Communicating Authentically: Enhancing EFL Students' Spoken English via Videoconferencing

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Abstract

This study examines how synchronous computer-mediated communication (SCMC) tools afford English as a foreign language (EFL) learners with the opportunity to enrich their language learning experience, and so enhance their speaking proficiency by engaging in real communicative tasks with native English speakers (NSs). Two NSs and 36 students from a southern university in Saudi Arabia participated in a 12-week online videoconferencing study. The students were randomly divided into two groups. A pretest–post-test design was used to investigate changes in EFL learners' English speaking proficiency, and to examine their learning experiences. Participants' speech samples and their beliefs about using videoconferencing as a learning tool were collected during the first and twelfth weeks. Two English teachers then assessed the participants' performance using Sawaki's (2007) assessment scale for second language (L2) speaking ability. *T*-test and descriptive statistics were used to analyze and explain the data. Qualitative data was gathered from content analyses of the interviews conducted at the end of the study. The findings showed modest improvement in the participants' speaking proficiency and positive attitudes toward videoconferencing as a learning tool.

Keywords: videoconferencing, authenticity, conversation, SCMC (synchronous computer-mediated communication), speaking proficiency

Introduction

Learners of English, either as a second or as a foreign language, gauge their mastery (proficiency) of the language by using what they have learnt in class to engage actively in spontaneous and unstructured authentic dialogue with members of the English-speaking community. They do so in order to express themselves in a degree of seamless flow of organized and cohesive ideas (fluency), by using the correct word and pronunciation (accuracy) without conversation breakdowns (strain or obvious search for expressions, (Bueno-Alastuey, 2013; Council of Europe, 2001; Richards, 2008). This view is consistent with the recent paradigm shift in second language education, from focusing on the context of an isolated classroom to emphasizing naturalistic settings, and from a focus on L2 learning to an emphasis on L2 users (Wang & Vasquez, 2012).

The input-poor environment in EFL classes minimizes students' opportunities to communicate and express their ideas and opinions, either in class or elsewhere (Kouraogo, 1993; Neri, Mich, Gerosa, & Giuliani, 2008). The following issues have shaped the current state of pedagogy with respect to teaching speaking skills in the EFL context: large sized classes have limited speaking opportunities (Meddings & Thornbury, 2009); assessment criteria that mainly focus on grammatical accuracy; and difficulties in recruiting native English-speaking teachers that are typically related to financial and infrastructure issues (Gan, 2012).

Speaking is, by nature, a social act that aims at communicating and exchanging information with members of the applicable language community and at creating and maintaining relationships (Spratt, Pulverness, & Williams, 2005). Computer-mediated communication (CMC) serves as a venue for social interaction that offers EFL learners the opportunity for authentic use of English to convey their own messages (transforming, not telling), obtain feedback and evaluate their EFL learning. It also helps them create their identities as L2 users outside of the formal instructional setting of the classroom, while it also helps them build social relations with others (Chapelle, 2009; Satar & Özdener, 2008). Synchronous Computer-mediated Communication (SCMC) has been investigated as a useful medium for facilitating speaking skills acquisition and development of students' communicative competence (Jauregi, de Graff, van den Bergh, & Kriz, 2012; Levy & Stockwell, 2006; Kervin & Derewianka, 2011), pronunciation (Bueno-Alastuey, 2010), modified output (Bueno-Alastuey, 2013), willingness to communicate (Freiermuth & Jarrell, 2006; Macintyre, 2007), and reduce anxiety (Bueno-Alastuey 2011; Satar & Ozdener, 2008). SCMC's capacity for rapid interaction and spontaneous feedback opportunities enables instructors to relocate certain in-class speaking tasks outside the physical classroom (James, 2013; Neri, Mich, Gerosa, & Giuliani, 2008). The majority of SCMC research focuses on the use of text-based (Abrams, 2003; Johnson, 2008) and voice-based facilities (Bueno-Alastuey, 2010, 2011, 2013; Guth & Maio, 2010; Satar & Özdener, 2008; Sauro, 2011; Yamada, 2009).

On the other hand, a growing interest amongst researchers to explore the potential of implementing videoconferencing in an educational context has been observed (*cf*. Lawson, Comber, Gage & Cullum-Hanshaw, 2010; Satar, 2013; Yanguas, 2012). A scrutiny of these studies shows that researchers approach this issue from different perspectives using a variety of research designs. Researchers have investigated the design and use of videoconferencing in the language classroom (Hampel & Stickler, 2012; Wang, Chen, & Levy, 2010). They have also explored the impact of using videoconferencing to enhance the intercultural competence of L2 students (Jung, 2013; Yang & Chen, 2014;), their motivation and self-confidence (Jauregi, de Graaff, van den Bergh, & Kriz, 2012; Kissau, 2012; Wu, Marek & Yen 2012), and their language learning (Ko, 2012; Lu, Goodale, & Guo, 2014; Satar, 2013; Yanguas, 2010).

These studies reveal mixed finding about the benefits of using videoconferencing in the L2 classroom. A significant improvement in oral proficiency and pronunciation has been observed (*cf*. Lu, Goodale, & Guo, 2014; Xiao, Yang, & Zhang, 2010; Yanguas, 2010);

accurate word choice (Lu, Goodale, & Guo, 2014) has been contradicted by Ko's (2012) findings of insignificant differences in students' speaking performance. The findings have endorsed the improvement in the videoconferencing participants' fluency in receiving more standard modeling input (Bueno-Alastuey, 2013), and in the self-monitoring of their linguistic productions (Lu, Goodale, & Guo, 2014). Yanguas' (2010) study findings have attributed the low performance of the audio group to the "lack of visual contact" with NSs. This refutes the common belief that the anonymity of the audio medium reduces L2 learners' anxiety levels (Bueno-Alastuey 2011; Satar & Ozdener, 2008).
The findings of these studies of an exploratory nature serve as a starting point in investigating the impact of videoconferencing on Saudi EFL students' speaking proficiency in a real classroom. Moreover, they add to the dearth of research regarding how videoconferencing can contribute to developing EFL students' speaking proficiency, by using it as a means to develop L2 oral skills and to help provide some answers to the many questions that have arisen in the field (Yanguas, 2012).

The aim of this study, therefore, is to investigate the effects of videoconferencing, as a learning platform, on the development of Saudi EFL speaking skills (accuracy, fluency, word choice, cohesion and coherence). A secondary aim is to investigate the participants' attitudes towards the implementation of the technology (videoconferencing or VC) in this real-world situation – an advanced English speaking class. The videoconferencing technology's similarity to face-to-face interaction, in terms of transmitting instant visual cues and body language, creates a realistic communications setting. Such a setting then provides students with the opportunity to become involved in authentic dialogues, to negotiate meaning, and to practice and develop ways of arguing and expressing their own ideas as they make the transition from being language learners to being language users. Thus, the present study was conducted in order to elicit answers to the following two questions:

1) Does the use of videoconferencing as a learning tool enhance Saudi EFL students' speaking skills?
2) Do students perceive that they gained confidence as users and improved their speaking performance?

Conceptual Framework

The Interaction Hypothesis of language acquisition and development (Long, 1996) serves as the conceptual framework underpinning this study. This hypothesis associates input, attention (i.e noticing of mismatch between input and their own output), and output via negotiations of meaningful encounters which trigger interactional adjustment and so facilitate language acquisition - because they connect input, internal learner capacities, and output in productive ways (Doughty & Long, 2003). Videoconferencing affords

synchronous online communication and social presence. Thus, it facilitates ample opportunities for authentic conversations: the negotiation of meaning and form between L2 learners and their native speaker interlocutors creates an ideal learning environment (Blake, 2008; Yamada & Akahori, 2007). During their oral interaction, L2 learners rely on linguistic input in order to make the language more comprehensible. However, communication may start to break down as L2 learners either fail to express themselves properly or need to ask for more details or elaboration of information new to them. At this stage, the interlocutors will engage in a negotiation of meaning. NSs modify their speech via several mechanisms, such as repetition at a slower rate, using simpler words, and visual clues. In so doing they provide scaffolding, allowing learners to express meanings that they would otherwise be unable to. Such negotiation processes provide evidence which reinforces learners' knowledge about the language, and also provides new information on aspects of the L2 about which the learners had little or no knowledge (Gass & Torres, 2005). New comprehensible input then becomes a part of the learner's input and later, of their output (Gass & Mackey, 2007; Zhang, 2012).

Methodology

Participants

Thirty-six students registered for the speech workshop course (an advanced speaking course during the third year of the four-year Bachelor program in English) at the English Language Department of a southern university campus in Saudi Arabia. They participated in the study during the second semester of the 2012-2013 academic year. The students were informed that their decision to participate would in no way affect their grades in the class, and that their participation in the study was strictly voluntary.

The participants were English undergraduate Saudi males in their early 20s, from middle-class families. They had never been to English-speaking countries or been taught by native English-speaking teachers. The speaking proficiency level of the participants was heterogeneous, ranging from pre-intermediate to intermediate, as defined by the Common European Framework for the English Language (Council of Europe, 2001).

The participants were randomly assigned into two groups: the experimental group (n = 17 students) and the control group (n = 19 students). The control group took the English-speaking course delivered by the EFL course instructor in a regular classroom setting, which lasted 100 minutes every Thursday. The experimental group participants were involved in a one-hour online (via videoconferencing) conversation session in a language laboratory every Sunday and Tuesday during the 12-week study period (24 hours of

videoconferencing sessions in total). The topic of each class session was the same as that of the control group.

Two NSs from the United States and South Africa were involved, who had been working at the university main campus and teaching English in Saudi Arabia since 2011. They made great efforts to involve most students in every session; in addition, they consulted with the researcher after every session to ensure that all the students were involved in the discussions. Students and their NS teachers met during the first week. This meeting served as an icebreaker for students anxious about meeting the native-English teachers. The students introduced themselves at the beginning, then the NSs and the students engaged in a friendly conversation about their future plans.

Technology Tool

The experimental group used a videoconferencing system developed by Cisco Systems (fig. 1). A thorough exploration of the features of the videoconferencing tool was conducted early in the study design phase, in order to identify features that might be embedded in the design of the tasks. Ease of use and instant technical support had been considered when the tool was selected. Two tutorial sessions were held before the study was conducted, one for the participants and the other for the native English-speaking teachers. The tutorials introduced the features of the tool and gave participants the chance to use it.

Figure 1. Screen shot of the Cisco Systems videoconferencing tool

Data Collection Instruments

The study adopted a non-equivalent, pretest–post-test, quasi-experimental research design and a combined inductive–deductive research approach to fulfill its research purpose and respond to the research questions. A multimodal methodology that values both empirical (quantitative) and hermeneutic (qualitative) inquiries was used. Such an integration of

methods adds breadth, richness, and depth to our understanding (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), and allowed to embrace both types of explanations of phenomena. These methods included a speaking assessment rubric, video recording and a semi-structured interview.

1. **The speaking test.** The study has adopted Sawaki's (2007) assessment scale for L2 speaking ability, the validity of which has received extensive support from other scholars in the field (e.g., Sawaki, Stircker, & Oranje, 2008; Stoynoff, 2012). The scoring rubric for the speaking test was comprised of five analytic rating scales: *organization*, *pronunciation*, *vocabulary*, *cohesion*, and *grammar*. The first four scales were rated on a 4-point scale, ranging from 1 (*no evidence*) to 4 (*good*). By contrast, grammar was rated on a 7-point scale, ranging from 1 (*no systematic evidence of range and control of few or no structures; errors of all or most possible are frequent*) to 7 (*complete range and no systematic error, just lapses*).

In order to obtain pretest data, two independent raters used Sawaki's rubric to assess L2 learners' speaking ability, while reviewing the recordings of the experimental group participants' second videoconferencing sessions and the audio recordings of their counterparts in the control group. The post-test data was gathered from the recordings of the final videoconferencing sessions for the experimental group, while the audio recordings served as the post-test of the control group. The raters were trained to use the rubric and so obtained a good inter-rater reliability value range between 0.71, for the pretest data, and 0.74, for the post-test data as interpreted by Gwet (2008).

Video recording

The videoconferencing sessions were recorded and placed on the university secured server immediately at the end of each session, and then saved on two external hard disks. Video recording generally enables researchers to have access to naturally occurring events and so "preserves the temporal and sequential structure which is so characteristic of interaction" (Knoblauch, Schnettler, Raab & Soeffner, 2006:19). It also provides a fine-grained multimodal record of the details of an event (e.g., gazes, expressions, body postures and gestures). These features enable researchers using video data to examine resources and practices rigorously and systematically through which participants, within an interaction, build their social activities, combining the use of speech, facial expressions, gaze, gesture and posture.

Interview

In-depth interviewing was employed in collecting L2 participants' perceptions of using videoconferencing to converse synchronously with NSs. It elicits a vivid picture of each participant's perspective on the research topic. It is more practical to conduct intensive individual interviews with a number of participants to explore, in regard to a particular idea, their thoughts and behavior in detail, and in such a way as to offer a more complete picture of social phenomena, and to help answer the research questions (Boyce & Neale 2006). The

researcher has interviewed the participants individually in English at the end of the study. They were asked for their impressions of the experiment and how they assessed their oral proficiency at the end of the experiment.

Procedure

The design of the tasks relied on the students' linguistics input (gained from the different English courses they have studied in the previous two years of the English program), and the pedagogical objectives of the Speech Workshop course, which aims to provide students with opportunities to give speeches (both informative and persuasive speeches), practice interviewing skills and be actively involved in discussions and debates inside and outside the classroom. A pool of authentic topics was provided relating to the students' daily lives and appropriate for the students' interests and proficiency levels (Ellis, 2003). This was agreed upon between the course instructor, the researcher, and the native English-speaking teachers prior to the beginning of the study. These topics were distributed across the four Speech Workshop objectives. The three students were encouraged to select from these topics to initiate the dialogue in every session in both groups. Each student was allocated 10 minutes to make his oral presentation and to interact with the native English-speaking teachers and their colleagues. NSs started with an icebreaker task to help the participants to feel comfortable about their proficiency levels (Fig. 2).

Figure 2. Screen shot of a NSs and EFL students videoconferencing session

The participants focused on meaning until conversation (communication) breakdowns occurred due to unfamiliar linguistic elements or inadequate linguistics input. The participants were encouraged to repair such breakdowns, either individually, or by being supported by their colleagues or the NSs, and then to shift their focus back to meaning. The order of these tasks and topics in the early sessions was intended to equip the participants with the necessary linguistic and interactional skills to promote meaningful interaction in the target language, before they engaged in the deeper persuasive conversations and debates

of the later sessions. Here, they were involved in dialogues and debates about complex topics such as the ban on Saudi women driving and sports extremism. NSs initiated the debates by asking for the reasons for sports extremism and the driving ban. They encouraged the participants to express themselves and to allow others to express opposing opinions. Students used linguistic and paralinguistic resources to express themselves while debating real life situations and so (covertly) to achieve the aim of the course.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data was analyzed by SPSS. The mean and standard deviations were calculated for the speaking proficiency tests (pre- and post-tests) for both groups. *T*-test for related samples was applied to detect significance change ($p < 0.05$) of proficiency achievement levels within groups from the pre-test to the post-test. A thematic analysis of the interview qualitative data was conducted. The data was then coded into smaller analyzable units by creating categories and concepts that were determined a priori and in accordance with the research questions (Lockyer 2004).

Findings

Research Question 1: Does the use of videoconferencing as a learning tool enhance Saudi EFL students' speaking skills?

The t-test for two independent samples was conducted to determine whether there were any statistically significant differences in the EFL participants' speaking proficiency between the two groups, *before* the videoconferencing tool was used, and so to provide baseline data. The test results (Table 1) showed no significant difference between the scores for the control group (M = 14.32, SD = 3.1) and the experimental group conditions (M = 14.64, SD = 3.3); t (34) = 0.22 and p = .216. These results indicate that there were no significant differences between the two groups in their speaking test performances at the beginning of the study.

Table 1
Pretest independent samples T-test data

	Control group			*Experimental group*					
Speaking ability Pretest	***N***	***X***	***SD***	***N***	***X***	***SD***	***t***	***df***	***p***
	19	*14.32*	*3.1*	*17*	*14.64*	*3.3*	*0.22*	*34*	*0.216*

In terms of the speaking test performances at the end of the study, the t-test analysis of the post-test results (Table 2) showed a significant difference in the scores between the control group (M = 16.2, SD = 2.12) and experimental group conditions (M = 18.06, SD = 1.9); *t* (34) = 2.51, *p* = .017.

Table 2
Post-test independent samples T-test data

	Control group			*Experimental group*					
	N	***X***	***S***	***N***	***X***	***S***	***t***	***df***	***p***
Speaking ability Posttest	*19*	16.2	2.12	*17*	18.06	1.9	*2.51*	*34*	*.017*

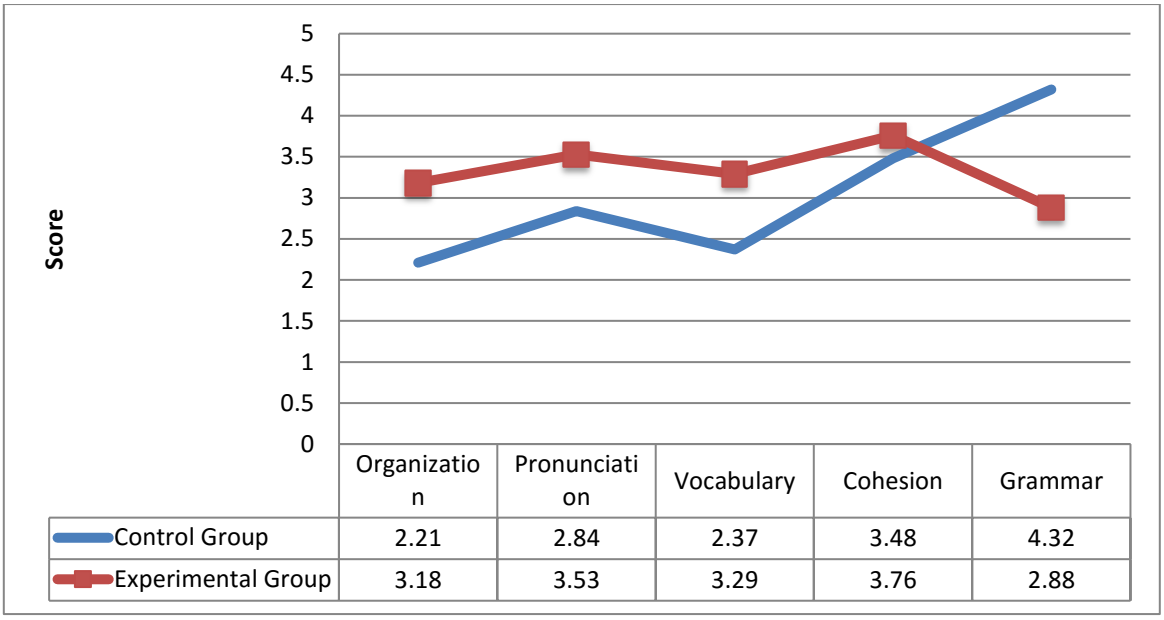
The findings of the analysis of the five different components of the test (Table 3) showed a significant difference in *organization* (*t* (34) = 3.2, *p* = .003); *pronunciation* (*t* (34) = 2.7, *p* = .009), *vocabulary* (*t* (34) = 2.95, *p* = .006), and *grammar* (*t* (34) = 4.45, *p* <.001). No significant differences were found in *cohesion* at the end of the study (*t* (34) = 1.387, *p* = .175).

Table 3
Speaking ability and effect size data of the experimental group

	Group	**N**	**Mean**	**SD**	**t**	**df**	**Sig. (2-tailed)**
Organization2	control	19	2.21	.976	3.21	34	.003
	experimental	17	3.18	.809			
Pronunciation2	control	19	2.84	.834	2.8	34	.009
	experimental	17	3.53	.624			
Vocabulary2	control	19	2.37	1.06	2.9	34	.006
	experimental	17	3.29	.772			
Cohesion2	control	19	3.48	1.17	1.4	34	.175
	experimental	17	3.76	.562			
Grammar2	control group	19	4.32	.885	4.4	34	.000
	experimental	17	2.88	1.05 4			

A further investigation of the experimental group's post-test five-component results, presented in Figure 3, showed that the experimental group scored higher than the control group on organization, pronunciation and vocabulary, whereas the control group managed a better performance on grammar. The two groups scored closely on cohesion, with the experimental group scoring a little higher. These results indicate that, on the one hand, online synchronous videoconferencing with NSs had strong positive impacts on the participants' English oral skills in terms of pronunciation, organization, and vocabulary. On

the other hand, it was demonstrated that traditional classroom English instruction worked better on the development of grammar.



	Organization	Pronunciation	Vocabulary	Cohesion	Grammar
Control Group	2.21	2.84	2.37	3.48	4.32
Experimental Group	3.18	3.53	3.29	3.76	2.88

Figure 3. Means of the post-test speaking components

Research Question 2: Do students perceive that they gained confidence as users, and improved their speaking performance?

The thematic analysis of the interview data revealed that the EFL participants generally had positive attitudes toward the use of videoconferencing in speaking classes. Changes in the participants' confidence in their speaking abilities were also observed. The findings indicate that the participants were willing to engage in conversation with NSs because they believed it could help improve both their pronunciation and vocabulary. Many of the participants believed that their pronunciation, fluency, and vocabulary had improved by the end of the study.

> Excerpt 1: *Those classes were very beneficial. I can speak very well. My language became richer of vocabularies. My pronunciation improved, especially when I talked with native speaker.* (S1)

> *I managed to correct pronunciation of words and [to learn] some new words also.* (S4)

The participants emphasized that the immediate feedback from the NSs helped them to improve their pronunciation, cohesion and grammar. It also helped create successful meaning negotiation between interlocutors as expressed in these excerpts.

> Excerpt 2: *I learnt from native speakers of English how to correctly pronounce. They helped to improve [my] talk.* (S5)
>
> *I talked with the doctors* [NSs] *then they corrected my mistakes.* (S 7)

Participants acknowledged that they had found it difficult to talk to NSs without preparation.

> Excerpt 3: *I thought, to meet a native speaker of English is very difficult, but with this small study, I become to know that there is nothing impossible.* (S 6)
>
> *I learnt to depend on myself in preparing of some topics.* (S 4)

The results indicate that participants were willing to engage in a variety of authentic dialogues with members of the target language community. Here, they also sought to exchange information, and to create and maintain social contacts.

Several of the participants indicated that they had enjoyed talking to the interlocutors.

> Excerpt 4: *I enjoyed listening and speaking to the native speakers…. I have found [out] now that I can speak without [being] shy.* (S7)
>
> *Chatting with the native speaker is fun. It breaks the barrier between the student and the teacher… I feel very confident to speak with native speakers more than before.* (S 6)
>
> *I enjoyed talking with people from English mother tongue…. The lectures were variety of topics and so fun. They were not boring.* (S 2)

Discussion

This study investigated the use of videoconferencing in a speech workshop (an advanced speaking course) as a tool to support students as they make the transition from language learners to language users. The aim is to help them through opportunities to become involved in authentic dialogues, to negotiate meaning, and to practice and develop ways of expressing and arguing for their own ideas. The speaking pre-test findings indicate no significant differences in oral performance amongst the Saudi EFL participants in the

control and experimental groups. Slight differences between the control group (M = 14.3) and the experimental group (M = 14.64) could be attributed to the number of participants in each group and to the participants' perceptions of speaking in English at the beginning of this study, as shaped by their previous speaking experience (Cadierno, 2012).

The post-test findings of this study revealed a significant difference in the participants' oral performance at the end of the study (t (34) = 2.51, p = .017). A moderate improvement in performance between the control group (M = 16.2) and the experimental group (M = 18.1) was observed. The experimental group participants outperformed the control group in pronunciation, organization and vocabulary speaking test components (see Table 3). These findings support the literature's view that synchronous VC with NSs has positive impacts on EFL learners' oral skills (Lu, Goodale, & Guo, 2014; Satar, 2013; Wang, Chen, & Levy, 2010; Xiao, Yang, & Zhang, 2010; Yanguas, 2012). The findings also expanded the literature by specifying that VC with NSs have a modest positive effect on EFL learners' English pronunciation (Lu, Goodale, & Guo, 2014; Satar & Ozdener, 2008; Xiao, Yang, & Zhang, 2010; Yanguas, 2012); organization, and accurate vocabulary use (Lu, Goodale, & Guo, 2014). This small effect could be attributed to the participants' acquisition of English as a foreign language as adults, and the interference of their mother tongue phonemics, in addition to the instructional approach applied in English speaking classes (Jesry, 2005). The participants in the control group performed higher in grammar than those in the experimental group. This is due to the experimental group mainly focusing on meaning rather than form, in order to repair or avoid communication breakdown and so to maintain meaningful communication (Kenning, 2010). Participants responded positively to receiving more standard modeling input that then became a part of their input and later, of their modified output (Bueno-Alastuey, 2010; Zhang, 2012); willingness to communicate (Freiermuth & Jarrell, 2006; Macintyre, 2007); reduced anxiety (Bueno-Alastuey 2011; Satar, 2013; Satar & Ozdener, 2008) and to their self-monitoring of linguistic production (Kissau, 2012; Jauregi, de Graaff, van den Bergh, & Kriz, 2012; Wu, Marek & Yen, 2012).

The qualitative evidence supports the findings that point to the positive impact of implementing a videoconferencing tool in an actual classroom. Participants seemed to have generally positive attitudes toward using VC in the EFL speaking classroom. Participants stated that conversing with English speakers was beneficial. They specified, in their answers to the interview questions at the end of the study, how they noticed a change in their language in terms of vocabulary, pronunciation, and their abilities to organize their discourse (i.e. their oral skills improved).

They enjoyed talking to the NSs, which raised their confidence in themselves as users of ESL, supporting Yamada (2009) and Satar (2013) of visual presence in reducing anxiety and motivating them to be socialized as L2 users with the target language community members. The interview analysis showed that L2 participants monitored their oral production in terms of pronunciation and vocabulary (self-monitoring). They stated that they managed to correct their pronunciation and to be prepared before coming to class (modified output). The findings also revealed that Saudi participants actively engaged in

the dialogues as L2 users in expressing their opinions in a friendly atmosphere. The findings echo those of Macintyre (2007); Richards (2008), and Spratt, Pulverness, & Williams (2005) who found that participants were willing to communicate with NSs about a variety of topics.

These results would indicate that participants in the VC group performed better in the speaking test and had a positive attitude toward using VC in speaking classes at the end of the study.

Limitations

The study has some limitations insofar as the effects of the course varied in relation the findings of the study. Students' busy schedules and exams affected their preparation of the course, leading the researcher to rearrange the session time twice, and consequently, the technical support team. Internet connection failure also affected the study's progress in the final week. The short span of time available for conducting the study and the modest number of participants affected the generalization of this finding to the wider EFL context.

Conclusion and Implication

The findings of this study emphasize the potential for the use of synchronous videoconferencing tools in EFL speaking classes. The evidence reveals their positive impact on Saudi EFL students' enjoyment and enthusiasm in speaking English. The method has helped remove barriers between the participants and the NSs by providing opportunities to practice and develop ways of expressing and arguing their own ideas interactively; in fact, VC technology has brought face-to-face communication experiences into an EFL speaking class.

The findings are consistent with previous studies that found improvements to EFL participants' pronunciation and use of appropriate cohesive devices ((Bueno-Alastuey, 2010, 2013; Lu, Goodale, & Guo, 2014; Xiao, Yang, & Zhang, 2010; Yanguas, 2010). Both sides engaged in authentic dialogue about current events and expressed their opinions and beliefs in a friendly environment. EFL participants managed to correct their pronunciation and use their modified outputs in the dialogues as L2 users expressing their opinions in a friendly atmosphere. These findings corroborate study findings in other EFL contexts which have shown that participants were willing to communicate with NSs (Macintyre, 2007; Richards, 2008; Spratt, Pulverness, & Williams, 2005).

The findings of this small-scale study cannot be generalized due to the modest number of participants, but they contribute to the understanding of VC use in EFL contexts in general. They present practical solutions for difficulty in recruiting native English speakers to

English programs in other EFL contexts, as well as presenting a real experience of language learning for students to interact with NSs. The study raised some questions about EFL students' beliefs about their language learning and performance, and the intricate associations these beliefs have with other human functions such learning strategies, L2 self-motivated behaviors, and academic achievement. Therefore, it would be interesting to explore a large scale population of Saudi EFL learners' in terms of their beliefs as indicators/predictors of their real capabilities.

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