Can Synchronous Videoconferencing Lessons Improve Korean Students' English Pronunciation?

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With the increased use of online learning in language education, the importance of videoconferencing lessons has recently received much attention in improving English speaking skills in Korea. This study examines the aspects of videoconferencing lesson that were helpful for improving students' pronunciation. Six middle school students in Korea were assigned to two videoconferencing sessions with pre- and post-tests, and they had opportunities for interviews and self-reports after the two sessions. During the pre- and post-test, students pronounced words from a screen, distinguishing specifically between /r/ versus /l/ and /b/ versus /v/. In the interviews and self-reports, they described the factors in the video-conferencing lesson that were most helpful for their English learning. This study examined the appropriateness of videoconferencing tools and found that students' self-assessment, more teacher feedback, and the flexibility of the technology were most helpful for improving Korean students' English pronunciation.

Key words: videoconferencing lessons, English pronunciation, self-assessment, teacher feedback

1. INTRODUCTION

English education policy in Korea recommends that English teachers use English during their classes. But many teachers have been used to focusing on the grammar and reading sections, and they feel burdened about speaking English as a classroom language. Also, the number of qualified native speakers is not sufficient to satisfy all the classroom needs. So videoconferencing lessons between native teachers in English speaking countries and students can provide an effective alternative to the current English classroom environment in Korea. At the same time, there are heated discussions about

whether videoconferencing lessons can improve English skills effectively and what specific factors can be helpful for students' language learning. So this study examines the appropriateness of videoconferencing lessons for language learning and shows what specific factors can improve English pronunciation in using videoconferencing lessons.

This study describes a basic tool for videoconferencing, Adobe Connect (site-licensed to Teachers College, Columbia University), and examine how this technology tool can be effective in designing language learning tasks. Wang's (2007) criteria were used for evaluating videoconferencing tasks. Wang argues that task design with videoconferencing tools should start from evaluating the features of the tool in order to identify the appropriateness for the task and to employ them for effective language acquisition. He refers to Chapelle's (2001) criteria for evaluating Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) tasks and applies them to evaluating videoconferencing tasks. Five criteria from Chapelle's study were employed in the present study, namely, language learning potential, learner fit, authenticity, positive impact, and practicality.

One of the reasons for applying videoconferencing lessons to pronunciation learning is that many Korean students are hindered in improving conversation skills by their perceived lack of English pronunciation skills. Hardison (2005) describes the priming role of visual cues in auditory-visual speech processing, and how the identification of pronunciation via visual cues can be very helpful for language pronunciation learning. So this study exposes students to pronunciation learning, which they feel they need to improve the most in their English learning. With a limited number of sessions, this study limits the research topic of pronunciation to distinguishing the difference between /r/ and /l/ and /b/ and /v/, which many Korean students have difficulty pronouncing.

The present study shows that students' self-assessment of their past performance from video recording, more feedback from native teachers, and flexibility of the videoconferencing lessons were the most helpful factors for improving students' English pronunciation. In particular, learners' metacognitive knowledge, motivation, and confidence were significantly raised through videoconferencing lessons, which can lead to more learner-centered learning in language teaching. Dickinson (1987) and Nunan (1988) point to a growing interest in self-assessment in recent years to meet the increasing interest in learner-centered language teaching and self-regulated language learning. In this study, students reviewed the video recordings of their own lessons, realized their repeated mistakes, and tried to correct them. Also, flexible conditions in the videoconferencing lessons created more comfortable environments for the Korean students who are not used to speaking in public, and they put more effort to correcting their own mistakes.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. Criteria for Evaluating Appropriateness of Videoconferencing-based Lesson

Wang (2007) claims that instructional design with technology tools should start from evaluating the tools to identify their appropriateness for effective learning, and that in designing videoconferencing lessons, one should identify each feature under the instructional design categories. Since the use of videoconferencing lessons in language learning is a relatively new experience, the evaluation of video conferencing tasks would greatly help improve the validity of such tools. In this study, Wang's criteria for evaluating videoconferencing tasks are used, which was derived from Chapelle's (2001) criteria for CALL task appropriateness as in Table 1. Wang (2007) applied Chapelle's (2001) criteria for CALL tasks to evaluating videoconferencing as in Table 2.

TABLE 1

Chapelle's (2001) Criteria for CALL Task Appropriateness

Criteria	Descriptions
Language learning potential	The degree of opportunity present for beneficial language learning
Learner fit	The amount of opportunity for engagement with language under appropriate conditions given learner characteristics
Authenticity	The degree of correspondence between the CALL activity and target language activities of interest to learners outside the classroom
Positive impact	The positive effects of the CALL activity on those who participate in it
Practicality	The adequacy of resources to support the use of the CALL activity

TABLE 2

Wang's (2007) Criteria for Evaluating Videoconferencing Tasks

Criteria	Descriptions
Language learning potential	The extent to which learner improves language learning through videoconferencing tasks
Learner fit	The fit between the difficulty level of the tasks and the proficiency level of the learners
Authenticity	The degree of interest to learners between the videoconferencing activity and the target language activity
Positive impact	The positive effects of videoconferencing tasks on participants' language learning
Practicality	The fit between the task and the capability to support task completion

2.1.1. Language learning potential

These criteria address whether the videoconferencing lesson allows the language learners to improve their target language, which is very important when using such technology tools embedded in a specific curriculum. Here by the researcher, the video-taped sessions were personally observed and analyzed to examine how effective the Adode Connect videoconferencing tool was in improving Korean students' pronunciation.

2.1.2. Learner fit

This refers to the fit between learner characteristics (e.g., learner's language proficiency or age) and task characteristics such as difficulty level or task activities. Butler and Lee (2006) claim that personal characteristics are considered important factors affecting language learning, so the fit between videoconferencing task activities and learners' language proficiency levels needs to be considered when evaluating the appropriateness of Adobe Connect for effective language learning.

2.1.3. Authenticity

Nunan (1993) believes that the authenticity of a task promotes more meaningful interaction in the target language and is very important in acquiring real-life skills. In the current situation in Korea, where enough qualified native teachers are not available for English classes, the authenticity factor can be a strong positive factor in motivating Korean students and in improving their pronunciation through interesting authentic conversation topics. So examining whether videoconferencing lesson facilitates authenticity relates to examining how well the lesson encourages student motivation for learning English.

2.1.4. Positive impact

Also, it should be considered whether videoconferencing lessons affect learners positively by improving pragmatic abilities, such as facial expressions, nods, and lip movements, which are necessary for pronunciation skills as well as for communication. In particular, if the technology can help language learners gain positive impressions of English, this tool may be effective enough to alter students' conceptions of English learning and transfer it to other subject areas.

2.1.5. Practicality

Wang (2007) claims that technology should be able to assist the videoconferencing task by providing easy access. Many educational technology tools have been developed by many researchers and business fields, though there are not many practical tools for learners that offer user-friendly interfaces and/or that are free. How well the videoconferencing tools provide students with practical access is one of the most important criteria for evaluating the tool's appropriateness for efficient learning.

2.2. Student's Self-Assessment by Reviewing the Past Performance

Accurate self-assessments allow students to become more autonomous agents in their education, taking responsibility for gaining and improving on their knowledge and skills (Boud, 1995; Dochy, Segers, & Sluijsmans, 1999). It is also crucial for education as a lifelong enterprise that continues far after the student has left the classroom (Guest, Regehr, & Tiberius, 2001). Oscarson (1989) explains how self-assessment can be beneficial in that it raises learners' awareness of their own learning, improves the orientation goals of individual learners, and enhances learners' self-assessment of affective domains.

According to Dunning et al., (2004), there are major two factors in flawed self-assessment—information deficits and information neglect—in which many people assess themselves incorrectly because they do not have enough information or because they simply neglect the information. But reviewing previous performance can lead learners toward better self-assessment of various skills, and students' self-assessments can grow closer to the teachers' assessments over time (Dunning et al., 2004). Also, self-assessment can increase interest in learner-centered language teaching and self-regulated language learning (Dickinson, 1987; Nunan, 1988). Considering how many language learners repeat the same mistakes in their language learning, which prevents them from improving their current level, videoconferencing lessons for reviewing past performance may be very positive for application to language learning.

Dunning et al. (2004) argues that "learning" should possess two components—retention and transfer—meaning that the ability to recall information over a long term and the ability to apply knowledge to a relevant situation are very important for effective learning. One of the most frequently reported problems in language learning in Korea is that it is difficult for students to apply knowledge from the classroom to different situations. For example, even if students achieve knowledge of English pronunciation and expressions, the lessons focus on memory and repetition, making it difficult for Korean students to apply them in different situations. But from the self-assessment in the

video reviewing activity, students can have an opportunity to realize their own mistakes and correct them, which is a very complex metacognitive process and helps the students transfer knowledge to relevant situations.

2.3. Feedback During Online Learning

Bonk et al. (2001) suggest that there are four roles of teachers during online lessons: pedagogical, social, managerial, and technological. The most important role for improved student-teacher interaction in online learning is the social role of the teacher. When teachers are more communicative and cooperative in student's learning, they can elicit more responses from learners. By providing a more comfortable environment and communicating individually online, teachers can perform the social role efficiently in the lesson, and they can obtain more clues for better understanding specific factors of student's speaking abilities, as well as for better interpreting student's emotional states during the lesson. This helps teachers to provide students more feedback, compared to the conventional classroom where teacher's feedback is limited by a large number of students in the class.

Not only quantitatively but also qualitatively advanced levels of feedback can be provided to the students during online learning. Krashen's (1985) input hypothesis theory outlines how language acquisition occurs efficiently when the L2 learner receives language input which is one level above the learner's current stage of competence, which requires the teacher's insightful examination of the learner's exact level of language skills. Rieth et al. (2003) argues that the extent of student's responses to the teacher depends on the teacher's input during the lesson. The teacher's appropriate feedback according to the individual's level is thus very important for increasing students' responses in language learning.

Ge et al. (2007) explain how a teacher's procedural scaffolding of feedback can also facilitate students' reflection and revision, and how structuring discourse around meaningful question-asking and answering cycles during online discussion elicits students' thoughtful questions for their constructive knowledge. From effective teacher feedback, students can detect knowledge gaps and attempt to modify their current weaknesses in their language learning. Teacher feedback need not be confined to responses to student's performance, and it can develop into prompting questions which lead the students to deeper reflection and sense-making. Ge and Land (2003) found that teachers' questions can prompt students to see multiple perspectives, create their own insightful questions, and improve their own performance. Lin and Lehman (1999) explain how questions that require elaboration may help students to articulate their thoughts, generate explanations, and direct attention to deficiencies in their

understanding.

The current conventional classroom in Korea usually has over 30 students in a class, where it is difficult for a teacher to actively play a social role or to provide enough feedback to individual students during teaching activities. It is even difficult to expect a teacher to provide students with prompting questions under the current memory and test based curriculum. To improve speaking ability as well as pronunciation skills, students need to receive enough feedback on pronunciation, useful expressions, and understanding nonverbal clues. Individual videoconferencing lesson can provide Korean students with effective input, leading to more efficient English learning.

2.4. Flexibility, Motivation, and Confidence

One of the strongest points of online learning is that learners can access the course unrestrained by physical and time constraints (McDonald, 2003). In our current society where information flows very quickly and is distributed to individuals via more personalized methods, the means of delivery is one of the most competitive factors in modern industries, including the education field. The flexibility of taking courses online allows students to choose the place and time they feel comfortable with the increasing role of online delivery in language learning, and the number of online language courses has been increasing rapidly over the past few years (Sifakis & Sougari, 2003).

More freedom in online learning can be interpreted as more responsibility of online learners. Learners can decide a convenient time to take online lessons where they feel most comfortable, which can help learners practice speaking more confidently and improve speaking abilities. But at the same time, they should be more responsible for their own progress by engaging in interaction with a teacher during online instruction. For example, it is difficult to complain of distractions from the conventional classroom caused by other students or by the physical learning environment, such as noise or unpleasant temperatures. Nevertheless, learner's greater control of the learning process would be an encouraging factor for their greater engagement in interaction with the teacher (Ng et al., 2006).

One of the strongest factors which flexibility can contribute in language learning is enhancing learner's motivation and confidence in language learning. Horwitz et al. (1986) observed that anxiety in second language use reflects the learner's fear of spontaneous interactions in the target language. Especially for Korean students who are not used to speaking in public, the videoconferencing lesson can allow students to feel comfortable in their own learning space and to experience a greater confidence in practicing their own mistakes. Also, flexible accessibility in speaking with native speakers can provide learners with more motivation to be involved in language learning.

Most Korean students take extra programs or go to private institutes after school, so the flexibility of online learning allows the students to choose a convenient place and time, for greater efficiency in English learning.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1. Research Questions

The purpose of the present study is to understand whether the videoconferencing task is appropriate for student's language learning and what specific factors of the videoconferencing lesson are helpful for improving Korean students' English pronunciation. The following questions are asked in the current study.

1. Is the videoconferencing task appropriate for improving language learning?
2. What factors of the videoconferencing lesson are helpful for enhancing Korean students' English pronunciation?

3.2. Subjects

The subjects in the present study were first-year middle school students learning English as a foreign language in Seoul, South Korea. Based on the results of their school English exams, their English level is considered intermediate and all of them have traveled abroad, but have never studied in English-speaking countries. They take English courses at school twice a week, a 45-minute lesson for each class, with an English teacher who teaches textbook-based teaching, focusing on grammar and reading. There is a speaking session, though it mainly focuses on repeating certain expressions which are to appear on the test. All of them have taken extra English courses at a private institute, which is very common for most students in Korea, and they have never taken English videoconferencing lessons before.

They were assigned two videoconferencing sessions in the present study, focusing on improving English pronunciation within in casual conversation. This study was planned for ten participants at first, but two of them could not connect with the Adobe Connect videoconferencing tool, and two others gave up participating in the research at the last moment because of scheduling problems. The total number of the subjects was thus six students: four male students and two female students.

Their English proficiency was at an intermediate level based on the test scores from their schools, which means they could hold a basic conversation with a native. For more

objective measures, all of the students took a pre/post test measuring their accuracy in English pronunciation. All of them live in nearby districts of Seoul, Korea, and thus have similar socioeconomic backgrounds. Their parents showed particular interest and cooperation in undergoing the videoconferencing lessons.

3.3. Materials

This study employed the Adobe Connect videoconferencing tool, which has various functions, such as creating meetings through e-mail, recording meetings, sharing files, white board, chat, and polls. But in order to create a practical environment where students can easily access the online lesson, the current study mainly focused on the camera, audio, recording, and chat functions. Two videoconferencing sessions each consisted of a 30 minute lesson, but the first session took much more than the scheduled time because students had difficulty in connecting Adobe Connect (even though researcher previously contacted them twice via phone and e-mail before the first session). To evaluate the appropriateness of Adobe Connect to improve learner's language learning, the present study used Wang's (2007) criteria for evaluating videoconferencing tasks with the researcher's personal observations and students' self-reports.

To examine how well the videoconferencing lesson can improve students' English pronunciation, the study used a two-fold pre/post test consisting of ten pairs of pronunciation questions from the Junior TOEIC test, which is one of the most common standardized English tests for elementary and middle school students in Korea. Specific questions in the test dealt with distinguishing the difference between /r/ and /l/ and between /b/ and /v/, which many Korean students find confusing.

Video recording as a technology tool serves an important role for researchers to analyze the appropriateness of videoconferencing tasks, and for students to review their own past performance and report their own reflections to the researcher. Interviews after class and self-reports via e-mail were performed to collect students' perceived responses about specific factors of the videoconferencing lesson that were helpful for their English learning.

3.4. Procedures

Before the first session, a pre-test measured how well the students can distinguish certain pronunciation distinctions, and a post-test after the two 30-minute sessions measured how well the students improved their pronunciation skills through the videoconferencing lessons. For better study validity, students were assigned to interviews and self-reports after two sessions to describe how they perceived their

English improvement. Self-reports via e-mail was done in Korean so students could describe them more freely and correctly.

Each 30 minute videoconferencing session was conducted with an individual student during the weekend because most students were busy with their private lessons during the week, and weekends were more convenient for scheduling with the13-hour time difference between New York and Korea. Two students had problems with the camera and audio during the first session, changed their computers, and rescheduled on the following weekend schedule.

3.5. Data Collection and Analysis

To collect data pertaining to videoconferencing task criteria, this research used mainly qualitative approaches, such as personal observations and video analysis for breadth of data collection. Sections of a standardized English test were used to collect data on how well students improved in English pronunciation. Also, self-reports and interviews with students were performed to collect data for evaluating the specific factors of videoconferencing lessons that were helpful for improving English pronunciation. Interviews with the students were conducted via videoconference meetings, and students reported their own perceptions of the lessons via email.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Appropriateness of Videoconferencing Tool

In order to examine the appropriateness of the videoconferencing tool, the researcher conducted a video analysis and personal observation with Wang's (2007) criteria of language-learner potential, learner fit, authenticity, positive impact, and practicality. The following in Table 3 are the categories and codes for analyzing the video-taped lesson. Each criterion was examined to evaluate the efficiency of this videoconferencing lesson via Adobe Connect for improving Korean students' pronunciation.

TABLE 3

Categories and Codes for Analyzing Videoconferencing Lesson

Categories	Codes for video analysis
Language learning potential	Number of interactional modification during the conversation
Learner fit	Student's answering questions of the content without pauses or misunderstanding
Authenticity	Content of the conversation (ex. Real life stories)
Positive impact	Nonverbal response (student's facial expression, nodding, etc.)
Practicality	Time & money spent to connect the videoconferencing lesson to complete the task

4.1.1. Language learning potential

In order to examine how much effective the videoconferencing tool for language learning, this researcher counted how many times each student engaged in interactional modifications during the lesson when they had misunderstandings during the conversation. In particular, when the students had difficulty in pronouncing a certain sound, there was more interactional modification than in the conventional classroom. These criteria were considered very important as a critical factor for instructional designing when the technology was embedded to a specific subject curriculum. The number of interactions caused by technical problem was not counted in this category.

TABLE 4

Number of Interactional Modification

Participant	Session 1 (30 min.)	Session 2 (30 min.)	M
Student A	24	21	22.5
Student B	25	22	23.5
Student C	20	17	16.5
Student D	22	20	21.0
Student E	25	18	21.5
Student F	19	25	22.0

Although there were frequent audio disconnections or delayed video, students displayed frequent interactional modifications to understand teacher's questions or the content of the conversation. They were informed that each lesson was focused on improving pronunciation, so they tried very hard to revise their perceived incorrect pronunciation, which increased the number of interactional modifications.

Also, most students except student F showed a decreased number of interactional modifications during the second session, which could be explained by the fact that the second session (distinguishing /b/ and /v/) was slightly easier for them, and the result of the pronunciation test and interview supports this interpretation. Student C with the

minimum number of interactions received the highest score in the post test. Compared to the conventional English class with very limited interaction between teachers and students, this result of interactional modification shows positive evidence that videoconferencing tool has strong potential in language learning.

4.1.2. Learner fit

To examine whether the task of videoconferencing tool fit the level of the students, this researcher observed how students continued the conversation and comprehended the teachers' questions. Students seemed to have a clear understanding of the conversation topic and followed each activity, including pre/post test. In order to fit student's age and language proficiency, the current study used limited functions of the Adobe Connect tool for their language learning, and the teacher guided the conversation according to their language level. Here the advantage of a one-to-one videoconferencing lesson was clearly demonstrated because the instructor could adjust the conversation to the level of the individual learner's linguistic ability (Wang, 2007).

4.1.3. Authenticity

To this age group of students who become bored easily with unauthentic topics, the selection of authentic subjects was an important factor in motivating the students. The fact that students had a conversation with a native speaker imparted a good deal of authenticity, and the main topic of their daily lives was another engaging factor for students in participating in the conversation. But when the teacher explained that the main purpose of the session was to improve the ability to distinguish pronunciation distinctions, some of the students showed disappointment at first but they still followed the teacher's conversation with an interest toward the authentic topics. The findings support Nunan's (1993) explanation that task authenticity enhances meaningful interaction and encourages more personal involvement in the task. If we consider how English learning should be applied into learner's real life situations, authenticity is important for using technology for language learning.

4.1.4. Positive impact

To find whether the videoconferencing lesson had a positive impact on the students, the researcher examined nonverbal factors in the video-taped lessons, such as their facial expressions or other body language. During the lesson, the many instances of laughing or smiling between the teacher and students and among the students might have

contributed to a positive self-image toward their own English pronunciation through honest conversation of their own mistakes. Even when there were technical problems during the lesson, such as bad audio connection or sudden video interruptions, students seemed to focus on the meaning of the content and to continue the conversation. All the students and parents responded positively when asked whether they would continue the videoconferencing lessons even after the current study.

4.1.5. Practicality

To evaluate the practicality of videoconferencing lesson, the researcher examined time and money spent on the lesson. The use of Adobe Connect in the present study did not cost any money for the students and they connected to the lesson only via their own e-mails; also, it can be freely downloaded. However, it took much longer than the scheduled 30 minutes due to misconnections between teacher's and student's computers. The researcher had to spend more time than planned in explaining how to connect the lesson because the description was written in English. The teacher nonetheless finished the task during the videoconferencing lesson with the help of students' continuous interest during their lesson.

4.2. Improvement in Distinguishing English Pronunciation

In order to examine whether students improved in recognizing English pronunciation distinctions, students took pre/post tests, each of which consisted of ten pairs of questions from a standardized English test. Each student pronounced words when they were presented in the videoconferencing lesson, and the number of correct answers was counted when students pronounced the target sounds. During the post test, they pronounced same words, but the order of words was switched.

TABLE 5
Questions of Distinguishing Pronunciation Test

Session 1 Questions (/r/ & /l/)	Session 2 Questions (/b/ & /v/)
1. Alive – arrive	1. Ban - van
2. Bill - beer	2. Base - vase
3. Collect - correct	3. Berry - very
4. Cloud - crowd	4. Boat - vote
5. Fly - fry	5. Bow - vow
6. Glass - grass	6. Curb - curve
7. Heal - hear	7. Dub - dove
8. Lead - read	8. Marble - marvel
9. Light - right	9. Comb - dove
10. Long - wrong	10. Dumb - curve

FIGURE 1

Number of Answers from Pronunciation Test (Session 1: /r/ & /l/)
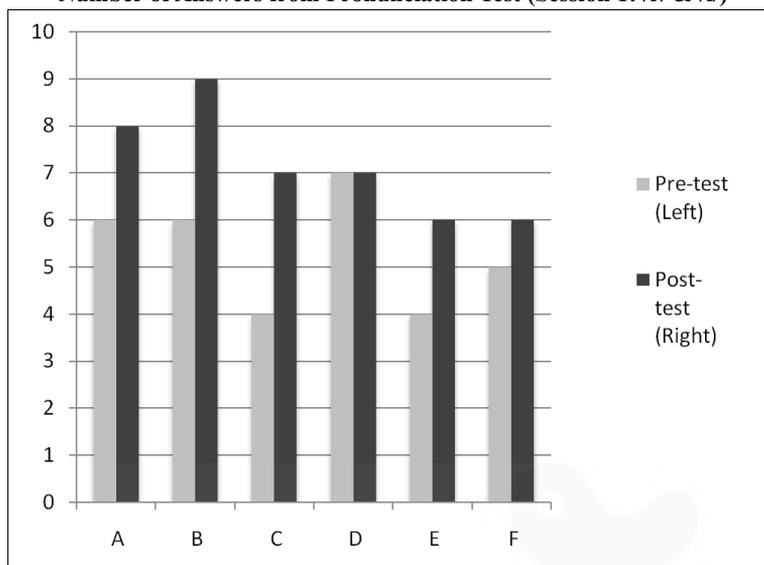
FIGURE 2

Number of Answers from Pronunciation Test (Session 2: /b/ & /v/)
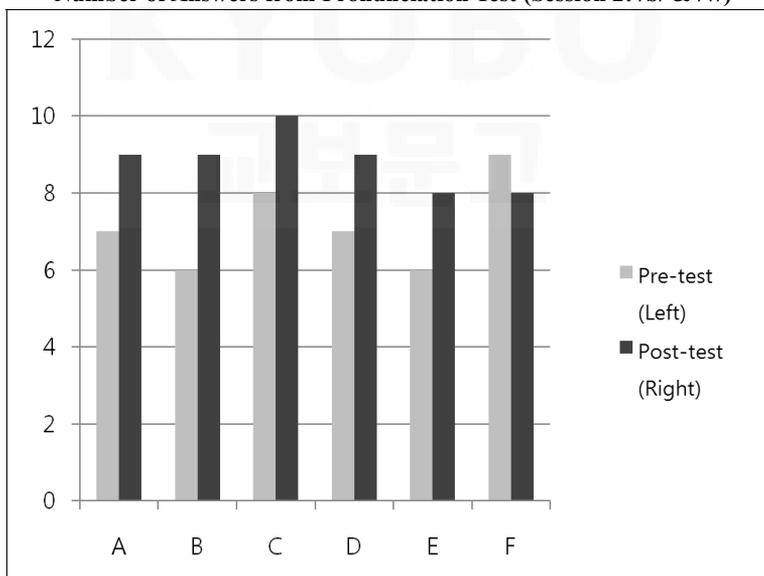
The results show a positive effect on students' performance from the videoconferencing lesson. Most students received a higher score on both pronunciation tests. But after the first session student D did not improve at all, and student F showed a

lower score on the post test after session two. There was a ceiling effect from session two (/b/ versus /v/), because all the students received almost perfect scores on the post test, and they even started with more than 50% correct answers from the pre-test. From the interviews, the researcher recognized that students were better at distinguishing the /b/ - /v/ distinction than the /r/ - /l/ distinction. So, in the present study, the analysis of video recordings, interviews, and self-reports compensated for the lack of validity of the word list in the second post-test.

The results show clear improvement from most of the students in distinguishing the English consonants, which provides positive impressions about the impact of videoconferencing lessons in improving pronunciation. Since many Korean students feel that their lack of pronunciation skills is one of the greatest problems in their language learning, preventing them from achieving overall English, the present study shows that individual videoconferencing lessons possess potential for dealing with these problems.

4.3. Student's Self-assessment from Reviewing Video Recordings

One of the most surprising results of the current study is that students could assess themselves very efficiently from the video recordings of their past performance. Students had of the opportunity to review the previous lessons and gained insight about their own strengths and weaknesses in language performance. Most of the students mentioned that they already knew that they had some problems in pronunciation, but from the video recordings, they recognized how they made repeated pronunciation errors as well as various cues for their English speaking skills.

Student A said that he did not realize that he repeated the same mistakes in pronouncing the /r/ sound and had many pauses in the middle of conversation. Most of the students mentioned that the watching video was embarrassing at first, but it was very helpful for them. They were able to notice when the teacher provided feedback on certain mistakes; they were reminded of their own mistakes later; and they attempted to correct them for better performance.

Ge et al. (2007) argues that self-assessment is very important to help learners identify their own weaknesses and produce more meaningful interactions during online learning. Students in the current study were able to articulate their own understanding and to compare their initial and corrected language performance. Video recordings of past performances provided the students with correct information and helped them accept the information for/in performing correct self-assessments. Access to previous performance via video was very convenient in this videoconferencing lesson, and the students simply clicked a button to view it.

4.4. More Efficient Teacher Feedback

In the videoconferencing interviews with the students after the sessions, the students mentioned that the native teacher's individual feedback was very helpful for them to recognize their own mistakes and to correct them during the conversation. For example, students found cues for correct pronunciation when the teacher showed the visually correct position of the lips with explanations for certain sounds. Students received more effective feedback according to their own level of language proficiency than in a conventional classroom. At the same time, students responded that the one-to-one online lesson between only a teacher and a student provided a very comfortable environment for them to try repeatedly to correct their own pronunciation.

Also, the teacher's prompting questions for encouraging student reflection and revision challenged the students to review their original responses and clarify their performance problems. For example, one female student said that when the native teacher asked her to recognize the differences between the teacher's and her own pronunciation, she was very embarrassed at first, but it made her attempt to determine the specific factor in her problem, and eventually she was able to correct it.

4.5. More Flexibility Increases Students' Motivation and Confidence

From the self-reports via e-mail and interviews during the videoconferencing meeting, students reported that the flexible condition of online learning was very useful for scheduling the lessons. All of the participants were busy taking other private lessons after school and the flexibility of videoconferencing lesson allowed the students to use their time very efficiently. They especially liked the fact that they could easily access a native speaker to practice English, which is difficult for them to do in Korea.

The flexible conditions of the videoconferencing lesson enhances students' motivation as well as confidence in English learning. Even though they had a hard time in connecting Adobe Connect at first and had frequent audio problems, they achieved positive effects on their language learning. They were motivated to have a conversation with a native speaker very easily and comfortably in their own house. They could also watch the previous lesson repeatedly until they were satisfied with their language performance, which provided them much confidence in improving pronunciation as well as learning English as a whole language. Students even reported they could expand their confidence from this study to other subjects in school, which could be another positive aspect of using technology for education.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The current study investigated whether videoconferencing lessons could be appropriate for language learning, and evaluated the videoconferencing tool according to Wang's (2007) criteria, namely, language-learning potential, learner fit, authenticity, positive impact, and practicality. The results of the study show that videoconferencing lesson can be effective for improving Korean students' English pronunciation, leaving aside the consideration of improving the technical factors of connecting the lesson. Students tried to continuously focus on the conversation and could complete the task per session, but in order to improve the long-term quality of the videoconferencing lessons better audio connections are required to help students focus on their learning.

The present study shows that student's self-assessments in using the recording tool, more efficient teacher feedback, and flexible conditions in the videoconferencing lessons were most helpful for improving students' English skills. By watching their previous performance, students recognized their own mistakes and attempted to correct them. Teachers were able to provide more quantitatively and qualitatively efficient feedback to individual students, which made the student feel positive toward the videoconferencing lesson.

The current study implies the necessity of future research on how videoconferencing lessons can improve English conversation abilities, within the context of other English skills. For example, students could practice English conversation when they read the text on the videoconferencing whiteboard or when they exchange their feedback on their own written essays. If we consider how instructional design with technology should be combined with effective learning in certain curricula, this kind of future research has a potential to make videoconferencing lessons conducive to language learning. Also, the study of speech recognition would be very helpful for language education, which provides visual data to help learners recognize their own language performance.

Considering the commitment and passion that many Korean students have spent in English learning, they have found their outcomes to bemore than disappointing. With the educational policy in Korea that focuses on communicative ability in English, the results of the present study leads to positive considerations of using videoconferencing lessons for improving English skills. Not confined by geographical limitations, videoconferencing lessons have already been shown to be advantageous to Korean students, as in practicing English conversation with native speakers even at home, which could reduce the large number of students who go abroad only to improve English conversation skills.

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Applicable levels: All

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