

Action Research in ESL: Enhancing English Oral Proficiency in an Asynchronous Speech Course

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Abstract—This action research investigated the impact of remedial collaborative techniques, pedagogical methods, and multimedia resources on enhancing oral language proficiency development among college English Language Learners (ELLs). Action research was used to gather data through a survey questionnaire and interviews with 25 ELLs enrolled in an asynchronous speech course. The participants' experiences with the remedial course strategies were positive for practicing their English communication skills. The participants attributed their satisfaction to the ample opportunities for collaboration with peers and the instructor, the course structure, and relevant multimedia resources. Feedback emerged as a critical factor in learner engagement and progress. The results underscore the potential of asynchronous learning for fostering oral language proficiency. However, further research is required to validate these findings in different contexts. This study provides a foundation for a more comprehensive understanding of factors contributing to the holistic improvement of oral language proficiency in asynchronous settings for college ELLs.

Index Terms—English language learners, oral language proficiency, asynchronous learning, language pedagogy, online educational strategies

I. INTRODUCTION

Numerous academic studies confirm asynchronous learning's efficacy in achieving academic outcomes on par with traditional, in-person teaching (Paul & Jefferson, 2019). This method of instruction is praised for its adaptability (Hrastinski, 2008), the depth of its interactive tools (Martin & Bolliger, 2018), and the autonomy it offers students in regulating their learning pace (Simonson et al., 2019). Asynchronous learning has indisputably proven its strength as a pedagogical tool. It fosters interaction and engagement and bolsters second-language communication skills (Buragohain et al., 2023). Furthermore, it ignites student motivation by delivering contextually meaningful and applicable learning experiences (Canals, 2020). Asynchronous learning platforms that deftly integrate various information and communication technologies, such as video conferencing, breakout rooms, and screen sharing, have the potential to shape a profoundly immersive and cooperative learning milieu for language learning (Kohnke & Moorhouse, 2022). However, the lack of real-time interaction in asynchronous learning can constrain dynamic exchanges (Sadaf et al., 2019) and challenge English Language Learners' oral language development (Means et al., 2014).

This action research study explored the impact of remedial strategies to offset oral language proficiency limitations in an asynchronous speech course to address the following research questions:

1. How do remedial collaborative techniques impact the development of oral language proficiency among college-level English Language Learners (ELLs) within an asynchronous language course?
2. How does remedial pedagogy influence oral language proficiency in the context of asynchronous learning?
3. What contribution do multimedia resources make in enhancing oral language proficiency among ELLs in an asynchronous language course?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Several barriers often impede the development of oral language proficiency in asynchronous learning environments. Three principal impediments were identified in prior research: communication barriers, pedagogical constraints, and insufficiencies in self-guided learning skills. Communication barriers arise from the limited opportunities for spontaneous interaction intrinsic to asynchronous learning settings. Pedagogical constraints encompass challenges associated with the reduced teacher-student interaction, which often limits students' immediate and regular feedback, restricts practice opportunities, and limits cultural context that often makes learning abstract and detached from real-world application. Finally, learners' lack of self-guided learning skills limits self-regulation, which is vital in the asynchronous learning environment that demands high levels of independence, information processing, critical thinking abilities, and metacognitive and self-reflection skills.

A. Limitations of Oral Language Development in Asynchronous Learning

Despite the many advantages of asynchronous learning (Simonson et al., 2019), one of its potential drawbacks is that it might hinder ELLs' oral language development and obstruct the adoption of accents and pronunciation (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016). This is because asynchronous learning lacks traditional classroom immediacy and conversational

dynamics that naturally foster fluency and comprehension through daily conversations allowing learners to listen to and emulate native speakers, enriching their language learning experience. In asynchronous learning, text-based materials limit learners' opportunities to practice pronunciation or interpret accents. Consequently, this could impair their understanding of language subtleties crucial for effective communication in the language they are studying (Thomson & Derwing, 2015).

Pedagogical constraints constitute a formidable obstacle to oral language skills development in asynchronous learning settings. Factors such as an absence of cultural context, diminished interaction between educators and students, and a need for more instant verbal feedback and practice opportunities collectively contribute to a less-than-ideal learning environment. The lack of immediate feedback leaves ELLs without the essential guidance to refine their pronunciation, grammatical structures, and patterns of language use (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). In contrast to conventional classroom settings, asynchronous learning environments impede ELLs' ability to make immediate corrections, a shortcoming that could affect language acquisition (Hrastinski, 2008). Furthermore, such delayed feedback may not effectively address the complex aspects of oral language learning, including the subtleties of intonation and stress patterns during live interactions (Golonka et al., 2014). These concerns underscore the importance of devising pedagogical methods to overcome these constraints in asynchronous language learning scenarios.

Language and culture are inextricably linked, with language proficiency often demanding an understanding of the cultural context intrinsic to the language (Kramsch, 2014). Learners may lack cultural context within asynchronous learning settings due to limited exposure to native speakers and authentic situations. This absence of context may challenge students' complete understanding of the social and cultural dimensions of the language, which is vital for effective communication (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013). In this regard, Byram (2021) emphasizes that intercultural competence is a central component of language learning, preparing learners to interpret and analyze experiences and situations from a cultural standpoint.

For successful navigation through asynchronous learning settings, it is imperative to have well-defined objectives, efficient time management, strategic choices in learning methodologies, and engaging in thorough and timely evaluations of outcomes. A lack of these competencies can lead to diminished motivation, negatively impacting ELLs' oral language proficiency (Artino, 2007), which inherently relies on consistent engagement and continuous practice in speaking and listening. The lack of self-guided learning skills hampers ELLs' ability to effectively utilize multimedia resources like videos, podcasts, and textual materials to improve their oral language proficiency (Lee & Choi, 2017). Without these skills, opportunities for enhancing language abilities, practicing oral language, and critically reflecting on language usage, pronunciation, and linguistic expressions may be missed (Schön, 1983).

B. Theoretical Framework

While asynchronous learning environments present distinct obstacles to oral language proficiency, their effective optimization hinges on a comprehensive approach blending interactive activities, in-depth content engagement, and self-reflection. Transitioning from theory to practice requires integrating key theoretical frameworks such as sociocultural, constructivist, and cognitive load theories. These frameworks provide a roadmap for structuring an actionable approach to language learning in asynchronous settings.

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, which posits learning as a social and interactive process (Vygotsky, 1978), should underlie asynchronous learning environments to promote social interactions. Discussion forums, collaborative projects, and peer feedback systems foster interaction, a key element of language acquisition (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Furthermore, Piaget's constructivist theory, which underscores the learner's active role in building knowledge from their environment, is foundational for asynchronous learning that engages with resources at their own pace, enabling individual exploration and knowledge construction (Piaget, 1952; Salmon, 2004).

Sweller's cognitive load theory provides essential guidance for structuring asynchronous learning environments. This theory emphasizes the importance of carefully managing cognitive resources during learning to prevent overload (Sweller, 1988). By utilizing scaffolding strategies, instructors can build on learners' knowledge, increasing complexity as learners become more proficient. Additionally, setting clear learning objectives gives learners a target to aim for and an understanding of what they need to achieve. Regular feedback gives learners an insight into their progress and areas of improvement, thus promoting self-regulation and helping them efficiently allocate cognitive resources toward improving their language skills. By integrating these strategies, we can significantly enhance the coherence and effectiveness of asynchronous learning environments, making them more accommodating and beneficial for (ELLs).

Designing asynchronous learning environments that foster oral language development requires the integration of collaborative activities and strategic technology use. Collaborative activities encourage interaction among learners, while various technological tools can be employed to enhance their listening and speaking proficiency (Sun & Chang, 2012). In addition, the curriculum should incorporate real-world and cultural contexts to provide a platform for learners to create meaningful connections, which in turn trigger deeper engagement with the curriculum content. This immersive approach can significantly boost student motivation and help learners improve verbal communication abilities (Kramsch, 2014).

Multimedia resources are invaluable in catering to diverse learning needs and preferences improving learners' linguistic comprehension and expressive skills. Presenting information in various ways allows for multiple learning styles and promotes inclusivity. Furthermore, including reflective activities and developing online communities foster

critical language skills evaluation. Reflective activities enable learners to review their progress and identify areas of improvement, while online communities offer opportunities for peer learning and feedback. These components together enrich self-guided learning experiences, cultivating an environment that encourages continual growth and development in language learning (Godwin-Jones, 2012; Goh & Vandergrift, 2021).

III. METHODOLOGY

A. *Purpose and Context of the Study*

This action research study used pedagogical techniques to maintain a consistent learning rhythm and optimally manage the course pace. This strategy aimed to maximize student engagement and foster oral language development. Incorporating ongoing assessments, regular support, and constructive feedback further bolstered this design, providing a mechanism to track students' progress toward course objectives.

The course promoted a collaborative learning culture and harnessed multimedia resources to craft a rich, immersive learning environment leveraging effective remedial strategies. A vital element of this design was the inclusion of formal and informal discussion forums supplemented by various collaborative tools. These strategies sought to enhance learner interaction and build a community-centric learning environment. Moreover, integrating conferencing tools mimicked real-time classroom dynamics, stimulating learner engagement through interactive discussions, debates, and presentations.

Multimedia resources were seamlessly integrated into the course, including recorded lectures, video demonstrations, and interactive online content. A wealth of textual and supplemental learning materials, such as e-books and articles, were used to deepen students' understanding and offer diverse perspectives on the subject matter. The course highlighted targeted language learning tools, such as pronunciation guides, vocabulary builders, and interactive language exercises geared toward developing oral language proficiency. This holistic approach aimed to compensate for the potential limitations of asynchronous learning in enhancing oral language development and offering a balanced, comprehensive approach to language learning.

This action research study investigated the experiences of college English Language Learners (ELLs) participating in a 12-week asynchronous speech course at a northeastern university. The study aimed to assess the effectiveness of research-informed strategies to enhance oral language proficiency. The course was carefully structured to offset oral language development challenges in asynchronous environments. Its curriculum promotes interpersonal interaction while stimulating learner engagement, motivation, and self-management skills. The assignments, tailored to foster these objectives, included: creating three extemporaneous video presentations of varying lengths and purposes, developing a speech outline and PowerPoint presentation for each speech, conducting peer evaluations and feedback using speech assessment rubrics, and engaging in collaborative tasks and discussions designed to broaden students' public speaking skills.

The study involved 25 undergraduate non-native English speakers who completed an online orientation and a computer literacy quiz to ensure their preparedness for the digital components of the course. These participants were fully briefed about the study's aims, the data collection process, and their rights. This included the right to withdraw at any time without consequence. Informed consent was obtained, underscoring their voluntary participation and comprehensive understanding of the research. Measures were taken to safeguard participant confidentiality and privacy, using numerical identifiers to ensure anonymity and create a secure environment conducive to authentic participation.

B. *Research Instruments*

This study used a students' survey questionnaire (Table 1) to explore the participants' perceptions of the collaborative techniques, pedagogical methods, and multimedia resources implemented in the course to counterbalance the limitations of oral language development in asynchronous learning.

TABLE 1
STUDENTS' SURVEY

Survey Statements	YES	NO
1. There were ample opportunities for student-to-student interactions (like group discussions and collaborative projects) that allowed for practicing oral English skills.		
2. Participating in student-to-student interactions (like audio/video messages, presentations) helped me enhance my English-speaking abilities.		
3. Interacting with other students in English increased my confidence in using English for oral communication.		
4. Listening to other students in audio/video discussions and presentations improved my English listening comprehension.		
5. Interacting with other students provided opportunities to expand my English vocabulary and improve my grammar.		
6. The instructor explained the course objectives, assignments, and grading system clearly and efficiently.		
7. The instructor provided timely, constructive feedback, followed clear grading criteria, and helped me improve my understanding and performance.		
8. The instructor created an engaging, motivating, and respectful learning environment, respected diverse student backgrounds, and handled disagreements fairly.		
9. Multimedia resources in the course were consistently available, easy to access on various devices, and free from technical difficulties.		
10. The multimedia resources were relevant to the course content, contributed to my understanding of the material, and made the course more engaging and interactive.		
11. The course offered diverse multimedia resources (e.g., videos, podcasts, interactive modules) that catered to different learning styles and incorporated resources from various reliable sources.		
12. The multimedia resources were well-integrated with course activities, with clear guidance and opportunities to discuss or ask questions about them.		

After completing the survey, the students were asked to respond to 12 interview questions (Table 1) in writing to explore their experiences with the course remedial strategies. This qualitative research method enables the immersive exploration of individual experiences and perceptions (Patton, 2002).

TABLE 2
STUDENTS' INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Survey Statements
Open-ended questions:
1. How have student-to-student interactions within the course contributed to developing your English-speaking abilities? Can you provide some specific instances or experiences?
2. How did audio/video interactions impact your confidence in using English for oral communication? Please describe any moments that stand out.
3. Can you share specific examples of how listening to other students' audio/video presentations has improved your English listening comprehension?
4. Can you describe how interactions with other students helped you expand your English vocabulary and improve your grammar? Please provide a few examples.
5. In what areas could the instructor have clarified the course objectives, assignments, and grading system? What improvements would you suggest?
6. Could you share a specific instance where the instructor's feedback significantly influenced your understanding and performance in the course?
7. Can you provide an example illustrating how the instructor created an engaging and respectful learning environment, especially during disagreements?
8. Did you encounter any difficulties while accessing the multimedia resources provided in the course? If so, could you describe these experiences?
9. How have the multimedia resources contributed to your understanding of the course content and enhanced the course's interactivity? Could you provide specific examples?
10. In what ways did the variety of multimedia resources cater to your learning style? Could you share some examples of how these resources supported your learning?
11. How effectively were the multimedia resources integrated with course activities? Could you explain how this integration either aided or hindered your learning process?
12. What specific guidance would you have found beneficial for effectively using multimedia resources? Were there instances where you felt the guidance provided needed to be improved? Please elaborate.

Combining the survey and interview methods allowed the study to delve into the students' challenges and experiences to understand the factors influencing their language proficiency. This emphasis on qualitative data in the research process resonates with Marshall and Rossman (2014), who emphasizes the pivotal role such data plays in unearthing complex behaviors and phenomena in educational research.

IV. FINDINGS

Braun and Clarke (2006) posit that themes within qualitative research should have a tight nexus with the research questions being addressed. Accordingly, this synthesis focuses on assessing the effectiveness of remedial strategies in addressing the challenges college-level ELLs faced in their journey toward enhancing oral language proficiency. The research findings offered a diversified perspective on participants' experiences and reinforced the credibility and

integrity of the research. Below are the study findings organized as answers to the research questions.

A. How do Remedial Collaborative Techniques Impact the Development of Oral Language Proficiency Among College-Level English Language Learners (Ells) Within an Asynchronous Language Course?

The analysis of survey data suggests that implementing remedial collaborative techniques in the asynchronous course format has made a tangible, positive impact on students' oral language proficiency development. An overwhelming majority of students - 92%, to be exact - confirmed the effectiveness of these methodologies, asserting that they were provided numerous opportunities for peer interaction. This included participation in group discussions and joint projects, allowing them to refine their spoken English skills. Moreover, qualitative data collected through student interviews supported these findings. A notable comment came from Student 10, who observed that "The realistic contexts provided by classmates' video speeches helped me avoid similar errors". This statement underscores the essential role of peer-to-peer interaction in driving successful language acquisition.

The data also showed that 88% of students found that participating in student-to-student interactions, such as audio/video messages and presentations, enhanced their English-speaking abilities. Comments from students offer insights into these survey results. Student 7, for example, found value in "examples from student videos," noting they provided real-life situations and helped avoid potential mistakes.

Interacting with other students in English increased confidence in using English for oral communication for 92% of students. This statistic is further supported by comments from Student 17, who noted that "classmates' feedback helped me deliver my speeches more clearly and concisely". Interaction with peers provided opportunities for constructive feedback, enhancing confidence levels.

Regarding listening to peers during discussions and presentations, 80% of students agreed it improved their English listening comprehension. Here, peer learning enhanced listening skills, a critical component of language learning. Furthermore, 88% of students reported that interaction with their peers helped expand their English vocabulary and improve grammar. These findings align with comments from students like Student 19, who said, "Discussion forums helped me with my communication skills through peer and instructor feedback".

The evidence collected through the survey and students' comments suggests that remedial collaborative techniques play a pivotal role in developing oral language proficiency among college-level ELLs in an asynchronous language course. Peer interaction, instructor feedback, and discussion forum engagement are crucial in these strategies, significantly enhancing students' language proficiency.

B. How does Remedial Pedagogy Affect Oral Language Proficiency in an Asynchronous Learning Context?

Results indicated that instructor's clarity, feedback, and a positive, engaging, and respectful learning environment significantly impacted oral language proficiency in the asynchronous course. The survey results revealed that 60% of students found instructor explanations of course objectives, assignments, and the grading system clear and efficient. However, 40% of students disagreed or were unsure.

64% of students agreed that the instructor's timely and constructive feedback improved their course performance. However, 32% of students were unsure of or disagreed with this sentiment. The data suggested that while feedback benefited the majority, a significant proportion of students did not find it effective, possibly due to variations in learning styles or communication barriers.

80% of students agreed that the learning environment was engaging, motivating, fair, and respectful. Qualitative analysis of students' responses to the interview provided more nuanced insights. The instructor's role, especially in providing feedback, emerged as an essential factor in language development. Student 2 said, "With the professor's feedback, I have been able to perfect my speech-making skills". Similarly, Student 5 stated, "Positive comments from the instructor had a major impact on my learning experience". However, as reported by Student 34, inadequate feedback led to less satisfactory learning outcomes and even withdrawal from the course.

Students also valued practice and engagement opportunities. Student 5, Student 11, and Student 15 all mentioned the benefits of ample speaking opportunities. Notably, Student 22 pointed out the low-pressure environment asynchronous learning offered, stating, "There was enough opportunity for you to practice my speaking skills. I honestly did not feel nervous; it was not much of a live feed, so there was much time to pace yourself".

Furthermore, self-assessment assignments have emerged as another crucial component of remedial pedagogy. Student 5 said, "The self-assessment assignments helped me improve my speaking skills." Similarly, Student 7 stated, "The self-assessment assignments enhanced my post-video quality as I was able to contribute my own passions to the speeches." This viewpoint was further echoed by Student 25, who found that self-assessment nurtured an interest in the topics of their speeches, saying, "The self-assessment assignments helped me improve my speaking and be more interested in the topics because I wanted to talk about what spoke to me more".

The study findings suggest that remedial pedagogy significantly influences oral language proficiency in an asynchronous learning context. The factors contributing to this outcome include clear and constructive feedback from the instructor. They also include a positive and inclusive learning environment, plenty of practice opportunities, and self-assessment assignments.

C. What Contribution do Multimedia Resources Make in Enhancing Oral Language Proficiency Among Ells in an

Asynchronous Language Course?

The results indicate that multimedia resources are pivotal in enhancing ELL understanding, catering to diverse learning styles, and adding an interactive element to the asynchronous learning experience. In the survey, students valued the consistent availability and easy accessibility of multimedia resources, with 76% agreeing that these resources were consistently available, easy to access, and free from technical difficulties. However, 12% of students expressed uncertainty, which indicates that a minority of students may encounter difficulties accessing these resources.

The relevance of multimedia resources to course content was a significant aspect. 80% of students agreed that these resources contributed to their understanding of the material, making the course more engaging and interactive. The data suggests that multimedia resources serve as effective tools to make course content more accessible and engaging for students.

The students also appreciated the diversity of multimedia resources offered in the course. 80% agreed that the course provided diverse multimedia resources catering to different learning styles and sourced from reliable sources.

Moreover, 72% of students agreed that the multimedia resources were well-integrated with the course activities, and there was clear guidance on how to use these resources. Incorporating multimedia resources into course activities has facilitated learning among students.

Analyzing student responses to interviews further underscored the importance of multimedia resources. For example, many students cited videos as instrumental in understanding and completing tasks. Student 17 noted, "Videos served as a helpful tool in understanding the tasks at hand," Student 9 added, "Practical assistance offered through videos simplified the assignments for me". Additionally, Student 5 shared, "Videos allowed me to grasp the course material more productively". The quality of these videos also emerged as a significant factor, with Student 24 pointing out, "I found videos produced professionally more effective compared to those of inferior quality". However, some students found inspiration in less professionally produced videos, as expressed by Student 14, "Even though of lesser quality, the videos made by fellow students proved to be quite motivational".

Interestingly, the videos' length was also highlighted. Student 9 preferred shorter videos due to their conciseness, stating, "Compared to extended videos, shorter ones provided more benefits".

The study findings underscore the importance of multimedia resources in enhancing oral language proficiency among ELLs in an asynchronous language course. Considerations such as availability, ease of access, relevance, diversity, integration with course activities, and the quality and length of videos can significantly impact their effectiveness.

V. DISCUSSION

The findings of this action research study contribute to the existing body of research on the effectiveness of remedial strategies, including collaborative techniques, pedagogy, and multimedia resources, in enhancing oral language proficiency among ELLs in asynchronous language courses (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The results provide valuable insights into the impact of these strategies and highlight the importance of tailoring their implementation to meet students' needs and preferences.

Collaborative techniques emerged as a significant factor in improving oral language skills among college-level ELLs. The data revealed that these techniques provided ample opportunities for student-to-student interactions, such as group discussions and collaborative projects, which allowed for practicing oral English skills. This aligns with previous research highlighting the importance of interactive learning environments for language acquisition (Long, 1981). The qualitative findings further support this, as students appreciated the practical contexts for learning provided through peer videos, indicating the value of peer learning in language development (Boud et al., 2001).

Remedial pedagogy played a crucial role in enhancing oral language proficiency. The study demonstrated that clear instructions, timely feedback, and an engaging learning environment facilitated language development. However, there were areas for improvement, particularly in the clarity of explanations and provision of feedback. This aligns with the importance of effective feedback emphasized in previous research (Carless, 2006). Instructor feedback significantly enriched the learning experience, providing constructive guidance and motivating students to strive for higher performance. The option to resubmit assignments for better grades also fostered continuous learning and improvement, aligning with the principles of formative assessment (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Shute, 2008).

Multimedia resources were identified as essential tools for enhancing oral language proficiency. The findings indicated that these resources were consistently available, accessible, and relevant to the course content, contributing to students' understanding and making the course more engaging and interactive. However, video quality and length emerged as factors influencing their effectiveness. Students preferred shorter, focused videos that minimized cognitive overload and maximized comprehension, aligning with cognitive load theory (Mayer, 2005). The study also revealed the need to consider students' preferences regarding video length, quality, and reading and writing assignments volume to optimize the learning experience.

The findings underscore the effectiveness of remedial strategies, including collaborative techniques, pedagogy, and multimedia resources, in enhancing oral language proficiency among ELLs in asynchronous language courses. However, the study also identified areas for improvement, such as enhancing the clarity of instructions, providing effective feedback, and optimizing multimedia resource quality and accessibility. By addressing these areas, educators and course designers can further enhance language proficiency development among ELLs in asynchronous learning contexts.

VI. IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study are instrumental in guiding the design and implementation of practical online language courses that effectively address ELLs' learning needs. By optimizing the structure and content of remedial collaborative techniques and pedagogical methods and harnessing multimedia resources, educators can create a more conducive learning environment for oral language proficiency development. This study thus lays the foundation for a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that contribute to the holistic improvement of oral language proficiency in college ELLs.

VII. CONCLUSION

This study offered valuable insights into enhancing oral language proficiency among college ELLs through remedial collaborative techniques, pedagogical methods, and multimedia resources. These multi-dimensional enhancements were systematically assessed through student surveys and interviews. The study substantiated the efficacy of asynchronous courses in honing English-speaking skills, contingent upon a well-defined, authentic, pertinent course structure and assignments. Integrating online multimedia resources, especially videos, emerged as a significant factor in student engagement and learning. Moreover, the students' preference for specific, constructive, and actionable feedback accentuated the importance of effective scaffolding and support in asynchronous learning environments.

However, the study has limitations, including the sample size and diversity, which calls for further research to generalize the findings. Future research avenues include comparing the effectiveness of asynchronous versus synchronous courses for college ELLs, examining the influence of diverse multimedia resources, and investigating the role of instructor feedback and grading on communicative skill development. Additionally, exploring cultural differences in asynchronous learning environments can provide deeper insights into their impact on communicative skill development among ELLs.

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