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A Case Study on Confidence and Fluency in Teaching Advanced Speaking Course via
Videoconferencing-Based Lessons

A thesis project submitted in
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
Master of Arts in Teaching English as a Foreign Language

By

Luiza Vardanyan

Lilianna Edilyan, Adviser

Rubina Gasparyan, Reader

Yerevan, Armenia

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We hereby approve that this capstone

By

Luiza Vardanyan

Entitled

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Master of Arts in Teaching English as a Foreign Language

Lilianna Edilyan, Adviser

Rubina Gasparyan, Reader

Irshat Madyarov, Ph.D.

MA TEFL Program Chair

Yerevan, Armenia

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DEDICATION

I wholeheartedly dedicate this research paper to my mother as a gratitude for her continuous support throughout my academic studies. Holding a Ph.D. in the field of engineering sciences, my mother interminably encouraged my choice for pursuing a career in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) and motivated me whenever I faced challenges in the completion of the current research. Her permanent support alongside the TEFL courses taken at the American University of Armenia (AUA) engendered the love towards education and research in me.

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Abstract

With the outbreak of COVID-19 in Armenia, education swiftly transferred to videoconferencing (VC) mode and attracted significant interest for research purposes. The following case study aimed at investigating how speaking confidence and fluency are developed via VC mode, the types of activities that are used in VC and the attitudes of the learners and the teacher regarding VC speaking course. The research focused on a speaking course at the American University of Armenia Open Education Program managed remotely via Zoom VC platform. The study was based on a mixed-method research approach. Lesson observations, analysis of the course syllabus and the semi-structured interview with the teacher allowed understanding of how speaking confidence and fluency are taught and the types of activities that are applied in VC mode. The semi-structured interview also helped to understand the teacher's perceptions of teaching speaking via VC mode, whereas the survey allowed gaining insights into the students' attitudes towards improving speaking via VC mode. The statistical difference of fluency and speaking total grade between the placement speaking test and post-course speaking test aimed at revealing whether the students progressed due to the course. The research findings reveal that speaking confidence and fluency can be facilitated with the help of temporary scaffolding, meticulously planned student-centered CLT task-based activities and multiple modes of VC communication features (breakout rooms). The research study further recommends the application of flexible error-correction to improve fluency in VC mode as well as the importance of breakout rooms as valuable pedagogical VC tool to differentiate interaction types in VC mode.

Keywords: Videoconferencing, speaking fluency, speaking confidence, EFL.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

With the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic, teaching and learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) has immediately shifted from the traditional face-to-face mode to videoconferencing-based lessons. Videoconferencing-based instruction, which takes place through a computer-mediated software or a web-based platform, connects teachers and learners from distant areas in a synchronous computer-mediated communication (Gilles, 2008; Al-Samarraie, 2019; Krutka, & Carano, 2016). This has become a major educational trend throughout the globe thus has attracted a significant attention for research inquiries in regards to teaching speaking skills.

It has been suggested that videoconferencing helps to develop speaking skills in foreign language learning (Isperdon, 2020; Sevy-Biloon et al, 2019; Wu et al, 2017; Alshahrani, 2016; Lu et al 2014; Lee, 2007). According to the aforementioned studies, Communicative Language Teaching activities help the learners to improve their target language fluency, accuracy, pronunciation and enrich their word stock even in the videoconferencing mode. At the same time, other studies suggest that videoconferencing lessons can hinder teaching speaking skills (Al-Samarraie, 2019; Vurdien, 2019; Taillefer et all 2014; Bueno Alastuey, 2011). As a few studies prove, speech interruptions, overlaps or no decent turn-taking happening are inevitable aspects of videoconferencing lessons. Furthermore, teacher-dominated videoconferencing lessons have been found to be unavoidable and detrimental for the speaking opportunities of the learners (Clarke, 2015; Hampel & Stickler, 2012). Teacher monologue and teacher-to-student interaction limit speaking opportunities for all the learners in the videoconferencing classroom. Consequently, teachers' poor pedagogical skills and technology use have been brought to attention as threats in teaching speaking skills via videoconferencing. These findings lead to

reconsidering the teacher's role in videoconferencing classroom and teachers' pedagogical skills while teaching speaking through videoconferencing mode.

1.1 Problem Statement

There is a shortage of information about the role of confidence in developing speaking fluency in VC mode. Furthermore, there is a lack of literature regarding the kinds of speaking activities teachers can use and how effective such activities are in regards to creating speaking opportunities in a videoconferencing classroom. Therefore, the following case study focuses on the types of activities that are applied in EFL speaking VC lesson, how speaking fluency and confidence are developed and the teacher's and students' perceptions regarding videoconferencing-based speaking lessons. The research questions of the current study are as follows:

1. How are speaking confidence and fluency developed during VC lessons?
2. What types of activities are used to develop speaking fluency in VC lessons?
3. What is the teacher's perception regarding teaching speaking via videoconferencing?
4. What is the learners' attitude towards videoconferencing-based learning aimed at developing speaking?

1.2 Significance of the research

The following research study aims at complementing the previous research with significant recommendations regarding developing speaking confidence and fluency via VC lessons. Firstly, the research study showcases the types of speaking activities which are used in videoconferencing lessons. The study also provides an insights into how to manage VC classroom and available technology features to build speaking confidence and fluency. Bearing the above mentioned purpose in mind, the following research study will concentrate on a

speaking course managed via VC platform in Armenia. In the frames of the current research study, the types of speaking activities done via VC lessons and teaching method will be observed. Furthermore, the learners' and teacher's attitudes towards teaching speaking skills via videoconferencing lessons will be explored with the help of specially designed online surveys and interviews.

1.3 Definitions of Terms

The definitions below stand for the terms occasionally used in this research paper:

EFL – English as a Foreign Language

L2 – Foreign/Second Language

TEFL – Teaching English as a Foreign Language

CLT – Communicative Language Teaching

VC – Videoconferencing

Face-to-face –f2f

CMC - Computer-Mediated Communication

1.4 Overview of the study

Chapter Two: Literature Review: The chapter reviews relevant literature regarding the features and functions of the spoken language as well as speaking activities done in f2f classrooms. The chapter also covers the descriptions and features of VC, its use in EFL classroom as well as advantages and disadvantages of teaching speaking via VC platforms.

Chapter Three: Methodology: The chapter discusses in detail the plan and the structure of the current research project. The chapter also covers the ethical considerations as well as the limitations and delimitations of the research.

Chapter Four: Results: The chapter presents and analyzes the data gained as a result of the research tools.

Chapter Five: Discussion and Conclusion: The chapter analyzes and discusses the key findings of the research in regards to the stated research questions. Additionally, the chapter presents the essential pedagogical takeaways and suggestions for further research studies.

References illustrate a list of secondary sources used in the Literature Review and the Discussion chapters of the research paper.

Appendices involve the tools and the materials used in the frames of the current research project namely the observation form, the interview questions, the survey and its results, the descriptions of the speaking activities as well as the research agreement form.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The Spoken Language

In an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom context English should be viewed and used as a means of communications (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2015). Target language use is central in a foreign language learning process as it develops the learners' communicative competence in the foreign language which includes the elements of interpretation, expression and negotiation of meaning. (Savignon, 2018; Savignon, 2001). Communicative competence of the learner is portrayed in the learners' grammar and discourse competence as well as sociolinguistic and strategic competence (Canale & Swain, 1980 cited in Derakhshan et al, 2016, p. 180). Therefore, it is widely believed that the development of the communicative competence in a foreign language needs to be based on a combination of meaning-focused and form-focused activities which aim at involving the learners in meaningful interactions (Savignon, 2018; Brown, 2006). In fact, such activities enable the learners to concentrate on the message and fluency during speaking while they implicitly teach the learners about the components of language accuracy as well.

Depending on the context and situation, the spoken language can carry several functions such as interactional, transactional and performance (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2015; Brown & Yule, 1983, p. 23; Derakhshan et al, 2016; Richards, 2008). While the interactional and transactional functions of the language help the speaker to engage in social contexts and information transfer between one or more people respectively, the performance function of the language appears as a talk delivered to an audience (for example, a speech, a presentation or a public talk) (Brown & Yule, 1983, p. 23; Richards, 2008). Obviously, each of the mentioned functions of language requires specific style and structure of speech. It is known that the

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach encourages teachers to facilitate authentic use of the target language in the classroom which means that the mentioned three functions of language should be present in the learning curriculum. Therefore, when teaching speaking skills the EFL teacher needs to be informed of the oral speech purposes and their role in the classroom in order to be equipped with strategies and activities to develop the authentic use of the target language (Richards, 2008). For example, transactional speech mainly involves activities where information transfer between entities occurs such as information-gap activities, role plays and group discussion activities which are usually intertwined with the receptive skills (Richards, 2008; Derakhshan et al, 2016). Therefore, it is essential for the teacher to identify the target speech purposes in order to properly choose and plan the speaking activities for the students.

2.2 Using Speaking Activities within CLT Approach

In a communicative language classroom, speaking activities range from discussions, speeches, role plays, interviews to games and drama (Lazaraton, 2001; Perego & Boyle, 2017). Lazaraton, 2001, explain the types of CLT activities and their purposes: 1) Discussions are usually intertwined with listening or reading tasks as a follow-up activity and are commonly used by EFL teachers (p.106), 2) Speech can be prepared as well as impromptu where the latter one helps the students think on their feet and concentrate on their fluency (p.106), 3) Role play usually puts students in different real-life situations and makes them act accordingly (p.107). Interviews help the learners to ask and answer structured questions in a given context (p.110). Similarly, Perego and Boyle, 2017, explain other types of CLT activities: 1) Games target different aspects of the spoken language such as grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, etc. thus can help the learner improve their academic performance and boost their creativity while

speaking (p. 173). 2) Drama motivates students to speak as they have to act out and present their learning in either formal or in non-formal classroom settings (p. 174).

Therefore, diversification of communicative tasks engages the students in negotiation of meaning which is beneficial for the development of communicative competence in the target language (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2015; Blake, 2000). During such activities, learners encounter various problems (lexical, grammatical, phonological, etc.) and they collaboratively solve them with the help of negotiation (Blake, 2000). This, in fact, helps the students to learn the target language in an implicit way and to apply real life communication strategies in order to successfully complete the task. In a research study conducted by Al-Garni and Almuhammadi, 2019, significant attention was allocated to the fact that CLT activities done in pair and group work helped the students to improve their pronunciation, vocabulary and fluency of English language. This once again underlines the importance of student-to-student interaction in the class because it enables the learners apply communication strategies and become flexible users of the language. Furthermore, in such case CLT activities help the learners experience real-life situation and produce authentic speech.

Within a CLT context, flexible error-correction skills are an essential component while teaching speaking skills to EFL learners. Depending on the types of activities assigned and the context, teachers need to decide whether or not to apply an explicit error correction or a delayed feedback in order not to distract the students' speaking process (Lazaraton, 2001, p.110). For instance, the former correction type usually happens during accuracy-focused activities in order to attract the students' attention to the grammatical, vocabulary or pronunciation feature, while teachers apply the latter one during fluency-based activities after the student has finished talking. While providing feedback, teachers need to take into account the context and the goal of

error-correction as it is likely to leave either a positive impact on the students or inhibit them and make them feel insecure regarding their speaking skills.

2.3 Confidence and Fluency in Speaking EFL

Confidence in L2 speaking has been defined as the combination of two components: the absence of language anxiety and the self-evaluation of one's achievement in L2 (Macintyre et al, 1998, p. 551). It also incorporates the willingness and the ability to communicate effectively as well as adaptively in various contexts. In the TEFL context, fear and insecurity of speaking English is a common feeling among EFL learners which makes speaking confidence an essential subject of research.

Krashen, 2009, elaborated on the Affective Filter hypothesis by stating that several affective factors can influence the students' success in the second language acquisition (SLA). In this aspect, students with a high motivation and self-confidence are believed to achieve success in SLA (Krashen, 2009). Therefore, Krashen underlines the essential role of a teacher to facilitate the lesson input and diminish the affective filters, so that the learners enjoy successful language learning process (Krashen, 2009). This concept leads to the conclusion that the teacher needs to take into account the students' psychological aspects in order to manage the affective filters. When exposing the students to the input (e.g. lesson activities), teachers need to set goals to reduce students' language anxiety and foster their motivation and self-confidence so that the students feel content with their learning.

Understanding the relationship between language anxiety and speaking confidence as well as achievement is important for the teacher in order to help the learners become confident speakers of English. Tridinanti's research study was concerned with the correlation among the students' speaking anxiety, self-confidence and speaking achievement. Accordingly, it was found

that the anxiety did not have any substantial relationship with the speaking achievement (Tridinanti, 2018). Whereas, the correlation of self-confidence and speaking achievement suggested a positive relationship which meant a better performance was possible in case the learner had an increased speaking confidence. The results of the current study imply that the learners' performance depends on their L2 confidence. Therefore, EFL teachers need to prioritize the learners' self-confidence and help to build self-confidence when teaching them speaking skills.

Several research studies suggest that speaking confidence issues as well as fluency can be improved with the help of peer-cooperation in the classroom (Doqaruni, 2014; Tridinanti, 2018; Zondag, 2020; Alayah, 2018). Doqaruni, 2014, replaced story reading lectures with extra speaking activities during the lessons in order to increase the learners' EFL speaking confidence. Whereas extra speaking activities somewhat increased the learners' confidence to speak English, pair and group works had the most significant influence. It was found that the pair and group work activities helped the learners to freely express themselves and feel more confident to interact (Doqaruni, 2014). Similarly, in Zondag's research, 2020, a relatively big number of participants considered collaboration, engagement and the fun element of the speaking activities helpful in building up their confidence. Meanwhile, in this research study, students were asked to complete impromptu improvisation speaking activities namely status expressions, storytelling and conversations (Zondag, 2020). Consequently, the mentioned results underline the importance of both diversifying communicative tasks and incorporating cooperation in an EFL classroom in order to build EFL speaking confidence. They imply that the speaking activities which entail elements of cooperation among the learners help them decrease reticence during the class and practice authentic communication, whereby they implicitly build speaking confidence.

Furthermore, Alrayah, 2018, correlated the cooperative learning activities with the speaking fluency progress that the students had. During the research study, the students engaged in authentic communication practices (such as interaction, discussion, active participation and cooperation) and utilized a lot of social skills during cooperative learning activities while the teacher facilitated the interaction and interfered upon necessity. The correlation results revealed a significant improvement among the students' speaking fluency (Alrayah, 2018). Hence, it can be presumed that cooperative learning activities help the students to concentrate on social interaction and meaning transfer. In this way, the cooperative learning activities implicitly improve students' speaking fluency.

2.4 Videoconferencing: Types and Pedagogical Values

With the advancement of technologies, CLT has also transferred to videoconferencing (VC) mode. VC is a digital platform which enables multiple users to engage in a synchronous computer-mediated communication regardless of their geographical distance (Gilles, 2008; Al-Samarraie, 2019; Krutka, & Carano, 2016). Besides communication opportunities, videoconferences also offer the users digital functions such as chat boxes for written communication, functions to send and share files, images or presentations, turn on and turn off video or audio connections as well as utilize user mood reaction buttons. These functions of VC platforms are considered pedagogically valuable and have attracted sufficient attention for research studies in TEFL.

There are several types of videoconferences ranging from Desktop-based videoconferencing (DVC) and Web-based videoconferencing (WVC) to Internet-based videoconferencing (IVC) (Al-Samarraie, 2019). The main feature that differentiates the mentioned three types is the media and the mode of interaction that they offer to the users

(Al-Samarraie, 2019, p. 124). All of these types of videoconferences can be applicable for educational purposes.

- IVC is aimed at providing one-to-many type of interaction to its users and it is suitable for delivering lectures or conducting trainings remotely (e.g. ZOOM STATION).
- WVC provides multiple modes of communication: one-to-one, one-to-many, many-to-one, many-to-many. WVC creates opportunities for online discussions and networking via a web-based platform (e.g. Facebook Live, Skype for Business, Team Viewer and ZOOM Web).
- DVC also provides multiple modes of communication: one-to-one, one-to-many, many-to-one, many-to-many. It also provides discussion opportunities via specifically fixed and installed computer systems.

Zoom is amongst the frequently used VC platforms which can be categorized into both WVC and IVC. In fact, Zoom has been found an advantageous videoconferencing-based platform for the online synchronous learning as it offers a number of features such as breakout rooms, chat boxes for private and group written communication, screen sharing, document and video sharing as well as a whiteboard, shared painting opportunities for the students and teachers (Lobley et al, 2017). The host of the Zoom videoconference can assign the participants to the breakout rooms randomly or manually where the participants can work in pairs or in small groups and can both see and hear each other. Moreover, once the participants encounter a problem or have questions, they can easily call the host with the help of the specially designed button. In their turn, teachers can easily visit all the breakout rooms and observe the pair work or group works done there. Consequently, Zoom provides ample functions to facilitate learning

experience in VC mode. Its breakout rooms are an opportune function for the learners to practice interpersonal communication and do pair work and pair checking activities.

2.5 Advantages of VC in Teaching Speaking

From the educational perspective, VC can be abundant with both opportunities and limitations for interaction (Al-Samarraie, 2019).

A few studies were carried out to investigate the influence of videoconference-based instruction on the speaking skills. Those research studies have come to prove that videoconferences increased learners' engagement in the class and helped them improve their oral skills (Isperdon, 2020; Sevy-Biloon et al, 2019; Wu et al, 2017; Alshahrani, 2016; Lu et al 2014; Lee, 2007). The above mentioned research studies display the same findings highlighting the significance that the CLT activities (storytelling, dialogue, discussion, presentations, etc.) applied during synchronous CMC helped the research participants improve their fluency and accuracy of speech as well as pronunciation and, in some cases, vocabulary knowledge. In Isperdon's case study speaking was the most favorite part of the videoconferencing lesson for the Armenian learners (Isperdon, 2020). In fact, the home atmosphere and having the cameras off made the learners feel relaxed. In addition to that, home atmosphere and having the cameras off helped the learners to participate in discussions and worry less about making mistakes. On the other hand, Lee highlights that the presence of synchronous audio and visual aspects of human communications influences speaking in VC (Lee, 2007). Teacher-to-student and student-to-student rapport in VC also facilitate online communication happening in VC because learners feel psychologically relaxed in VC environment.

A meticulous lesson planning and activity design for VC lessons was found to be as essential component for the development of speaking skills (Bueno Alastuey, 2011;

Loranc-Paszyk, 2015; Vurdien, 2019; Hampel, 2006; Iino et al, 2016). As the activities focused on the meaning, the learners shared having developed essential conversational components namely strategic competence and discourse competence which boosted their self-confidence in the target language and decreased their speaking anxiety. Additionally, the task-based activities helped the learners improve their fluency of speech and enlarge their knowledge of vocabulary (Iino et al, 2016).

The research study conducted by Hampel found that in a VC medium, student-centered tasks and activities specially designed for VC lessons were beneficial for the students' speaking skills (Hampel, 2006). According to this research study, activities were designed for the VC mode which were mainly meaning-focused activities and communicative activities covering topics of social, political, cultural and historical fields. The findings of the research suggest that student-centered activities in VC make the students become autonomous learners and take responsibility for their performance during the lesson. The multiple modes of interaction (student-to-student, student-to-teacher and teacher-to-students) facilitated the negotiation of meaning among the learners. Consequently, it is important for the teacher to carefully adapt and develop learning materials for the online medium and apply different modes of communication happening during the lesson. In this way, if decent pedagogical efforts are made, VC can be transferred into student-centered learning environment and facilitate a lot of speaking from the students' side. Lim and Pyun suggest that teacher role in computer-mediated communication is different from the face-to-face one as in the online medium they need to become the facilitator of communication (Lim & Pyun, 2016).

The participants of Loranc-Paszyk's study noted that the videoconferencing mode increased their motivation for the speaking practice as it was a novel experience for them.

Furthermore, in an academic semester-long research done by Vurdien, which aimed at exploring how videoconferencing helped the learners develop their speaking skills, found that the videoconferencing task design can have a positive influence on the students' learning experience. Accordingly, the learners enjoyed the task-based activities done via Zoom platform and felt motivated to speak due to them. This result once again underlines the importance that the teacher carefully designs and adapts the communicative tasks for the videoconferencing mode.

The previous research also suggests that videoconferencing communicative tasks help the learners develop communicative competence especially strategic competence (initiating, responding, turn-taking) and discourse competence (Bueno Alastuey, 2011; Taillefer et al 2014; Loranc-Paszylk, 2015; Vurdien, 2019). Furthermore, Vurdien and Taillefer also found that body language plays a key role in complementing the spoken language during videoconferencing lessons such as facial expression, nodding and hand gestures help the learners better understand each other. Hence, the video option that VC platforms offer are likely to compensate the lack of face-to-face reality and personal contact and assist the learners to better grasp the communication.

2.6 Disadvantages of VC in Teaching Speaking

Videoconferencing-based instruction is likely to be detrimental to the development of speaking skills for several reasons. Firstly, technologies are prone to malfunctioning which is evidently a great threat in an educational setting. Background noises, delay, frozen screen or poor Internet connection are inevitable drawbacks of VC which decrease students' motivation to speak (Isperdon, 2020; Sevy-Biloon & Chroman, 2019; Gillies, 2008; Bueno Alastuey, 2011; Lim & Pyun, 2016). From the students' perspectives, sound distortions and connection glitches take sufficient time from the lesson and diminish the time allocated for learning and practice.

Since such occurrences are unavoidable, the teacher can tackle the issue by introducing the students to the digital platform and helping with the issues.

One of the biggest threats to the development of speaking skills in videoconferencing are the possible interruption, overlaps or no turn-taking happening during the lesson which make the learners stay silent (Al-Samarraie, 2019; Vurdien, 2019; Taillefer et al 2014; Bueno Alastuey, 2011). Taillefer's research done with the Spanish and Hong Kong students via Skype videoconferencing portrayed that strategic competence varies from culture to culture and, as a result, can hinder the development of strategic competence in a foreign language as it happened among the participants of their study (Taillefer et al 2014). Meanwhile, Vurdien's study depicted that simultaneous talking and occasional overlaps in speech delivery hindered communication and as a result a long-lasting silence dominated the lesson (Vurdien, 2019). Although the participants of the study enjoyed videoconferencing lessons and the activities done during the lesson, they still preferred the face-to-face format because of the lack of personal contact.

Another potential downside in VC lessons might occur when a student in a pair or group work does not interact or possesses a higher command of the target language (Al-Samarraie, 2019; Vurdien, 2019; Taillefer et al 2014; Bueno Alastuey, 2011). This can cause speaking anxiety and decrease the motivation to speak among the peers. Consequently, the format of the videoconferencing may not be as effective in developing strategic competence as presumed. It is obvious that the educator needs to be aware of the mentioned possible threats in order to adopt relevant pedagogical approaches to teaching speaking skills through VC. Additionally, good classroom management techniques play a key role in teaching learners communication strategies.

Teachers' poor pedagogical skills and their lack of technology understanding hinders students' motivation and willingness to speak during synchronous videoconference-based

instruction (Gillies, 2008; Bueno Alastuey, 2011; Hampel & Stickler, 2012; Clarke, 2015; Sevy-Biloon & Chroman, 2019). Participants of a few research studies were dissatisfied with the scarcity of interaction opportunities during videoconferences and mentioned teacher's monologue and active students' monologue as the key factors that make them stay silent during the lessons. Poor pedagogical performance was considered as the essential factor limiting the development of productive skills (Clarke, 2015; Hampel & Stickler, 2012). Teacher-dominated videoconference-based lessons include mainly either teacher's monologue or teacher-to-student interaction which evidently contradicts to the CLT approach. Also, teachers with a poor command of technology knowledge are likely to limit the opportunities of successful VC lessons (Clarke, 2015). In this way lessons might not be as interesting for the learners because of the lack of decent technology-related activities or technology-related features applied which in fact make VC lessons lively and can compensate the absence of face-to-face contact.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Context

The following case study aimed at investigating how speaking confidence and fluency are developed via VC namely Zoom videoconferencing platform, the types of activities that are used during the VC lessons as well as students' and teacher's perspectives regarding VC speaking lessons. The study was implemented at the American University of Armenia (AUA) Open Education Program in the frames of "Advanced Speaking English" course. The course followed a pre-designed syllabus which comprised an array of task-based activities and speaking exercises from Language Leader Advanced course book (King et al, 2010).

The course aimed at developing EFL speaking confidence and fluency among the learners. The speaking course was designed for thirty hours of instruction which comprised 15 lessons overall. The classes were managed remotely via Zoom videoconferencing platform for three times a week and two hours per session. No speaking tests and assessment methods were applied throughout the course except for the placement speaking interview.

3.2 Participants

The participants of the study were selected based on non-probability convenience sampling method. The participants were the teacher and the learners from the "Advanced Speaking English" course. Overall, ten learners were enrolled in the course: nine Armenian learners and one Iraqi learner. They were young adults and adults with proficiency level of English ranging from Upper-Intermediate to Advanced.

3.3 Instruments

The study followed a mixed-method research approach with the sequential Qual+Quan strands. Equal weight was given to both qualitative and quantitative stands in order to answer the

research questions. The data were collected separately with the help of lesson observations, interview, survey and post-course speaking test.

Observations were carried out five times throughout the course with a pre-designed checklist (Appendix A) in order to gain insights into how speaking confidence and fluency are developed during Zoom lessons. An interview was held with the teacher in order to understand the course goals, design, speaking activities as well as the teacher's perspective on teaching speaking skills via VC sessions (Appendix B).

An online survey was distributed to the learners at the end of the course to collect data on their perspectives of the VC course as well as the speaking activities done during the course (Appendix C). The survey encompassed overall eight questions whereby the learners had to rank their satisfaction with the course speaking activities done, opportunities and limitations of speaking in VC lessons, their confidence in speaking English after the course. The students were also asked to rank the effectiveness of the list of activities done throughout the course as well as to mention aspects they would like to see included in the course (such as error-correction, vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation/intonation) and VC features that had an influence on their speaking confidence (such as breakout rooms, chat window, screen sharing, etc.). The results of the survey were analyzed and reported anonymously.

Additionally, a post-course speaking test was carried out with the seven learners of the course who had taken a placement speaking interview at the beginning of the course. This post-course speaking interview aimed at finding out if there was a significant difference in regards to fluency that the students had to improve in the frames of the speaking course. Therefore, a paired t-test was conducted via JASP Statistical tool in order to measure the significant difference between the results of the placement test and post-course test. The

speaking tests were assessed by the researcher and a qualified International English Language Testing System (IELTS) speaking examiner in order to guarantee valid and reliable scores. Inter-rater reliability issues were taken into consideration.

3.4 Ethical considerations

The researcher was well-informed about research ethics and had Institutional Review Board (IRB) certificate on “Human Participant Protection” which guarantees the ethical considerations of participants’ data. Therefore, the researcher strictly obeyed and followed the ethical considerations in this study.

Firstly, the researcher asked for approval from AUA Open Education Program to conduct a case study in the frames of its “Advanced Speaking English” course. Secondly, the researcher issued an agreement form according to which the placement test results and the evaluation rubrics provided by AUA Open Education Program will be used solely for the current research purpose and will not be disclosed to the third parties (Appendix E). Furthermore, the research participants (the teacher and the learners) were informed about the research procedure and were asked for their participation consent. The learners were notified that the results of the survey and speaking interviews would be strictly kept anonymous and confidential.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

4.1 Developing Speaking Confidence and Fluency via VC

As mentioned earlier, the course comprised thirty hours of instruction (15 lessons) on Zoom VC platform. The researcher observed ten hours of the course. During the observations, a pre-designed checklist was being filled in as well as field notes were being taken (Appendix A) regarding the classroom management techniques and teaching methods via VC platform.

A similar routine in the VC lessons was observed throughout the ten hours of observation. The teacher started the lessons by conversing with the students (chit-chatting) until all the students joined the VC classroom. This was followed by either introduction of the lesson plan to the students or by the explanation of the activity to be done during the lesson. Before the students embarked on the activities, the teacher pre-taught them vocabulary items necessary for a specific activity. Afterwards, the students were sent to the breakout rooms to brainstorm and prepare the speaking activity. Finally, the students pitched and presented their works in the main VC room to the entire class.

The observed VC classes were managed in a calm and friendly atmosphere due to the good rapport that the teacher established with the students. Throughout the VC lessons, the teacher acted very friendly and related to the students' feelings. It was noticeable that the students felt comfortable with the VC lessons because they could easily engage in the conversations with the teacher, amongst each other as well as they could readily use Zoom VC features such as chat window and screen sharing option.

Types of interaction in the VC classroom varied: teacher-to-students, teacher-to-student, student-to-student and student-to-teacher. This was successfully achievable due to the activity

design (mostly task-based activities) and the videoconferencing features that Zoom offered (breakout rooms).

It is interesting to note that most of the communication in the VC lessons was done by the students. The teacher acted as the facilitator of interaction by modeling a sample answer to engage the students in the activity, guiding or helping the students whenever they felt confused with an activity. Throughout the interaction happening among the students, the teacher did not interfere and let the students manage their own speaking process, follow turn-taking and use their strategic competence. As a result, it was noticed that students sometimes started using paraphrasing strategies when they did not know a word in English.

Meanwhile, it is worth highlighting that error-correction was hardly present in VC lessons with the advanced students. Occasionally, the teacher would provide immediate feedback to an erroneous statement made by a student in case the error was frequently made.

The videoconferencing room and the breakout rooms were the main VC features that were used for speaking activities. The teacher used the main videoconferencing room for presentations, whole class discussions or activities and questions-and-answer sessions. Breakout rooms were used quite often in the class for group work activities, small group discussions, brainstorming as well as pair work. It is interesting to underline that the communication happening among the students in the breakout room was very authentic, since students usually negotiated with each other to complete a task. When the teacher visited the breakout rooms, the teacher rarely participated in the conversations happening there among the students. Therefore, the students mainly relied on their abilities in order to clearly express themselves.

The teacher quite often used the chat window of Zoom VC platform to type there new words for the students in order to facilitate the input. Furthermore, the teacher usually used the

screen-sharing option either to show the students the tasks and instructions or to play a video for the students to watch.

A paired t-test was done in JASP Statistical Software in order to understand whether the course helped the learners improve their fluency. Therefore, the placement speaking test and post-course speaking test results were used to measure the significant difference of the students' fluency. Even though the speaking tests were graded based on the fluency, grammar, pronunciation/intonation, vocabulary and content that the students produced, only grammar and pronunciation were excluded during data analysis since the course did not focus on those skills. Fluency and total grade were the main focus of the analysis. Meanwhile, vocabulary was also taken into account since the students were sometimes taught vocabulary during the course.

The results of the t-test revealed a marked effectiveness of the VC speaking course. The p value, which denoted the significant difference ($p < 0.05$) between the overall results of the placement speaking test and post-course speaking test, was equal to 0.01 which meant there was a slight progressions among the students (Table 1).

Paired Samples T-Test

Measure 1	Measure 2	t	df	p
Post overall	- Pre overall	-3.724	6	0.010

Note. Student's t-test.

Table 1

Interestingly, fluency exhibited an unnoticeable difference between the placement test and post-test with the p value of 0.045 (Table 2). Mild difference in vocabulary were also observed with the p value of 0.004 (Table 2). Furthermore, even though content delivery was not

the focus of the analysis, it showcased a slight difference of 0.007 which implied that the students changed their speaking strategies to some extent (Table 2).

Paired Samples T-Test

Measure 1	Measure 2	t	df	p
Post flu	- Pre fluency	-2.521	6	0.045
Post grammar	- Pre Gramm	-2.121	6	0.078
Post vocab	- Pre vocab	-4.599	6	0.004
Post content	- Pre content	-3.970	6	0.007
Post pronun	- Pre pronun	0.225	6	0.829

Note. Student's t-test.

Table 2

4.2 Types of Speaking Activities Done during VC Lessons

The course syllabus was carefully examined and analyzed by the researcher. Questions regarding the course objectives, design and activities were also discussed with the teacher during the interview. The teacher also provided descriptions regarding the course activities done which the researcher later analyzed (Appendix D).

It was found that the course activities were mainly task-based (Appendix D). These task-based activities required either production of spontaneous (impromptu) speech or prepared speech from the students' side. Spontaneous speech, according to the teacher, refers to the speaking done by the student without any initial preparation, meanwhile, the prepared speech is carefully planned by the student. For instance, "Tourism Sector," "Room 101," "Alibi," "Dragon's Den" and "Political Debate" activities required the students to brainstorm and prepare their speech during peer-collaboration process. Whereas, "Hot Air Balloon," "True or False Game" and "Family Fortune" made the students produce impromptu speech (Appendix D).

These activities aimed at preparing students to speak fluently and confidently in different social contexts.

Debates, role plays as well as small group conversations were also among the speaking activities done throughout the course (Appendix D). These also entailed some elements of brainstorming and preparedness from the students' sides. Interestingly, the majority of the activities encompassed game elements in them too as they positioned the students in imaginary yet real social contexts.

4.3 Teacher's Perspectives on Teaching Speaking via VC Lessons

A semi-structured interview was held with the teacher of "Advanced Speaking English" course about the course and the overall experience of teaching speaking via VC lessons (Appendix B). Accordingly, the course served as an environment for the Armenian learners to practice their English speaking skills in order to overcome their speaking anxiety, fear as well as to become more confident at speaking English. The course focused on speaking fluency, confidence and strategic competence rather than on speaking accuracy. The teacher's main goal was to help students express their ideas fluently and more confidently and use paraphrasing strategies once they got stuck while speaking English.

According to the teacher's insights, the majority of speaking activities that the course syllabus encompassed were successfully adapted to the VC mode. However, speaking activities that required some physical space in order to be managed were impossible for the teacher to transform to the online mode therefore they were eliminated from the course syllabus (e.g. when the students have to move around to interact).

Personalizing speaking activities for the students played a key role during VC lessons. Personalization, according to the teacher, meant letting the students manage their own speaking

and expressing themselves without relying on the teacher's support. To accomplish this, the activities were carefully planned, well-staged and were based on the students' interests. As the teacher put it, the three stages of presenting the speaking activity were: presenting an interesting task, eliciting brainstorming and interaction among the students. Importantly, the teacher's main goal was to personalize the students' speaking experience and output and diminish the teacher's output in the meanwhile.

Scaffolding was another key technique that the teacher used to teach speaking via VC lessons. The teacher explained that after the students were assigned the speaking task, they had to rely on their own abilities and manage all the speaking on their own. The teacher would frequently visit the breakout rooms and guide them whenever they had difficulties speaking. Meanwhile, when asked about error-correction in the breakout rooms and the VC main room, the teacher admitted the lack of error correction skills. The teacher further clarified that eliciting and guiding the interaction among the students was the main goal and error-correction was frequently disregarded.

The teacher considered breakout rooms that the Zoom VC platform offers as the only biggest advantage. According to the teacher, the breakout rooms provide students a "*private, little place*" for small group discussions and interaction. Unlike the f2f classroom, breakout rooms provide students a calm space to communicate without being distracted by any external noise or interferences.

The lack of f2f socialization was among the disadvantages of the VC mode. According to the teacher, the VC lessons lack the authentic communication happening in f2f classroom whereby the students can interact freely and avoid speech overlapping.

4.4 Students' Attitude towards the VC Speaking Lessons.

To gain insights into the learners' attitudes towards the speaking course in VC mode, an online anonymous survey was distributed among the students of the "Advanced Speaking English" course (Appendix C). The survey encompassed seven close-ended questions (multiple-choice questions, Likert-scale questions) and one open-ended question. Only nine students out of ten completed the survey.

First of all, according to the survey results, more than the half of the surveyed students (77,8%) felt very satisfied with the course speaking activities. Similarly, seven students mentioned being very satisfied with the speaking opportunities they had throughout the course. As far as speaking confidence is concerned, all the students agreed that the course helped them increase their confidence in speaking English. Interestingly, more than a half of the surveyed students (77,8%) mentioned that the online mode of the course did not limit their opportunities to speak during the lessons whereas only two students experienced some limitations of opportunities to speak because of the online mode (Appendix F).

The students were further asked to rank the speaking activities done throughout the course either "Effective," "Somewhat Effective," "Least Effective," or "N/A" (Not Applicable, in case the students missed the lesson thus did not do that activity) based on their personal judgment. The descriptions of those activities were provided to the students as a separate attachment (Appendix D) in case the students did not remember the procedure of the activity. According to the results, among the effective activities that 88,8% of the students ranked were "Tourism Sector," "Dragon's Den," "Reality Island," "Picture Narration," "Reality Island" and "Presentations" (Table 1). Only one student considered "Presentations" as the least effective. "True or False Game," "What Would You Do," "Political Debate," and "Idiom's Quiz" were

considered effective by 77,7% of the students and “Somewhat effective” by 22,2% of the class.

“Hot Air Balloon” role play was ranked effective by fewer students (five students).

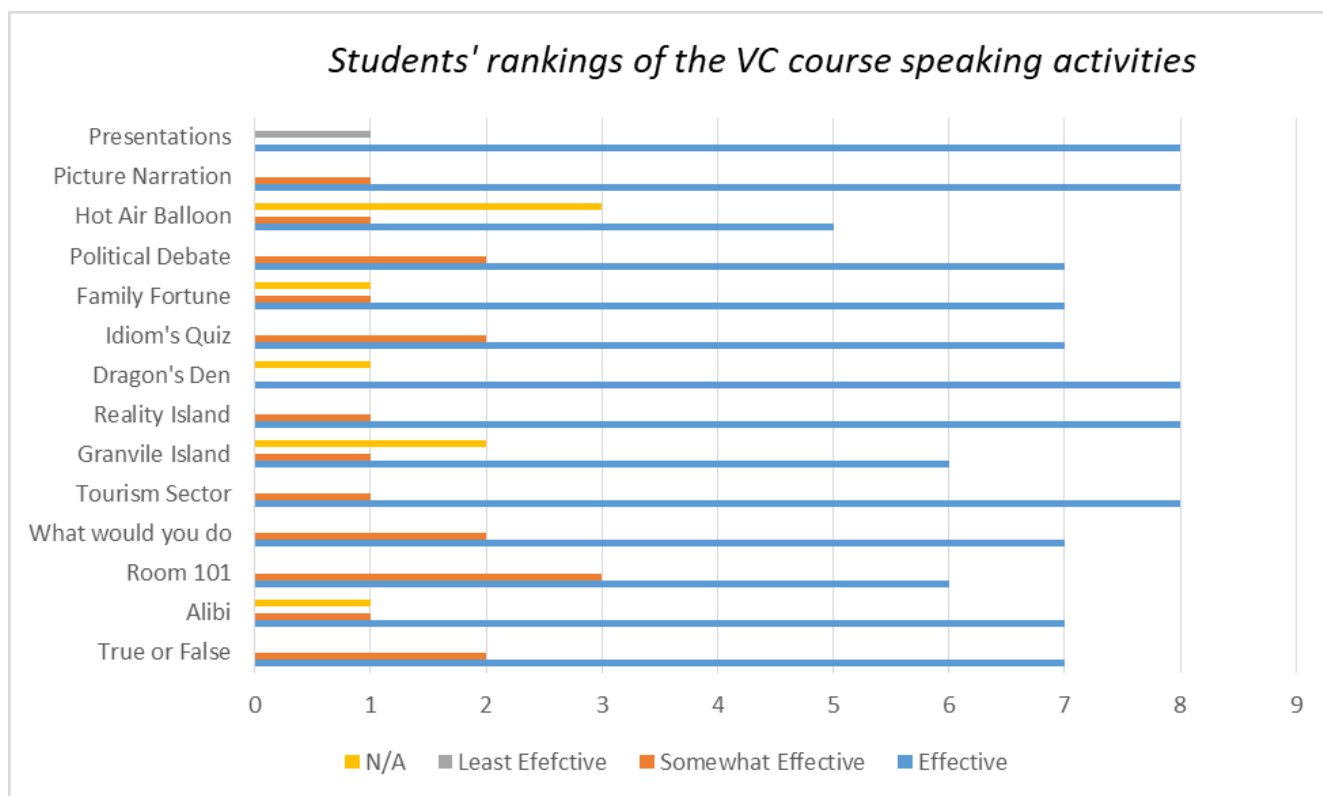


Figure 3

When asked about several aspects they would like to see more in the course, the majority of the class (6 students) chose error-correction and vocabulary. Only four students preferred to see more grammar in the course, while three students opted for pronunciation/intonation.

The main videoconferencing room and the breakout rooms were among the leading videoconferencing features that helped the students increase their confidence in speaking English (Table 2). It is interesting to note that although the breakout rooms provided the students opportunities to speak more in small groups or in pairs, all the students considered the main videoconferencing room more opportune for speaking confidence.

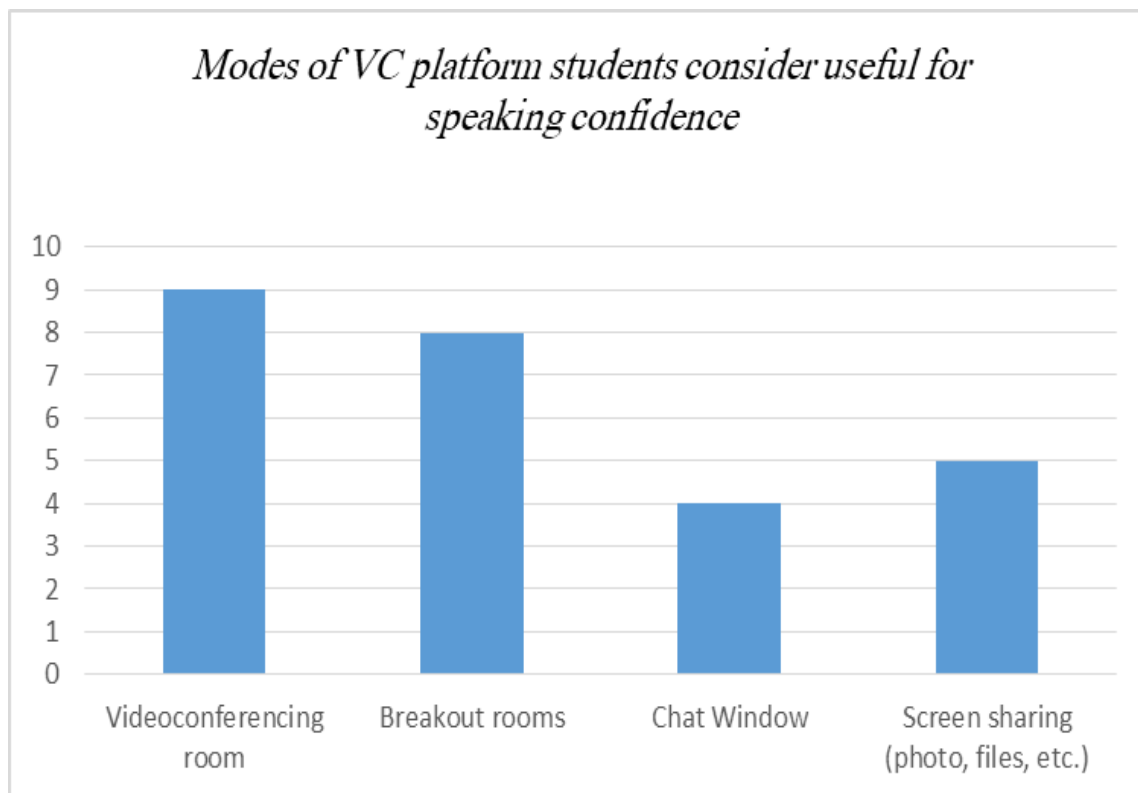


Figure 4

According to the students' comments, the videoconferencing room and the breakout rooms helped them to practice their speaking skill and communicate amongst each other more (Appendix F). Furthermore, some students even considered breakout rooms and videoconferencing room quite innovative to do speaking activities as well as an interesting means of conducting group works.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Discussion

This chapter presents and discusses the findings of the current research project in relation to the literature.

Research Question 1: How are speaking confidence and fluency developed during VC lessons?

Within the frameworks of the current research project it was found that the multiple features of CMC that the teacher used during the VC lessons helped the learners to speak freely and confidently. The videoconferencing main room as well as the breakout rooms create opportunities for the students to establish authentic communication and speak at length without any ambient disturbance. Particularly, both the teacher and the students found the breakout rooms opportune for speaking skills since it helped to make the tasks more interesting. These findings imply that the VC room and the breakout rooms help the teacher to diversify the types of speaking happening throughout the lessons. In fact, these VC features are effective tools that a teacher can use to conduct speaking activities, pair and group works in VC classes like in f2f classes.

Furthermore, scaffolding plays a much greater role in VC speaking lessons. As it was observed, the teacher helped the students to get engaged in the speaking task by modeling examples, providing a background or by sharing a personal anecdote. This finding is in line with Lim & Pyun's (2016) recommendation that the teacher's role is to guide and to facilitate the interaction happening in VC lessons. Also, as Hammond & Gibbons (2005) explain, during temporary scaffolding, the teacher gradually diminishes the help to the students, so that they develop a sense of autonomy in learning (p. 10). The results of the current study indicated that in

order to become more autonomous and confident EFL speakers, the students were sent to the breakout rooms to manage their speaking on their own. Scaffolding was applied only when the students felt confused or mixed up. This finding implies the importance of balanced scaffolding skills, so that the teacher helps the students to become confident speakers. Temporary scaffolding in CMC maintains students' speaking motivation and confidence, meanwhile the teacher needs to use it reasonably to encourage students' autonomous learning as well.

Another finding of the current research project suggests that the VC mode requires dividing the speaking task into a few stages. In fact, the task-based activities managed during VC lessons were divided into a few subsequent stages by the teacher: introduction of the task, brainstorming, pitching and Q&A session. After the teacher introduced the speaking task, the teacher sent the students to the breakout rooms to brainstorm in order to generate ideas, negotiate meaning and prepare to pitch in front of their classmates. This process was followed by pitching or presenting their work in the VC main room and Q&A session among the students and the teacher. Evidently, these stages require the students to use different functions of the spoken language such as transactional, interactional and performance (Brown & Yule, 1983, p. 23; Richards, 2008). Each of the mentioned stages enables the learner to gain confidence in either of spoken language functions. This result is similar to Loranc-Paszylk's (2015) research study result whereby students' speaking self-confidence can be facilitated with the help of a well-staged lesson plan and carefully designed activities which focus on meaning transfer. Consequently, when teaching speaking confidence and fluency in VC mode, the teacher needs to meticulously plan each stage of the lesson in order to develop a specific speaking function (transactional, interaction, performance) among the students. These enable the learners to adjust their speech according to the lesson stage and produce authentic language while transferring meaning.

The results of the statistical analysis indicated a significant progress among the students' speaking fluency, vocabulary, content and overall grade before taking the course and after completing it. The students' overall grade difference between the placement speaking test and post-course speaking test suggest that there was a marked progression in students' oral production ($p = 0.001$). Hence, it can be implied that the course objective was successfully achieved. Meanwhile, speaking fluency showed a very small difference ($p = 0.045$) between the placement speaking test and the post-course speaking test. In contrast, vocabulary and content underwent significant changes among the students ($p = 0.004$ and $p = 0.007$ respectively). These results lead to the assumption that the students have somewhat enriched their vocabulary knowledge and have learnt to better transfer meaning orally.

On one hand, these findings complement to the suggestion that CLT activities managed in VC mode help learners improve their fluency and vocabulary (Sevy-Biloon et al, 2019; Wu et al, 2017; Alshahrani, 2016; Lu et al 2014; Lee, 2007). On the other hand, the low significance of the speaking fluency shows that the students have slightly improved their fluency. However, this low significance attracts attention because the course aimed at targeting especially fluency. Such result might be justified with the absence of fluency-focused error-correction techniques throughout the lessons. Otherwise, the course syllabus needs to be reviewed and more impromptu speech based activities need to be integrated into the course curriculum.

Research Question 2: What types of activities are used to develop speaking fluency in VC lessons?

The results of the observations and the interview revealed that CLT task-based activities and role-plays help the learners practice speaking fluency and improve confidence in VC lessons. Task-based activities and role-plays that target fluency and confidence can be easily transferred and adapted to the VC mode in case they do not require any physical space to be managed. Such activities helped to increase the students' talking time and diminish the teacher's talking time during VC lessons. This finding slightly differs from Clarke's (2015) and Hampel & Sticklers' (2012) suggestion regarding the possible threat that teacher dominance and monologue can have on students' interaction in VC lessons. The finding of the current research might be viewed as an exceptional case that the above mentioned suggestions by Clarke and Hampel & Sticklers indicate. In fact, the current research showed that teacher dominance in VC lessons can be avoided by diversifying the communication types in the classroom (pair work, group work, etc.) and by selecting activities based on the students' interest.

An important finding that the interview with the teacher and the observations also revealed was that VC speaking activities need to be meticulously planned and personalized for the students in order to attract their interest. Since VC mode offers technology features such as screen-sharing, chat boxes and breakout rooms, the teacher planned the speaking activities beforehand in order to manage them successfully in VC mode. In addition, personalized activities relate to the students' experiences and interests, therefore they keep them motivated to speak throughout the lessons. This finding coincides with the one suggested by Hampel (2006) according to which VC lessons that encompass student-centered activities positively influence their oral skills.

Research Question 3: What is the teacher's perception regarding teaching speaking via videoconferencing?

The semi-structured interview held with the teacher showed a few significant features of teaching speaking via VC mode. Firstly, the breakout rooms in VC mode were the main feature that had an advantage over f2f classes in regards to teaching speaking. They enabled students to talk freely without being interfered by ambient noise. Secondly, VC lessons require enough preparedness from the teacher's side and use of technology skills in order to motivate students to speak. Similar results were found by Isperdon, 2020, regarding the importance of diversifying technology features use during VC lessons (breakout rooms, applications) and planning how to use those features to target a specific language skill.

Research Question 4: What is the learners' attitude towards videoconferencing-based learning aimed at developing speaking?

The survey results showed that the students had a positive attitude towards the VC-based speaking course. Nearly all the students felt satisfied with the course speaking opportunities because the VC mode of the course did not impede their speaking opportunities. Importantly, all the students agreed that the VC speaking course helped them increase their speaking self-confidence. Furthermore, the students felt very satisfied with the course speaking activities as they considered the course activities mostly effective and frequently somewhat effective. These results suggest that, overall, the course activities contributed to their speaking practice throughout the course. A similar finding was noticed in Vurdien's (2019) research study whereby the task-based activities done on Zoom made the learners feel engaged in the class and speak freely. Furthermore, the results also imply that students are likely to have a positive speaking experience in VC mode in case the teacher efficiently manages the VC lesson and the VC platform.

The survey results also illustrated that error correction and vocabulary are preferable aspects that students would like to have more in the course. As the results of the observations and the interview revealed, there was nearly no error-correction done throughout the lessons and there was some vocabulary teaching included in the course. Lazaraton, 2001, underlined the importance of flexible error-correction in CLT classrooms. A delayed feedback provided students at the end of their speech helps them improve their fluency errors (Lazaraton, 2001). Hence, it can be presumed that fluency could generate a significant difference in the post-course test results in case flexible error-correction techniques were used throughout the course.

Lastly, the students' responses once again complemented to the finding that the VC main room and the breakout rooms are effective pedagogical tools in VC lessons. According to the students, these two features helped them to build speaking confidence during VC lessons. In fact, these features allowed to diversify the types of communication happening in the class (teacher-to-student, teacher-to-students, student-to-teacher, students-to-students) and keep the lesson flow interactive. Doqaruni's, 2014, and Zondag's, 2020, research studies showed that in f2f classes students' speaking confidence was boosted with the help of collaborative activities (pair and group work) which were both fun and engaging for the students. Similarly, the speaking activities in VC lessons of the current research study were mainly designed for group work and pair work purposes and the students admitted enjoying them. Nearly all the students of the current research project commented regarding the effectiveness of the breakout rooms for their speaking confidence. Therefore, breakout rooms are opportune pedagogical tool that helps the learner speak freely and feel more confident about their speech.

5.2 Limitations and Delimitations

The following case study encompasses several limitations and delimitations. Firstly, the sample size of the research is relatively small, therefore the results cannot be completely generalized. Additionally, the online survey administered with the learners is likely to have bias in participants' responses.

As far as delimitations are concerned, the age of the research participants and the advanced level of language proficiency were selected based on convenience sampling. The course was offered by AUA Open Education Program and learners were selected based on their placement speaking interview results and completion of relevant English courses. In addition, the placement speaking test was assessed by different raters whereas the post-course speaking test was assessed by the researcher and a qualified IELTS speaking examiner. Having different raters in the placement speaking test may question the validity and reliability of the placement test results.

5.3 Conclusion

The following case study aimed at investigating how speaking confidence and fluency are developed in VC lessons, the types of speaking activities used as well as the teacher's and the students' attitudes towards VC speaking course. The research study revealed that in order to develop speaking confidence and fluency in VC mode, it is important for the teacher to carefully plan the lessons, adapt student-centered CLT task-based activities, use temporary scaffolding during the VC lessons and integrate multiple modes of communication features that the VC platform offers. Particularly, it was found that the breakout rooms that Zoom VC platform offers helps to differentiate the communication happening in the classroom and make the tasks more interesting. Furthermore, the teacher's and the students' exhibited positive attitude and

experience of VC speaking course as the course showed some progress in regards to speaking confidence.

5.4 Pedagogical Implications

Since VC-based CLT lessons continue advancing day by day, several pedagogical implications will be listed below as takeaways from the following research project.

1. As previously mentioned, delayed feedback regarding spoken errors is essential when teaching speaking fluency (Lazarton, 2001). The students of the current research project showed a slight progress in fluency which could be explained with the absence of sufficient error-correction throughout the lessons. To add, the survey results showed that the students would like to have their errors corrected by the teacher. As a result, the current research project underlines the importance of flexible error-correction when teaching speaking fluency and confidence.
2. Breakout rooms are a valuable pedagogical tool which enable the teachers to diversity the communication in VC lessons (pair work, group work) depending on the activity type. Diversifying the communication types in the classroom is essential in order to enable the students to practice different functions of the spoken language. The research illustrated how effectively the breakout rooms can be used to help students conduct brainstorming, negotiate meaning and communicate authentically.
3. Dividing the speaking activity into several stages in VC mode helps to keep the students' interest and elicit the production of various speech types: transactional, interactional and performance.
4. Scaffolding is essential both in the VC main room and in the breakout rooms. Meanwhile, when teaching fluency and confidence, the teacher needs to use temporary scaffolding in

a flexible way in order to help the learners become autonomous and responsible for their learning.

5.5 Recommendations for Further Research

The current research study allows sufficient space for further research projects in teaching speaking confidence and fluency via VC mode to other EFL proficiency levels namely Intermediate and Upper-Intermediate levels. More research is necessary to understand how to do error-correction and provide feedback on speaking in VC speaking classes. Particularly, research into error-tracking and error-correction in VC-based breakout rooms would help the teachers provide effective feedback to their students.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Observation Form

Course: Speak English with Confidence - Advanced

Date:

Age of learners:

of learners:

Target language proficiency:

Duration of the lesson:

1. Kinds of activities used

Kind of Activities Used	Class #	Comments (Field notes)
Listening-speaking activities		
Reading-speaking activities		
Writing-speaking activities		
Problem-solving activities		
Games		
Role Plays		
Dramatizations		
Songs		
Discussion Questions		
Conversations		
Debates		
Presentations		
Speech		
Information-Gap activities		
Description		
Brainstorm		
Storytelling		
Story Completion		
Interview		
Report		
Find the difference		
Picture narration		
Other		

2. Technology Use in the Classroom

Type of Technology	Class # ____	Comments (Field notes)
Board		
Chat Windows		
Slides		
Breakout Rooms		
Videoconferencing room		
Online tools		

Other		
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3. Field Notes

Interview Questionnaire

1. What criteria did you use to design the course (goals, outcomes, design, order of topics/activities)?
2. What challenges did you encounter while designing an online speaking course?
3. What types of speaking activities does the course include? How do they intend to improve speaking skills?
4. How are teaching speaking skills via videoconferences different from face-to-face teaching?
5. Based on your experience, what types of speaking activities are effective during videoconference-based teaching? Why?
6. Based on your experience, what types of speaking activities are not effective during videoconference-based teaching? Why?
7. What kind of videoconferencing tools or online tools do you use to teach speaking?
8. Which components of speaking are mostly targeted during the course (fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, coherence)? Why (not)?
9. How do you tackle students' speaking errors?
10. How do you avoid teacher-monologue in videoconferences?

Survey for Advanced Speaking Course Students

The survey aims at collecting students' perspectives on the speaking course and its management in videoconference mode. The survey is implemented in the frames of research thesis fulfillment of AUA's "Teaching English as a Foreign Language" Graduate Program. The participants' answers will be strictly kept confidential and will not be shared with third parties without their initial consent.

1. How satisfied are you with the course speaking activities?
 1. Very satisfied
 2. Satisfied
 3. Somewhat
 4. Dissatisfied
 5. Very dissatisfied

2. How satisfied are you with the speaking opportunities you had throughout the course?
 1. Very satisfied
 2. Satisfied
 3. Somewhat
 4. Dissatisfied
 5. Very dissatisfied

3. Do you think that the online mode of the course limited your speaking opportunities?
 1. Yes
 2. No
 3. Somewhat

4. Did the course help you increase your confidence in speaking English?
 1. Yes
 2. No
 3. Somewhat

5. Please rank the speaking activities you think were effective in the online mode of the course. If you were absent from a class and do not know a specific activity, tick "N/A." Please refer to the "Activity Description" file where you can find the descriptions of the activities in case you do not remember them.

True or False Game	Effective	Somewhat effective	Least effective	N/A
Alibi				
Room 101				
What would you do				
Tourism Sector - Tourism opportunities in Armenia				
Granville Island				
Reality Island				
Dragon's Den				
Idioms Quiz				
Family Fortune				
Political Debate				
Hot Air Balloon				
Picture Narration				

Presentations				
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6. Which of these would you like to see included in this course? (tick as many as apply)
- Error-correction (spoken errors)
 - Grammar
 - Vocabulary (idioms, lesson-related vocabulary)
 - Pronunciation/intonation
 - Other
7. Which of the modes of videoconferencing do you find useful to increase your confidence in speaking English? (tick as many as apply)
- Videoconferencing room (the main session)
 - Breakout rooms
 - Chat window
 - Screen sharing (photo, files, etc.)
 - Other
8. Please explain your choice in Q. 7.

Activity Description– Advanced Speaking Course

Activity	Description
True or False Game	Students present four facts about themselves, two are true and two are false. The class has to guess the correct sentences after cross-examination of student.
Alibi	A crime has been committed. Students are selected into two groups and prepare their questions and story. Students are then questioned by police inspectors to determine which ‘gang’ (group) has committed the crime.
Room 101	Students present things that really bug them and class decides on which ideas to put into room 101.
What would you do	Students are given some situations. In groups they read the situations and guess what their classmates would do in such situations.
Tourism Sector - Tourism opportunities in Armenia	In groups, students choose a tourism sector and prepare a presentation promoting their ideas in Armenia.
Granville Island	Students debate the development of an island into a tourist attraction.
Reality Island	Students role play as imaginary characters and audition for a part on the TV show
Dragon’s Den	Students prepare a marketing strategy for a new and useless product. They pitch it to the Dragons (classmates) to persuade them to invest in the products.
Idioms Quiz	A quiz game. Students are given with an idioms and three possible options of their meaning. The students need to guess the correct meaning of the idiom.
Family Fortune	The teacher provides the students some open-ended questions and top 5 answers. In groups, students individually have to ask and answer those questions in order to guess the correct, top answers. Similar to “Family Fortune” TV Show.
Political Debate	Opposing political parties present their manifesto and prepare to defend it and also attack the opposition’s policies.
Hot Air Balloon	Some celebrities are in a hot air-balloon and one of them has to be thrown out. In groups, students assume one of the celebrities and have to persuade why they are worth to be kept in the balloon.
Picture Narration	The class is divided into groups of A and B. Group A has to narrate two real and two imaginary photos to Group B and Group B has to guess which description is based on a real or imaginary photo.
Presentations	Students present a topic of their interest in class.

Appendix E

Agreement

“Teaching Speaking Skills via Videoconferencing-based Instruction” is a research thesis conducted by Luiza Vardanyan for the fulfillment of her thesis requirements at “Teaching English as a Foreign Language” Graduate Program at the American University of Armenia (AUA). The research was carried out in the frames of “Advanced Speaking Course” offered by the AUA Open Education Program. As a part of the research methodology, Ms. Vardanyan conducted post-course speaking interviews with the students of the course. In order to assess those interviews, she kindly requested the assessment rubric that AUA Open Education Program used for the placement of students.

According to the current agreement,

- The provided assessment rubric will be used solely for Ms. Vardanyan’s research purpose to assess the post-course speaking interviews in order to correlate the speaking placement interviews with the post-course speaking interviews.
- The provided assessment rubric will be used only by the researcher, Ms. Vardanyan, and an International English Language Testing System (IELTS) speaking test rater, _____, in order to provide a valid and reliable data.
- The rater, _____, will be required to sign the current agreement according to which she will use the rubric only in the frames of Ms. Vardanyan’s research.

Hereby I, AUA MA TEFL student Luiza Vardanyan, confirm that the assessment rubric provided by AUA Open Education Program will be used solely for the purpose of my research and will not be disclosed to third parties.

Date:

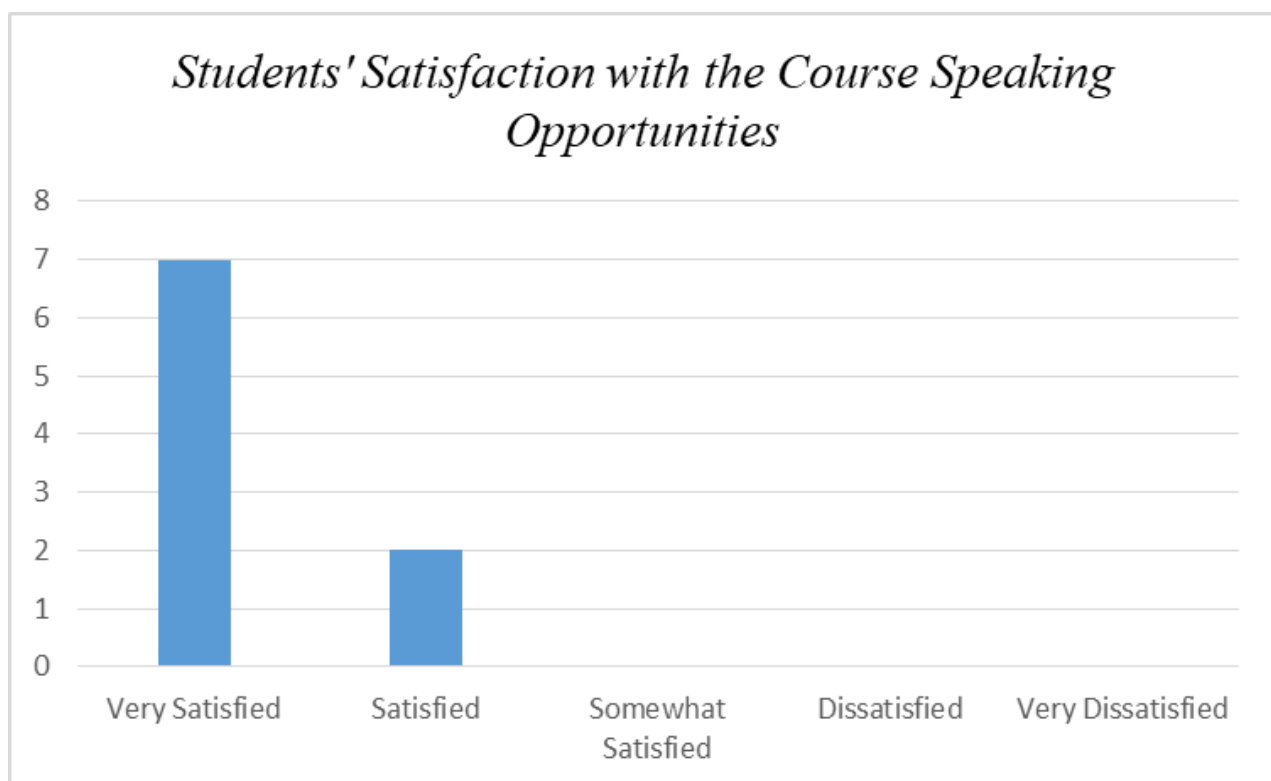
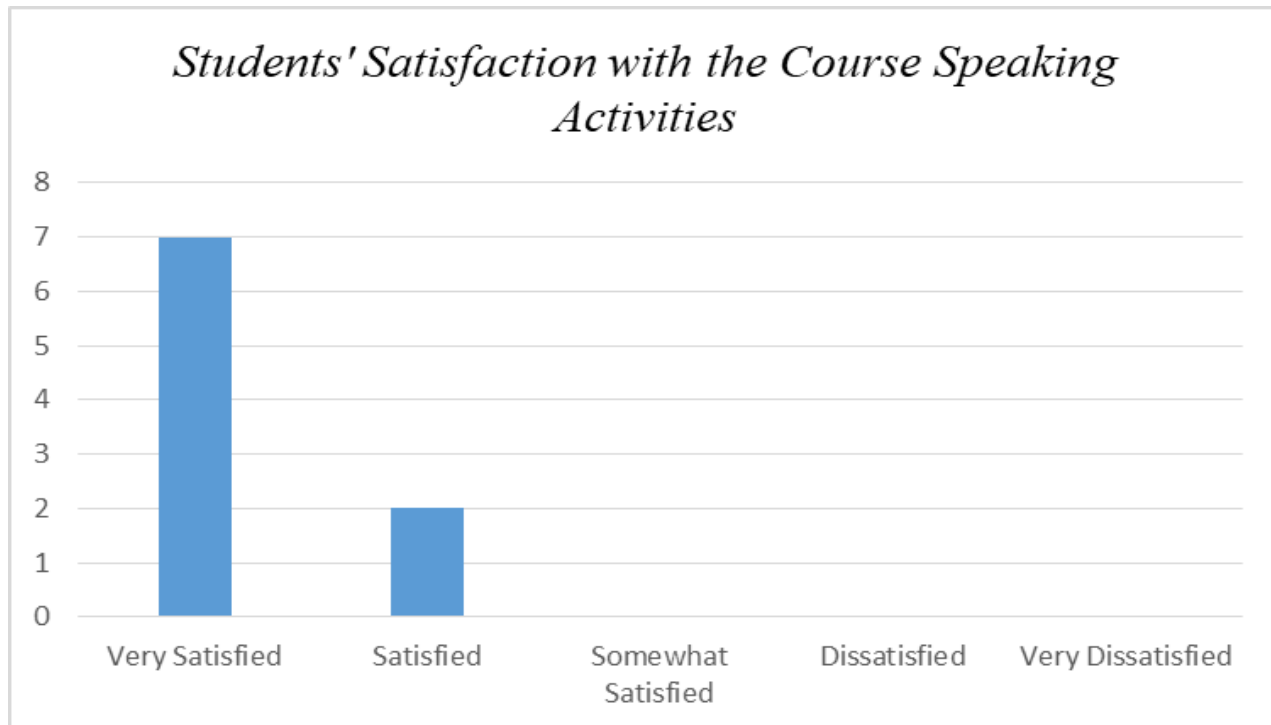
Signature:

Hereby I, _____, confirm that the assessment rubric provided by AUA Open Education Program will be used solely for the purpose of assessing the post-speaking interviews as part of Ms. Vardanyan’s research. I confirm that the provided rubric will not be disclosed to third parties.

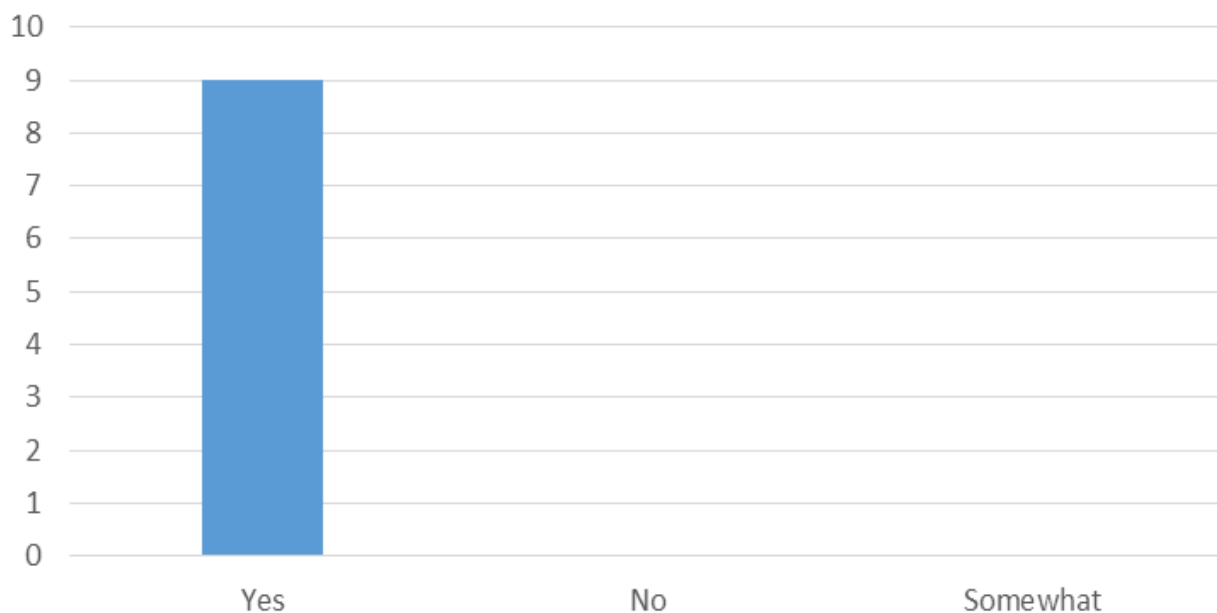
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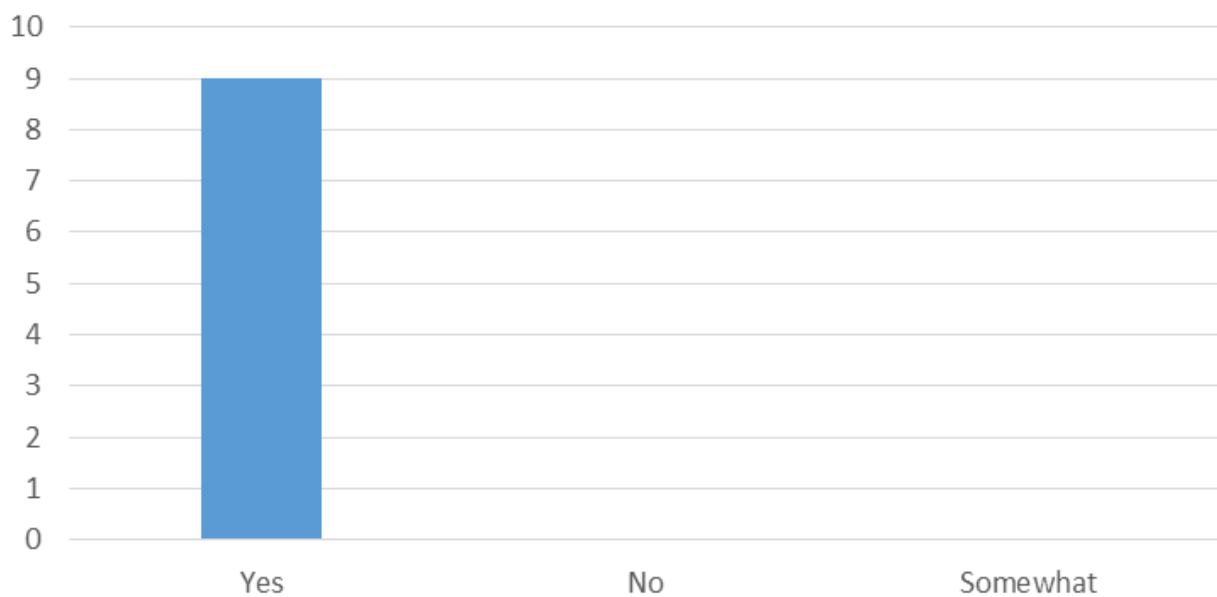
Appendix F

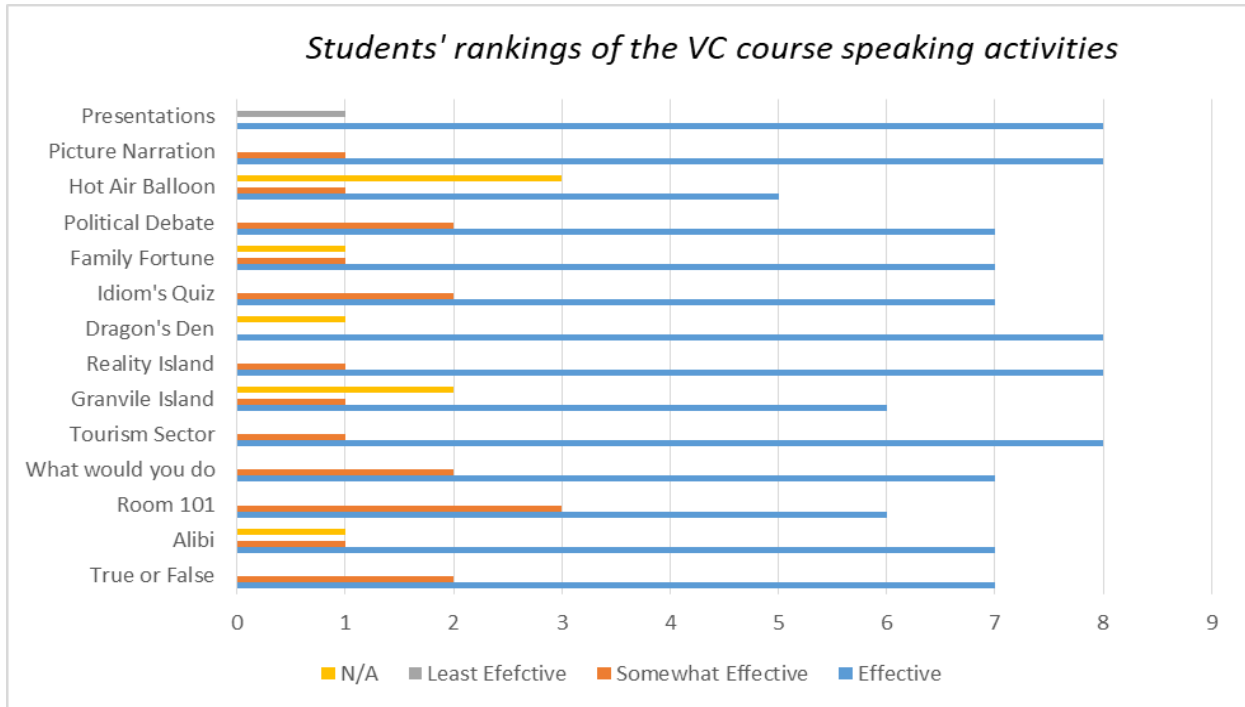
Analysis of the Students' Survey

Students' Opinion whether the Course VC Mode Limited Their Speaking Opportunities

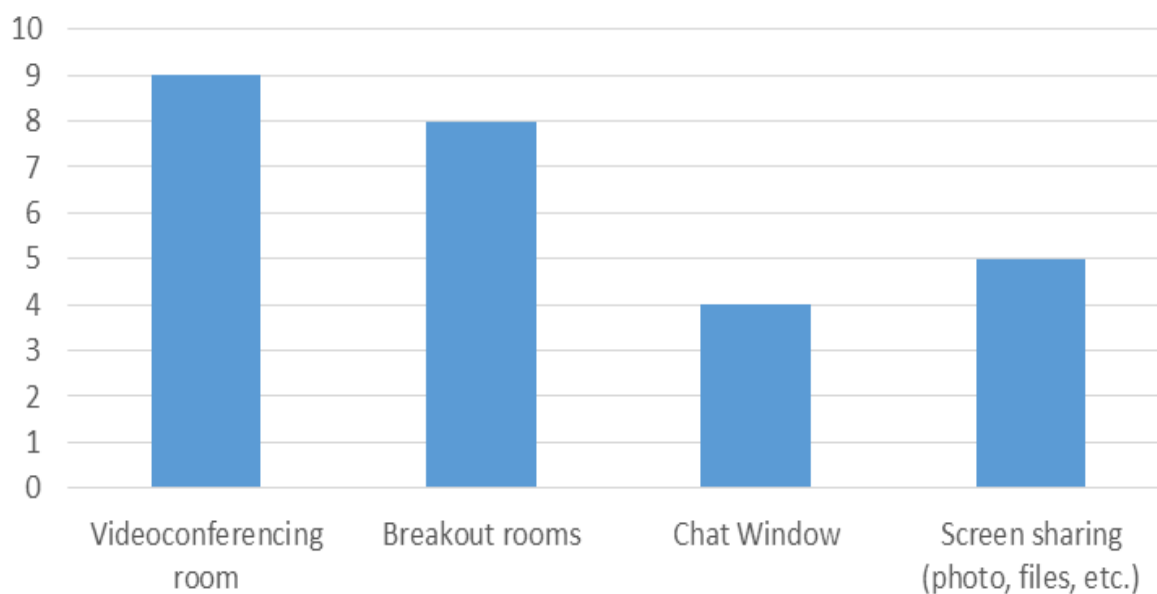


Students' Opinion whether the Course Helped Them Increase EFL Speaking Confidence

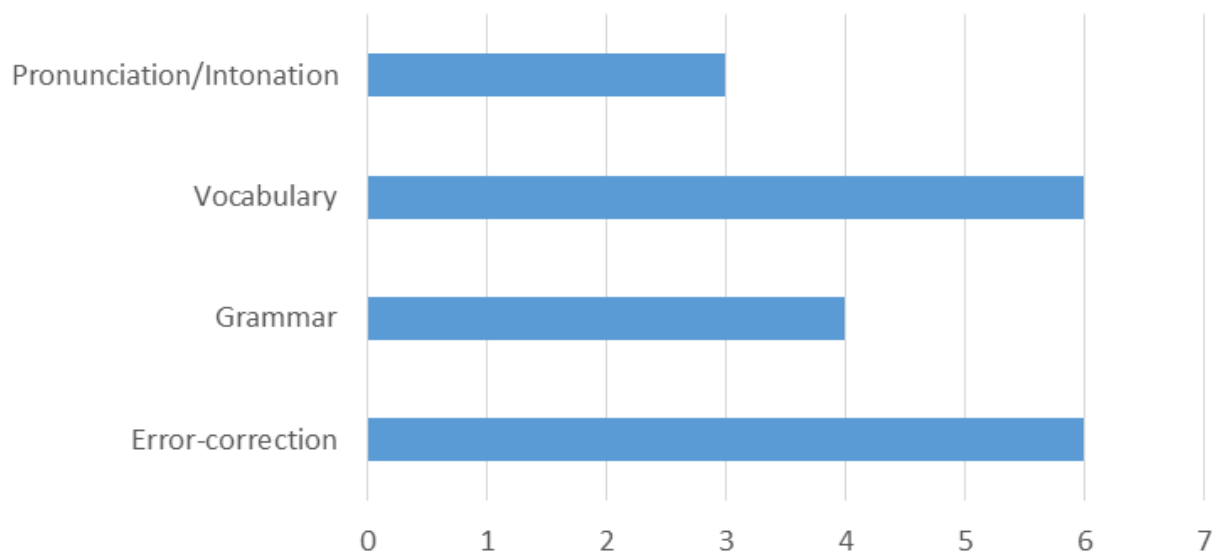




Modes of VC platform students consider useful for speaking confidence



What Students Would Like to See Included in the Course



8. Please explain your choice in Q. 7.

9 responses

This course was very interesting and useful for me. I enjoy it very much. Thank You Vigen!

There was a chance to speak more, and had a practice.

Breakout rooms were effective in terms of communication inside divided teams and tasks

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Videoconferencing and breakout rooms give more opportunities to the student to speak

All good

All these modes were used for different purposes, so each of them was useful itself.

I find each of them really useful. First, in order not to be boring each time just use one mode. And the second, each mode has its interest in speaking and increasing/developing your critical/logical thinking.

It was very interesting to have a small group discussions and then to present to the whole group.