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| | ,  10(4):  49-64 |
| | 2013-03-25 |

# Utilizing a Preparatory Online Oral Discussion Forum to Improve In-class Group Discussions

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**Abstract:**

This is a follow-up to a previous paper on the use of the Moodle LMS and its discussion forum module to enhance the learning environment in EFL communication strategies courses. Blended learning (b-learning) environments, the integration of in-person classroom activities and outside-of-class computer-mediated communication (CMC) activities, are becoming more prevalent in EFL courses. As all EFL instructors know a premium is placed on in-class time. In order to help maximize the productive skill usage during the lessons, some of the receptive and productive skill activities have been able to be moved out of the classroom.

In this brief study asynchronous oral recordings in online discussion forum postings were used to prepare for in-class discussions. Receptive skills could also be practiced by listening to and/or reading classmates' pre-discussion postings on a given topic. This was thought to better enable them to synthesize their own opinions before participating in face-to-face (F2F) group discussions. The topics and themes were student-generated, therefore providing higher interest value and authentic content. The writer believes that scaffolding pre-discussion oral forum postings helped prepare students to more actively participate in subsequent in-class discussions on the same topic. This quasi-experimental study will investigate the potential benefits of this combination.

**Keywords:** group discussions, online discussion forum, scaffolding, blended learning, Moodle

## 1. Background Introduction:

Integrating technology to improve the learning process and the growing trend for blended learning (b-learning) environments offers teachers many new options to better utilize in-class time, while also increasing the students' motivation to study outside of class. The scaffolding effect of using oral submissions in an online discussion forum to better facilitate active participation in subsequent face-to-face (F2F) classroom discussions

showed positive results when undertaken in a 3rd year Research and Presentation course which focused on oral skill development.

The pressures of communicating in real time for many EFL students often results in grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation errors for learners. In addition, learners may not have adequate contextual knowledge to actively participate in a F2F discussion (Lewis, 2011). The combination of text or oral postings in an online discussion forum with conventional F2F group discussions is a natural extension to create a b-learning environment for students to improve their L2 communication proficiency. In addition, the online discussion forum facilitates more in-class productive target language usage, because students are better prepared in terms of content and vocabulary to readily participate in the F2F group discussions. This is particularly true for some less confident or reticent students.

Students can engage in this asynchronous communication outside of the classroom at their own pace. Creating a non-threatening learning environment where there is still social interaction between learners (Vygotsky, 1978) through the online discussion forum enables them to enhance their comprehensible input, linguistic and contextual knowledge, on a given topic prior to the in-class discussion. The collaborative nature of scaffolding the online discussion forum with the ensuing group discussion encourages students to proactively share and receive knowledge, thus increasing their learner autonomy. "The use of collaborative learning in the classroom can create an egalitarian environment, in which students take control of their own learning and become active generators of knowledge" (p. 60). (Little, 1991 as quoted in Birch & Poyatos Matas, 2002)

Mendelson's study "showed that instructors can scaffold productive student participation in these discussions first by having students prepare their contributions in online forums prior to class, and then by shaping class discussions to provide students with opportunities to successfully share and expand on those contributions" (Mendelson, 2010, p. 26). Several researchers have suggested that transfer-of-learning depends on how much the learners feel the learning in the two different contexts are relevant to each other (Mendelson, 2010). Engle, Nguyen, & Mendelson (2009) suggest, "that instructors can facilitate transfer by "expansively framing" learning activities to encourage students to perceive those activities as relevant beyond their immediate context" (Engle, Nguyen, & Mendelson (2009) quoted in Mendelson, 2010, p. 28).

In addition to increased participation and language production in the in-class discussion, the scaffolding of these two activity components also offers students three other added benefits of exposure to multiple literacies, providing authentic content and engaging students in collaborative work (Shoffner, M. 2007).

## 2. Procedure and Data Analysis:

A quasi-experimental study of the students' oral communicative skills was undertaken

in an intermediate level 3ʳᵈ year Research and Presentation course.　The objective of this course was to help students improve their listening and speaking skills for the purpose of making presentations as well as general communication.　Although the main focus of this course was on listening and speaking, all four macro skills were integrated into the syllabus.　The name of the course is somewhat of a misnomer, as the main content of the in-class activities was group discussion and presentation skill practice.　Research training was not specifically dealt with in the course.　The total enrollment for this elective course was 18 Faculty of Business Administration students.　The course met once a week for a 90-minute class lesson and typically required the students to do about 120 minutes of class preparation between lessons.　One of the weekly homework activities was to participate in an online discussion forum with the other members of the class.　The online forum required students to post either a new topic or a reply to a classmate's topic a minimum of once a week.　The posts could be done in either text or oral form.　The instructor constantly monitored the learners' interaction and initiated follow-up discussions and feedback on the content of their weekly forum postings.　Students were strongly encouraged to maintain weekly participation in the forum as a core requirement for the course (Matsune, 2010). The student-generated forum topics generally focused on current events and student lifestyle and were often followed up with in-class group discussions.

　　In this brief investigation four F2F in-class group discussions topics were observed, recorded and evaluated.　A quasi-experimental analysis was done in two designs.　In one format students completed two oral pre-discussion online forum postings that were each followed by subsequent small group discussions on the same topic.　In the second format two group discussion topics were completed without any corresponding oral pre-discussion online forum submissions.　While all enrolled students were observed in the various activities, for the purpose of this study the performances of only six subjects were analyzed. This is because they were the only subjects out of a class of 18 students to attend and participate in all six of the activities that were examined.　The six subjects did not necessarily participate with the same group members for all the four F2F discussions, but they did complete all the activities.

　　The measurements were taken using four categories out of an original five-category rubric presented by Underhill (1997).　The four categories that were evaluated were content, fluency, grammar, and vocabulary.　The content category was further modified to include coherence and cohesion as tested in the Australian Assessment of Communicative English Skills (**access:**) test.　A description of the original scoring criteria and descriptors used in the **access:** sub test is given in Appendix A.　In Underhill's original set the category of pronunciation was also evaluated, but this was omitted for the purpose of this investigation as the pronunciation performance was a relatively constant variable across the subjects that were observed.　The aforementioned criteria were further modified to more closely match the level range of the students in this investigation.

**2a. Scoring Criteria for the Four Language Categories**

The following are the modified criteria and descriptors used by this instructor to score the subjects in the six activities.

FLUENCY

5 = Speaks fluently with only occasional hesitation.　Speech may be slightly slower than that of a native speaker.

4 = Speaks slower than native speakers, with some hesitations and groping for words that impedes communication slightly.

3 = A marked degree of hesitation, due to groping for words or inability to phrase utterances easily, impedes communication.

2 = Speech is fragmented due to unacceptably frequent and long hesitations, pauses or false starts that seriously impedes communication.

1 = Fluency only evident in the most common formulaic phrases.

GRAMMAR

5 = Able to communicate effectively using a broad range of structures with only minor errors.　Displays accurate grammar usage.

4 = Generally demonstrates control of a variety of structures with only occasional minor errors.

3 = Is able to use a range of basic structures.　Errors may be frequent and may sometimes interfere with communication.

2 = Is able to use only a narrow range of basic structures.　Errors are likely to be frequent and intrusive but limited communication is possible.

1 = Severe limitations of grammar prevent all but the most basic communication.

VOCABULARY

5 = Has a wide vocabulary.　Displays accurate word usage.　Is able to use circumlocution easily and effectively.

4 = Vocabulary is broad enough to allow the subject to express most ideas well.　Minor word usage errors.

3 = Vocabulary is adequate to express most simple ideas but limitations prevent expression of more sophisticated ideas.　Word usage errors may be frequent and may sometimes interfere with communication.

2 = Limited vocabulary limits expression to simple ideas only.　Circumlocution is laborious and often ineffective.

1 = Very limited vocabulary.　Some difficulty to express even the most basic ideas.

CONTENT, COHERENCE AND COHESION

5 = Content is insightful, logical and relevant to the discussion topic. Discourse is coherent. Cohesive devices are only occasionally misused.

4 = Content is logical and relevant to the discussion topic. Discourse is generally coherent. Cohesive devices may be limited in range or sometimes used inappropriately or inaccurately.

3 = Content is marginally relevant to the discussion topic. Meaningful information is limited. Usually able to link sentences using more common cohesive devices. Longer utterances may be incoherent.

2 = Minimal relevant content. The information is seriously limited. Some evidence of connected discourse but the overall effect is disjointed. Cannot sustain coherent structures in longer utterances.

1 = Only able to use only isolated words and formulaic phrases. Lacks any coherence.

## 2b. Scoring of the F2F Group Discussions and Online Forum Postings

**Two F2F Group Discussions WITHOUT the Scaffolding Benefit of the Preparatory Oral Online Discussion Forum Postings**

| Student | Mean scores for the two discussion topics | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Fluency | Grammar | Vocabulary | Content | **Total** |
| A | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 12 |
| B | 3.5 | 3 | 2.5 | 3.5 | 12.5 |
| C | 3 | 2 | 2 | 2.5 | 9.5 |
| D | 2.5 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 8.5 |
| E | 3.5 | 3.5 | 3 | 3 | 13 |
| F | 3.5 | 3.5 | 3.5 | 4 | 14.5 |
| Group Mean Scores | 19 | 17 | 16 | 18 | |

The topics for the two group discussions without corresponding pre-discussion oral online forum postings were "Mobile music players and safety" and "Recent inventions". Additional data on the six students' English proficiency based on their scores in the GTEC Speaking and Listening Test can be seen in Appendix B. In general the GTEC Speaking and Listening Test data supported the observed speaking proficiency for most of the students in the F2F group discussions.

**Two Asynchronous Preparatory Oral Online Discussion Forum Postings**

| Student | Mean scores for the two oral forum postings | | | | |
|---------|---------|---------|------------|---------|-------|
| | Fluency | Grammar | Vocabulary | Content | **Total** |
| A | 4 | 3.5 | 4 | 4 | 15.5 |
| B | 4 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 14 |
| C | 3.5 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 13.5 |
| D | 3 | 2.5 | 3 | 3.5 | 12 |
| E | 4 | 3.5 | 3 | 4 | 14.5 |
| F | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 16 |
| Group Mean Scores | 22.5 | 19.5 | 20 | 23.5 | |

This data shows the evaluation of two oral forum postings in the discussion forum module of the Moodle LMS. The online discussion forum enabled students to proactively control their learning by choosing meaningful and authentic content as well as adjusting the level of difficulty of the discussion topics to their own language proficiency. The voice recordings were posted either using the built-in Nanogong applet or attaching a mp3 file using a different recording application such as Audacity. Screenshots of sample oral online postings can be seen in Appendix C. Each posting was a minimum of 150 words of text or a 90-second voice recording, but the majority of postings were closer to 200 words of text or about 120 seconds. The online discussion forum integrated the four macro skills into an out-of-class preparation component for the course.

In some cases students reported that they re-recorded their oral discussion forum submissions one or more times before posting them either because that were unsatisfied with the quality of their English fluency and content or the audio quality of their recording.

**Two F2F Group Discussions WITH the Scaffolding Benefit of the Preparatory Oral Online Discussion Forum Postings**

| Student | Mean scores for the two discussion topics | | | | |
|---------|---------|---------|------------|---------|-------|
| | Fluency | Grammar | Vocabulary | Content | **Total** |
| A | 3.5 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 13.5 |
| B | 3.5 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 13.5 |
| C | 3 | 2 | 2.5 | 3 | 10.5 |
| D | 2.5 | 2 | 2.5 | 2.5 | 9.5 |
| E | 3.5 | 3.5 | 3 | 4 | 14 |
| F | 4 | 3.5 | 3.5 | 4 | 15 |
| Group Mean Scores | 20 | 17 | 17.5 | 21.5 | |

The topics for the two small group discussions with corresponding pre-discussion oral online forum postings were "Job-hunting" and "Year-end plans". Again, the GTEC Speak-

ing and Listening Test data generally supported the individual differences in observed listening and speaking proficiency for most of the students in the F2F group discussions.

## 3. Observations and Interpretations:

In general the evaluation and observations supported the natural expectation that the overall F2F discussion performance was slightly better when scaffolded with pre-discussion oral forum participation.　This can be seen by referring to the group mean scores as well as most students' individual score totals.

In the cases where the students engaged in the in-class group discussion without having done the preparatory discussion forum activity, a general observation was that the pace of the discussion was slower and quality of the content was restricted to expressing only simple comments or opinions.

On the other hand, the group mean scores for the in-class group discussions scaffolded with the pre-discussion oral forum postings on the same topics showed a better fluency and content evaluation.　There was evidence that internalized information and knowledge gained through the online discussion forum were used in the ensuing F2F group discussion.

The online forum posting provided the students with additional preparation and practice to formulate their individual opinions before engaging in the in-class discussions. The asynchronous online communication provided a less stressful and more comfortable means for shy students to engage their classmates in idea exchange before the conventional F2F group discussion (Hansen, 2001).　On its own the preparatory discussion forum also promoted learner autonomy and self-confidence to proactively interact with their classmates, thus improving the F2F group discussion and the overall classroom dynamics (Mynard, J. 2008).　It was particularly evident that the more reticent students were more confident to express or reiterate their comments in the group discussions after they had previously recorded their opinions in the oral forum postings.　Furthermore, in this scaffolding design it was also observed that the higher proficiency students were better able to remain relevant and on-topic with their comments throughout the discussion.　This was perhaps due to their pre-discussion reflection and the online input.

Based on the observations from the two discussion activity designs a number of other communication behaviors were observed.　Bygate categorizes these strategies in two groups; facilitation techniques and compensation techniques (Bygate, 2001 quoted in Lewis 2011).

　Facilitation techniques:
　- Simplification ― avoiding complex structures
　- Ellipsis ― omitting parts of a sentence
　- Formulaic expressions ― 'chunks' and set phrases that are often functional

- Fillers and hesitation devices ― phrases and sounds that buy the speaker thinking time

Compensation techniques:
- self-correction
- false starts
- repetition
- rephrasing

With the two F2F group discussions that the students engaged in without the online preparatory discussion forum postings the facilitation techniques were more prevalent and the compensation techniques were generally absent.   In particular the simplification and ellipsis techniques were observed.   This appeared to be a reduction strategy that students utilized to compensate for their anxiety or the time pressure to engage with the other members spontaneously.   Furthermore in these cases, the students appeared more hesitant in their participation which resulted in numerous lapses during the discussions.   As confidence and interpersonal skills are inherently important in F2F in-class group discussion, this may be one of the reasons some students have lower production particularly when they lacked preparation or were "less rehearsed" in articulating their opinions.

With the two F2F group discussions that the students engaged in with the pre-discussion oral forum participation, both types of strategies were apparent.   In addition to the facilitation techniques that were observed in the discussion-only design, some compensation techniques were also noticeable.   In particular the use of repetition and rephrasing were more prevalent.   The communication techniques were especially apparent in the asynchronous pre-discussion oral forum postings, but also evident in the ensuing group discussions on the same topics.

McDonell (1992) believes that students improve their language proficiency engaging in group discussions because certain student elements exist.   This writer also observed some of these student behaviors in the F2F discussions (both with or without the preparatory oral online forum discussions).   They included:

・had better listening skills as a result of responding and acting on what has been said
・receive immediate response to their participation
・consult with each other to seek opinions and information
・articulate their needs and interests
・exchange information about ideas, feelings, and needs
・focus with conversational partners on meaning and what is appropriate, rather than on accuracy

The additional student conditions that were particularly apparent in the F2F discus-

sions that followed preparatory oral online forum discussions included:

・have more comprehensible input through peer interactions
・build on the talk of others through elaboration and/or restatement
・relate new information about language to existing information
・initiate their own questions
・become aware of audience, purpose, and social context
・make use of their own natural learning power in a positive and accepting environment
(McDonell 1992b: 60-61 quoted in Birch, Poyatos Matas 2002)

## 4. Conclusion:

It was assumed that students taking this 3$^{rd}$ year optional course wanted maximum opportunities for communicative interaction with the teacher and their peers.  By incorporating a b-learning environment, the teacher was able to expand the opportunity for the students in engage in authentic communication both inside and outside the classroom.  Learning is a social process (Vygotsky, 1978) and students were able to interact in asynchronous and synchronous settings which made the most of the individual students' linguistic strengths, perspectives and knowledge.  The social interaction in both the online discussion forum and F2F group discussions were positively received by the students.

As the cursory data indicates, the student performance in the group discussions was often better when the subjects had also participated in the preparatory online discussion forum.  It is said that the language itself should be meaningful to the learners in order to promote learning.   The language generated in the pre-discussion oral forum appeared quite appropriate for fostering this type of learning environment.   This topic content was both authentic and intellectually stimulating.  When scaffolded with subsequent F2F group discussion the two-stage design promoted the development of a socially supportive learning environment which could be cultivated further as the semester progressed (Becker & Ravitz, 1999 quoted in Matsune, 2010).   The scaffolding was also a better way to increase comprehensible input for the students which in turn improved their overall ability and motivation to use the target language.  It is hoped these factors resulted in enhanced language learning.

The observations here supported similar findings by Mendelson (2010) that scaffolding pre-discussion oral forum participation helped students to successfully share and expand on a greater variety of relevant content in the ensuing F2F group discussion.   In addition the students appeared to be able to express their comments more clearly and concisely than when they engaged in group discussions without the preparatory online discussion forum.  This counters Abrams' feeling that asynchronous discussion boards offer little to improve F2F discussion (Abrams, 2003).   While some may feel that neglecting to insist on accuracy and linguistic form in the language skills used in these activities is unproductive, it has also

been said that grammatical form and vocabulary will naturally improve as students gain confidence in their communicative competence and fluency (Matsune, 2010). As Lewis (2011) points out native speakers use the same facilitation and compensation techniques as were observed in this investigation. She states, "Many students are reluctant to speak in a foreign language because they worry about making mistakes. By pointing out the fact that even native speakers are constantly correcting and reformulating what they say, we can encourage our students to take more risks in L2 and realize that they don't need to speak in perfectly-formed, grammatically-correct, complex sentences" (p. 48).

Although the results are far from being conclusive, the use of this type of preparatory CMC activity to improve the discussion performance gave the students an additional tool to utilize for their broader communication practice. In addition, the teacher has another avenue to communicate and interact with the students outside of the class time.

## Limitations and Future Considerations

Despite positive indicators in this quasi-experimental study, there were obviously a number of problems and shortcomings which put the validity and reliability of any results into question. To begin with, as Hayati, A and Askari E. (2008) mention, "...teachers scoring the students' oral proficiency subjectively is neither reliable nor valid, and so the given scores cannot present the true ability of the subjects in oral language proficiency (p. 7)." The use of neutral raters as opposed to the course instructor would lessen the subjective assessment in the various categories of the scoring criteria. Other deficiencies included the small sample size. Full participation by all the enrolled students in all preparatory and in-class activities would also obviously have improved the reliability of the observed results. Although the modified scoring criteria and descriptors were similar to those commonly used to evaluate speaking performance, perhaps more specific measurements could be devised to better match the context of the observed activities.

In addition to addressing the aforementioned limitations in this study, another context for examination could be comparing text versus oral pre-discussion forum postings and their influence on subsequent F2F group discussions. That being said, a more thorough future investigation of this b-learning context may provide us with evidence and ideas to help EFL students to further improve their overall communication proficiency.

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**Appendix A:** Australian Assessment of Communicative English Skills (*access:*) Test: Scoring criteria and descriptors, oral interaction sub-test, December 1992

FLUENCY

6 = Speech is as fluent as, and of a speed similar to, an educated native speaker.

5 = Speaks fluently with only occasional hesitation.　Speech may be slightly slower than that of a native speaker.

4 = Speaks more slowly than native speakers, with some hesitations and groping for words though without impeding communication.

3 = A marked degree of hesitation, due to groping for words or inability to phrase utterances easily, impedes communication.

2 = Speech is fragmented due to unacceptably frequent and long hesitations, pauses or false starts.

1 = Fluency only evident in the most common formulaic phrases.

RESOURCES OF GRAMMAR

6 = Range and control of a native speaker.

5 = Able to communicate effectively using a broad range of structures with only minor errors.

4 = Generally demonstrates control of a variety of structures with only occasional minor errors.

3 = Is able to use a range of basic structures.　Errors may be frequent and may sometimes interfere with communication.

2 = Is able to use only a narrow range of basic structures.　Errors are likely to be frequent and intrusive but limited communication is possible.

1 = Severe limitations of grammar prevent all but the most basic communication.

VOCABULARY

6 = Uses a wide range of vocabulary precisely, appropriately and effectively.

5 = Has a wide vocabulary. Is able to use circumlocution easily and effectively.

4 = Vocabulary is broad enough to allow the candidate to express most ideas well.

3 = Vocabulary is adequate to express most simple ideas but limitations prevent expression of more sophisticated ideas.

2 = Limited vocabulary restricts expression to simple ideas only.　Circumlocution is laborious and often ineffective.

1 = Very limited vocabulary.　Able to express only the most basic ideas.

COHERENCE AND COHESION

6 = Discourse is coherent.　Cohesive devices are so smoothly and effectively managed as to attract attention.

5 = Discourse is coherent.　Cohesive devices are only occasionally misused.

4 = Discourse is generally coherent.　Cohesive devices may be limited in range or sometimes used inappropriately or inaccurately.

3 = Usually able to link sentences using more common cohesive devices. Longer utterances may be incoherent.

2 = Some evidence of connected discourse but overall effect is disjointed. Cannot sustain coherent structures in longer utterances.

1 = Able to use only isolated words and formulaic phrases.

APPROPRIACY

6 = Uses language as appropriately and effectively as an educated native speaker.

5 = Sensitive to register requirements. Generally responds appropriately to unpredictable turns in conversation.

4 = Demonstrates good awareness of social conventions and has some ability to respond to unpredictable turns in conversation, though may sound unnatural.

3 = Has some awareness of social conventions but often has difficulty responding appropriately to unpredictable turns in conversation.

2 = Has limited awareness of social conventions. Essentially unable to cope with unpredictable turns in conversation.

1 = Essentially unable to respond appropriately to register requirements.

INTELLIGIBILITY

6 = Speech can be followed effortlessly by the interlocutor.

5 = Speech causes the interlocutor only occasional strain and can generally be followed effortlessly.

4 = Speech requires some concentration and may require occasional clarification by the interlocutor.

3 = Speech requires concentration and/or clarification by/on the part of the interlocutor.

2 = Speech can only be understood with constant effort. Repeated clarification may be needed.

1 = Speech often unintelligible even with considerable effort on the part of the interlocutor.

COMPREHENSION (live version only)

6 = Rarely misunderstands, except occasionally when speech is very rapid or ambiguous.

5 = Appears to have only occasional problems in understanding.

4 = Appears to be able to understand most speech but may require repetition of details.

3 = Generally able to get gist of most speech but may require repetition. More comfortable with slower rates of speech.

2 = Often has difficulty understanding utterances. May require frequent repetition or reformulation.

1 = Demonstrates only intermittent comprehension even of simplified speech.

OVERALL COMMUNICATIVE EFFECTIVENESS

Scale of 1 to 6 (6 = near native flexibility and range; 1 = limited).

(Source: O'Loughlin, K. J. (2001). *The equivalence of direct and semi-direct speaking tests*.)

**Appendix B:** GTEC Speaking and Listening results for the 6 subjects (Administered on April 28, 2011)

| Subject | Listening | Speaking | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| A | 94 | 116 | 210 |
| B | 109 | 125 | 234 |
| C | 99 | 122 | 221 |
| D | 80 | 106 | 186 |
| E | 120 | 116 | 236 |
| F | 159 | 124 | 283 |

GTEC Scoring criteria and relative level of proficiency for each skill:

| Score | Listening | Speaking |
|---|---|---|
| 250 | Able to understand complicated discussions in meetings where English is spoken exclusively | Able to confidently communicate in English in almost any complex situation |
| 240 | | |
| 230 | | |
| 220 | | |
| 210 | | Able to hold complex discussions and make presentations or speeches |
| 200 | | |
| 190 | No problems understanding meetings or telephone conversations in English | |
| 180 | | Able to use English in general work situations, such as in management, discussions or negotiations |
| 170 | Able to generally follow English meetings; however, may have some difficulty understanding the entire thread of discussion | |
| 160 | | |
| 150 | Meetings using English may be difficult; however, able to travel or shop overseas using English without much difficulty | Able to provide simple instructions to subordinates and colleagues; or to ask for specialties in restaurants |
| 140 | | |
| 130 | Able to follow conversations when making hotel or restaurant reservations, or when shopping | Able to communicate in English when shopping or making reservations when traveling overseas |
| 120 | | |
| 110 | Able to understand approximately 50% when traveling overseas | Able to speak English in fixed formats, such as when making reservations, speaking on the phone, or when shopping |
| 100 | | |
| 90 | Able to understand simple phrases; however, will experience difficulty in conversational settings | Able to order in a restaurant; however, may experience some difficulty |
| 80 | | |
| 70 | | Would have difficulty speaking English, even in a simple context |
| 60 | | |
| 0–50 | Able to understand only when words and simple phrases are spoken slowly | |

Source: GTEC Evaluation of Four Fundamental Skills Retrieved on April 20, 2012 from http://www.benesse.co.jp/gtec/english/test/score.html

**Appendix C:** Sample Preparatory Oral Online Discussion Forum Postings
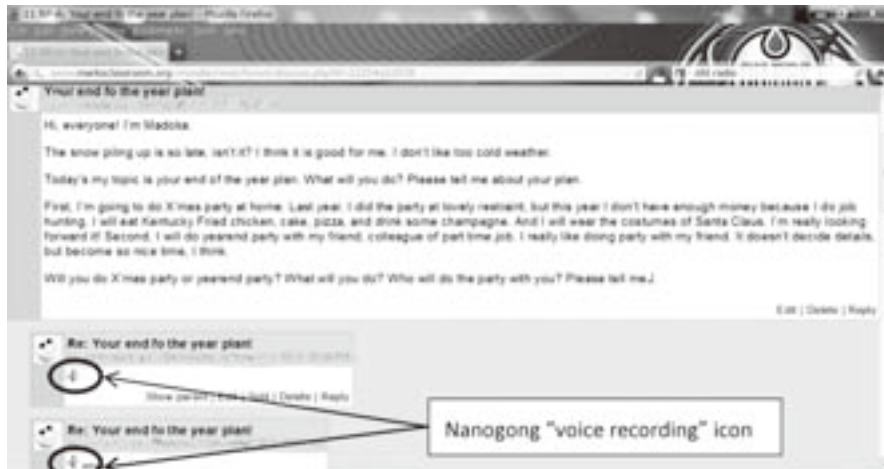




Note: The Nanogong applet can be installed in the discussion forum editor to enable voice recording and playback. The forum editor can also allow file attachments thus providing the additional option of attaching mp3 format voice recording files created by recording applications such as Audacity.

Sources: Moodle LMS (Version 1.9). [LMS computer software] Available open-source software at http://moodle.org, NanoGong (Version 4.0) [Audio editor computer software]. Department of Computer Science and Engineering at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology. Available open-source software from http://gong.ust.hk/nanogong/ and Audacity (Version 2.0.3) [Audio editor computer software]. Available open-source software at SourceForge.net