IDEA SHARING: THE USE OF WIN, SELF-CREATIVE INTERACTION PPT, AND ONLINE TESTS TO ASSIST IN THE INSTRUCTION OF ENGLISH FOR TAIWANESE FRESHMEN

Hui-kuei Hsieh
Hui-uen Chia
WuFeng University, Taiwan
Email: sandyyang@gms.npu.edu.tw

Erickson Lin
Simon Fraser University, Canada

Introduction

Nowadays, because of the expansion of high-speed networking, people highly depend upon computers and the Internet to receive information and acquire knowledge. Education is gradually transforming from teacher-centric to student-centric. Instructors have become facilitators, tutors, coaches, guides and motivators. As a result, instruction has become non-linear and self-directed. Traditional classroom lectures are being gradually replaced by interactive teaching approaches. To reflect this trend, new forms of instruction must also take learners' needs into consideration. Consequently, interactive multimedia (IM) integrated instruction has become a must in Taiwanese higher education. Today, IM and courseware are required educational media in almost every Taiwanese university. WuFeng University (WFU) is no exception, as it is dedicated to sharing the hands-on teaching experience of WIN, a Web-based courseware, creative interactive PowerPoint lessons (PPTs), and online tests to promote active learning and teaching of freshman English for Applied English majors.
A Brief Description of WIN

WIN is an educational online learning program for course management developed by WFU’s Information and Technology (IT) Support Center. WIN provides users with a platform for communication and sharing educational content, providing: (a) bulletin boards, (b) chat rooms, (c) discussion boards, and (d) email systems. WIN allows instructors to post announcements on the bulletin board, and provides chat rooms for teachers and students to chat online in real time. Instructors can set up online office hours to interact with students through the chat room. Messaging students for timely feedback increases teacher-student interaction. WIN permits students and professors to create discussion threads and reply to already-created threads, promoting active collaboration of course content and group projects. Teachers use discussion boards to create Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) or Questions and Answers (Q&A) tabs to help students with technical problems. Finally, WIN mail allows the sending of emails.

As for sharing information, WIN provides the following features: (a) course content, (b) calendars, (c) learning modules, (d) learning outcome assessments, (e) assignments, and (f) grade books. Teachers can create course content tabs to post learning materials such as articles, assignments, audio-visual teaching materials, etc. Instead of being only read, WIN enables learners to interact with dynamic visual content, such as embedded videos, audio, or audio-visual materials. Once teachers set due dates for assignments and tests, they automatically show in the calendar. Through the learning modules function, professors post different lessons for students to access. There are various options for online assessments in WIN: tests, quizzes, surveys and polls can be easily created to meet the course needs, and can be easily reused. Teachers can create assessment tabs to post quizzes and exams, and students can access them via the Internet. Test results are automatically graded and immediate feedback is provided after submission. With this feature, grading is completed faster, enabling teachers to keep up with student progress.
and provide timely feedback. Teachers can create course surveys for summative evaluation, the results providing valuable information for course improvement. Additionally, an assignment tab for submitting assignments online provides a convenient way for students to submit homework. Once the assignment is submitted, the teacher is notified, and grades students online, attaching a file as feedback. Finally, student grades are automatically shown in the —Grades— tab. Grades for every assignment and test are shown as an alert notification.

Therefore, students and professors alike benefit from WIN's interactive, engaging, and practical features. Through discussion boards and chat rooms, instructors and students can constantly interact without time or space restrictions. Bulletin boards and grade alert functions give students the due dates of assignments. They also receive overall grades periodically, so students are engaged and retention rates are increased. With a computer and the Internet, students are able to study anywhere at their own pace. Course content and online tests can be reused to reduce educational costs, making WIN cost-effective. When faced with problems, students learn with virtual tutors through video simulations or simple animations. The online office hours and the FAQ tab established on the discussion board provide instantaneous feedback and solutions, reducing learning anxieties.

Methods

The Instructional Goal and the Students

The instructional method is to manipulate self-created interactive learning materials, and WIN provides participants with a digital teaching environment reflecting personal styles. After course completion, the students were expected to apply all 4 language skills to produce an —About Me— video, becoming self-directed and self-regulated. The students were 28 Applied English freshmen, 10 males (36%) and 18 females (64%), enrolled in the fall semester of 2010. Eighteen percent of the students were Applied English majors, but the majority (82%) were non-Applied English majors when they were
in senior high school. Ninety percent of the students were beginning learners of English.

**Course Design and Implementation Procedures**

**The Course Design**

The design and development of instructional materials followed the Analysis-Design-Development-Implementation-Evaluation (ADDIE) model (McGriff, 2000). Instructional materials were based upon the learners’ needs. During the teaching process, formative evaluations were applied for immediate course revisions. Summative evaluation was applied after completion of the course and subsequent results were used for further instructional improvement. The Attention-Relevance-Confidence-Satisfaction (ARCS) model (Keller, 1999) was applied as the motivational model. The materials were used to raise students' interest and attention and were relevant to the learners' life. Teaching methods were used to build up student confidence and a task-oriented teaching approach was adopted as well.

**The Content of the Instructional Materials**

The content of the instructional materials contained commonly used vocabulary and phrases, basic grammar, and sentence structures. The course was divided into 4 units: (a) Unit 1: self-introduction, (b) Unit 2: family and friends, (c) Unit 3: my home and (d) Unit 4: my neighborhood (see Appendix I). The content was well-sequenced, from simple to complex, and concrete to abstract. For example, each unit was based on a scenario immersing students in real-world situations through rich audio and visual cues (e.g., instructional videos and audio-based self-creative PPT lessons). Videos with English subtitles provided audio-visual input. The unit PPT was divided into 4 parts: —listen and read,—the text,—vocabulary and phrases,—grammar usage. Audio input (sound files) was inserted into every part. In Part 1, the sound file was embedded in the sound button next to every sentence. By pressing the sound button, students listened and read aloud unlimited individual sentences at
their own speed. In Part 2, the unit text appeared as an English-Chinese bilingual transcript, reinforcing reading comprehension. In Part 3, vocabulary and phrases were equipped with a sound button to help students listen, read, and memorize new words and phrases audibly. Part 4 contained explanations of the usage of basic grammar and sentences to build up students’ fundamental grammatical knowledge.

The Tests

In the first week of the semester, a pre-test (see Appendix II) was given and in the last week of the semester, the same test was given as the post-test. The results were compared and analyzed to evaluate the outcome. Every unit also contained several self-creative online practice tests to reinforce learned content, and an online unit test to evaluate the outcome. Tests were made by 2 interactive online test makers, HotPotatos (Ghorbanpour, 2012) and Adobe Captive 5 (Adobe Systems Incorporated, 2011). Test content was sequentially connected from easy to difficult. The tests were uploaded to WIN as practice and unit assessments.

The Course Platform

The course materials were placed on WIN under Freshman English Fall 2010. The platform was divided into 10 sections: Section 1, Bulletin Board, was used to make announcements of upcoming events. Section 2, Teaching Materials, contained instructional videos and PPTs. Section 3, Course, contained the course introduction, syllabus, course schedule, and grading criteria. Section 4, Test, included the pre-test, post-test, 12 practice tests (3 for each unit), and 4 online unit tests. Section 5, Assignment Submission, was where students submitted video transcripts and projects. Section 6, Student Works, was where excellent student video projects were posted for student reference. Section 7, Unit Discussions, allowed students to participate in the discussion board based on the guideline regulated by the instructor. Section 8 was the Teacher-Student
Interaction and Q&A. After completion of each unit’s online test, students were asked to fill out the online unit survey for course summative and formative evaluation. The content of the survey included: content appropriateness, learner affective factors (i.e., attitudes, self-expectations, motivations, and interests), learning difficulties, technical problems, instructor and TA assistance, etc. If students encountered any learning or technical difficulties, they could post the questions for immediate assistance. Section 9, “Useful Links,” had many useful online resources posted as supplemental or referential material. Section 10, “Grade,” helped students track personal grades for all activities.

**The Training of Video Production Techniques**

An easy-to-use video production software, Movie Maker (Russell, 2013), was taught in the first week of the semester in order to cultivate student video production skills. Its usage facilitated the creation of self-introduction English videos with subtitles (practicing writing skills), images (carrying out photo-taking skills and creativity) and sound files (applying speaking skills).

**The Implementation Procedures**

The course took place from July 1, 2010 to January 19, 2011. The implementation procedures are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1**: Time Table of the Implementation Procedures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Tasks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>July 1-Aug. 31, 2010</td>
<td>2 months</td>
<td>Design and develop course materials, upload all course materials to WIN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sep. 15, 2010</td>
<td>1 week</td>
<td>Course introduction, pre-test, grouping and technical training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dates</td>
<td>Duration</td>
<td>Tasks</td>
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<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct 6-20, 2010</td>
<td>3 weeks</td>
<td>Unit 1 in-class course instruction, Q&amp;A, online practice tests, after-class discussion questions, Q&amp;A and online tutoring by TA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct. 27, 2010</td>
<td>1 week</td>
<td>Online Test 1, online course evaluation survey 1, Unit 1 video project production.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov. 3-17, 2010</td>
<td>3 weeks</td>
<td>Unit 2 in-class instruction and after-class tutoring (same as Unit 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov. 24, 2010</td>
<td>1 week</td>
<td>Online Test 2, online course evaluation survey 2, Unit 2 video project production.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec. 1-15, 2010</td>
<td>3 weeks</td>
<td>Unit 3 in-class instruction and after-class tutoring (same as Unit 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec. 22, 2010</td>
<td>1 week</td>
<td>Online Test 3, online course evaluation survey 3, Unit 3 video project production</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec. 29, 2010-Jan. 12, 2011</td>
<td>3 weeks</td>
<td>Unit 4 in-class instruction and after-class tutoring (same as Unit 1), Unit 4 video project production</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan. 19, 2011</td>
<td>1 week</td>
<td>Online Test 4, online course evaluation survey 4, post test, course debriefing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The course design and development were completed in 2 months. The total length of the semester was 18 weeks. The first week included course introduction, pre-testing and technique training. The last week was for post-testing and after-learning reflection/debriefing. Every unit was taught in one month. Students had classes in a language lab equipped with computers, headsets, and speakers. Each class was 100 minutes in length, divided into 2 periods, with 50 minutes per period. During the first period of week 1, the students watched the instructional video, then listened and read aloud
sentences from the text through their computers until every new word, phrase, or sentence was learned. In the second period, students interacted with their computers, self-studying the lesson and taking the first online practice test. The instructor would ask individual students to read aloud and recall what they had learned to check their comprehension of what had been taught during the self-directed study process. During the first period of week 2, the previously -learned lesson was reviewed, and Parts 3 and 4 (text and grammar usage/sentence structure) of the instructional PPT were taught. In the second period, students repeated the previous week’s self-study session. The instructor would check each student’s perceptions of what was taught to find his or her personal learning difficulties or questions and provide proper guidance. The first period of week 3 was an overall review of the unit lesson. During the second period, students were requested to complete the third online practice test as many times as needed until all questions were answered correctly before leaving. The instructor monitored the class and served as a guide and personal tutor for individualized instruction, especially for slower learners. During the first period of week 4, students were asked to take the online test. The tests were auto-graded and feedback was given immediately upon test submission. During the second period, the correct answers were explained to reinforce comprehension.

**Online Tutoring**

On the WIN discussion board, there were 12 lesson-related weekly discussion topics (3 for each unit), after-learning reflections, and Q&A. Students were divided into 5 groups, with 5 to 6 people per group. During the first three weeks of learning, each group of students participated in the discussion board to share ideas with other members regarding the weekly class topic. They also needed to respond to group members based on the discussion guidelines. The teaching assistant (TA) provided sample articles for each discussion topic as a writing model for student reference. The TA would monitor
the discussion board and mind the less-motivated/participating students, providing individualized web-based guidance through the WIN chat room or alternative messengers, such as MSN or Skype. Students could post their after-learning reflections or ask individual questions (i.e., learning difficulties, or technical problems) on Q&A for individualized TA assistance. Students were requested to fill out an online unit survey within a week after every unit. The results were used for course formative evaluation so the instructor could investigate student attitudes. The results also provided insight in the strengths and drawbacks of the course design.

**The Assignments and Evaluation Criteria**

The assignments and evaluation criteria are listed as follows:

1. Twelve online practice tests (3 for each unit): Every unit included 3 interactive online practice tests: the dictation of vocabulary, phrases, short sentences, and long sentences to reinforce every unit lesson. Students listened to the question and typed in the correct answers. The tests were auto-graded and students would receive immediate feedback on self-error corrections after the submission of the practice tests.

2. Four online tests (20 points): Every unit contained an online test to assess student learning progress. The questions in the tests were from the test bank of practice tests. After several practice tests, students were to answer the questions for better grades. The idea was from the old proverbs —“practice makes perfect” and —“no pain, no gain.” Once students put effort into the practice tests, they would get a better grade. The tests were also used to assess student listening proficiency and grammatical knowledge.

3. Twelve discussion questions (30%): There were 12 weekly discussion questions (3 for each unit; see above). After class, students were requested to post their own ideas
and respond to other group members regarding the discussion question. The teaching assistant (TA) would monitor the discussion board, give feedback, and grade students.

4. Four unit video projects (40%): Every student needed to create 4 video projects, 1 for each unit. At the end of the semester, the 4 projects were combined into an “About Me” video. The 4 videos were: (a) self-introduction, (b) family and friends, (c) my home, and (d) my neighborhood. Every project included pictures, sound files, and subtitles. All video projects were submitted to WIN for peer evaluation.

5. Participation and attendance (10%): In class, students were evaluated based on their attitudes when taking the practice tests as well as during the self-study sessions. Attendance was also a must. Prior notice was required if the student could not attend class.

6. Peer evaluation (bonus points 5%): Students were asked to evaluate other video projects and vote for the top five. The top five received 5 bonus points.

Results and discussion

Based on the comparison of the pre-test and post test, the results of the online tests, analysis of the discussion posts, and after-learning unit surveys, the effects of the teaching method were ascertained, as revealed in Table 2.
### Table 2: The Effects of the Teaching Method

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Positive Effects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading &amp; Writing</td>
<td>(a) Students were able to use proper punctuation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(b) Students learned the usage of correct writing format.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(c) The length of paragraphs was much longer.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(d) Students learned more vocabulary and understood proper word/sentence usage.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(e) Grammatical errors were reduced.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking</td>
<td>(a) Student pronunciation and intonation improved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(b) Fluency was developed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening &amp; Grammar</td>
<td>Most students could listen and type vocabulary, phrases, short sentences, and long sentences with nearly 80% accuracy. The average score of the 4 online unit tests was raised from 64 to 76.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes/Motivation</td>
<td>(a) Critical thinking skills were developed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(b) The course was fun and without pressure.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(c) Students became more self-directed.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(d) Motivation was increased.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most students (60%) felt that their critical thinking skills developed. The course successfully trained students to become independent thinkers, helped them to plan their own study, and to be self-regulated and self-directed. According to the results of the unit surveys, 60% of the students claimed that they often referred to the model writing samples and online sources to make in-depth decisions for proper wording and grammatical usage. Nearly 70% of the participants stated that they spent time preparing and producing every unit video. Many learners expressed that they had fun, gained enthusiasm for learning, and hoped to continue studying. More importantly, the students felt that they had made significant progress, giving them confidence.
### Items & Negative effects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study load &amp; Technical problems</th>
<th>(a) For the at-risk learners, the study load was very heavy.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(b) The server provided by the IT Support Center was not stable.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(c) The Internet connection was poor.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(d) Learners had limited computer knowledge.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(e) Some of the computers were out-of-date with limited capacity.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

A few less-motivated students (5% of the participants) reported that the courseware was too heavy. Therefore, they seldom participated in group discussions or submitted video projects. The group discussions were subsequently slightly more difficult and this resulted in poor learning outcomes for the less-motivated. The server once crashed during the second online test. There was limited Internet access, when too many people accessed the Internet; the downloading speed of files became slower or failed. A few students (10%) encountered difficulties in producing video projects or were not familiar with the courseware interface. Students from remote areas (20% of participants) with poor Internet connection could not access the Internet to study at home. With low-capacity computers, students (30% of participants) depended on lab computers to work on video projects; however, the regular hours of the computer lab were limited from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

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**Evaluation and Implementation**

According to the unit surveys, the difficulty level of the course suited students’ English proficiency. The course guideline was appropriate, and content was well-sequenced and relevant. The online tutoring helped increase reading and writing abilities and trained students’ critical thinking. The interaction among instructors and students was positive, and instructors provided care and
encouragement and gave immediate feedback. Therefore, most students (80%) recommended this course to other students. However, students expressed dissatisfaction with the stability of lab computers. Some students had difficulty producing videos on their home computers due to insufficient technological capabilities stemming from older computer systems. Several students (10%) encountered difficulties producing the video or were not familiar with the courseware interface.

To improve the teaching method, the following should be implemented. First, courseware operation manuals or videos should be provided to every student in order to make sure that all students are familiar with the courseware. During the first week of the course, all students should be requested to study an operational manual, and then take the related quiz to ensure 100% accuracy in courseware operation. In the first month of the semester, 4 weekly technical training workshops should be provided by the TA to train students with lesser understanding of computers. These students should be familiarized with video production skills, the operation of the courseware, and solving personal technical problems. Additionally, the language labs should be equipped with high-speed Internet with flexible access, and be open to students from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m., especially those from remote areas with limited Internet access. The instructor should provide students with online office hours so they can receive immediate feedback or assistance through instant messengers (i.e., MSN, Skype, Facebook, or WIN chat room). Finally, if uncooperative students burden other group members, regrouping and cross-group discussions should be considered.

**Conclusions**

In today’s global world, good communicative English ability and basic communication skills have become necessities. To help the digital generation become self-directed and ready for reality, this class used WIN, interactive PPTs, and other multimedia to assist in the instruction of freshman English. The results show that the students’
language skills and positive attitudes increased, confirming that the course design was effective; however, technical problems and Internet access persisted as major obstacles. Therefore, computer training workshops and technical training programs provided at the beginning or before the start of the course would result in a better learning outcome.

The Authors

Hui-kuei Hsieh is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Applied English, WuFeng University, Taiwan. She obtained a Ph.D. in Educational Technology from Indiana State University, U.S.A. Her research interests include computer-assisted English teaching, distance learning, and web-based course design and development.

Hui-uen Chiai is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Applied English, WuFeng University. She holds a Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction from Chiayi University, Taiwan. The areas of her academic interest are methodology in TESOL, cooperative learning, extensive reading, reader response, reading strategies, and alternative assessment.

Erickson Lin is a university student majoring in World Literature at Simon Fraser University, BC, Canada. He has completed the TESOL training program and received the certificate from Oxford Seminars. He is Dr. Hsieh’s teaching assistant and specializes in curriculum planning, TESOL methods, essay writing, and editing.
References


APPENDIX I: SAMPLE UNIT PPT

Let's get started, now!

Hello everyone, I am now sitting in front of the computer using the webcam. Today I will like to take a chance to introduce myself. First of all, my name is Erickson Lin and I am 17 years old. I was born in 1992 in Taipei, Taiwan and I moved to Vancouver, Canada when I was 6 years old. I weigh 57 kilograms and I am 180 centimeters tall. My Zodiac sign (star sign) is Virgo.

I have a family of four, my mom, my dad, and a younger sister. I used to have a dog, Snooty, but not anymore.

I was set away 2 years ago because we couldn't take care of him.

I am now a freshman university student at SFU or Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, Canada.

I am studying World Literature. My major is Art.

Some people might ask me what I am going to do in the future.

I would say that I will be a writer, maybe a librarian, maybe a journalist, whatever, till it's just uncertain so I am not sure yet.

My hobby is reading and writing in my spare time. I like to go out shopping with my friends or chat with my friends on the Internet.

Hello everyone, I am now sitting in front of the computer using the webcam. Today I will like to take a chance to introduce myself. First of all, my name is Erickson Lin and I am 17 years old. I was born in 1992 in Taipei, Taiwan and I moved to Vancouver, Canada when I was 6 years old. I weigh 57 kilograms and I am 180 centimeters tall. My Zodiac sign (star sign) is Virgo.

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I am studying World Literature. My major is Art.

Some people might ask me what I am going to do in the future.

I would say that I will be a writer, maybe a librarian, maybe a journalist, whatever, till it's just uncertain so I am not sure yet.

My hobby is reading and writing in my spare time. I like to go out shopping with my friends or chat with my friends on the Internet.
I have a family of four, my mom, my dad, and a younger sister. I used to have a dog, Snoopy but not anymore. He was sent away 2 years ago because we couldn’t take care of him. I am now, a freshman university student at SFU or Simon Fraser University in Vancouver Canada. I am studying World Literature. My major is Art.

Some people might ask me what I am going to do in the future. I would say that I will be a writer, maybe a librarian, maybe a journalist, whatever, but it’s just uncertain so I am not sure yet. My hobby is reading and writing. In my spare time, I like to go out shopping with my friends or chat with my friends on the Internet. Well, that’s it. I will tell you more about myself next time. See you next time and have a great day.
My name is Erickson.

My hobby is reading and writing.

In my spare time, I like to go shopping with my friends. I also like to chat with friends on the Internet.

I moved to Vancouver, Canada when I was 5 years old. I used to have a dog named Snoopy.

It was sent away 3 years ago.

**English Names (Men):**

First name: + Last name - Erickson Lin

Titles:

(1) Mr. / Mrs. / Ms. / Miss

Greetings: Mr. Lin / Mrs. Lin / Ms. Lin / Miss Lin

**Popular US names:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English name</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Erickson</td>
<td>English name origins</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Chinese name:**

Erickson Lin

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English name:</td>
<td>Women/Girls:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**English name:**

Erickson

**Meaning:**

Erickson

http://unst.unlth.com/eng/conn/junior/con_1.html
APPENDIX II: PRE-TEST AND POST-TEST

Name: ___________________________ Student number: ___________________________

Directions: 1) Save this file as Self-Introduction_ your name (i.e., Self-Introduction_Hui-kuei Hsieh). 2) Feel free to refer to any information. DO NOT COPY any of the referred information or it will result in the failure of this class. 3) Do your best. 4) After completion, submit it to the WIN.

Task: Hi Class: Please make a self introduction according to the following information.

1. Please introduce yourself including your name, birth places and countries, hobbies, personal traits and jobs. (20 pts)

2. Describe yourself including your personalities, favorite foods, colors, sports, and daily routines. (20 pts)

3. Introduce your friends and families. (20 pts)

4. Introduce your home including rooms and things at home. (20 pts)

5. Introduce your neighborhood including places surrounded. (20 pts)