomfortable and upsetting. Such discomforts, however, should be no greater than what we experience in everyday life. If you experience discomfort you can stop the research procedure at any time.

Compensation for participation

There is no financial incentive for this research study and your participation in this study will not affect your subject final grade. However, in this study, you will be taught some learning skills, which may help you become a better learner. You will also be invited to reflect on your personal experience. Such reflection may give you insights about yourself. In addition, this research project can provide valuable information on the implementation of peer assessment which in turn could help inform future curriculum revision.

Confidentiality

Any information obtained in this study will remain very strictly confidential, will be known to no-one, and will be used for this research study only. Codes, not names, are used on all instruments to protect confidentiality.

Data retention

The data containing personal identifiers will be kept for 6 months after publication of the relevant research results.

Participation and withdrawal

Your participation is voluntary. This means that you can choose to stop at any time without negative consequences.

Questions and concerns

If you have any questions about the research, please feel free to contact Eric HO at 3400 8532 or eric.lm.ho@polyu.edu.hk.

Signature

I _____ (Name of Participant) understand the procedures described above and agree to participate in this study.

I ** agree / do not agree to the [video-recording / audio-recording] during the procedure.

I ** wish / do not wish to be identified.

(** Please delete as appropriate.)

Signature of Participant

Date