

Are You Listening? -- The Development of Online Peer Assessment System for English Oral Reading

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Abstract: Peer assessment is a common used strategy in EFL reading class in Taiwan to help EFL teacher “ensure” that all students are paying attention to others’ oral reading. In this study we develop an online peer assessment system for EFL oral reading activities to overcome the potential drawbacks of traditional peer assessment.

Keywords: Peer assessment, oral reading, EFL, online peer assessment

Introduction

Oral reading fluency is one of the important early English reading skills [1, 2]. That an EFL student is capable of oral reading a paragraph accurately and without hesitation, i.e. fluently means he/she can automatically connect the relationship between orthography and pronunciation rules. While one student reading, all the others are naturally asked to listen to the oral reading carefully. Moreover, it is sometimes that all the other students except the reading ones are asked to assess their peer’s reading results with the aims to decide the best readers and prevent the students from being distracted.

Although peer assessment is often used in EFL classroom to evaluate students’ performance in different learning activities, because of the lack of immediate statistical function, the final result of peer assessment is quite often based on teacher’s view or a rough vote. Such a rough decision consequently causes students’ feeling of unfairness or misunderstanding the meaning of peer assessment. Furthermore, when peer assessment is used to evaluate students’ oral reading, the degree of difficulty in helping all of the students concentrate upon the reading and give correct evaluation is remarkably increasing. In addition, the potential drawbacks of peer assessment, such as hitchhikers, giving identical ratings, or inflating one’s own ratings [4] also risk the fair and validity of peer assessment.

To overcome the potential drawbacks of peer assessment which were mentioned above as well as to provide EFL teachers with a convenient tool to apply peer assessment to oral reading activity, we develop an online peer assessment system for English oral reading (Online Peer Assessment System, OPAS). The following sections briefly describe the peer assessment system (OPAS), system evaluation, and finally present conclusions.

1. Online Peer Assessment System for English Oral Reading (OPAS)

OPAS is able to help students do peer assessment which is often used in oral reading activities in EFL class. The online peer assessment system is not only a mobilized implementation of peer assessment activity but also a function-advanced version. It possesses the functions including online evaluating, data collecting, data analyzing, rating quality confirming, as well as error diagnosing. The peer assessment procedure is briefly described as the following. While student logins OPAS, the system will convey the target paragraph which is used for oral reading on each student's screen. Then all the students listen to their peers to orally read the target paragraph. While they recognize that some words are mispronounced they note those words by clicking on the word with a stylus. As soon as the assessment is finished, OPAS automatically evaluate the performance of the oral reading based on the results of peer assessment. Furthermore, OPAS will compare students' and EFL teacher's evaluation and then decide the best evaluators of peer assessment. By doing this comparison, OPAS is also capable of providing the information which is related to students' oral reading performance, error patterns, and listening ability. Such information is useful for EFL teacher to understand students' problem in reading and listening and consequently serves as a reference foundation for conducting a remedy instruction plan for those students who need more specific learning help.

The brief procedure of OPAS is shown as Figure 1. As shown in the procedure, OPAS provides students and EFL teacher with different information (the block depicted in bold frame). For students who are evaluated, OPAS shows them the assessment results for their oral reading including the score and the mispronounced words. In addition, for those who act as evaluators, OPAS presents them the differences of peer assessment results between theirs and their teacher's. Furthermore, in order to help EFL teacher to understand students' listening ability as well as the common error patterns of oral reading that most of the readers have, OPAS provides EFL teacher with several kinds of statistical analysis data, such as the overall list of peer assessment result and the difference table of evaluation between student's and EFL teacher's. From the difference table, EFL teacher can find out who the best evaluators are. Besides, the EFL teacher can also look up the table of error patterns to know the words that are mispronounced by most of the readers. This information can then serve as a reference foundation for conducting a remedy plan for helping those students who need more practicing.

2. Conclusion

Peer assessment is a common approach used in Taiwanese EFL classes, especially in inter-group contest activities, such as oral reading contest. However, because of the potential drawbacks, the actual essential of a traditional peer assessment is much like a 'teacher-centered' assessment. In order to overcome the drawbacks exist in traditional peer assessment, an online peer assessment system, OPAS, was developed. OPAS is mobilized implementation of peer assessment activity, which possesses the advanced functions including immediate feedback, data analysis, confirmation of assessment quality, and error pattern diagnosis to help the EFL teacher to further understand students' oral reading and listening performance. It can be concluded that the proposed online peer assessment system, OPAS, overcomes the inherent shortcomings of traditional peer assessment with the support of technology.

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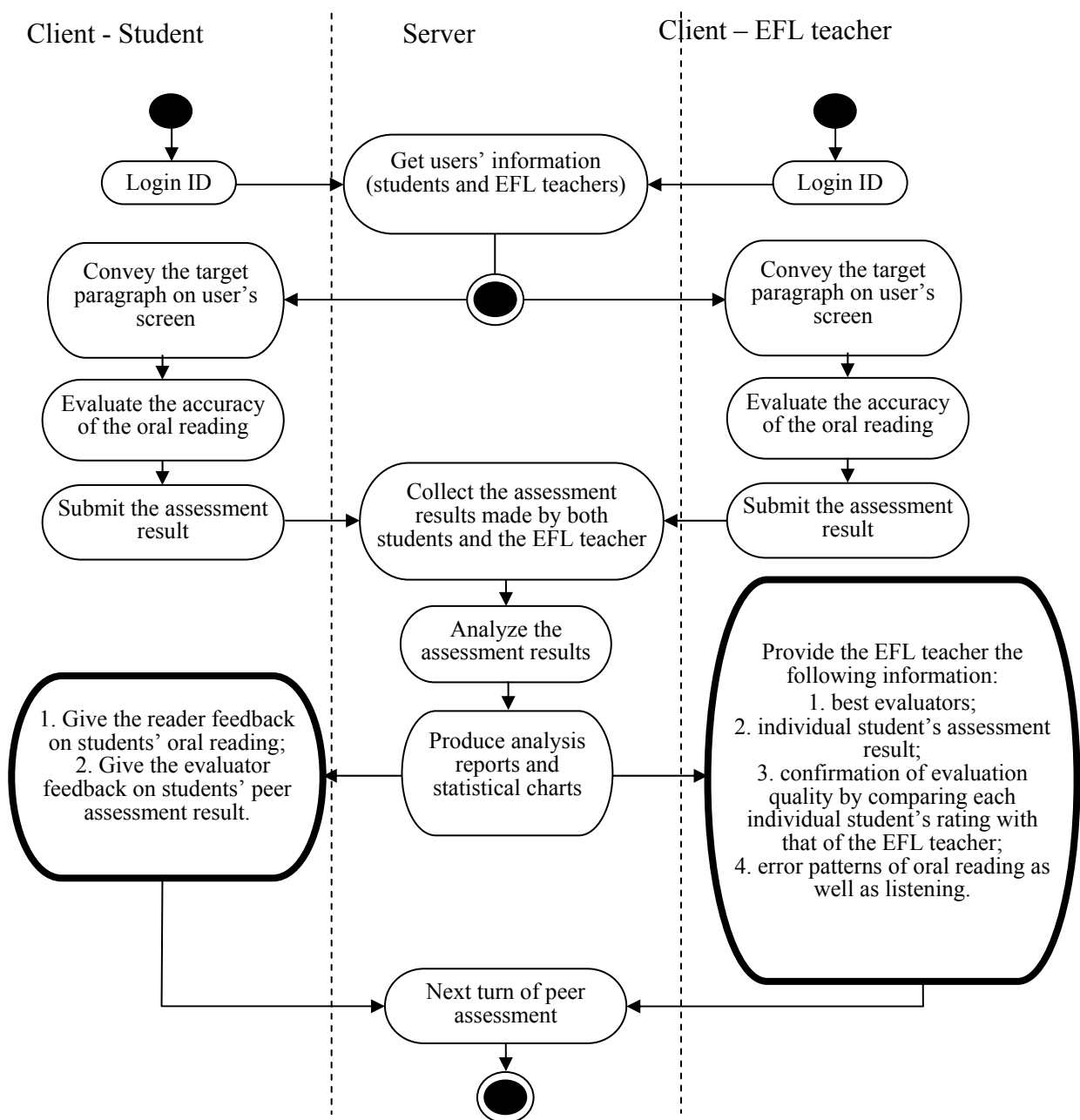


Figure 1. The procedure of OPAS.