

Student Perceptions of the Value of Recorded Speaking Tasks in Asynchronous Online English Classes

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Abstract

This paper will focus on the reactions students had after two semesters of online English language classes supplemented with regular recorded Speaking Tasks. As the lessons were asynchronous, language practice and production based upon spontaneous communication that forms a part of many modern language classes was impossible. In the aim of providing opportunities for student output, the online study materials were designed with the principles of task-based learning in mind and culminated with Speaking Tasks based on lesson contents, which were recorded by the students and uploaded to Google Classroom. Feedback to each Speaking Task was provided by the teacher. The lesson format and The Speaking Tasks were designed to mitigate the learning opportunities lost by moving classes out of the classroom and online due to the COVID-19 pandemic. At the end of the academic year, two cohorts of students (one group of first year students and one group of second year students) were given a questionnaire survey to gauge their reactions to this style of language learning. Responses indicated that overall both the first and second year students found the Speaking Tasks to be a useful supplement to their regular lessons and were helpful in improving their productive language ability.

Keywords : task-based language learning, output, curriculum design, CALL

Background

In 2020, the COVID 19 pandemic caused a disruption in all aspects of life around the world. Of course, education was also affected as educational institutions chose or were ordered to shut their doors to students and scrambled to go online. Educators were forced to adapt their curriculum and lesson contents in a very short time, while students had to follow them in making the transition away from classrooms and onto the Internet. Some educational styles were more easily adapted to the online formats. Seemingly, lecture style classes are much easier to provide through an “online and on demand” format. However, classes based on interaction between teachers and students were more difficult. Based on theories and research from the field of second language acquisition, there is a general consensus that classes and curriculum that provide a good balance of language exposure through comprehensible input and language practice/production with ample opportunity for output are effective and engaging for language learners. Many language teachers quickly invited their students to live classes through video conferencing applications, such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams. However, as it was predicted that many students (and teachers) at the university would be unable or unwilling to participate in live online classes, the decision was made by the university that participation in these live online classes would not be mandatory. Therefore, it was necessary for teachers to provide “on-demand” lessons for students unable to participate in the live online classes.

Compulsory English Classes in the Faculty of International Studies and Liberal Arts at St. Andrew's University

English as a second language classes are prioritised as part of the compulsory education in the Faculty of International Studies and Liberal Arts. All first and second year students take four compulsory English classes per week. In the first year these are 英語 AI~ 英語 A~IV and 英語 BI~ 英語 BIV. The “A” classes focus on receptive skills (reading and listening) and grammar knowledge. The “B” classes focus on productive skills (writing and speaking) and practical English usage. The second year classes are titled 中級英語 (Intermediate English) and designated into four separate skills OC (oral communication), W (writing), L (listening), and R (reading). As this distinction and designation of skills to be focused on in different classes is seen as important, due to it being written into the curriculum, accordingly even when shifting to online lessons it was imperative to preserve the focus of the classes despite the shift to online learning.

Teachers were told to provide lessons though the University's online portal called, “M-Port”. Use of other platforms such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams and Google Classroom was also permitted, with the teacher having the responsibility of instructing students on the usage of any chosen platform. Through systems such as M-Port, Microsoft Teams and Google Classroom, teachers could send instructions, lessons and assignments etc. Students could complete the assigned work as text or in attached files such as Word documents, PDFs, etc. As for language classes, it is

easy to perceive that grammar practice and explanations, listening and reading comprehension and writing tasks could be administered through this system without much diversion from regular face to face classes. Of course the experience of the students would be different, and students would not be able to directly interact with the teacher. Therefore, the primary problem faced by language teachers was to provide an opportunity for spoken language output, an integral component of English classes, especially 英語 BI~ 英語 BIV and 中級英語 OC.

As a teacher of both of the above mentioned classes, I considered the stipulations of the curriculum, the needs of the learners and the available technology. Ultimately, I decided to use the Google Classroom Platform for the following reasons. Firstly, all students had a university Gmail account, meaning registration was much easier than Microsoft Teams. Secondly, the design and interface of Google Classroom is visual and intuitive making it more similar to social media platforms such as *Facebook* and *Instagram*, and therefore would be easier for students to get used to. Next, it can be accessed through browsers and applications for smartphones. Finally, in addition to assignments, there is a forum style top page, called *Stream*. Students could submit work both privately (seen only by the teacher) and publicly (accessible to all class members). More details about the lesson contents and format will be included in a following section.

Literature Review

A more thorough literature review of the theoretical basis behind the

use of speaking tasks related to broader theories in second language acquisition and how these were applied to the design of the speaking tasks have been submitted for publication in Wagner (2021). Therefore, only a brief overview of the relevant literature will be included here.

Despite falling out of fashion somewhat since their initial publication, the theories of second language acquisition promulgated in the numerous works of Stephen Krashen still retain prominence in the field. The most influential of his theories is the *Input Hypothesis*. Krashen claims that, “...humans acquire language in only one way – by understanding messages or by receiving comprehensible input...” (1985, p. 2). While Krashen sees comprehensible input as the most valuable and indispensable component of second language acquisition, as teachers the final result of successful language acquisition should be production of the language by their students, “...speaking is a result of acquisition, not its cause.” (Krashen, 1985, p. 2). So even in asynchronous classes, that do not prevent the teacher from providing ample comprehensible input, it is important for teachers and students to be able to show the result of acquisition, ideally through the production of written and spoken language.

The Output Hypothesis of Merrill Swain places emphasis on the role and importance of language production in the process of second language acquisition. “Producing the language might be the trigger that forces the learner to pay attention to the means of expression needed in order to successfully convey his or her own intended meaning” (Swain, 1995, p. 249). One key aspect of this theory is the *Noticing Function*. Ex-

plained simply, when learners try to communicate in the target language they notice gaps in their knowledge. This triggers active learning and expedites the acquisition process. Another important part of the *Output Hypothesis* is the *Hypothesis-testing function*: When learners have the opportunity to speak or write in the target language, they employ existing knowledge and assumptions about grammar etc. They can test if these are correct by the reactions they receive. In the case of this class, they can get explicit feedback from the teacher regarding their errors in grammar etc.

Swain asserts that, “...the importance of output to learning could be that output pushes learners to process the language more deeply – with more mental effort – than does input” (Swain, 2000, p. 99). Considering individual differences in learning styles and educational contexts, most language acquisition researchers and educators agree that providing language learning environments that are rich in both comprehensible input and opportunities for output is likely to be the best practice for language teachers.

Informed by both the Input Hypothesis and Output Hypothesis, the principles of *Communicative Language Teaching* and *Task-Based Learning* were influential in the inclusion and design of the Speaking Tasks discussed in this research. Proponents of communicative Language Teaching assert that “communicative competence, and not simply grammatical competence, should be the goal of language teaching” (Richards, 2005, p. 9). While it is true that the emphasis of communicative language

teaching is providing opportunities for student output, the relation to Krashen's Aquisition-Learning Hypothesis, and his preference for natural language acquisition is clear. "Language is best taught when it is being used to transmit messages, not when it is explicitly taught for conscious learning." (Terrell & Krashen, 1983, p. 56). For proponents of communicative language teaching, "communicative competence, and not simply grammatical competence, should be the goal of language teaching" (Richards, 2005, p. 9). Accordingly, in communicative language classes, explicit grammatical explanation is minimised or avoided entirely. The emphasis is on function not form.

Task-based language learning can be seen as a pedagogical approach that aims to give specific direction and practical shape to the concepts of communicative language teaching. Ellis defines *tasks* in second language education as, "activities that call for primarily meaning focused language use. In contrast, exercises are activities that call for primarily form focused language use" (2003, p. 3). However, modern approaches to communicative language teaching and task-based language learning do not exclude the value of form-focused instruction entirely.

As Ellis writes:

While a task requires a learner to act primarily as a language user and give focal attention to message conveyance, it allows for peripheral attention to be paid to what forms to use. Also, when performing a task, learners' focal attention may switch momentarily to form as they temporarily adopt the role of language learners. (2003, p. 5)

Considering the background of the learners, who are more accustomed

to more traditional teacher-centred and grammar-based form of English learning still very prevalent in language education in schools in Japan, I have also chosen, in the design of Speaking Tasks, to include a focus on form in most cases, and make explicit connection between form and meaning. I designed the Speaking Tasks as an opportunity for output through a realistic act of communication, with the aim of consolidating the learning of lesson contents and encouraging the student to temporarily shift their focus from being a language learner to a language user as much as possible.

Lesson Format and Delivery

The lesson materials were provided as Microsoft Word documents and audio files. The Microsoft Word files included instructions as to what pages of the class textbook to complete, and spaces to input answers to textbook activities. Audio files for listening tasks were supplied as .mp3 files. The files also included additional materials to supplement the textbook such as grammar explanations, extra activities such as grammar drills and links to Youtube videos etc.

As a general concept for the design of lessons as a whole, I was informed by the three stage design, of task-based learning described by Nunan as, “pretask, task and follow up” (2003, p. 12).

At the end of most lesson files, there was a Speaking Task. Students were directed to read the instructions for the Speaking Task and to record themselves speaking.

Speaking Tasks included clear instructions. While they did vary, gener-

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ally students were given a theme to talk about, or a question to answer. Depending on the task, students were given instructions including specific vocabulary sets or grammatical constructions to use in the Speaking Task. Minimum times for the Speaking Tasks were designated between one and two minutes. Students were instructed to upload their speaking tasks to the forum style page of Google Classroom called "Stream". Files uploaded to stream are open and accessible to all class members. This has the benefit that students can listen to other students' tasks and read my feedback to those tasks, increasing input. Furthermore, it was thought that if students know their Speaking Tasks can be heard by other students, they would be more likely to put more effort into their work. Examples of the Speaking Tasks are included as an Appendix.

Pre-task activities have the goal of introducing the topic or genre of the task, generating interest in it and previewing the language abilities necessary to complete the task. In the follow up, learners reflect on their achievements and receive constructive criticism and further explanation and instruction as required. I decided to super impose the pre-task, task and follow up cycle of task-based language learning over the traditional language teaching paradigm known as the P-P-P approach (Present, Practice, Produce). My conceptual design of each lesson was as follows:

Pre-Task (Present and Practice)

The textbook based materials provided to the students described above constituted the pre task. Students were introduced to the topic themes and target language.

Task (produce)

In earlier lessons, a model Speaking Task and script were provided by the teacher.

Follow-up

I responded to each student's Speaking Task individually throughout the year. My feedback always included two components. Firstly, as I treated the task as an act of communication, I responded to the content of the task, the opinions expressed, or the experience described in a personal way. This has the function of motivating the students, to show that they had successfully completed the communicative task and conveyed their intended meaning in the foreign language, this was designed to acknowledge the efforts of students and hopefully increase their motivation. The second part of the feedback was instructive, explicitly pointing out and correcting errors in grammar, vocabulary use and pronunciation.

Key Research Questions

Entirely online classes were a new experience for teachers and students. Therefore, it was relevant to find how students perceived this style of language learning. The key research questions are as follows:

1. To what extent did students find the Speaking Tasks to be useful for their development of ability in English as a second language?
2. Were the reactions and perceptions of second year students, who had experienced one year of regular university English language classes different from first year students, who did not have this experience?

Participants

The participants in the online classes were one class of first year students, who did the Speaking Tasks as requirements for 英語 IB and IIIB (22 students), and one class of second year students who did the Speaking Tasks as requirements for 中級英語 OC classes (18 students).

Methods and Data Collection

At the end of the academic year, both cohorts of students were asked to cooperate in completing a questionnaire regarding their experiences and opinions of the online classes, particularly the Speaking Tasks. The questionnaire included 21 questions with Likert scale response choices and one section where students could freely write their opinions. The entire questionnaire was written in both English and Japanese. It is included as Appendix B. All of the percentages are rounded to one decimal.

Results and Analysis

1. Familiarity, Ease and Enjoyment

The change to online classes, and other restrictions on lifestyle presumably caused a lot of stress to students. So, it was important that the chosen format, Google Classroom, and the lesson contents did not add to the stress of the students, already struggling to adapt to various styles of online learning. Responses to the questions related to the overall ease, familiarity and enjoyment of completing the Speaking Tasks will be presented in the following tables and discussed.

Table 1

Student Responses to the Question Prompt: “Before this class have you had the experience of recording your speaking and listening to your own English?”

Response Choices	1 st Year Student Responses	2 nd Year Student Responses
I regularly did this	9.1%	22.2%
Many times	9.1%	11.1%
A couple or a few times	40.9%	38.9%
Once	0%	0%
Never	40.9%	27.8%

As shown in the table above, the majority of students did not have much experience with recording themselves speaking as part of their language study. The second year students seemed to have slightly more experience of this, indicating some may have participated in similar activities in the past, possibly during their first year of university. Overall though, it was quite a new experience for students to regularly add this type of Speaking Task to their study regime. Also, a response given in the final section of the questionnaire where students could freely write their opinions indicated that the novelty of the experience may have contributed to the enjoyment and perceived value. “It was an unusual experience, I enjoyed it.”

Table 2

Student Responses to the Question Prompt: “Overall, I felt that Google Classroom was easy to use.”

Response Choices	1 st Year Student Responses	2 nd Year Student Responses
Very easy	54.5%	55.6%
Mostly easy	27.3%	44.4%
Neither easy nor difficult	13.6%	0%
Difficult	4.5%	0%

As predicted, due to its visual interface and similar design to social

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media platforms, the vast majority of students found little difficulty accessing lesson materials and submitting their work through Google Classroom. The second year students indicated slightly more ease of using the system.

Table 3

Student Responses to the Question Prompt: “I enjoyed doing the Speaking Tasks.”

Response Choices	1 st Year Student Responses	2 nd Year Student Responses
Strongly agree	13.6%	27.8%
Agree	54.5%	50.0%
Neither agree nor disagree	27.3%	16.7%
Disagree	0%	0%
Strongly Disagree	4.5%	5.6%

Interestingly, the second year students reported more overall enjoyment of the Speaking Tasks. Without further data as to reasons why, it is difficult to speculate on the reason for this. It was heartening though, that the number of students to claimed to dislike doing the speaking tasks was low in both cohorts. However, perhaps as second year students were accustomed to communicative language teaching and production-based classes, they were more keenly aware of the loss of output caused by online lessons. The following comment from a second year students is translated from Japanese. “As my opportunities for output in English are limited, this was a really good way of practising.”

2. Relevance of Speaking Tasks to Class Content

Table 4

Student Responses to the Question Prompt: “I felt there was a direct connection between the Speaking Tasks and class activities/class textbook.”

Response Choices	1 st Year Student Responses	2 nd Year Student Responses
Strongly agree	36.4%	55.6%
Agree	40.9%	38.9%
Neither agree nor disagree	18.2%	1.0%
Disagree	4.5%	0%
Strongly Disagree	0%	0%

As indicated in table 4, above, the majority of students seemed to understand this explicit connection between the lesson contents and Speaking Tasks showing the setting of themes and topics was appropriate. The responses of the second year students was more positive. Perhaps due to their experience of English classes incorporating some aspects of task-based learning in their first year university, the pedagogical aspects of the Speaking Tasks were more apparent.

Table 5

Student Responses to the Question Prompt: “Doing the Speaking Tasks caused me to revise the class content and textbook.”

Response Choices	1 st Year Student Responses	2 nd Year Student Responses
Strongly agree	13.6%	27.8%
Agree	45.5%	38.9%
Neither agree nor disagree	27.3%	33.3%
Disagree	9.1%	0%
Strongly Disagree	4.5%	0%

As an impetus to motivate students to revise and consolidate learning of the class contents, the results were fairly good, but suggest that some

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tweaking of the Speaking Task design might be necessary to improve this. Combining the response choices of “Strongly agree” and “Agree” gives us a total of 59.1% for the first year students and 66.7% for the second year students. However, the percentage of second year students who chose “Strongly agree” was more than double of that of the first year students. It seems this is connected to the answers regarding the understanding of the connection between the Speaking Tasks and the class content encountered in the “pretask” stage.

Table 6

Student Responses to the Question Prompt: “Doing the Speaking Tasks helped me to remember grammar, vocabulary, phrases and pronunciation advice learned in class.”

Response Choices	1 st Year Student Responses	2 nd Year Student Responses
Strongly agree	18.2%	38.9%
Agree	40.9%	44.4%
Neither agree nor disagree	31.8%	11.1%
Disagree	0%	0%
Strongly Disagree	9.1%	0%

Responses to the question about remembering class content also correlate to the questions about revising course materials quite closely. While these results are not ideal, especially the 40% of first year students who chose “Neither agree nor disagree,” “Disagree,” “Strongly Disagree.” We must keep in mind that one key aspect of the Speaking Task design was for students to produce original language, and not merely reiterate the contents of the textbook or lesson. However, there is certainly room for improvement in this aspect.

3. Improvement of Overall English and Individual Skills

Questions regarding to what degrees students saw the Speaking Tasks as an effective way to improve their English ability were perhaps the most important, and the responses to these would be most indicative of the success or otherwise of this experiment.

Table 7

Student Responses to the Question Prompt: “Overall, doing the Speaking Tasks helped me to improve my English.”

Response Choices	1 st Year Student Responses	2 nd Year Student Responses
Strongly agree	13.6%	27.8%
Agree	54.5%	50.0%
Neither agree nor disagree	22.7%	22.2%
Disagree	0%	0%
Strongly Disagree	9.1%	0%

In response to this item on the questionnaire, the majority of students felt that they could improve their English through the Speaking Tasks. However, the almost one quarter of students who were not sure if they actually improved is not insignificant. Some addition to the syllabus, such as pre-test and post-test would be beneficial to motivate students, and hopefully show tangible improvement. The response from the second year cohort was slightly more positive than that of the first years.

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Table 8

Student Responses to the Question Prompt: “Doing the speaking tasks helped me to increase my confidence to speak English.”

Response Choices	1 st Year Student Responses	2 nd Year Student Responses
Strongly agree	13.6%	38.9%
Agree	40.9%	38.9%
Neither agree nor disagree	31.8%	22.2%
Disagree	9.1%	0%
Strongly Disagree	4.5%	0%

Second year students perceived a much bigger increase in their confidence to speak English.

Despite the difference in answers to question prompt, over half of the first year students did feel they had become more confident. In this case, the question prompt was unfortunately ambiguous, and did not ask the students if this confidence was limited to doing the Speaking Tasks, or would translate into real life or face-to-face classroom situation.

Table 9

Student Responses to the Question Prompt: “Doing the speaking tasks helped me to improve my grammar.”

Response Choices	1 st Year Student Responses	2 nd Year Student Responses
Strongly agree	9.1%	22.2%
Agree	54.5%	44.4%
Neither agree nor disagree	22.7%	27.8%
Disagree	4.5%	0%
Strongly Disagree	9.1%	5.6%

As stated above, in the literature review, there was an effort made to include a focus on form and structure in the Speaking Task. In the instructions, there was often explicit instruction regarding particular

grammatical structures to be incorporated. Most students reported an increase in their grammar knowledge.

Table 10

Student Responses to the Question Prompt: “Doing the speaking tasks helped me to improve my vocabulary.”

Response Choices	1 st Year Student Responses	2 nd Year Student Responses
Strongly agree	13.6%	27.8%
Agree	59.1%	38.9%
Neither agree nor disagree	13.6%	27.8%
Disagree	4.5%	0%
Strongly Disagree	9.1%	5.6%

One of the motivations for incorporating Speaking Tasks was the Output Hypothesis of Merrill Swain. It was envisaged that these lessons would help students expand their vocabulary in two ways, by recycling and improving memory of vocabulary encountered in the pre-task stage and by triggering *noticing function*. In this way students would discover gaps in the vocabulary knowledge when they prepared for the Speaking Task and be provided cause to look up new vocabulary to fill those gaps. This indeed seems to be the case as more gains in vocabulary were reported than for grammar.

Table 11

Student Responses to the Question Prompt: “Doing the speaking tasks helped me to improve my fluency.”

Response Choices	1 st Year Student Responses	2 nd Year Student Responses
Strongly agree	18.2%	33.3%
Agree	50.0%	38.9%
Neither agree nor disagree	18.2%	27.8%
Disagree	4.5%	0%
Strongly Disagree	9.1%	0%

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Across both cohorts, over two thirds of students thought they were able to speak more fluently as a result of doing the speaking task. Students were encouraged to practice speaking before they recorded and to rerecord as many times as they liked until they were satisfied. This repeated practice is likely the cause of the mainly positive responses to this question.

Table 12

Student Responses to the Question Prompt: “Doing the speaking task helped me to improve my pronunciation.”

Response Choices	1 st Year Student Responses	2 nd Year Student Responses
Strongly agree	22.7%	27.8%
Agree	27.3%	55.6%
Neither agree nor disagree	36.4%	11.1%
Disagree	4.5%	1.0%
Strongly Disagree	9.1%	0%

Among the second year students, pronunciation was the language skill that most students felt improvement in. A possible reason for this was the feedback given by the teacher which often pointed out errors in pronunciation and gave advice to fix these errors. Sometimes, feedback included links to external resources, such as Youtube videos to aid the students in English sounds that are particularly difficult for L1 Japanese learners to produce. However, both first and second year students were provided with this kind of feedback, so it is unclear why there was a discrepancy between the two cohorts.

Table 13

Student Responses to the Question Prompt: “The feedback given to me by the teacher was helpful.”

Response Choices	1 st Year Student Responses	2 nd Year Student Responses
Strongly agree	59.1%	72.2%
Agree	18.2%	16.7%
Neither agree nor disagree	18.2%	11.1%
Disagree	4.5%	0%
Strongly Disagree	0%	0%

For the teacher, this was the most difficult and time-consuming part of the experiment, so it was very encouraging to see that most students strongly agreed that the feedback from the teacher was helpful. This also showed that without the addition of the Speaking Tasks, students would not have had any opportunity to receive feedback regarding their spoken English in the asynchronous learning environment. Responses from students such as the following emphasised the value of this feedback. “Every time, the teacher gave me a comment. The comment made me encourage and happy, so I did all tasks.”

Table 14

Student Responses to the Question Prompt: “In the future, I want to continue recording myself speaking English as part of my English study.”

Response Choices	1 st Year Student Responses	2 nd Year Student Responses
Strongly agree	9.1%	11.1%
Agree	50.0%	66.7%
Neither agree nor disagree	27.3%	16.7%
Disagree	9.1%	0%
Strongly Disagree	4.5%	5.6%

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While significantly over half of the students expressed a desire to continue recording their speech as a method of improving their English in the future, the combined response was lukewarm when compared to the previous question discussed, regarding the value of feedback. This could be interpreted as meaning that while students did see this as a valid learning experience, they would prefer to practise speaking English in a regular classroom environment. Second year students reported a stronger intention to continue with this kind of study in the future.

4. Increase in opportunities for input and output

One of the initial goals of incorporating the Speaking Tasks was to increase the sheer amount of language input as well as create opportunities for output. One of the reasons for having students upload the speaking tasks to the public forum, Stream, was to enable students to both hear the Speaking Tasks of other students and read the teacher's feedback to them.

Table 15

Student Responses to the Question Prompt: "I listened to the Speaking Tasks submitted by other students."

Response Choices	1 st Year Student Responses	2 nd Year Student Responses
Always	4.5%	5.6%
Often	0%	27.8%
About half the time	9.1%	5.6%
Occasionally	59.1%	38.9%
Never	27.3%	22.2%

Even though second year students were more likely to listened to the tasks submitted by other students, a large proportion of all students only

occasionally or never did this. This was negative result. In the free comment section, one student wrote that, “It may be useful to listen to other student’s recording file as a task.” Indeed, this may be a useful element to improve future iterations of this system. For example, students could be required to listen to and comment upon other students’ submissions.

Table 16

Student Responses to the Question Prompt: “I read the teacher’s feedback to other students’ Speaking Tasks.”

Response Choices	1 st Year Student Responses	2 nd Year Student Responses
Always	13.6%	11.1%
Often	13.6%	5.6%
About half the time	4.5%	5.6%
Occasionally	18.2%	44.4%
Never	50.0%	27.8%

Similarly, the students who took the time to read the feedback given to the other students was also very low. So, in this way it could be said that the Speaking Tasks were not successful in increasing the students’ comprehensible input as much as hoped. In contrasts, the responses did show that students’ opportunities for output and target language practice certainly did increase.

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Table 17

Student Responses to the Question Prompt: “On average, how many times did you practice doing your Speaking Task before you recorded it?”

Response Choices	1 st Year Student Responses	2 nd Year Student Responses
I usually didn't practice before I recorded.	4.5%	5.6%
I practiced once or twice.	36.4%	50.0%
I practiced three or four times.	40.9%	22.2%
I practiced four or five times.	9.1%	5.6%
I practiced 5 or more times.	9.1%	16.7%

This showed that almost all students practised speaking by themselves before hitting the record button. Over half of the first year students claimed to practise at least three times or more before recording. Second year students practised less before recording overall.

Table 18

Student Responses to the Question Prompt: “On average, how many times did you record your Speaking Task before you uploaded the final version?”

Response Choices	1 st Year Student Responses	2 nd Year Student Responses
I only recorded once and submitted that.	0%	0%
I recorded twice.	31.8%	44.4%
I recorded three times.	40.9%	16.7%
I recorded four times.	13.6%	5.6%
I recorded more than four times.	13.6%	33.3%

The data clearly shows that students did not merely record their Speaking Tasks once and then submit them, but recorded, and re-recorded mostly likely to fix errors or add extra parts. This tendency, combined with the data in Table 17 that showed students usually practiced at least twice before trying to record shows that students had the opportunity for sustained and focused speaking practice.

5. Improvement of metalinguistic awareness

One of the benefits purported by Swain's Output Hypothesis is increasing consciousness amongst learners of how language works and their own ability to manipulate it. In practical terms, the Speaking Tasks were designed to help students become more aware of their own errors, and their current ability levels through language production.

Table 19

Student Responses to the Question Prompt: "Doing the Speaking Tasks helped me to understand my strengths and weaknesses in English."

Response Choices	1 st Year Student Responses	2 nd Year Student Responses
Strongly agree	18.2%	27.8%
Agree	36.4%	44.4%
Neither agree nor disagree	31.8%	22.2%
Disagree	9.1%	5.6%
Strongly Disagree	4.5%	0%

The majority of students responded that they did become better able to understand their strengths and weaknesses in English. It is likely that while preparing for the Speaking Tasks, students noticed gaps in their vocabulary or through the feedback, found fossilised errors in grammar, pronunciation etc. and hopefully made some efforts to improve their identified weaknesses.

Table 20

Student Responses to the Question Prompt: “Through doing the speaking tasks, I became better at noticing mistakes in my English.”

Response Choices	1 st Year Student Responses	2 nd Year Student Responses
Strongly agree	22.7%	16.7%
Agree	40.9%	61.1%
Neither agree nor disagree	22.7%	22.2%
Disagree	4.5%	0%
Strongly Disagree	9.1%	0%

Responses to this questionnaire item seem to respond to the items about the value of feedback and number of times rehearsing and recording. Making errors is a natural and expected part of learner language and being self-aware of these errors is an important part of progression to higher levels of proficiency. That the vast majority of students did claim to have become more aware of their errors is a very positive sign.

Limitations and Future Research

The most obvious limitation of this study is that all of the results regarding improvements of English ability etc. are self-reported and cannot be quantitatively verified. In the circumstances, there was no practical way to implement any kind of pre-experiment test or post-experiment test. Also, it is unlikely that a more experimental research design conducted in similar circumstances could be implemented. As disruptions to education caused by the COVID-19 pandemic continued, teachers and students became better equipped and more accustomed to conducting classes through platforms such as Zoom. The methodology, materials and formats described in this research began as an exercise of damage limitation, not designed to replicate the experience of learning a second

language in a classroom with peers and a teacher. However, similar experiments such as the effectiveness of recorded Speaking Tasks as supplements to real time online classes or regular face-to-face classes do have potential to inform curriculum development.

Conclusion

The methodology, materials and formats described in this research were not designed to replicate the experience of learning a second language in a regular classroom with naturalistic interaction between teachers and students. They did however, seem to represent the best way to mitigate the loss of education quality during an unexpected and unprecedented situation from the point of view of the teacher. Moreover, the results of the questionnaire show that students overall acknowledged numerous benefits in their language development that would have been unobtainable if Speaking Tasks were not integrated into the asynchronous online curriculum. Without these tasks, students would have had no opportunity for spoken output, including focused speaking practice and no chance to receive specific and personalised feedback regarding their spoken production. Finally, this research supports claims for the efficacy of communicative and task-based approaches in language teaching in general, and particularly the perceived value of this pedagogical approach from the view point of language learners.

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