



## THE USE OF PUBLIC SPEAKING TO PROMOTE CONFIDENCE IN LEARNING ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

**Irma Wahyuny Ibrahim<sup>i</sup>,**

**Nor Syahiza Shahabani**

Akademi Pengajian Bahasa,

Universiti Teknologi MARA,

Shah Alam, Malaysia

### **Abstract:**

Students in a public higher learning institution in Selangor, Malaysia (a HND program in Electronics Engineering) had low self-confidence level in the English Language. Although they were excellent in their Engineering subjects and managed to get scholarships to further their studies overseas, they always turned down the offers due to their lack of self-confidence communicating in the English Language. Lecturer had incorporated public speaking lessons in the English Language syllabus from 2007 until 2010 as an effort to instill confidence in every student. There were 32 hours of lessons with two hours duration for each class. 385 students experienced the public speaking components and 100 students answered the questionnaire. The quantitative data have been collected at the end of the research. Some of the findings are 96% of the students stated that speaking ability was their main weakness compared to Listening, Reading and Writing abilities, 85% believed that being able to converse in the English Language was crucial for their better future. 87% agreed that Public Speaking component boosted up their confidence level. The number of students studying overseas increased since they had gained enough confidence communicating in the English Language.

**Keywords:** public speaking, promote confidence, learning

### **1. Introduction**

#### **1.1 Background of Study**

Effective lecturers will realise that confidence is needed for their students to perform their skills in the English Language. From the four skills in the English Language, which are, Listening, Reading, Speaking and Writing, it is believed that Speaking skill requires confidence more than the other skills. Confidence will determine the students' successfulness in conveying their messages either in every day's conversation or in

---

<sup>i</sup> Correspondence: email [irma.wxy@gmail.com](mailto:irma.wxy@gmail.com), [iza\\_shah74@yahoo.com](mailto:iza_shah74@yahoo.com)

classroom presentations. Students from a public higher learning institution in Selangor, Malaysia (an HND program in Electronics Engineering) have inadequacy problems in English Language. Most students consider to be intermediate students in English Language since they are non-native speakers, rarely or never practice English outside their classroom and managed to get mediocre result in English Language in their SPM (formal final examination in secondary school). The majority of them were young male adult (90%), with an age range of 18-20 years. Although they were excellent in their Engineering subjects, managed to get scholarship to further their studies overseas but they always turned down the offer due to their lack of self-confidence communicating in the English Language.

## 1.2 Objectives

This research is an attempt to develop self confidence in the students in a public higher learning institution in Selangor, Malaysia. The study included using public speaking lessons in the English Language syllabus. Public Speaking lessons are believed to be able to boost up the students' confidence level in speaking skill. Robert (2007) pointed out once the students manage to deliver information in front of an audience, the students' confidence level will increase tremendously. The study was held in the classroom setting since students are believed to be more comfortable in such a controlled environment (MacIntyre et al., 2001). The findings of this study will make the educators aware about the importance of incorporating Public Speaking component in the English Language syllabus as to improve the effectiveness of learning the English Language. Based on the objective of the study, this research attempts to answer the following questions:

1. What are the learners' perception and attitude on their public speaking skill?
2. What are the learners' perception and attitude of Public Speaking on their social lives?
3. What are the learners' perception and attitude on Public Speaking in order to improve their confidence level?

## 2. Literature Review

Speaking is considered as public task, where the students will be exposed to embarrassment if their initial messages are not properly understood by others (MacIntyre, Baker, Clement, & Conrod, (2001)) and when they feel that they are being evaluated by others ([Yaikhong; Usaha](#), 2012). Paalhar (2009) pointed out students suffer from lack of confidence, because they feel they are inferior speakers compared to others and this anxiety will affect their speaking skill. Two studies from Koch & Terrell (1991); MacIntyre & Gardner (1991) found out that speaking or communicating in the second language is indeed anxiety provoking.

Some L2 learners may find learning English is a burden and stressful (Wu, 2010) because learning English is not an easy process due to their socio-cultural barriers ([Hewagodage](#), & [O'Neill](#), 2010), however some may find it exciting and interesting when

they have certain targets and reasons to do it. Learners may want to learn language skills and also the skills to effectively present and convey messages when these skills become important to them. For instance, learners who prepare themselves to study abroad may find knowing English and being able to communicate in English effectively is a must and is a requirement. That cultivates interest amongst these learners to learn and acquire the language. Yet, the process of teaching and learning English language has to be carried out appropriately and systematically (Wu, 2010) with the existence of a proper public speaking class because as an L2 learner, not only the knowledge and skills of the language are important but also the courage and the confidence to speak up outside of their classroom contexts and settings. Jakelova (2012) mentioned in her study that those who have public speaking skills will be offered a good job in comparison to those who are less competent. Therefore, with the public speaking learning opportunity that these learners possess and the support from the instructors and peers (Riedel, 2012; [Kovac & Sirkovic](#), 2012) could increase learners' confidence level that is, the confidence to learn the language and later the confidence to apply the language in a written form and also verbally in public. [Kovac & Sirkovic](#) (2012) also found out that learners become more aware of the skills required in oral presentation when the class involves peer evaluation to assess the presenter.

As these L2 learners begin to know and understand English language through their formal English class, learners will slowly develop their language skills to communicate. Additionally, with the practices carried out ([Bass](#), 2010) in class, learners could later increase their confidence level to interact with people in public. Nevertheless, public speaking in English could also lead to anxiety and concern especially amongst L2 learners because they fear of the language ([Yaikhong & Usaha](#), 2012) and also because what you present represents you and reflects who you are. Thus, having a formal class on public speaking assists many L2 learners in pursuing their ambition to successfully deliver message in public, voice out points of views amongst their contacts and also manage to put forth professional arguments in public or in a meeting team. John (2012); Shi & Farooq (2012); Rogers & [King](#), (2012) found out in the research that those who undergo public speaking class are able to deliver speech in public compared to those who do not. All these speech activities can be attained when L2 learners have the confidence with the subject content and also the most important, they have to have the confidence to deliver the content publicly and orally.

Moreover, since a public speaking class offers many guidelines and skills such as how to plan the speech, practice the speech, engage with the members of the floor, be aware of body language and facial expressions, think positively, cope with nerves and so forth, learners will later become confident and compelling speakers. These guidelines and skills which are imparted in public speaking class are very important as they help L2 learners to achieve confidence to speak up ([Bhattacharyya](#) and [Patil](#), 2010). Thus, it creates opportunities in their future career and also as they are signed up to study abroad.

### 3. Methodology

Lecturer has incorporated public speaking lessons in the English Language syllabus for final semester students, starting from 2007 until 2010 as an effort to instill confidence in every student. There were 32 hours of lessons of public speaking, which run for two hours in each class duration. Towards the end of the semester, students needed to present one ceremonial speech and one informative speech for assessments. All speeches have been recorded for students to watch and learn their mistakes. The lecturer will discuss on how he or she will evaluate the students before speech presentations. The evaluation form will be also given to the students for peer evaluation. As many as 385 students experienced the public speaking components and 100 students are picked randomly to complete the questionnaire for this study.

The sample was made up of 100 students in their final semester. These students voluntarily agreed to participate in this research. The reason for choosing this group of students, mainly because the final semester students were more aware about their needs to further their studies or join the workforce once they graduated from this college. The quantitative data have been collected at the end of the research. The questionnaire consists of 10 statements and 2 short-answer questions. The responses for 10 statements are measured by using a five-point Likert scale: 5 for “strongly agree”, 4 for “agree”, 3 for “undecided”, 2 for “disagree” and 1 for “strongly disagree”.

### 4. Findings

The questionnaire focused on three sections. The first section was on students’ perception and attitude on their current public speaking skill and other learning skills, which are called Reading, Listening and Writing. The second section was on students’ perception and attitude on the importance of having Public Speaking skill on their social life and also their future career. The third section was on students’ perception and attitude on how Public Speaking improve their confidence level.

#### 4.1 What are the learners’ perception and attitude on their public speaking skill?

Figure 1 shows the result for students’ perception and attitude on their public speaking skill, 96% of the students stated that speaking ability is their main weakness compared to Listening, Reading and Writing abilities. 68% of the students rated their speaking ability as ‘weak’, 20% rated themselves as ‘average’ and 12% as undecided. These students have been studying English Language for 11 years and yet, more than half of the participants of the questionnaire believed that their speaking skill is below average. This situation is supported by studies by Bueno, Madrid, & McLaren, (2006) cited by Lai-Mei Leong & Seyedeh Masoumeh (2017) that a lot of students of the English language were not able to converse in the language properly and were not being understood by others even though they have learnt the language for many years. This issue may have occurred – though the students have been exposed to learning the language skills for many years - due to the

specific focus provided by the language instructors or the instruction system itself in which language instructors are more into guiding and coaching the students on the other three language skills namely listening, reading and writing (Yu, Song, & Miao, 2019).

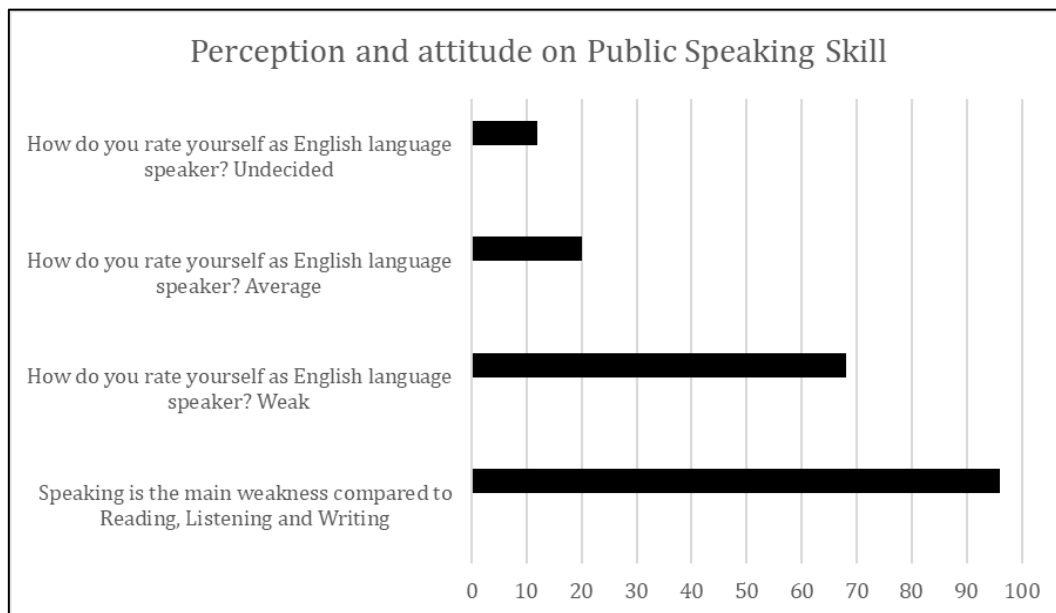


Figure 1: Bar chart showing the learners' perception and attitude on their public speaking skill

#### 4.2 What are the learners' perception and attitude of their Public Speaking skill on their social lives?

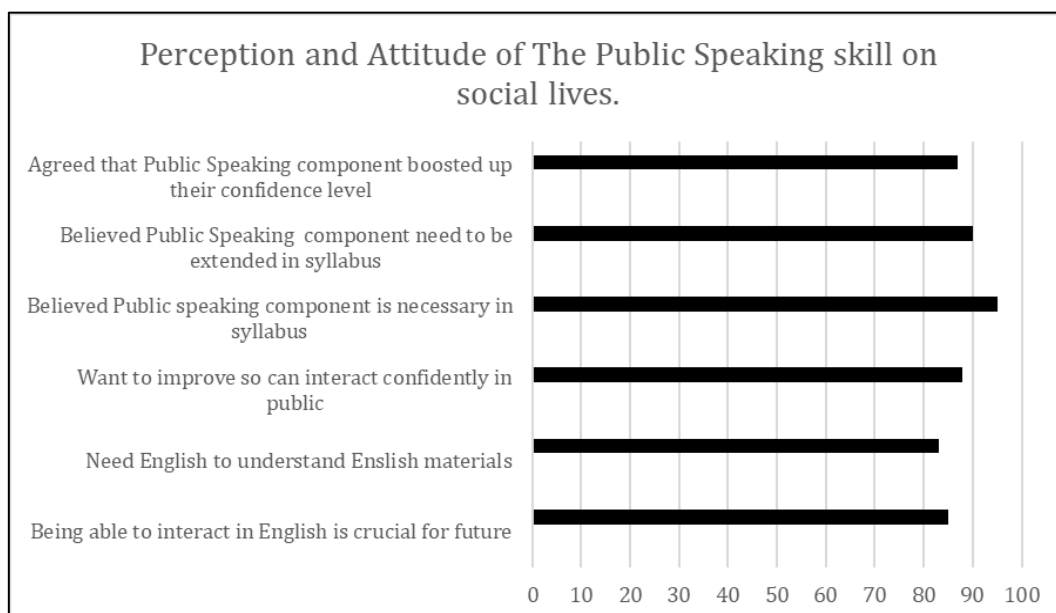


Figure 2: Bar chart showing the learners' perception and attitude of their Public Speaking skill on their social lives

Figure 2 shows the result for the second section, which is, students' perception and attitude of their Public Speaking skill on their social lives. The bar chart shows that 85%

of the students believed that being able to converse in the English Language is crucial for their better future. 83% of the students believed that they need the English Language to understand knowledge from English materials such as newspapers, magazines and internet. 88% of the students wanted to improve their speaking skill so they will be able to interact confidently with others in public. 95% of the students believed that the Public Speaking is necessary component in the syllabus. 90 % of the students believed that Public Speaking components in the syllabus need to be extended. 87% of the students agreed that Public Speaking components boosted up their confidence level. The results demonstrate practical needs and perceptions by the subjects with their high preferences to learn public speaking which is believed can assist them to socialise and to interact in their classroom setting. Huffman (2018) in her study found out that language learners were able to speak English more often and more fluently, increased self-confidence while speaking, learned appropriate pronunciation and so forth after being guided on public speaking skills. The spontaneous interaction amongst members in a class or in a workshop is believed to boost the learners' confidence as well as decrease their nervousness.

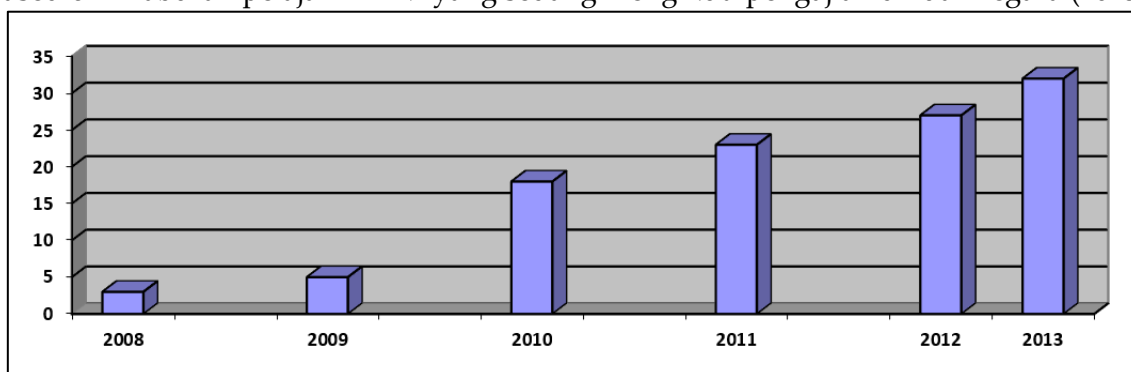
#### **4.3 What are the learners' perception and attitude on Public Speaking in order to improve their confidence level?**

The final two short answer questions also focused on the students' perception before and after they learn the public speaking component. The first short answer question which was "How would you describe yourself before learning the Public Speaking unit?". The students believed that they were timid, shy, afraid to voice out their opinion in class and afraid to make mistakes while giving out ideas orally. Some of them believed they could not present a speech in public because they did not have experiences and their lecturers or teachers never let them to do so before. A few of them regarded themselves as weak speaker and they felt that Public Speaking component has forced them to practice their speaking skill in the English language by kept on practicing before they presented their speeches in front of their friends. The second short answer question which was "How would you describe yourself after learning the Public Speaking unit?". The students believed that they felt a sense of achievement since they managed to deliver their speeches. They became confident and felt more comfortable speaking in public. They also believed that they have evolved and became better students in their speaking skills. A few of the students realised that they needed practice for becoming better speakers in the English language. The results portray positivity amongst the subjects after being coached in their public speaking series. They realised that by being imparted with more speaking skills and strategies can help them to speak with confidence because lacking of receiving input on speaking skills would contribute to students' speaking anxiety as students felt embarrassed and afraid to speak up using English language (Jugo, 2020).

## 5. Conclusion

The lecturer incorporated the public speaking component in the English language syllabus for three years, starting from January 2007 until November 2010. An interesting finding has been found that the number of students studying overseas has increased starting from July 2008 until July 2013. The students spent two and half years completing their studies in this college, and the increment of the number can be clearly seen from July 2009 onwards. Based on the interview, which has been given to the candidates before they further their studies overseas, the candidates from this public higher learning institution in Selangor, Malaysia seemed more confident and presented positive body language when they conveyed their ideas. Figure 3 below, shows the increasing number of students studying overseas as a result of being confident communicating in the English Language.

**Figure 3:** Bar chart showing the increment of the number of students studying overseas based on “Taburan pelajar KKTm yang sedang mengikuti pengajian di luar negara (2013)”



X : the number of students

Y : the year

In conclusion, this study shows clear connection between public speaking and confidence. Many lecturers or teachers should realise the importance of public speaking for second language learner. Teachers or lecturers can tailor the public speaking activities and make it suitable for their students. It is hoped that educators of the English language can implement public speaking component as an important part in the English language syllabus. Public speaking activities should not be serious in nature as the students learn better in natural environment. The teachers or lecturers play very important role in order to determine the success of Public Speaking activities in the classroom.

## Acknowledgement

Immeasurable appreciation and deepest gratitude are extended to Associate Professor Dr Noor Hanim Rahmat for her insights and valuable guidance in motivating us to publish this study.

### Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest towards the publication of this article.

### About the Authors

**Irma Wahyuni Ibrahim** is an English lecturer at the Akademi Pengajian Bahasa, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia. Taught English for 24 years to Secondary School and university students. Her research interest includes ESP, TESL methodology and Linguistics.

**Nor Syahiza Shahabani** is an English lecturer at the Akademi Pengajian Bahasa, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia. Taught English for 25 years to school and university students. Currently pursuing her PhD on Syntax and Instructional Design. Research interest includes Syntax, Instructional Design and ESP.

### References

- Bass, A. N. (2010). From business dining to public speaking: Tips for acquiring professional presence and its role in the business curricula. *American Journal of Business Education*, 3(2), 57-63. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com.ezaccess.library.195912242?accountid=2518>
- Grose, T. K. (2012). WOW the audience. *ASEE Prism*, 22(4), 36-38. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com.ezaccess.library.uitm.edu.my/docview/1261456829?accountid42518>
- Hewagodage, V., & O'Neill, S. (2010). A case study of isolated NESB adult migrant women's experience learning English: A sociocultural approach to decoding household texts. *International Journal of Pedagogies & Learning*, 6(1), 23-40. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com.ezaccess.library.uitm.edu.my/docview/791520518?accountid=2518>
- Huffman, D. K. (2018). *A correlative study on the community as classroom concept and ELL achievement and adjustment* (Order No. 10789865). Available from Education Collection. (2033548541). Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com.ezaccess.library.uitm.edu.my/docview/2033548541?accountid=42518>
- Johnson, K. H. (2012). *The effect of a high school speech course on public speaking anxiety for students in a college-level public speaking class*. (Order No. 3519055, Trevecca Nazarene University). *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses*, 87. Retrieved from [http://search.proquest.com.ezaccess.42518.\(1036631294\)](http://search.proquest.com.ezaccess.42518.(1036631294)).
- Jokelova, A. (2012). *Effects of relevance- and confidence-enhancing motivational strategies, suggested strategies, and statements on academic performance and course satisfaction in undergraduate students of a blended public speaking course*. (Order No. 3546504,



- University of South Alabama). *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses*, , 201. Retrieved from [\(http://search.proquest.com.ezaccess.library.uitm.edu.my/docview/1266831892?accountid42518\)](http://search.proquest.com.ezaccess.library.uitm.edu.my/docview/1266831892?accountid42518).(1266831892).
- Jugo, R. R. (2020). Language anxiety in focus: The case of Filipino undergraduate teacher education learners. *Education Research International*, 2020 doi: <http://dx.doi.org.ezaccess.library.uitm.edu.my/10.1155/2020/7049837>
- Koch, A. S., & Terrell, T. D. (1991). Affective reactions of foreign language students to natural approach activities and teaching techniques. *Language Anxiety: From theory and research to classroom implications*.(pp 109-126). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Kovac, M. M., & Sirkovic, N. (2012). Peer evaluation of oral presentations in Croatia. *English Language Teaching*, 5(7), 8-16. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com.ezaccess.library.uitm.edu.my/docview/1027548730?accountid42518>.
- Lai-Mei, L., & Seyedeh M., A. (2017). [An Analysis of Factors Influencing Learners' English Speaking Skill](#). *International Journal of Research in English Education*. 2(1), 34-41. Retrieved from <https://www.sid.ir/en/journal/ViewPaper.aspx?ID=520992>
- MacDonald, L. J. (2011). Increasing comprehension of content delivered in English to non-native speakers. *International Forum of Teaching and Studies*, 7(1), 5-9,58. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com.ezaccess.library.uitm.edu.my/docview/865913489?accountid2518>.
- MacIntyre, P. D., Baker, S. C., Clement, R., & Conrod, S. (2001). Willingness to communicate, social support and language learning orientations of Immersion Students. Cambridge University Press. *SSLA*, 23, 379.
- MacIntyre, P. D., & Gardner, R. C. (1991). Methods and results in the study of anxiety in language learning : A review of the literature. *Language Learning*, 41, 85-117.
- Paalhar, S. L., (2009). Gender differences in public speaking anxiety. Retrieved March 9, 2013, from <http://clearinghouse.missouriwestern.edu/manuscripts/226.asp>.
- Riedel, D. (2012). *A narrative inquiry exploring how college communication professors engage students with public speaking apprehension*. (Order No. 3529201, University of the Incarnate Word). *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses*, 140. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com.ezaccess.library.uitm.edu.my/docview/1095702384?accountid42518>.(1095702384).
- Robert, D. (2007). Public Speaking and Self Confidence Go Hand In Hand. Retrieved February 10, 2013, from <http://ezinearticles.com/?Public-Speaking-and-Self-Confidence-Go-Hand&id=842912>.
- Rogers, E. R., PharmD., & King, Sean R., PhD., M. S. (2012). The influence of a patient-counselling course on the communication apprehension, outcome expectations, and self-efficacy of first-year pharmacy students. *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education*, 76(8), 1152. Retrieved from

- <http://search.proquest.com.ezaccess.library.uitm.edu.my/docview/1266360381?accountid42518>.
- Shi, L., & Farooq, N. (2012). Linguistic and attitudinal factors in normal-hearing bilingual listeners' perception of degraded English passages. *American Journal of Audiology (Online)*, 21(2), 127-39. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com.ezaccess.library.uitm.edu.my/docview/1324441370?accountid42518>.
- Taburan pelajar KKTM yang sedang mengikuti pengajian di luar negara.(2013). Senarai para pelajar KKTM seMalaysia ke luar negara. Kuala Lumpur: Majlis Amanah Rakyat.
- Wu, K. (2010). The relationship between language learners' anxiety and learning strategy in the CLT classrooms. *International Education Studies*, 3(1), 174-191. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com.ezaccess.library.uitm.edu.my/docview/821695619?accountid=2518>.
- Yaikhong, K., & Usaha, S. (2012). A measure of EFL public speaking class anxiety: Scale development and preliminary validation and reliability. *English Language Teaching*, 5(12), 23-35. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com.ezaccess.library.uitm.edu.my/docview/1288359831?accountid42518>.
- Yu, L., Song, Q., & Miao, J. (2019). A study on the problems and countermeasures of oral English teaching in rural junior middle schools under the background of man-machine dialogue examination in china. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 9(7), 810-815. doi: <http://dx.doi.org.ezaccess.library.uitm.edu.my/10.17507/tpls.0907.09>.

Creative Commons licensing terms

Authors will retain the copyright of their published articles agreeing that a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0) terms will be applied to their work. Under the terms of this license, no permission is required from the author(s) or publisher for members of the community to copy, distribute, transmit or adapt the article content, providing a proper, prominent and unambiguous attribution to the authors in a manner that makes clear that the materials are being reused under permission of a Creative Commons License. Views, opinions, and conclusions expressed in this research article are views, opinions and conclusions of the author(s). Open Access Publishing Group and European Journal of English Language Teaching shall not be responsible or answerable for any loss, damage or liability caused in relation to/arising out of conflict of interests, copyright violations and inappropriate or inaccurate use of any kind content related or integrated on the research work. All the published works are meeting the Open Access Publishing requirements and can be freely accessed, shared, modified, distributed and used in educational, commercial and non-commercial purposes under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License \(CC BY 4.0\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).