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Student-centered Speaking Practice Using an MP3 Player and the Text-bulletin Board

Jeong-Weon Song
(Hanyang Cyber University)

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The present study investigated the effects of student-centered speaking practice outside of the classroom using an MP3 player and the Cyworld text bulletin board on speaking ability. 37 students participated in this study. The data from the 37 participants were collected based on pre- and post- narrative speaking tests. The results of the t-test showed statistical significance in terms of total number of words, total number of word types, and TSE measures. The participants also showed positive responses to the questionnaire with regard to the speaking practice of the study. Although listening was not the focus of the study, it was also practiced on the sub-board of the Cyworld text bulletin board. The study suggests that the MP3 player and the text bulletin board could be used for student-centered speaking practice in an EFL context.

[English Speaking/MP3 player/text bulletin board]

I. INTRODUCTION

With the development of the Internet and technology, English has become a global language. Following this trend, people in various countries communicate with each other in English and this accounts for the importance of spoken English. In an attempt to improve English communication, many universities in Korea employ native English speakers to teach English. Nevertheless, it is difficult to have enough English speaking practice as class hours are generally limited to two to four hours per week, especially for the non-English major students, as there are a great number of students in each English class. It is also not easy to practice speaking English outside of the classroom in an EFL context. According to the findings of the study by Lee (2005), outside of the classroom, Korean students mostly spend less time practicing speaking and writing English than listening and

reading. The present study attempts to provide student-centered speaking practice for Korean students in an EFL context outside of the classroom without the presence of a teacher. For this purpose, the use of an MP3 player and the text bulletin board seems to be feasible for speaking practice based on the trend of Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL). The major advantage of the use of the MP3 player is portability, and this makes self-directed learning possible (Kang & Kim, 2007). The study, therefore, attempts to investigate the effects of student-centered speaking practice using the MP3 player and the text bulletin board outside of the classroom on English speaking competence.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The following presents the background to the study which includes the processes of speaking production, the definition of Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC), and MALL in English language education.

1. The Processes of Speaking Production

As the main focus of the study is to improve English speaking, it is important to explain the processes of English speaking. Levelt (1989) describes the four processes of speech production as the conceptualizer, the formulator, the articulator and self-monitorization. The conceptualizer generates messages which include planning the content. The formulating stage includes grammatical and phonological processes. The third element, the articulator, concerns the converting of the phonetic plan (internal speech) into overt speech. The last stage is self-monitoring in which the speaker listens to his own overt speech at the articulating stage and has an opportunity to evaluate it. As these processes are extremely fast, second and foreign language learners generally lack automaticity in producing speech. It is therefore important to investigate as quickly as possible which type of speaking practice can help learners to practice these language production operations.

According to Bygate (1987) and Levelt (1989), language learners actually have to move their vocal organs in order to improve their speaking abilities. The speaking practice of the present study using the MP3 player and the text bulletin board may provide the EFL learner with just such opportunity to speak and practice English, because after the students have conceptualized, formulated, and articulated the content of their speech, they can self-monitor what they have said by listening to their own voices on the recorded MP3 files. Learners also have a chance to listen to other students' recorded MP3 files on the text bulletin board. Thus, recording and listening to their own and other MP3 files can facilitate speech production and motivate speaking practice, as students can practice and monitor

their own speaking whenever and wherever they want.

2. The Definition of Computer-Mediated Communication

Since the text bulletin board is used in the present study, Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) needs to be explained. It is defined as communication between human beings using computers (Herring, 1996). This is divided into synchronous and asynchronous (Murray, 2000). The former includes Internet Relay Chat (IRC), Moos, and the computer video/audio conference. On the other hand, the latter concerns e-mail and the bulletin board. J. Han (2002) presented effective methods to develop communicative competence of EFL learners using CMC. There have also been studies that investigated the impact of synchronous CMC, especially Internet Relay Chat, on speaking areas (Chang, 2003; Han, 2003, 2005; Min & Choi, 2002; Park, 2003). The findings of these studies suggest that IRC-based CMC speaking practice seemed to help improve speaking ability. The drawback of these practices might be that there is no actual speaking production and listening practice. In contrast, asynchronous CMC has been used to research the effects of the use of e-mail and key-pal writing practice on L2 writing and report an L2 writing improvement (Cononelos & Oliva, 1993; Ho, 2000; Huh, 2000; Son & O'Neill, 1999). There have also been studies that investigated the effects of the use of the text bulletin board for writing and peer-revision writing practice (Jun, 2004; S. Han, 2002; Lee, 2000; Lee, 2002; Park, 2004; Song, 2006a). S. Han (2002) researched and reported the positive effects of writing activity on the bulletin board in improving English composition. Lee (2000) also supported the positive influence of writing practice and peer-revision on writing proficiency using the bulletin board. The text bulletin board has been mostly employed for research in the writing area. Song (2006b) investigated its use for practicing listening and reading, and reported that the listening and reading of the participants improved. However, there have been no studies to investigate the effects of using the text bulletin board on speaking or other language areas.

3. Mobile-Assisted Language Learning and the Use of the MP3 Player

This sub-section presents the background to the use of the MP3 player in the present study. Recently, there have been a few studies that have suggested the use of the cellular phone, PDA and the MP3 player in English language teaching (Kim, 2003). This is known as Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) (Cho, 2006). Kim (2003) developed and offered a sample PDA-based course for learning English syntax. The majority of the students answered favorably in the interview about the PDA-based English Syntax course. Some technical problems in the use of PDA were pointed out, such as the excessive length

of time for logging, rebooting, and re-accessing the home server system. There have also been many attempts to present PDA course contents as indicated below. Sung (2003) also examined PDA-based contents for a high school listening test. Thornton and Houser (2005) report that studies of vocabulary items which were sent by email using a cellular phone were more effective than those sent by email through the computer. Cha (2006) explains how to teach English using Ubiquitous Computing (UC) and provides different ways of studying listening, speaking, reading and writing. However, as he pointed out, it is not easy to communicate with the UC system, and its use in speaking therefore needs to be researched further. He also mentioned that, at the moment, UC seems to be suitable only for learning prefabricated spoken English sentences. Cho (2006) shows how podcasting, which combines the advantages of the Internet and the MP3 player, could be employed in English language teaching. Choi and Kim (2006) researched the effects of using cellular phones on vocabulary studies. There was no significant difference in the achievement tests, but the participants showed a positive attitude toward the mobile contents. Kang and Kim (2007) also presented the mobile contents using TV drama for learning English listening skills and vocabulary.

Although these studies supported PDA-based courses, their effectiveness needs to be experimentally researched as most studies were concerned with attitudes toward PDA contents based only on the findings of the questionnaire. In addition, previous studies attempted to research the influence of ubiquitous learning mostly in the areas of English listening and vocabulary. There have been no studies to investigate the use of the MP3 player in the practice of speaking. The present study, therefore, attempts to ascertain whether the MP3 player and the text bulletin board could be used effectively to practice speaking in an EFL context. The research questions of the study are as follows:

1. What are the effects of student-centered speaking practice using the MP3 player and the text bulletin board on the speaking competence of EFL learners?
2. What are the attitudes of EFL participants toward student-centered speaking practice using the MP3 player and the text bulletin board on the Internet?

III. METHOD

1. Subjects

The subjects in this study were 37 female students from S women's university. Their academic years and ages varied, but most were in their twenties (93%). They enrolled in the General English course (Writing and Presentation). The level of most students was that

of beginners, with a few of them classed as intermediates, based on the pre-speaking test.

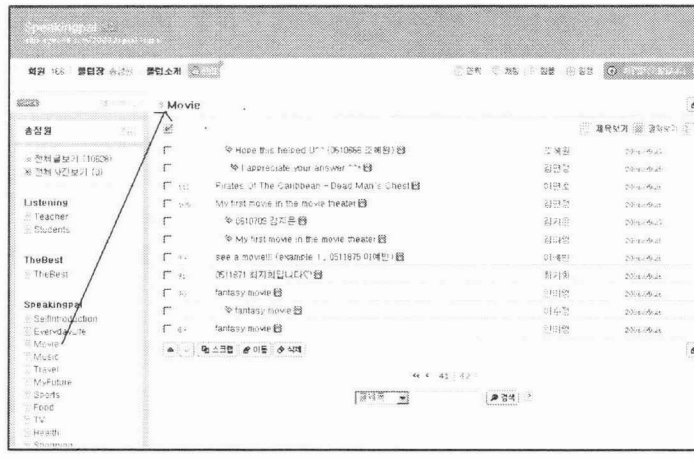
2. Speaking Practice on the Cyworld of the Internet

For the speaking practice, the Cyworld text bulletin board on the Internet site and an MP3 player were used. The use of the Cyworld Internet site is a trend among the younger generation to communicate with each other, and most university students listen to music using an MP3 player. Although there is a recording function on the MP3 player, most students use it only for listening to music rather than English speaking practice.

The speaking activity of the study was a part of the course requirement, and the students did it outside of class at their convenience for about 10 weeks. As this was a student-centered activity, there was no error correction to the speaking samples from the teacher or from the researcher who only provided general comments about speaking practice. The Internet address of the speaking practice is: http://club.cyworld.com/20062speakingpal. This was opened on the 19th September 2006. Figure 1 shows a sample of the Cyworld text bulletin board on the Internet site.

FIGURE 1

Sample of Speaking-pal Practice



The participants were required to record each English speaking practice on the given recording sheet. Thus, the number of times the students engaged in this activity was calculated according to the numbers on the self-recording sheet, and also the reported number of uploads on the Cyworld text bulletin board, which could be checked only by the

manager of the board.[1] The following table shows the total number of practice times of the participants of the study, and this shows that they practiced speaking about 235 times.

TABLE 1

Number of Speaking Practices of the Selected Students

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Total Number of Speaking Practices of the study	37	70	465	234.86	108.027

The following explains the types of English-speaking practice using the MP3 player and the Cyworld text bulletin board.

1) Speaking Pal (speaking only)

The first speaking activity is known as 'Speaking Pal'. As this name suggests, the subjects practiced and recorded their speaking exercises in English outside of the classroom using an MP3 player.[2] The recorded English speaking files were uploaded onto the 'Speaking pal' sub-board of the Cyworld bulletin board. There was no limitation with regard to time or the number of speaking practices, but the participants were required to perform at least three times per week. As for the topics for English-speaking practice, these were either free or specific. For instance, they were allowed to talk about anything on the sub-board of 'Freeboard' but there were also 14 specific topics on the 'Speaking pal' sub-board.[3] When the participants engage in speaking by themselves outside of the classroom, if they want to ask questions, they can do so using the 'Q & A' sub-board. They are also advised to refer to other resources, such as a dictionary or a grammar book, etc.

2) Speaking and Interaction

The students were also asked to interact after listening to other students' speaking practice on the 'Speaking pal' sub-board. For this interaction, they write their replies on the public forum. Alternatively, they record their replies using an MP3 player and upload them

[1] Cyworld provides the uploaded numbers that each person has made to the text bulletin board manager.

[2] A small number of students who did not have MP3 players used a cellular phone with a recording function or an electronic dictionary for the recording.

[3] The 14 specific topics for the speaking practice were as follows: self-introduction, everyday life, movies, music, travel, my future, sports, food, TV, health, shopping, boy/girl friend, books, art.

onto the public forum. However, this practice was not a face-to-face, or synchronous conversation.

3) Listening and Uttering Useful Expressions

One of the sub-boards of the Cyworld text bulletin board was designed for the 'Listening and Speaking' activity, that is, to practice listening to and speaking useful English expressions using the MP3 listening files recorded by native speakers. There are several Internet sites providing free and useful MP3 listening files. The researcher indicated these site addresses on the Cyworld text bulletin board in order to provide the students with free MP3 files for studying English. The researcher also uploaded the sample listening MP3 files onto the text bulletin board. These consisted of conversations provided by the Darakwon Publishing Company for free.[4] The participants also uploaded useful MP3 files for listening. They were required to listen to these files as models for speaking, and to record any useful conversational expressions that they thought important using the MP3 player. The recorded speaking files were uploaded onto the 'Listening and speaking' sub-board.[5] The students were also asked to download the listening and speaking files onto their own MP3 player, and listen to them anywhere and at any time they felt like it.

4) Selecting the Best Speaking Samples

After listening to other students' speaking samples on the above 'Speaking Pal' board, they were required to select the best MP3 speaking practice file, and upload it onto the 'The Best' sub-board. This activity was done every other week, and was intended to motivate the students to listen to their peers' speaking samples. It was also expected that selecting other best speaking samples might impel the participants to do their best in their own speaking practice, so that their samples would be chosen as the best.

3. Instruments

The qualitative data were collected by administering pre- and post- spoken narrative tests based on a series of pictures, that is, the telling of a story based on a given set of pictures.[6] The reasons why the spoken narrative task were used was because this task is

[4] http://www.darakwon.co.kr/

[5] As the students do not have the book or scripts of the listening files, some appear to write down notes while listening.

[6] The spoken narrative task is one of the common task types used in many official speaking tests such asthe Test of Spoken English (TSE) by ETS, the Test of Oral Proficiency (TOP) administered

familiar to most English language learners, and this accesses a visual stimulus through a set of pictures as Ortega (1999) points out.

As to the qualitative data, a questionnaire was distributed to ascertain the amount of speaking time that the students had usually practiced before participating in the present study. It was also to examine the attitudes of the participants toward the speaking practice of the study (see Appendix).

4. Data Collection

37 students took the pre- and post- spoken narrative tests before and after the speaking practice of the study. The subjects were not allowed to take any notes before or during the speaking tests. No comment was made on the students' pre-speaking performance, and the picture set was collected immediately after the test. As there were about 10 weeks between the pre- and post- tests, the same picture set was used.

After finishing the post- spoken narrative test, the questionnaire was distributed to the 37 participants, and was collected when they had answered it.

5. Data Analysis

The transcribed pre- and post- speaking data were analyzed according to the following three measures: 1) Total number of words; 2) Total number of word types (a number of different vocabulary items used); and 3) Test of Spoken English (TSE). Conventionally, the total number of words and word types are counted as a Type-Token Ratio (TTR). However, the TTR is generally affected by the length of the samples, and those of the present study varied, depending on the students. These two measures were, therefore, counted separately by using WordSmith Tools version 3.0. For the holistic criteria, the spoken narrative performance of the participants was evaluated according to the rubric for TSE from the ETS and O'Loughlin (2001), from 1 (the lowest score) to 6 (the highest score) on a 0.5 scale. This TSE score was used to measure the overall spoken performance of the present study. When counting the number of words and word types, repeated words were not included. However, for the TSE, the repeated words were included in order to measure the overall spoken performance.

To examine the statistically significant mean difference between the pre- and post-speaking tests in terms of the total number of words, word types, and TSE scores, the

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by Seoul National University, and the Multimedia Assisted Test of English (MATE) by Sookmyung Women's University, etc

Paired Samples t-test was applied using the SPSS package, version 15.0. In order to establish inter-rater reliability - that is, to identify the tendency of different raters to give the same TSE score to the same speaking sample - 40% of the data was subjected to an inter-rater reliability test using the SPSS package, version 15.0. The result of Cronbach's alpha was 0.875, which indicates a high level of agreement between the raters.

As for the questionnaire, the multiple-choice questions were counted and converted into percentages. Then the open-ended questions were categorized and summarized. The number of student responses for each open-ended questionnaire item was more than 37 because some participants provided more than one answer. All the answers for the open-ended questions were considered and categorized for the analysis.

IV. RESULTS

The following explains the results of the findings of the qualitative and quantitative data of the study.

1. The Effects of the Speaking Practice of the Study on Speaking Proficiency

This section presents the results regarding the effects of the speaking practice of the present study (using the MP3 player and the Cyworld club text bulletin board) on speaking proficiency. The students' spoken performance was compared before and after the speaking practice using the MP3 player on the Cyworld text bulletin board. There was a considerable improvement in terms of TSE, total number of words, and total number of word types, as Tables 2 to 4 show.

Firstly, the TSE mean score significantly improved, increasing by 0.36, from 2.54 to 2.91 [t(df=36)= -6.809, p=.000] (see Table 2). This implies that the students' speaking ability can be enhanced in the long term if they continue their speaking practice on the Cyworld using an MP3 player.

Secondly, regarding the total number of words, there was also a marked improvement from 94.11 to 108.84 [t (df=36)= -3.831, p=.000], with an increase of 14.73 (see Table 3). This means that the participants produced about 15 words more in the post-speaking test than the pre-speaking test.

TABLE 2

TSE Scores

	N	M	SD	Mean Differences		
				M (SD)	t	p
Pre-test	37	2.54	0.58	+0.36 (0.33)	-6.809	.000
Post-test	37	2.91	0.55			

TABLE 3

Word Number for the Speaking Test

	N	M	SD	Mean Differences		
				M (SD)	T	p
Pre-test	37	94.11	29.09	+14.73 (23.39)	-3.831	.000
Post-test	37	108.84	28.15			

Lastly, considering the total number of word types, the mean of the pre-speaking test was 53.41 and this went up to 58.86 [t (df=36)= -4.450, p=.000], with an increase of 5.46 in the post-speaking test (see Table 4). The improvement in these three measures suggests that students' speaking practice on the Cyworld text bulletin board using the MP3 player could be useful for improving English speaking proficiency of the EFL students.

TABLE 4

Word Types for the Speaking Test

	N	M	SD	Mean Differences		
				M (SD)	T	p
Pre-test	37	53.41	11.63	+5.46 (7.46)	-4.450	.000
Post-test	37	58.86	10.79			

2. The Attitude of the Participants toward the Speaking Exercises of the Study

The following shows the students' attitude toward speaking practice using the MP3 player and the text bulletin board (see Tables 5 and 6). The improved spoken performance in terms of the three measures described earlier seems to be consistent with the results of the questionnaire. Overall, the participants showed a positive response to the speaking practice of the study. The following records the detailed replies of the participants.

Regarding questions 1 and 2 (see Table 5), before becoming involved in the speaking activity of the study, 29 students (78%) answered that they did not engage in any speaking

practice at all. However, after becoming involved in the speaking activity of the study, all 37 participants (100%) practiced English speaking as follows: 1) 21 students (57%) practiced speaking for about 30 minutes a day; 2) 7 (19%) practiced speaking for one or two hours a day; 3) 9 (24%) answered that they practiced speaking for 15 minutes a day. These results show that the speaking practice of the present study was able to provide opportunities for the participants to practice speaking English.

TABLE 5

Speaking Practice Hours

Q	Average speaking practice time	3-4h/day	1-2h/day	30m/day	15m/day	0 m/day	No Answer
1	Before the speaking practice of the study	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (8.11%)	4 (10.81%)	29 (78.38%)	1 (2.70%)
2	After the speaking practice of the study	0 (0%)	7 (19%)	21 (57%)	9 (24%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

* ( )= %

Table 6 presents the attitudes of the participants toward the overall practice of the study. Focusing on the speaking-pal practice, 36 participants (97%) responded (Question 3) that their speaking improved very much or much after participating in the MP3 speaking activity of the present study. This is consistent with the improved spoken performance of the study. Next, for question 4, 32 students (86%) answered that the listening and speaking practice was very much or much useful for improving their speaking. In comparison to the answers to questions 3 and 4, for question 5, selecting the best speaking samples was considered as only little useful for improving the speaking ability of the students (20 students=54%), whereas 17 students (46%) stated that this activity was very much or much useful. Next, for questions 6 and 7, the participants replied that the speaking practice of the study was interesting (Q6, 33 students=89%) and helpful in reducing their anxiety toward speaking English (Q7, 36 students=97%).

Considering questions 8 to 11, when the participants practiced speaking, they referred to dictionaries and grammar books whenever they had doubts during speaking practice (Q8, 36 students=97%). 37 students (100%) (Q9) responded that they actually listened to other MP3 speaking samples on the text bulletin board, and 34 (92%) (Q10) explained that they replied to other participants' speaking samples. 32 (86%) (Q11) responded that they were encouraged to practice speaking by other students' uploaded speaking samples on the board, though 5 (14%) were little motivated. For questions 12 and 13, the 32 students (86%) (Q12) wanted to continue the speaking practice of the study, and 34 (92%) (Q13) expected

to improve their speaking ability if they continued the speaking practice of the study, though 3 (8%) little agreed.

TABLE 6

Results of the Questionnaire

Q	Summary of Statement	Very much	Much	little	Very little
3	Effects of speaking-pal practice on improving English speaking	10 (27.03%)	26 (70.27%)	1 (2.70%)	0 (0%)
4	Effects of listening & speaking practice on speaking	7 (18.92%)	25 (67.57%)	5 (13.51%)	0 (0%)
5	Effects of selecting the best speaking sample of speaking	4 (10.81%)	13 (35.14%)	20 (54.05%)	0 (0%)
6	Increasing interest in speaking	9 (24.32%)	24 (64.86%)	4 (10.81%)	0 (0%)
7	Decreased anxiety toward English speaking	9 (24.32%)	27 (72.97%)	1 (2.70%)	0 (0%)
8	Refer to other resources for speaking practice	18 (48.65%)	18 (48.65%)	0 (0%)	1 (2.70%)
9	Experience in listening to other students' speaking	7 (18.92%)	30 (81.08%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
10	Responding to other students' speaking	5 (13.51%)	29 (78.38%)	3 (8.11%)	0 (0%)
11	More motivated after seeing speaking practice samples on the board	8 (21.62%)	24 (64.86%)	5 (13.51%)	0 (0%)
12	Continuing speaking-pal practice	7 (18.92%)	25 (67.57%)	5 (13.51%)	0 (0%)
13	Expectation to improve speaking after speaking-pal practice	17 (45.95%)	17 (45.95%)	3 (8.11%)	0 (0%)

* ( )= %

As for the open-ended questions 14 to 19, the participants mentioned various advantages and disadvantages of the speaking practice, but overall they reported more advantages (see Tables 7 to 9).

Questions 14 to 15 consider the advantages and drawbacks of the speaking practice of the study (see Table 7). Question 14 seemed to indicate the greatest number of advantages of the MP3 speaking-pal practice: first, the participants appreciated having a chance to

practice English speaking (30%); second, as a result of taking part in the activities of the study, the students were able to show confidence in speaking English (17%); lastly, the requirement to listen to each other's speaking practice was helpful (12%). In general, most respondents appreciated having the opportunity to speak English and felt more confident in expressing themselves after using the MP3 player and the Cyworld text bulletin board.

On the other hand, some of the inconveniences of using the MP3 for speaking practice (Q15) were also mentioned, as the following shows: firstly, as the students had to upload the recorded MP3 files of the speaking practice onto the Cyworld bulletin board, this was considered inconvenient (26%). Secondly, the requirement to listen to each other's speaking was pointed out as being stressful because they wanted to speak better English. Lastly, as the speaking practice of the study was student-centered, the lack of feedback from the teacher was a disadvantage. The rest of the responses regarding the benefits and drawbacks of the MP3 speaking practice are referred to in Table 7.

TABLE 7

Summary of the Open-ended Questions for Speaking Practice[7]

	Questions	Responses
14	The advantages of MP3 speaking practice on the Cyworld Internet site	26 (30%) having chances to practice speaking English
		15 (17%) gaining confidence in English speaking
		10 (12%) being helpful to listen to other students' speaking practice
		9 (10%) useful for speaking
		8 (9%) being able to practice speaking repeatedly
		7 (8%) decreasing anxiety in speaking English
		5 (6%) increasing interest in studying English
		3 (3%) improving English pronunciation
		3 (3%) learning various English expressions
15	The disadvantages of MP3 speaking practice on the Cyworld Internet site	10 (26%) inconvenient to upload the files
		7 (18%) being stressful for better practice
		6 (15%) no disadvantage
		5 (13%) no feedback from the teacher
		5 (13%) unimportant content
		2 (5%) burden to practice during exam time
		2 (5%) many files by the same person on the board
		1 (3%) suggestions for English chatting
		1 (3%) suggestions for role play

* ( ) = %

[7] Some respondents gave more than one answer, and all the answers were listed.

Regarding the listening and speaking practice (Questions 16 to 17) (see Table 8), the participants mostly accepted that there were more advantages than disadvantages since they answered that they were able to learn various English expressions (33%) as well as to improve their listening (31%) and English pronunciation (18%). 69% of the respondents stated that there was no disadvantage regarding the listening and speaking practice.

Lastly, the open-ended questions 18 and 19 concern the advantages and disadvantages of 'selecting the best speaking sample practice' (see Table 9). 53% of the participants agreed that having opportunities to listen to other students' speaking samples was the greatest advantage (Q18). Another benefit was that listening to other samples made them motivated (15%). As for the disadvantages of this activity (Q19), 50% maintained that there were none. Another 30%, however, mentioned that this activity took up a considerable amount of time as they had to listen to many samples to select the best.

TABLE 8

Summary of the Open-ended Questions for Listening and Speaking Practice

	Questions	Responses
16	The advantages of listening/speaking practice on the Cyworld Internet site	17 (33%) learning various English expressions 16 (31%) improving listening 9 (18%) improving English pronunciation 6 (12%) increasing confidence and interest toward English 2 (4%) improving speaking 1 (2%) having free listening files
17	The disadvantages of listening/ speaking practice on the Cyworld Internet site	18 (69%) no disadvantages 4 (15%) taking a lot of time to practice 3 (12%) concentrating only on some expressions 1 (4%) no feedback from the teacher

* ( ) = %

TABLE 9

Summary of the Open-ended Questions for Selecting Speaking Sample Practice

	Questions	Responses
18	The advantages of 'the selecting the best speaking sample practice	25 (53%) having chances to listen to other students' speaking samples 7 (15%) being motivated 6 (13%) having chances for feedback from other speaking samples 5 (11%) learning new expressions 4 (9%) improving listening

19	The disadvantages of 'the selecting the best speaking sample practice'	15 (50%) no disadvantages 9 (30%) taking a lot of time 4 (13%) difficult to listen to many files 1 (3.3%) being subjective 1 (3.3%) suggestions for the dictation

* ( ) = %

In short, it seems that apart from the inconvenience of uploading the MP3 files, the students appeared to be satisfied with the MP3 speaking practice on the Cyworld text bulletin board as well as with the listening/speaking practice outside of the classroom although these were student-centered activities without feedback from the teacher.

V. DISCUSSION

The following discusses the results of the study. As there has been no previous attempt to use the MP3 player and the text bulletin board in the speaking area, it is difficult to compare the results of this study with those of previous ones. However, the present findings in terms of the attitudes of the participants toward MALL are mostly consistent with earlier research (Choi & Kim, 2006; Kim 2003; Thornton & Houser, 2005). As for the use of the text bulletin board, there has been no direct work to compare with the findings of this study as previous surveys mostly used the text bulletin board in the writing area. Nevertheless, the positive attitudes of the participants in the study toward the use of the text bulletin board for learning English are also consistent with past findings (S. Han, 2002; Lee, 2000; Song, 2006a).

Based on the positive attitudes toward speaking practice using the MP3 player and the text bulletin board, and the improved spoken performance of the participants in the post-speaking test, the results of the study seem to support the idea that student-centered speaking practice outside of the classroom could be useful for improving speaking competence. The use of the MP3 player and the text bulletin board also seems to enable EFL learners to practice both speaking and listening. Although the speaking practice of the study is not based on face-to-face interaction, the participants were at least able to practice speaking in an EFL context, where it is not easy to practice speaking. As explained earlier, the speaking processes of the EFL learners are not automatic, so students need practice to make these processes spontaneous. Considering this point, the major advantages of employing the MP3 player for speaking practice are as follows: Firstly, the students were at least able to express themselves verbally in English. The participants made the following

comments on the open-ended questions.

"I used to not to have chances to practice English speaking, but because of the speaking practice of the study, I was able to practice speaking at home or during the class break time. In order to practice speaking, I also spent some time to refer to other English books."[8]

"I have studied English almost 6 to 10 years. However, my English speaking hours for the last 10 years almost equal what I have practiced speaking because of the present speaking activity using an MP3 player."

"In the beginning, it was difficult to speak English, but as time went by, it was getting easier to do it, and I gained more confidence."

Secondly, the participants were able to listen and monitor their own speech by using the MP3 player. This is important because the actual movement of the vocal organs is one of the elements that improve speaking ability, as mentioned earlier by Bygate (1987) and Levelt (1989). The following is what the participants said regarding the open-ended questions.

"The speaking practice was useful to improve pronunciation as I was able to listen to my own pronunciation and to realize that there are pronunciations that I need to change."

The next advantage of the MP3 player for speaking practice is its portability since the students can practice speaking anywhere and at any time. Lastly, the MP3 player is commonly used by university students, though most of them use it only for listening to music rather than for speaking practice. In relation to this point, although the main focus of the practice of the present study was to improve speaking proficiency, the participants were also able to practice listening as they were able to upload and download the MP3 listening files onto the 'listening sub-board' of the text bulletin board. Listening to the English on the MP3 listening files of the 'listening sub-board' could act as a model for the participants regarding how to speak. This point is supported Brown (2001) who argues that

"Production and reception are quite simply two sides of the same coin; one cannot split the coin in two... Often one skill will reinforce another; we learn to speak, for example, in part by modeling what we hear, and we learn to write by examining what we can read" (p. 234).

The participants in the study also provided the following comments.

"Because I spoke what I listened to on the listening sample files, the expressions were remembered much more easily, and this also made me listen to the expressions more carefully."

"What I listened to became a model for the correct pronunciation and intonation, by repeating what I heard, the pronunciation improved."

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[8] Due to limited space, this paper cites only a few of the more typical student comments.

"This activity was useful to improve both speaking and listening at the same time."

Regarding the use of the Cyworld text bulletin board, the present study purposely chose to use it as it happens to be part of a trend among the younger generation. Secondly, it is easy for teachers to create a cyber space for English practice. Thirdly, as it is also possible to design different sub-boards on which students can practice different language skills simultaneously such as listening or speaking together, as in the present study. Listening and reading can also be practiced on the sub-boards of the text bulletin board (Song, 2006b). Lastly, as students can see each other's English practice on the board, it is highly motivating for them, as underlined by the students' responses to the questionnaire.

However, as the speaking practice of the study did not consist of face-to-face interaction, it is questionable whether it might also be useful for interactive conversation. Furthermore, the use of the MP3 player seems to be more appropriate for beginners or for early intermediate levels rather than for advanced learners in the EFL context, since they may prefer more interactive conversation practice. The various speaking practice methods using the MP3 player and the text bulletin board need to be researched further.

VI. CONCLUSION

The present study has attempted to investigate the impact of speaking practice employing the MP3 player and the Cyworld text bulletin board on speaking proficiency. The improved spoken performance of the participants in the post-speaking test in terms of TSE, total number of words, and total number of word types seems to support the idea that the speaking practice of the study was useful for the EFL learners to improve their speaking competence. The results of the questionnaire also showed the positive attitudes of the participants toward the speaking practice of the study. Before participating in the present research, the 78% of the participants did not practice speaking English for even one minute a day. However, by involving themselves in this study, all the participants were able to have an opportunity to practice speaking English. These findings may suggest to teachers and learners that this kind of student-centered speaking practice outside of the classroom at least provides a chance to practice English speaking in an EFL context. However, it also needs to be pointed out that the findings can not be generalized for all language learners as the data were limited to a small number of participants because of the impracticable situation on the study. Another thing is that the speaking practice of the study was not based on face-to-face interaction but on monologue or asynchronous speaking. Neither could the positive findings of the study be generalized in all the various speaking situations. For future studies, the different types of speaking practice, using the MP3 player and the text bulletin board for EFL learners, need to be investigated. Although

listening was not the main focus of the investigation, the present study also suggested how to practice listening with speaking simultaneously using an MP3 player and the text bulletin board. There could be other possible ways to practice speaking using the MP3 player and the text bulletin board, and these should be researched further.

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APPENDIX

Questionnaire for the Speaking Practice of the Study

1. How many hours did you practice speaking per day on average before participating in the speaking practice of the study?
   1) 3-4 hours 2) 1-2 hours 3) 30 minutes 4) 15 minutes 5) 0 minute
2. How many hours did you practice speaking per day on average after participating in the speaking practice of the study?
   1) 3-4 hours 2) 1-2 hours 3) 30 minutes 4) 15 minutes 5) 0 minute
3. How useful was the speaking practice of the study using the MP3 player and the Cyworld text bulletin board in improving your speaking?
   1) very much 2) much 3) little 4) very little
4. How useful was the 'Listen and speaking' practice in improving your speaking?
   1) very much 2) much 3) little 4) very little
5. How helpful was the 'Selecting the Best Speaking Sample' practice in improving your speaking?
   1) very much 2) much 3) little 4) very little
6. To what extent did the speaking practice of the study increase your interest in English speaking?
   1) very much 2) much 3) little 4) very little
7. How far did the speaking practice of the study decrease your anxiety toward English speaking?
   1) very much 2) much 3) little 4) very little
8. How often did you refer to other resources (for example, dictionaries, the Internet or a grammar book) when you had problems in speaking?
   1) very much 2) much 3) little 4) very little
9. How often did you listen to other participants' MP3 speaking samples on the Cyworld text bulletin board?
   1) very much 2) much 3) little 4) very little
10. Once you had listened to other speaking samples, how often did you reply?
    1) very much 2) much 3) little 4) very little
11. To what extent did the other participants' speaking samples motivate your speaking practice?
    1) very much 2) much 3) little 4) very little
12. How much do you want to continue with the speaking practice of the study?
    1) very much 2) much 3) little 4) very little
13. How much do you think your speaking will improve if you continue with the speaking practice of the study?
    1) very much 2) much 3) little 4) very little
14. What are the advantages of the MP3 speaking-pal practice of the study?
15. What are the disadvantages of the MP3 speaking-pal practice of the study?

16. What are the advantages of the 'Listen and Speak' practice of the study?
17. What are the disadvantages of the 'Listen and Speak' practice of the study?
18. What are the advantages of the 'Selecting the Best Speaking Samples' practice of the study?
19. What are the disadvantages of the 'Selecting the Best Speaking Samples' practice of the study?

Examples in: English
Applicable Languages: English
Applicable Levels: Tertiary education

Jeong-Weon Song
Dept. of Practical English
Hanyang Cyber University
17, Haengdang-dong, Seongdong-gu
Seoul, 133-791, Korea
Tel: (02) 2290-2855
Fax: (02) 2290-2828
Email: edujws@hotmail.com

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