

## Conversation Cloud: Videoconferencing as a learning ecosystem for practicing conversational English

### What this research was about and why it is important

In many countries where English is not the main medium of communication, English language learners do not usually have many chances to practice speaking skills. This study investigated the use of videoconferencing technology in an activity called “Conversation Cloud” to provide Thai undergraduates with opportunities for authentic conversations with English speakers from around the world. An analysis of frequently occurring issues revealed key elements and conditions that positively influenced learning and engagement. Also, as the relationships among these variables were observed clearly, the videoconferencing learning space was viewed to be similar to a biological ecosystem, where the focus would not be on separate variables producing a predictable outcome, but rather a spontaneous web of interacting elements in the whole system. This research has implications for the use of videoconferencing in various contexts aiming to facilitate students’ speaking progress in order for them to become confident English speakers in the global context.

### What the researcher did

- The Thai undergraduates who joined Conversation Cloud sessions during September – November (2018) were invited to complete the survey regarding their learning experience. 115 questionnaires were returned.
- The researcher interviewed 8 focal students, 3 teachers moderating the sessions, and 3 guests who were English speakers from other countries.
- The researcher took field notes, recording related information such as the direct experience being in the setting and the quotations of the people involved.
- The software ATLAS.ti was used to identify frequently mentioned issues in the open-ended part of the survey (the students’ reasons for their ratings), the interviews, and the field notes.

### What the researcher found

- The analysis of the frequently mentioned issues in all data sources revealed the key elements which played an important role in Conversation Cloud: the context, the learner, other people, and technology.
- Certain conditions were also found to enhance learning and engagement: when the environment was authentic, natural, and relaxing (or “organic” as one guest called it), when there was support via interaction with other people and technology, and when diversity of people and their language/content was evident.
- The findings revealed the relationships among the elements and the conditions, forming the learning ecosystem with interacting factors influencing learner experience.

### Things to consider

- The study has provided implications for the use of videoconferencing in various learning contexts to consider all the key elements involved, to create an authentic and relaxing environment, to support language learning via verbal strategies and technology, and to foster diversity when appropriate.
- With the understanding of the interacting variables in a learning ecosystem, it is clear that technology is only one part in the system where changes in any components could affect the whole. Therefore, the important question would not be whether the use of a technology would improve learning outcomes. Rather, it would be useful to explore influential variables, their relationships, and how language learning could be enhanced in a particular digital landscape.

**Materials, data, open access article:** N/A

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