Introduction

Along with written communication, ability to manage others and effective team leadership, public speaking has been reported by teachers, former students, and employers as essential to further career development (Beidel, Turner, & Dancu, 1985; Gary & Murray 2011; Jaffe, 2012; Sellnow, 2005; Zekeri, 2004). In addition, in order to be globally competitive, students need to be equipped with effective English public speaking skills for their future careers in different occasions and in foreign contexts. In view of this, many EFL departments in Taiwan universities include English public speaking or speech training courses as a prerequisite in the curricula design.

Among those who take public speaking courses, an overwhelming number of students are novice speakers, which means they are inexperienced in public speaking. The beginners’ anxiety can be a potential barrier to learning, which is complicated by the fear of speaking in English, a foreign language.

Foreign language anxiety (FLA) has been considered as one of the major affective factors that influence FL learning (Aida, 1994; Brown, 2007; Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986; Phillips, 1992). Most language anxiety research has focused on speaking since it was thought to be the most anxiety-provoking skill among all the four language aspects (Aida, 1994; Phillips, 1992; Young, 1990). Particularly, public speaking, an advanced form of oral speaking, induces even more anxiety in EFL students. The reason is evident: among the four generalized communication settings (public speaking, meetings or classes, small group discussions, and dyadic conversations), public speaking generates the highest level of anxiety (Richmond & McCroskey, 1995). The training results of an English public speaking class deteriorate when students’ public speaking anxiety (PSA) is coupled with FLA. Moreover, speaking in small groups, considered as a form of public speaking and as part of public speaking training, is often adopted in EFL public speaking course design (Jaffe, 2012; Sellnow, 2005). Although the audience is small, group discussions still induce anxiety (GA) in some students.

To solve the problems, it will be of invaluable help if a training method can be integrated into the course design to reduce the stress that students feel when facing the opportunities of English public speaking. This research proposes a feasible way by means of conducting theatrical performances outside classroom. Theatrical experience shares many similar attributes to public speaking experience in terms of the nature of setting, the presence of audience, and the involvement of body and voice in delivery skills.

The use of drama in L2 curriculum is becoming an emergent research field (Stinson & Winston, 2011). In Taiwan kindergarten, English as a foreign language is commonly introduced to preschoolers through songs, stories, and drama. In Asia, English teachers employ drama-based English as a FL instructional class program to facilitate students’ English competence (Kao, Carkin, & Hsu, 2011; Stinson & Freebody, 2006). Young or mature, English learners enjoy and are eager to...
participate in all of drama-based learning activities.

However, the major aim of the above literature is on English acquisition and proficiency. Virtually no research links drama and English from a different perspective—the delivering aspects of drama to benefit public speaking learners in higher education. The purpose of this study is to explore whether theatrical performances as part of public speaking regimen help to reduce EFL students’ PSA and GA levels. The current research extends the understanding of the impacts of public theatrical performances on English PSA and GA. By doing so, it seeks to explore the dramatic strategies of reducing English PSA and GA with the implication that instructors can better design pedagogical activities, course plans, and classroom instruction to effectively alleviate student PSA and GA in English.

By applying public theatrical performance activities to English Public Speaking regimen in an EFL context, the teacher/researcher sought possible answers to the following questions:
(1) What effects does the application of theatrical performances have on public speaking training for English majors?
(2) What may be the appropriate frequency and application procedures for theatrical performances in English public speaking class?
(3) In terms of reducing English PSA and GA, do the students who had stage experience in contests progress more than those who did not?

**Literature Review**

**Foreign Language Anxiety and Its Reduction**

Foreign language anxiety (FLA), a common phenomenon observed in many language learners, has received wide attention of research (Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991; Lucas, 1984; Phillips, 1992; Young, 1999). Scholars usually agree that FLA adversely influences language learning and performance (Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991; Phillips, 1992; Sellers, 2000; Young, 1991). For example, Yan & Horwitz’s (2008) reported that their participants could perform better in a less anxiety eliciting atmosphere. Aida (1994) found there was a moderate negative correlation between anxiety and course grades. The students with high anxiety received significantly lower grades than the students with low anxiety. Similarly, Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope (1986) reported that Spanish and French students with higher FLA levels tended to receive lower scores than students with lower anxiety levels. As English is one kind of foreign language for students in non-English countries, English, naturally, is a source of anxiety in learning. This kind of English anxiety experienced by students will be the FLA examined in this research.

Although some researchers argue that facilitative anxiety can benefit foreign language learners (Alpert & Haber, 1960; Scovel, 1978; Spielmann & Radnofsky, 2001), many language instructors and researchers still feel reserved about the feasibility and suspect that anxiety may operate as an affective filter which prevents
a learner from learning a target language (Krashen, 1987). Indeed, Elkhafaifi’s research (2005) concluded that providing a less stressful classroom environment and reducing student’s anxiety enabled instructors to help students improve both their skill-based FL proficiency and overall FL performance. Previous research also reported various ways for the reduction of FLA. Kondo and Yang (2004) reported five major categories of students’ tactics for coping with language anxiety: preparation, relaxation, positive thinking, peer seeking, and resignation. Iizuka (2010) found that to cope with anxiety-provoking contexts, students employed more positive strategies (such as making a greater effort, being well-prepared, and cohort cooperation) and fewer negative strategies (such as giving up, ignoring, or distancing themselves from difficult situations.) These pedagogical suggestions have pointed the way for teachers to help students reduce FLA.

**Anxieties in English Public Speaking and Small Group Discussion**

McCroskey and Richmond (1982) suggested that there were four communication contexts that were most relevant to communication apprehension (CA): group discussions, talking in meetings, conversing with others, and giving a speech. In general, the main causes that resulted in heightened CA were novelty (increased uncertainty about behavior), formality (narrower confines for acceptable behavior), subordinate status (appropriate behavior in the hands of the superior), conspicuousness (new social settings or standing up to speak in a class or meetings), unfamiliarity (more comfortable feeling when communicating with familiar people); dissimilarity with audience, and degree of attention from others (moderate attention to be the most comfortable, while being stared at intently or being ignored to be uncomfortable) (Buss, 1980). Among the four categories of CA, the current research is concerned with group discussion anxiety and public speaking anxiety because group discussions and presentations were frequently employed in the class of this study.

According to Lightbown and Spada (1999), students have more time and more practice in speaking in small groups than they do in entire-class activities. However, speaking up in small groups is challenging to shy students. Defined as a category of social anxiety attributed to heightened public self-consciousness (Buss, 1980; Cheeck & Buss, 1981), shyness is especially relevant to the difficulty in peer interaction (Boivin, Hymel, & Bukowski, 1995; Xu, Farver, Chang, Zhang, & Yu, 2007). As a result, intragroup anxiety (GA) was generated.

O’Hair, Rubenstein and Stewart (2010) defined public speaking anxiety (PSA) to be the fearfulness when a speaker delivered a speech publicly. Like CA in general, PSA consisted of many elements: inadequate experience, unfamiliarity with the audience, and unwillingness to be the focus of attention. Young (1990) pointed out PSA was more imperative than FLA: Given the fact that speaking in the foreign language was not exclusively the source of student anxiety, speaking in front of the class was. It is therefore reasonable to conjecture that speaking in front
of the class in English, being one kind of FL, is even more debilitating.

Literature of PSA is bountiful, but only a handful of it is on English PSA. Plangkham and Porkaew (2012) investigated the level of anxiety at different stages of public speaking and found that the highest level of anxiety occurred in the performance stage of public speaking. Jin (2009) probed into the factors related to college students’ English PSA and found that the anxiety was generally at the moderately high level, which was mainly generated from English self-concept, personality (extrovert/introvert), speech preparation, situational factors, background knowledge, and public speaking experiences. Except for English listening self-concept, the other factors had a significantly negative correlation with English PSA, among which self-concept of English speech and speech preparation were the two major variables with respective predictive values of 51.7% and 16.5% of PSA. Chen (2009) conducted a research in Taiwan in a similar vein and found two clusters of stressors contributing to students’ anxiety—social and psychological. Social factors included peers’ response and audience familiarity; whereas psychological factors included self-perceived oral proficiency, self-perceived accuracy of pronunciation, and self-perceived personality.

The teacher/researcher applied public theatrical performance to explore its impact on English PSA and GA. Such research will contribute to the extension of the literature of English PSA and GA.

**Theatrical Performance as Public Speaking Training**

A performance is the acting out of a written play (Aristotle, 1984). According to Osipovich (2006), a theatrical performance is a particular kind of interaction between performers and observers (i.e. actors and audience members) in a shared physical space.

The use of drama has gradually been embraced for teaching and professional development initiatives by arts and humanities professionals, particularly those who heavily require communication in public. For example, there have been efforts bringing theatre and performance into medical education to teach case presentation skills to doctors-to-be (Hammer et. al., 2011). The use of role-playing, a common subgenre of drama, is generally employed to teach future lawyers and judges specific legal skills, but Scully-Hill, Lam and Yu (2010) further explored the potentials of using drama in legal education and to serve more meaningful purposes than mere skill training.

The reason why drama enters professional education is that what constitutes a good theatrical performance strikingly resembles good delivery of speeches. In drama as well as in speeches, the messages are sent through actors’ voice and through body language. An engaging delivery of speech incorporates stage presence, eye contact, vocal inflection, interesting detail and succinct, well organized performances; movement and acting exercises in theatrical training echo these aspects. McCallion (1998) wrote a classic on voice training for theater
performers, but he also aptly pointed out that his book could be equally helpful for those professionals who rely on voice. For one thing, rather than a loud and booming voice, one of the first requirements of a good speech is good voice projection, which means being heard clearly by all the audience in the hall, plus clear articulation. Although actors slightly slow down the normal rate of delivery while keeping as natural a flow of the language as possible, clear articulation is usually more of a key to comprehension than slowed speech. In addition, nonverbal language is important because observers will attend very sensitively to actors'/speakers’ facial features, gestures, and body language. It is a valuable opportunity for the participants to be conscious of these nonverbal aspects.

Theatrical Performance and Anxiety Reduction

Several attempts are made in discovering the relationship between theatrical performance and anxiety reduction. Lobman (2013) conducted a qualitative research which tried to experiment with new tools to deal with test anxiety. The program successfully helped children face anxiety and test-taking through play, performance, and team building. In another investigation of the relationship between leisure preferences and anxiety levels of the teacher interns in four aspects: pedagogy, evaluation, class management, and interpersonal relations, Daly and Morton (2011) reported that the Arts majors showed lower levels of anxiety. It is possible that those in the Arts (Drama, Music, etc.) were used to being on the stage and were therefore less feared by being requested to be on the stage in the classroom.

There were also reports from practices of drama to treat different kinds of anxiety. One example is the usage of humor drama in the treatment for the pathological fear of being laughed at, which is a specific variant of shame-bound anxiety (Titze, 2009). Current research sees the inclusion of drama and other forms of therapy in the treatment of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), a chronic and disabling anxiety disorder that occurs after a traumatic event, although the effectiveness still requires further confirmatory studies (Zhang, Hu, Li, Li, & Ursano, 2011).

As the above review stated, using theatrical performance to serve education is not a novelty. Drama has been employed as a tool for research, reflection, and skill-building in public speaking; drama has been employed as a tool for reduction of various kinds of anxiety. What is lacking is the application of drama in reducing PSA and GA. The researcher was interested in the link between drama and its effects on PSA and GA reduction, which remained relatively unexplored. Hence, this study intended to expand the literature of the usage of drama in this issue.

Methodology

This study intended to investigate the application of public theatrical performance to English Public Speaking class by exploring its use and impact on
English PSA and GA. The teacher/researcher polled students who have gone through the application of theatrical activities. Progress was tracked by comparing pre-performance and post-performance surveys from the participants.

Participants

The sample of the study consisted of a class of forty-seven English-major seniors at one technological university in central Taiwan.

Procedure

At the beginning of the semester, the research instrument, for the first time, was distributed to the students to circle the number that best described their feelings of GA and PSA. Then all the students were divided into small groups in four or five people to conduct future drama collaboration and discussions inside and outside classroom. In order not to make shy students remain reticent, intragroup discussions were required as part of the curriculum. They were supposed to participate in discussion and brain-stormed with fellow group members as the course required. Group members should take on the responsibility of sharing their thoughts with other group members. The purpose was to give shy students more opportunities in practicing public speaking in a smaller, less threatening scale. The course design consisted of instructions from the teacher/researcher, group discussions, drama rehearsals, and public theatrical performance. In addition, the teacher/researcher arranged two theatrical performances conducted in groups by the participants outside classroom. The first public theatrical performance was scheduled in the middle of the first semester and the second one was scheduled in the middle of the second semester. After the first public performance near the end of the first semester, the same questionnaire, for the second time, was distributed to the students to circle the number that best described their feelings of GA and PSA. After the second public performance near the end of the academic year, the same questionnaire, for the third time, was distributed to the students to circle the number that best described their feelings of GA and PSA. The three sets of data revealed the students’ self-perceived GA and PSA levels in time series.

Survey Instrument

Personal Report of Communication Apprehension-24 (PRCA-24) is the best available measure of traitlike CA and can predict general feelings that people have about communicating in specific communicational situations (Richmond & McCroskey, 1995). CA comprises four types of anxieties: intragroup discussions (GA), talking in meetings, conversing with others, and giving a speech (PSA). In this research, the measure of PSA and GA in the PRCA-24 was adopted to measure the presence of the participants’ PSA and GA because they were engaged in rehearsing presentations and they were divided into small groups to conduct
collaboration and discussions in the research design. Hence the statements measuring the constructs of GA and PSA in PRCA-24 were relevant to this research and were adopted into the research instrument (see Appendix).

A strong case has been established for the reliability of the original PRCA instrument introduced in 1970 (McCroskey, 1978), as findings of a series of studies have indicated that the PRCA was able to predict communication behaviors that would be expected on the basis of the theory underlying the construct of CA. In addition, PRCA’s cross-situational consistency has also been reported by McCroskey & Beatty (1984) and McCroskey & Richmond (1982). PRCA-24, a more recent version of PRCA, has been investigated and resulted in strong support of the content validity of the items used in the instrument (McCroskey, Beatty, Kearney, & Plax, 1985).

The PRCA-24 has twenty-four statements inquiring how people feel in four communication contexts which were suggested as most relevant to communication apprehension by McCroskey and Richmond (1982): group discussions, meetings, dyadic conversations, and public speaking. Each context consists of six statements with a five-point Likert scale, ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree”. The instrument used for investigations consists of twelve statements: six from the group discussions segment and six from public speaking segment. They were translated from English to Chinese by the teacher/researcher. Two experts in the field of research design were invited for a judgmental analysis to determine the reliability of the Chinese version of the research instrument.

Items 2, 4, 6, 7, 9, 11 were positive statements while Items 1, 3, 5, 8, 10, 12 were negative (McCroskey, Beatty, Kearney, & Plax, 1985). In order to make all six items in the same direction, the results of Items 2, 4, 6, 7, 9, 11 were reversed before data was put to analysis. For the negative statements, “strongly agree” meant 5 points, “agree” meant 4 points, “neither agree nor disagree” meant 3 points, “disagree” meant 2 points, and “strongly disagree” meant 1 point. For the positive statements, the scale was reversed, i.e., “strongly agree” meant 1 point, “agree” meant 2 points, “neither agree nor disagree” meant 3 points, “disagree” meant 4 points, and “strongly disagree” meant 5 points. The higher scale indicated that the respondent felt a higher level of anxiety and vice versa.

The PRCA-24 was copyright by McCroskey and could be reprinted and used for research and instructional purposes without additional authorization (McCroskey, Beatty, Kearney, & Plax, 1985).

**Data Analysis**

The research instrument adopted from PRCA-24 questionnaire contained two dimensions: intragroup anxiety (coded as GA) and public speaking anxiety (coded as PSA). The totality of the two dimensions was coded as PCA (partial communication apprehension). In the following figure and tables illustrated in the section of Results and Discussion, “intragroup anxiety before the first public
“Intragroup anxiety after the first public performance” was denoted as GA1, “public speaking anxiety before the first public performance” was denoted as PSA1, and the totality of GA1 and PSA1 was denoted as PCA1; they were the investigated anxieties in the first survey at the beginning of the class. “Intragroup anxiety after the first public performance” was denoted as GA2, “public speaking anxiety after the first public performance” was denoted as PSA2, and the totality of GA2 and PSA2 was denoted as PCA2; they were the investigated anxieties in the second survey near the end of the first semester. “Intragroup anxiety after the second public performance” was denoted as GA3, “public speaking anxiety after the second public performance” was denoted as PSA3, and the totality of GA3 and PSA3 was denoted as PCA3; they were the investigated anxieties in the third survey near the end of the academic year.

The results of the surveys were analyzed by descriptive analysis, Independent t-test, and Paired t-test. The descriptive statistics of their answers such as percentages and means were calculated by Microsoft Excel 2007. Further analysis of t-tests was executed by SPSS 2008.

**Research Framework**

Each of the forty-seven students has conducted two public theatrical performances while receiving in-class instructions from the teacher/researcher and made in-class rehearsal practices. All the students were asked to reflect on their own GA and PSA levels at the beginning, after the first public performance, and after the second public performance. The research framework was summarized in Figure 1.
Results

Results of the Participants Background Information

Regarding participant demographic information, all of them are from the same school, a university of science and technology in central Taiwan. It was found that the predominant majority of students who enrolled in English Public Speaking class were female. Out of the forty-seven participants, only 3 (about 6%) were males and 44 were females (about 94%). As English Public Speaking was a required course in the fourth-year EFL program, all of the participants were seniors from Applied English Department registering in this course. They had studied the language for an average of six years in vocational or normal high schools. More than half of them either had experience in public speaking contests or participated in dramatic performance contests before registering in the course (N=27, 57%). The rest of them had no experience on the stage at all (N=20, 43%). The above demographic information was summarized in Table 1.
Table 1 Participants’ Background Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of Students</th>
<th>47</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>3 males 44 females</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous Speech/Drama Contest Experiences</td>
<td>Yes: 27 No: 20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In order to make sure if all participants started at the same footing when they took English Public Speaking class, an Independent *t*-test was performed to examine whether the stage experience made a difference among students on their intragroup anxiety level (GA), the anxiety of public speaking (PSA), and the partial CA (PCA) before, during and after the intervention time period.

Table 2 showed significance levels of all kinds of anxieties respectively. Setting the confidence interval of the difference at 95%, the significance level of GA1 was 0.303, PSA1 was 0.112, and PCA1 was 0.072. It meant that no significant difference was detected between those who had had stage experience and those who had not at the beginning of the research. The significance level of GA2 was 0.259, PSA2 was 0.221, and PCA2 was 0.117. It meant that there was no significant difference between those who had had stage experience and those who had not after the first public theatrical performance near the end of the first semester. The significance level of GA3 was 0.446, PSA3 was 0.151, and PCA3 was 0.120. It meant that no significant difference was found between those who had had stage experience and those who had not at the end of the second semester. The variable “previous speech/drama contest experiences” was controlled in the research.

To sum up, all the significance levels were much higher than 0.05, indicating the two subgroups had similar qualities in terms of GA, PSA and PCA in the initial stage before any intervention of theatrical performance and hereafter. All in all, the participants seemed to be a fairly typical group of university students in their senior year of language study.
Table 2 Differences of Anxiety Level according to Previous Stage Experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No experience</td>
<td>GA1</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2.550</td>
<td>.701</td>
<td>1.041</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>.303</td>
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<td>2.333</td>
<td>.709</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PSA1</td>
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<td>.758</td>
<td>1.619</td>
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<td>.112</td>
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<td>PSA1</td>
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<td>.694</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PCA1</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3.154</td>
<td>.547</td>
<td>1.842</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>.072</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PCA1</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>2.873</td>
<td>.493</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>GA2</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2.517</td>
<td>.679</td>
<td>1.143</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>.259</td>
</tr>
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<td>2.290</td>
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<td>1.241</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PCA2</td>
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<td>.469</td>
<td>1.597</td>
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<td>.117</td>
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<tr>
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<td>.647</td>
<td>.768</td>
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<td>.446</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>GA3</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>2.056</td>
<td>.564</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PSA3</td>
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<td>.591</td>
<td>1.462</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>.151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>3.086</td>
<td>.593</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PCA3</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2.767</td>
<td>.419</td>
<td>1.584</td>
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<td>.120</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PCA3</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>2.571</td>
<td>.419</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. *p<.05

Results of the Quantitative Data

The researcher conducted Paired t-test on the anxieties of GA, PSA, and PCA in different time periods to monitor their course of variation. The result was shown in Table 3.
Table 3 Comparison of Anxieties in Different Stages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GA1</td>
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<td>.706</td>
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<td>46</td>
<td>.614</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>.674</td>
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<tr>
<td>PSA1</td>
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<td>.734</td>
<td>3.056</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSA2</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>3.280</td>
<td>.613</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PCA1</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>2.993</td>
<td>.530</td>
<td>2.786</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>.008</td>
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<td>.485</td>
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<tr>
<td>GA2</td>
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<td>.674</td>
<td>4.044</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>.000</td>
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<tr>
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<td>PSA2</td>
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<td>.425</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Note.  
*p<.05

The participants’ GA1, PSA1, and PCA1 occurred before the first theatrical performance, and here it was referred as data set 1. GA2, PSA2, and PCA2 were measured after the first public performance, and here it was referred as data set 2. A comparison between the two sets of data showed that the GA1 and GA2’s $t = 0.508$ was not significantly different at 0.614 level with $df = 46$. It meant that after completing the first performance, the intragroup anxiety was not significantly reduced. The PSA1 and PSA2’s $t = 3.056$ was significantly different at 0.004 level with $df = 46$. It meant that after completing the first performance, the public speaking anxiety was significantly reduced. The participants’ PCA1 and PCA2’s $t = 2.786$ was significantly different at 0.008 level with $df = 46$. It meant that after completing the first performance, the partial communication apprehension was significantly reduced.

The participants’ GA3, PSA3, and PCA3 were measured after the second theatrical performance near the end of the academic year, and here it was referred as data set 3. The same procedure was performed to compare this set of data against the second set of data, i.e., GA2, PSA2, and PCA2. The result showed that the GA2 and GA3’s $t = 4.044$ was significantly different at 0.000 level with $df = 46$. It meant that after completing the second performance, the intragroup anxiety was significantly improved. The PSA2 and PSA3’s $t = 1.281$ was not significantly different at 0.207 level with $df = 46$. It meant that after completing the second performance, the public speaking anxiety was not significantly improved. The PCA2 and PCA3’s $t = 4.284$ was significantly different at 0.000 level with $df = 46$. It
meant that after completing the second performance, the partial communication apprehension (PCA) was further significantly improved.

**Discussion**

Regarding the question: What effects does the application of theatrical performances have on public speaking training for English-majors? From the cross comparison between the three sets of data in Table 3, it was found that intragroup anxiety (GA) has not changed significantly (significance level=0.614) after the first public performance conducted by the whole group. Not until the second performance did GA start to reduce significantly (significance level=0.000). It seems that the participants need more time to cope with group anxiety. Lobman’s (2013) successful case study of the test anxiety program which incorporated team building as one of the tools to reduce anxiety supports the results of GA reduction in this research. The finding is also in accordance with the research of Iizuka (2010) and Kondo and Yang (2004) that peer cooperation is one of the tactics that students frequently use to cope with learning anxiety. It seems that only after the implementation of the second public theatrical performance do the group members develop familiarity among them and feel more comfortable discussing and voicing opinions in intragroup discussions. It means that it takes time for shy students to participate in intragroup public speaking. The result shows that it takes at least two stage performances to improve GA.

The significance level of the difference between PSA1 and PSA2 was 0.004, but the significance level of the difference between PSA2 and PSA3 was much higher (0.207). It suggests that public speaking anxiety (PSA) is significantly reduced upon the completion of the first public performance but does not show further significant reduction after the second implementation of the theatrical performance in comparison to its significant change after the first performance. The message is that, unlike GA, reducing PSA does not require frequent implementation of public performance. The debut of a theatrical project gives the strongest impact on PSA reduction. Only once will do the work. Daly and Morton (2011) offer a plausible clue for the significant PSA reduction. As the participants are used to being on-stage extramurally, they are therefore less stressed by being on-stage. In addition, the stress level remains constantly low because the participants are used to being on-stage.

On the whole, regarding the participants’ partial communication apprehension (PCA), the first performance exerted significant impacts on PCA reduction (significance level=0.008), and the second performance exerted even more significant impacts on PCA reduction because the significance level of the difference was even lower (0.000). It suggested that PCA was continually reduced significantly after the second theatrical performance, and the reducing effects was very prominent (significance level=0.000). The message of this result indicates that both performances in the theatrical project give strong impacts on PCA reduction.
Regarding the question: What may be the appropriate frequency and application procedures for theatrical performances in English public speaking class? The evidence showed that along with the second implementation of the performance, the participants felt more comfortable in interacting and discussing with their group members. It can be concluded that at least two theatrical performances are required. It may also be inferred that the more implementations the better the effects of GA reduction. In addition, Lightbown and Spada’s (1999) recommendation to employ small grouping is also in line with the findings for students to gain more practice time. On the other hand, compared to the degree of PSA at the beginning of the project, the degree of PSA was decreased significantly after the first public theatrical performance (significance level=0.004), but the degree of decrease of the same attribute was not significant after the second performance (significance level=0.207) when it was compared to the degree of PSA after the first public theatrical performance. It is suggested that one execution of public performance is sufficient for students to practice stage-related skills to reduce their PSA successfully. As to reducing the partial communication apprehension (PCA), both the first and the second theatrical performances are effective. This finding is supported by Kondo and Yang (2004), Jin (2009), and Iizuka (2010), who all stress on the importance of well-preparation in advance to control language anxiety. In this theatrical project, preparation was incorporated in many rounds of rehearsals and group discussions before the participants were actually on stage. To synthesize the findings about GA, PSA, and PCA, more than two theatrical performances may be conducted to determine whether GA further reduces with more performances. However, due to time constraint posed by an academic year, two performances per academic year are suggested to gain the maximum benefits of reducing GA, PSA, and PCA simultaneously.

Regarding whether those who had stage experience progressed more than those who did not, the results in Table 2 showed that the GA, PSA and PCA between those who had had stage experience and those who had not were not significantly different before and after the drama intervention. It is usually assumed that those who have stage experience progress more than those who do not. However, the results do not support such an assumption. This finding is encouraging for those students who feel inferior at a disadvantaged starting point in the class because of lacking public presence before. This finding indicated that it is never too late for them to start public speaking training, and they can achieve equally to those savvy performers in terms of anxiety control through learning and participating in theatrical performance.

**Conclusion**

This study intended to investigate the application of public theatrical performance to English Public Speaking class by exploring its use and impacts on English PSA and GA. Forty-seven participants divided in small groups were
recruited in this investigation. Results showed that public theatrical performances significantly reduce PSA but not GA after the first performance. After the second performance GA started to show significant improvement, but PSA did not show further reduction. PCA has maintained the trend to be reduced continually by the two theatrical performances. Moreover, the results indicated that the anxiety reduction made between those who had had stage experience and those who had not were not significantly different before and after the drama intervention. This finding may encourage those who feel disadvantaged because they lack the experience of public presence, and also may boost them to believe in themselves that by learning and participating in theatrical performance, they can achieve equally well. In conclusion, the results of GA, PSA, and PCA proved that the theatrical techniques effectively reduced college students’ anxieties in the public speaking class. It is suggested that more than two theatrical performances may be conducted to determine the effects of more performances on further GA reduction. However, due to course time constraint, two performances per school year are suggested to gain the maximum benefits of reducing GA, PSA, and PCA simultaneously.

Applications suggestions

Since this study revealed that Taiwan EFL students showed anxiety reduction as two theatrical performances were implemented along the course of public speaking training, it is important that the course instruction incorporates appropriate theatrical performance in EFL public speaking teaching for the purpose of reducing students’ anxiety and in turn enhance their competence in public speaking.

Along the project, the teacher should offer instruction on how to prepare for a theatrical performance via the techniques learned from the public speaking textbook. For example, the teacher should teach students how to select proper materials and activities according to the nature of the audience, and how to conduct themselves in terms of movement on the stage, body movement, posture, gestures, facial expressions, voice variety and eye contact step by step so that they will understand the proper way to conduct the above public speaking techniques through the theatrical performance.

In addition, the pre-performance rehearsing stage, the teacher should assist students by giving advice on the proper way to rehearse a play via the techniques learned from the public speaking textbook. For instance, the teacher should teach students how to properly maneuver visual aids, and how to avoid reading the script mechanically. At the same time students should try to memorize some important content so that they can speak extemporaneously.

Finally, the teacher should always accompany students both in class and during the public theatrical performance outside classroom, showing the utmost support and giving immediate feedbacks to students. With the teacher’s advice,
presence and support, students can eventually deliver a superb theatrical performance outside classroom, which in turn reduces their anxiety and boost their confidence in English public speaking.

**Limitations and Further Research Suggestions**

The current study inevitably has some limitations, which call for further investigation. First, the proposed research framework is only experimented in an English public speaking class in the case university. With the limited number of participants from the central part of Taiwan, the findings may not be generalized to all EFL students in other settings. Comparative studies at the same university or across different universities using the same research framework are suggested to draw out more robust conclusions. More participants from other parts of Taiwan and from other levels of education are needed so as to increase the generalizability of the research results.

Second, students’ perceptions of English PSA may not be in line with their actual competence. Therefore, a comparative study of students’ perceptions and actual performances in English public speaking deserves further exploration.

Third, further research on the methods that students use to manage their anxiety over the course of public speaking training via theatrical performance is needed in order to understand their strategies and find ways to help students cope with their anxiety.

Last but not least, as the study investigated only GA, PSA and PCA over the course of public speaking training via theatrical performance, the proposed research framework should be readily applicable to evaluate different aspects (e.g., public speaking output, efficacy, among others) of students’ perception. All such efforts will lead to effective English public speaking among Taiwan students eventually.
Theatrical Performance as a Training Approach to Reducing College Students’ Anxieties in EFL Public Speaking Class

References


Appendix

本調查表資料僅供課程改進及研究之參考使用，絕不影響你的個人成績評分，且一切資料保密，故請放心作答。請確定每一題都作答，謝謝！

ID # __________________________

請仔細閱讀下列句子，並根據你的想法圈選答案。
非常不同意 = 1    不同意 = 2    中等 = 3    同意 = 4    非常同意 = 5

1. 我不喜歡參加團體討論。  1  2  3  4  5
2. 大體而言，參加團體討論時我是自在的。  1  2  3  4  5
3. 參加團體討論時我是焦慮緊張的。  1  2  3  4  5
4. 我喜歡參與團體討論。  1  2  3  4  5
5. 跟初識的人作團體討論時我是焦慮緊張的。  1  2  3  4  5
6. 參加團體討論時我是平靜放鬆的。  1  2  3  4  5
7. 我不怕公開演講。  1  2  3  4  5
8. 當我公開演講時，我會感受到身體某些部分非常緊繃而且僵直。  1  2  3  4  5
9. 當公開演講時我是放鬆的。  1  2  3  4  5
10. 當我正在發表演講當中，我的思緒會變得迷惑且混亂。  1  2  3  4  5
11. 我懷抱著信心，面對發表演講的機會。  1  2  3  4  5
12. 發表演講時，我會緊張以致於忘記我確實知道的事實。  1  2  3  4  5