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**DESIGNING A TRAINING PLATFORM FOR A LANGUAGE TESTING SPEAKING
SECTION: A CARNIVAL IN TIME OF EXAM**

MA Thesis

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Abstract

Anxiety of public speaking has always been a struggle, especially for language learners taking level examinations. Meanwhile, educational technology is developing rapidly. Recent studies have shown ways to use technology to help students overcome fears of speaking a foreign language in stressful situations, but they use extensive resources and lack addressing students' procedural fear and fear of judgment. This study uses action research to design an online computer-based exam simulation, as well as quantitative, qualitative research and (self-)reflection to analyze students' and educators' experience. The results demonstrate the design's impact on the two understudied fears in students, and on the instructors' practice. Strengths and limitations of the design are highlighted. Suggestions on how to study the topic are put forward.

Keywords: public speaking, level examinations, language learners, educational technology, procedural fear, fear of judgment, online simulation, design

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Chapter 1: Introduction

An essential part of any educator's work is preparing their students for examinations. Such evaluations are destined to establish if the competences learners were meant to develop in the course were in fact obtained. For language acquisition, the aim is to develop a language competence, which is commonly assessed based on four main skills: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. The former, arguably, presents the biggest challenge for the students (Zaremba, 2006).

There have been multiple studies addressing the development of the 'academic aspect' of oral speech: phonetics, public speaking devices, vocabulary and speech cliches etc (See, for example, Karpovich et al., 2021). However, the fear of public speaking along with language barrier are complex phenomena. The ability to perform well during an exam is directly linked to coping with a significant amount of stress. There are several aspects that serve as a source of anxiety, and a comprehensive training of all associated linguistic aspects fails to address other important components of student insecurities (Dansieh et al., 2021; Grieve et al., 2021). Those components are, firstly, lack of technical experience of being in an exam setting, i.e. practice runs to train behavioral strategies of a student during examinations. Secondly, what is missing is an aspect particular to speaking, but irrelevant for other parts or language-testing: the burden of personal responsibility for one's actions while physically appearing in front of an evaluation commission. In their research on student fears of public presentations, Grieve and his colleagues (2021) write: 'the findings clearly identified the lack of and need for further comprehensive support for students with a fear of public speaking' (p. 8).

This research aims to study the way an online computer-based simulation of an examination enhances the process of preparation for an oral part of a foreign language testing. The design of the simulation includes a scaffolding to introduce various sources of anxiety gradually. Namely, it aims to alleviate the burden of personal responsibility at the initial stages of preparation through the use of technology tools that alter personal image manifested in voice and appearance.

The intent of the study is to see the outcomes and possible challenges of introducing an educational simulation platform in the course of getting individuals ready for undergoing examination of their oral skills. It is not our goal to deal with psychological aspects of

subjecting oneself to the assessment of others, but rather to create a training design destined to allow the learner to go through their process on their own and analyze their experience with it.

While the topics of a language barrier and fear of public speaking have been addressed by researchers before, this work stands out, because it aims to help an educator address the aforementioned challenges while faced with two main scarcities: of time and of resources. The former renders it impossible to work with each student in a reasonably sized classroom individually in tackling their fears and anxieties. Moreover, such work lies within the competences of the science of advanced psychology and outside the realm of teaching (Splett et al., 2013). The latter renders studies devoted to the use of virtual reality (see, for example, Lindner et al., 2021) and other advanced technology useless due to the excessive costs of the equipment and training. This study proposes an educational design comprising technological tools that are publicly accessible through standard classroom equipment (a computer or a laptop, a camera, a microphone) free of charge.

The research is divided into four chapters. In the first section titled ‘Theoretical Overview’, the key concepts are defined and the framework of the study is laid out. The following chapter, ‘Methodology’, describes the key features of the training design and its implementation, as well as presenting the differences between the two experiments conducted by the authors. It also introduces the methods used in the research. The chapter ‘A Carnival in the Time of Exam’ presents the results as well as a reflection on the use of design intervention to address public speaking anxiety and discusses potential future implications of research findings. In the last section ‘Conclusion’, the study is summarized and the key features are highlighted for future discussion.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Overview

In this chapter, we define the core concepts pertaining to our research, establish connections between them, and set the framework for the study.

Fear of Public Speaking

Language acquisition is commonly divided into four areas: reading, writing, listening and speaking. The modern framework of language-teaching focuses on the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach (Teh, 2021). It considers communication competency to

be the main goal of language acquisition and places a student's experience in the center of learning (Farrell & Jacobs, 2003). This research follows CLT; hence, puts special emphasis on the oral aspect of language learning. Previous research shows that it is used more frequently compared to reading and writing in communication (Rivers, 1981).

Essential as the skill is, oral communication also presents a considerable challenge to learners. According to Dwyer and Davidson (2012), public speaking is one of the most common fears among US college students. Bartholomay and Houlihan (2016) argue that fear of public speaking or public speaking anxiety affect one in every five persons.

The phenomenon is so common it has been referred to by various terms even in the academic world. We can list communication apprehension (McCroskey et al., 2014), public speaking anxiety (Bodie, 2010) and glossophobia (Hancock et al., 2010) among others. This study uses 'public speaking anxiety' as the main operational term, following Bodie (2010). As he defines it, public speaking anxiety is "a situation specific social anxiety that arises from the real or anticipated enactment of an oral presentation" (Ibid, p.72). Present research also refers to the phenomenon as 'fear of public speaking' and uses the two terms interchangeably.

Aida (1994) names three key factors that cause social anxiety. They are fear of low evaluation by the teacher; fear of negative feedback by the listeners; fear caused by past failures. In their 2017 work, Abdullah and colleagues list more potential sources of fear. The most relevant for this study are insufficient skill development, embarrassment, and the influence of external conditions. Allen and colleagues (2018) also suggest distinguishing internal fear (speaker's own perception and feelings about their performance) and external fear (being in the spotlight in front of people). More recently, Korytina in her research (2021) identifies the following causes of it: "a psychological factor, like shyness, a lack of sufficient knowledge and skills or articulation and hearing disabilities. It can also be a semantic barrier of communication" (p. 5).

Of special interest is the research conducted by Grieve and colleagues (2021). The study aimed to discover the main fears experienced by higher education students engaged in public speaking and the effect of that fear on their academic performance. The researchers concluded that public speaking anxiety indeed has a negative influence on learning. They also outline the six main sources of fear: "fear of being judged, physical symptoms, uncertainty about the topic, negative effect on university experience, practice and preparation, and more practical support needed" (Ibid, p. 1284).

To further categorize the results of Grieve and colleagues' study, we suggest putting it into four categories based on the kind of support students would need to overcome them.

Firstly, the negative effect on university experience can be paralleled with 'fear caused by past failures' in Aida's study (1994). It refers to receiving a bad result and is associated with the essence of grade-based learning. This fear is natural for high-achieving students and cannot be completely removed from an acquisition process due to the necessity to evaluate progress. The issue pertains to the domain of psychology and is being researched there (see, for example, Engel et al., 2021).

Secondly, uncertainty about the topic and practice and preparation are concerned with developing the subject-related skill and is usually addressed through regular educational practice. This study does not aim at assessing the impact of the designed simulation on concrete classroom skills.

Thirdly, the need for more practical support corresponds with the desire of students to get first-hand experience. Some contemporary teaching practices, such as inquiry-based learning, address the issue. The curriculum should incorporate a trial version of what the stressful situation features, even on a very physical level (environment, timing and disposition of people), in order to give students the confidence to perform well in a familiar situation.

Fourthly, one can group physical symptoms and the fear of being judged into the same category purporting to the concept of personal image that will be dwelled on later in this chapter. For that, the study adopts Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (1982) to systemize them. The author establishes a connection between second language acquisition and extralinguistic aspects referred to as 'affective variables'. According to Krashen, those aspects serve as a filter for knowledge input; the stronger their influence, the less productive language acquisition process will be. The three affective variables are motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety (personal and classroom). High levels for the first two factors and a low level for the latter are more conducive to learning.

Having taken all of the aforementioned factors into consideration, the present research aims to examine the potential of using an online computer-based simulation with image and voice-altering components to address the categories of fear associated with taking a speaking section of a foreign language examination. The paper seeks to answer the following questions: (1) In what ways does the use of an online computer-based simulation impact the students' perception of taking a foreign language exam (namely, one's self-perception, procedural and

environmental anxiety, and the burden of personal responsibility)? (2) How does the training platform impact the instructors' experience in preparing students to take a speaking section of a foreign language exam?

Self-image

According to Li (2020), the general source of speaking anxiety is tightly connected to negative self-image. In fact, public speaking anxiety is a very disturbing disorder, which has a lot of causes, however, in its core, it is negative self-image that influences it the most (Li, 2020).

Afrinda & Yanda (2019) provide the following definition of the phenomenon: "self image is one of three elements of self concept. Self Image or often called self-reflection (inner mirror) shows how one sees one's self and his or her own opinion" (p 56).

The term 'self-image' comes from presenting a case 'of yourself' in court. When a person needed to defend themselves and their rights before a judge, the term was coined, which came to be related to the art of speaking. This is truly important when it comes to the message and aspirations of the speaker. The speaker is always the person that is in the center of attention when they need to deliver a good speech. In fact, speaking is not the only part that is important when delivering a speech, but having a positive self-image influences it greatly (Afrinda & Yanda, 2019).

If there is one thing that public speaking cannot be completely separated from is self-confidence. It is a requirement for a person to be able to convey their ideas and arguments in front of the audience when doing public speaking. Usually, people who have high self-confidence will have the courage to do public speaking. They are also better at getting a hold of their emotions when they are under pressure. The best way to tell how self-confident a person is when performing publicly is through their body language, vocal variety, facial expressions, and eye contact (Nadiyah et al., 2019).

The fact that negative self-images play a key role in social anxiety has been supported by recent experiments in which participants' image of themselves was experimentally manipulated (Hirsch et al., 2006). In fact, even people that experience social phobias claim that during social situations they experience negative images of themselves (Hackmann et al., 2000).

One of those is a research done by Hirsch and colleagues (2006) where volunteers not usually influenced by public speaking anxiety were divided into three groups. One group was rehearsing a negative self-image, another one a positive self-image and the last control group was holding a speech without the intervention of any type of self-image. They were all developed based on a memory of a related, earlier event, one where they felt relaxed, and one where they felt anxious. What was discovered is that the negative self-image group felt more anxious compared to the positive one, and the control group. Thus, even though these individuals were not previously affected by public speaking anxiety, when negative self-image was introduced, they seemed less satisfied with their performance, consequently showing that negative self-image can actually be the cause for public speaking anxiety.

Moreover, Hirsch and colleagues (2003) conducted a study where people who were affected by social phobia were required to talk with a stranger while adopting their usual negative self-image, or a less negative control image. After the conversations were done, the participants that adopted the negative self-image rated their anxiety as higher and their performance as worse, as opposed to the conversation where they adopted a controlled self-image. What is more important to note here is that there was an observer who rated the videotape and this observer was not told which kind of self-image they were rehearsing and they also rated the social performance of the controlled self-image group as better, compared to the negative self-image one (Hirsch, et al., 2006).

Anonymity

Two concepts closely connected to self-image are anonymity and alter ego. They are intertwined with each other and closely connected with the process of learning a foreign language.

Foreign language learning does not only focus on the acquisition of a new system of communication, but it also represents a tool for socialization and a process of identity construction. For decades, this notion has not been the focus of teaching and research (Flowerdew, 2011). However, Belcher and Lukkaria (2011) argue that this needs to change and that learners should not only focus on what they are able to do in a language, but also who they want to be through it.

Adolescence is the time where the 'self' changes the most and there is expansion of the self-concept, self-awareness and self-identity (Neinstein et al., 2016). Moreover, the

connections between this process and language have also been considered. When language learners speak, they reconstruct their identity and how they represent themselves in the social world (Nematzadeh & Narafshan, 2020).

This brings us to the notions of alter ego and anonymity. These concepts have mostly been used in technology-mediated environments for language learning. These used to be more marginal, specialized and they depended on custom-made materials. However, they have grown into more open spaces which are connected to our everyday world and technologies of users (Nematzadeh & Narafshan, 2020). Namely, they have come into the classroom environment, brought by technology, and are major contributors to the present study.

Anonymity is a concept that gained a new meaning with the rise of the digital world. As defined by Anon Collective, very symbolic to the topic, anonymity is an “active absence” (2020, p. 26). Such an explanation is accurate because it draws attention to the fact that otherwise distinguishing features are not simply missing but intentionally concealed. Instead of depriving a person of their essentials, anonymity “produces a range of possibilities and opens up potentials for what would otherwise be unthinkable” (DiSalvo, 2021, p. 321).

One of the ways that the notion of anonymity has been researched in education is in virtual reality (VR) through avatars. Chen & Kent (2019) investigated how to empower learners with avatar anonymity. The users were able to choose their own profile pictures and to interact with others in the virtual environment. In this case, personal identity was not required and the anonymity was provided by the avatar, which could be anything from a superhero to a fairy. It allowed the participants to practice and hone their language skills, and get rid of the anxiety and stress of face-to-face encounters.

According to Deutschmann and Panichi (2013) an avatar for language learners was a ‘virtual dummy’ that could be used to show their identity, but it could also be used to hide themselves behind it. Thus, the ‘loss of face’ in digital space can be personified by an avatar identity (Chen & Kent, 2019). The participants of the experiments developed an avatar identity, and they could either make the avatars close to their own persona, or use their endless creativity and imagination (Wigham & Chanier, 2015).

Anonymity has been shown to have a huge positive influence on protecting privacy for psychological well-being. By hiding one’s physical appearance, a person can be free of judgment (Lim & Zo, 2011). The anonymous nature of the avatars gave the students some sense of a ‘masked’ security that aided them in not feeling embarrassed or laughed at when

they would make mistakes during oral communication. Moreover, the usage of avatars decreases the learners' anxiety that is tied to communication in a foreign language, especially for people that are more shy. This identity helped them to take more risks when communicating, they were also empowered and felt less embarrassed when making mistakes, which is very rare in a typical classroom. (Chen & Kent, 2019).

The findings of another study by Maloney and colleagues (2020) with social VR showed similar results. Their respondents claimed that being anonymous on the internet makes everything easier. People liked that while using VR other users could not identify them. They were more prone to disclose information. Anonymity also made them feel safe as well and be able to share their emotions. (Maloney et al., 2020)

Anonymity is not restricted to one's visual perception. Even a person having an avatar can be recognized by their voice, and it can reveal information on that person's ability. Thus, even knowing someone's voice can influence social interactions and how people view one's potential (Maloney et al., 2020). Such a result highlights the many aspects of anonymity that should be taken into account.

Alter Ego

Along with the ability to hide or erase our specific features, the digital world provided us with a chance to modify them to our liking. Virtual environments give users a 'clean slate onto which to construct their desired virtual identities' (Kennedy, 2006; Turkle, 1994). Rethinking one's persona and adjusting its features to fit that image is what constituted the creation of an alter ego.

In language learning, the phenomenon of linguistic alter ego has been recognized for years. In the process of oral self-expression, using language-specific features is inevitable to reconstruct a personality. At the same time, those features would be transformed by linguistic means, making it one of the building blocks of one's language persona (Karaulov, 1987).

Together, the ability to reinvent oneself physically and, to some extent, cognitively is what constitutes an alter ego for this study. With the employment of digital means, students can recreate themselves as someone drastically different (Matviyenko, 2010; Riberio, 2009; Turkle, 1995). In the experiment conducted by Linney and colleagues, such a process of meaningful interaction with a computer was proven to be based on playful and reflexive nature, when the person explored their interests and boundaries in a harmless way (2005).

Learning is close to such an exploration in its nature. An example of it is a study by Triantafyllakos and colleagues (2009) dealt with the concept of alter ego in collaborative design of a course. The study showed that alter egos helped many of the students get liberated from the fear of exposing themselves. Moreover, it supported their introspection and boosted their creativity. In fact, the authors of the study suggest design alter egos as a great, engaging and supportive technique for educational software with students. These so-called design alter egos were in fact fictional characters, different types of personas that had been created by the participants of the study, with a specific name, face, personality and life story. In that way, the participant had their own detailed rendition of 'the user,' their agent throughout the process, thus playing a role. In this context, the design alter egos helped the participants be free of fear of exposing their own selves during the entire process (Triantafyllakos et al., 2009).

This study views alter ego as a type of mask taken from the point of view of the person ('hero') wearing it. "The change, desired or unexpected, requires the hero to take on skills, some of which are impossible, others necessary but possible, others undesirable and possible. The mask helps in this path <...> in which the change takes place from "I cannot" to "I could" to "I can" " (Settineri et al., 2019, p. 5). Alter ego is relevant as a protective tool allowing students to go further in their exploration rather than a means to produce an effect on the surrounding environment.

Cognitive Load and Scaffolding Theories

Having analyzed multiple aspects that constitute challenges for a person acquiring speaking skills, we must turn our attention to the particularities of learning. Cognitive Load Theory (CLT) provides the necessary framework to manage cognitive demands a student would have to address in the course of learning.

Cognitive learning theory is a 'limited processing capability' of the human brain in the course of learning new information (Sweller, 1994, p. 310). It examines the way cognitive resources are allocated and used while studying, as well as the role and impact of instructional design on it (Danilenko, 2010). The amount of work the learner's cognitive system has to process is referred to as cognitive load, and it depends on the individual.

There are three interconnected components to cognitive load: intrinsic, extraneous, and germane. The intrinsic load depends on the level of a learner's prior knowledge and experience with the material that is being learned. The extraneous load is constructed by the

way the material is taught. The germane load is the effort of the learner to integrate the material to create schemas (Sweller et al., 1998).

However, it has been discovered that there are external forces contributing to different components of cognitive load. For the intrinsic load, emotions and stress make a significant impact on broadening or narrowing cognitive resources (Brünken et al., 2010; Kalyuga & Plass, 2019). A positive emotion makes cognitive load appear smaller and thus facilitates learning (Brom et al., 2018). Stress and uncertainty, on the other hand, restrict the capacity of working memory. Consequently, Moran (2016) suggests that strategies should be worked out to alleviate such states. The extraneous load depends on the instructional design; thus, adding new elements to it, such as excessive interactivity, can lead to an overload (Sweller, 2020). Oppositely, having experienced contextual signals, a learner can be used to transferring knowledge from long-term to working memory to ‘generate action appropriate to [the] environment’ (Ibid, p. 7).

Therefore, instructional design becomes of utmost importance. In its contemporary rendition, it has to account for the emotional and procedural difficulties students would be facing while performing the task. While preparing the student, all elements should be practiced, including those contributing to intrinsic and extraneous loads, and balanced accordingly.

Designing an instructional pattern relies on scaffolding. Scaffolding instruction is the “role of teachers and others in supporting the learner’s development and providing support structures to get to that next stage or level” (Raymond, 2000, p. 176). Through this instructional method, a ‘more knowledgeable other’ organizes an environment that is conducive to learning. It facilitates the initial challenge of learning the material. However, later the scaffolds are gradually withdrawn. The goal is to get the learner to the point where they would be able to perform the task independently (Chang et al., 2002). According to Hartman (2002), the learner is supposed to develop his problem-solving and self-regulating skills enough to provide for his independent activities.

Typically scaffolding contributed to the way and sequence in which students construct their subject knowledge. External scaffolds can be removed when the student “developed more sophisticated cognitive systems related to fields of learning such as mathematics or language” (Raymond, 2000, p. 176). This paper argues that additional sources of cognitive

load, namely emotional component and procedural challenges, should be accounted for when creating a training design.

Gamification

A key element to this research is overcoming the fear and discomfort associated with a stressful situation. The search for a mechanism to achieve that has led the authors of this study to the concept of ‘gamification’.

In its most comprehensive definition, gamification is “the use of game design elements in non-game contexts” (Deterding et al., 2011, p. 9). Such design elements can be broken down into “gamebased mechanics, aesthetics, and game thinking to engage people, motivate action, promote learning, and solve problems” (Kapp, 2013, p. 125). It is an approach designed to ‘increase extrinsic and intrinsic motivation’ through ‘ludic activities’ (Buckley & Doyle, 2016, p. 24).

It has been proven that implementing gamification in language learning is beneficial for students (Celik et al., 2020). According to Derakhshan and colleagues (2021) and Wang and Derakhshan (2021), language learners who have not achieved the desired level of emotional engagement experience negativity such as anxiety, boredom, frustration, and anger. Introducing games into the classroom can help to develop positive attitudes towards the learning process. Research indicates that inclusion of ungraded games in class was especially helpful for “lower-performing students”, and overall anxiety levels were lower in game-based classroom activities (Adkins-Jablonsky et al., 2021, p. 10). One of the worries with gamification is the potential impact of ‘joy and lightness’ on ‘trivialising the gamified solution and gamification policy’ (Gross & Leemput, 2020, p. 19). However, rendering the process of examination as less significant or complex can be beneficial for preparation, as it helps with the event-specific anxiety. Teachers must create a safe environment with reduced impact of negative emotions (Benesch, 2018). The sense of comfort and safety is more conducive to positive outlook and creativity, allowing students to experiment. In turn, that openness to experiences serves as a vital component of developing interventions to help students cope with self-reported public speaking anxiety (Gallego et al., 2020). Moreover, Kim and colleagues (2014) in their literature review report that gamification boosts engagement and motivation among adult learners as well, provided that game interface and content are relevant to the course structure. In a research on gamifying ESL learning, Bardone

and colleagues draw a similar conclusion that “game mechanics were indicated as the reason for content being engaging and motivating for users”, but note that providing simultaneous instruction is important (2019, p. 629).

The extent of gamification can vary. “Between full gamification of the classroom and 20% quota suggestion, gamification is a tool to aid in achieving learning objectives and not vice versa” (Alsawaier, 2017, p. 29). Following Landers and colleagues’ nine game element attribute categories (Table 1), we recognize ‘conflict/challenge’, ‘environment’, ‘game fiction’, ‘human interaction,’ and ‘immersion’ (2015). Creating a complete substitution to reality, e.g. a virtual version of a school, would address the ‘environment’ and ‘immersion’. Introducing the goal of examination practice would present the ‘challenge’. The interactive component of facing examiners corresponds with ‘human interaction’ and adds to the ‘immersion’, while the ability to use filters introduces ‘game fiction’.

Table 1. Landers et al., 2015

Theory of Gamified Learning Game Element Attribute Categories and Definitions

Game Element Attribute Categories	Definition
Action Language	The method and interface by which communication occurs between a player and the game itself.
Assessment	The method by which accomplishment and game progress are tracked.
Conflict/Challenge	The problems faced by players, including both the nature and difficulty of those problems.
Control	Degree to which players are able to alter the game, and the degree to which the game alters itself in response.
Environment	The representation of the physical surrounding of the player.
Game Fiction	The fictional game world and story.
Human Interaction	The degree to which players interact with other players in both space and time.
Immersion	The affective and perceptual experience of a game.
Rules/Goals	Clearly defined rules, goals, and information on progress toward those goals, provided to the player.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Research methods

The core of this study is action research as a way of analyzing one’s own practice to improve it (McNiff, 2002). It is based on the existing problem that language educators face in the course of their professional activities: the lack of attention placed on familiarizing and

accommodating students with the examination process. As practitioners implementing the experiment, we got to ‘learn through action and reflection’, with self-reflection being central (McNiff, 2002, pp. 15-16). Based on our observations and conclusions, we then can introduce changes to our practices accordingly, and this process of improvement constitutes “a self-reflecting spiral of steps” essential to action research (Kemmins et al., 2013, p. 9). Following that metaphoric ‘spiral’, the authors engaged in self-examination focusing on implementation of the digital training platforms.

Self-reflection in participants is also promoted throughout the experiment. After each stage, they are asked to analyze their experience and through instructions, are prompted to address the results of self-analysis in subsequent stages. As a guide for that, we included questions concerning their approximate levels of overall and self-image-related public speaking anxiety of participants before, during and after the experiment in numerical value on the mandatory participant forms, rendering quantitative research necessary.

Additionally, reflexivity as a concept is central to the study. It is defined as ‘the capacity of any system of signification to turn back upon itself, to make itself its own object by referring to itself: subject and object fuse’ (Myerhoff and Ruby, 1982, p. 2). Moreover, following the idea that research methods construct a ‘frame the phenomena to be studied’ (Whitaker and Atkinson, 2019, p. 630), we contextualized the relationship between the practitioner and participants by introducing such a framework in the form of questionnaires comprising open-ended questions. In order to analyze the results, a qualitative method was employed.

Pilot Design of the Tool: Training Platform

This section is devoted to the pilot design of the tool that would allow us as educators to prepare the learner for the potential discomfort of an exam. As such, it had to feature all key characteristics of the test: the environment, the procedures, the audience and the tasks themselves, while still being available to educators with a limited resource base. The design addresses it by engaging technological applications with free access within limits that would satisfy the classroom prerequisites, and combining them to create a unified tool. It is meant to serve as a training apparatus for students. The choice of the overarching platform was dictated by particular necessities of the learners involved in the experiment. Traditionally, simulation of life setting is done through virtual reality (El Yamri et al., 2019). However, an average

school does not possess enough resources to bring VR technology into every English classroom. We aimed at finding a simulation of a space that would still allow the learners to be immersed while using accessible technology such as computers.

While the training platforms differ in the two cases of implementations, the applications incorporated in them are largely the same and address the same needs. To create a video feed that would imitate the presence of an examiner or a group of examiners, Movavi was used as an editing application. It allowed us to make changes to the videos as well as to add pauses for student participation while still broadcasting the tasks. In order for students to be able to achieve anonymity and then an alter ego, we incorporated two tools. The first, Voice Mod (for Windows) or Voxal Voice Changer (for Mac), allows one to alter one's voice. The second, Snap Camera, applies filters to one's image in real time, hence fully or partially transforming one's visually perceived persona. The two were selected for the ability of limited free access, the level of user-friendliness, and the overall compatibility with most applications allowing video calls.

Gather Town

For younger learners, we aimed to create an engaging, interesting environment that would motivate 9th grade students to practice. That is why the training platform we selected was Gather Town, an online conference software analogous to Zoom. Gather Town presented a reasonable solution as it allows to create a virtual environment as defined by El Yamri: a space that 'tries to put the user in diverse public speaking situations as realistic as possible (i.e. a large audience to give a lecture, a class or a job interview), allowing the speakers to train their speech and develop their skills to better cope with this type of situations in real life' (2019, 4). Gather Town allows multiple features that adhere to real-life simulation: one can see the virtual rooms that others occupy, move around and interact with other participants based on the locations in the rooms. Gather Town is a simulation of real-life rooms. Users can start and end conversations by simply walking in and out of the rooms, instead of being moved to an online room by someone else. Apart from all of this, Gather Town also has some pre-built environments that are created specifically for educators, like classrooms, campuses, dorms, labs, etc. Finally, Gather Town allows adding virtual components and tools into one's space, such as whiteboards, podiums, video streams, etc. One can select a pre-made

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environment, or create one's own from scratch (*Gather.town – Information Technology Services – Carleton College, 2021*).

We also searched for a gaming element built into the platform as a source of motivation for students to engage. According to El Yamri et al. (2019), there are plenty of situations where simulations are used to improve speaking skills. Naturally, using simulation in video games for education would be one of such examples. Gather Town, mimicking multiple features of such entertainment outlets as Minecraft, allowed us to present the practice test as a computer game, where the new and intimidating elements of an exam would be combined with a familiar and comfortable sequence of actions students engage in every day for fun.

Consequently, what we did was design an environment that would simulate the school students would take the exam at, including the exam rooms (Figure 1). We created a space with 12 different rooms resembling language class settings. The student could 'walk' into any of them to practice their oral exam, as well as making them impassible for other students when one was already in. Each of the classrooms would have a TV set – an interactive object students would engage to launch a pre-recorded and edited video meant as a sample oral exam. Each of the videos featured a view of a real classroom and three examiners: the main teacher along with two others from the school, reading from the different variants of exam scripts from previous years. It looked exactly how the real exam would look like (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Gather Town Screenshot



DESIGNING A TRAINING PLATFORM FOR A LANGUAGE TESTING SPEAKING
SECTION: A CARNIVAL IN TIME OF EXAM 19

The main space outside individual classrooms housed 24 different desks with chairs (according to the number of participants) that each student could occupy, as well as individual whiteboards to post their oral exam practice result videos on. Adjacent to it, we designed a small teacher's room, where the students could go to consult with the instructor if needed.

To further the sense of imitated reality, we made a small garden area where students could go and relax or just talk to their peers after each exam attempt. The main idea of the environment was not to use it as a webinar place and to have video calls, but instead a place for one to come and go as they please and practice their oral exams as many as 12 times. This study only concentrates on the four out of twelve possible attempts made by students.

Slightly below the teacher's room, we installed bulletin boards with embedded instructional videos where the teacher explained which applications they had to download (Voicemod/Voxal, Snap Camera and Vimeo) and how to get them working in order to record themselves doing the oral exam.

Hypervideos

The second edition of training design addressed a different audience – adults who have completed at least one level of higher education and felt the need to practice monological speech in a variety of languages for international exams. Those kinds of assessments are frequently computer-based and/or take place online, so it appeared logical to 'rehearse' them using technology. Less emphasis was placed on re-creating a physical environment, as there is no unitary model for what such a space would look like as well as the procedure of entering and interacting with examiners in the physical world was not as relevant. Unlike schoolchildren, adults were generally willing to spend less time on the training, which meant that the number of applications and total time necessary to interact with them should have been decreased. For a more mature audience, we considered the joy of walking around an imaginary world of lesser value than the convenience and speed of accessing an exercise. All of the aforementioned requirements contributed to the decision to use hypervideos as the main platform for the new version of the training design (Figure 2).

DESIGNING A TRAINING PLATFORM FOR A LANGUAGE TESTING SPEAKING
SECTION: A CARNIVAL IN TIME OF EXAM 20

Figure 2. Hypervideo Screenshot



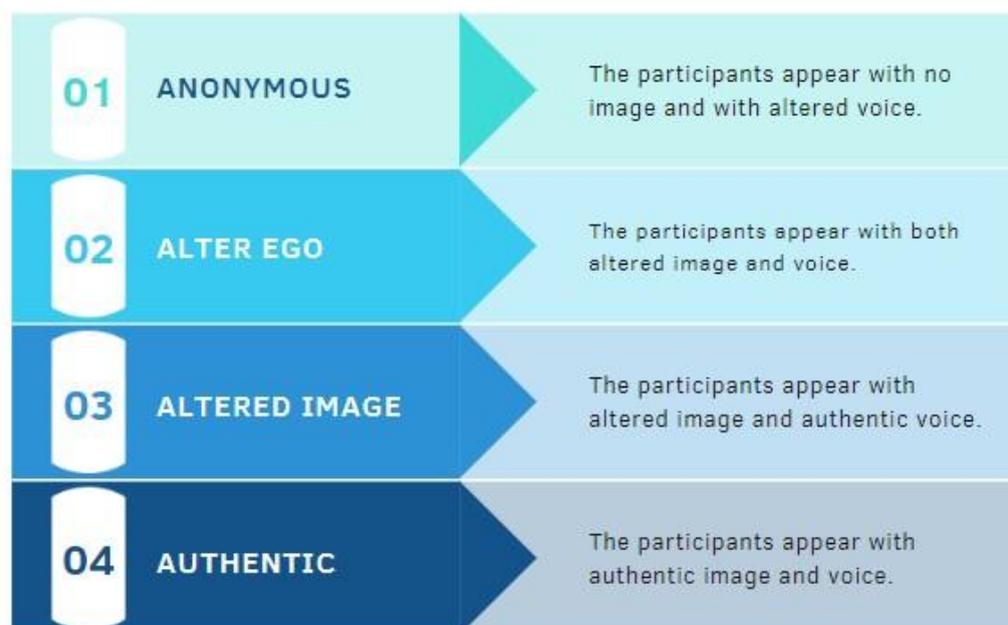
Hypervideos are “interconnected video scenes containing ‘dynamic’ hyperlinks that are available during the course of the video scenes and that refer to further information elements (such as texts, photos and graphics)” (Zahn, Barquero, & Schwan, 2004, p. 276). The main advantage of this tool is interactivity. Aprea and colleagues (2018) underline “three distinct affordances for interactivity: control features, hyperlinks, and exchange options” (p. 2). For the creation of the design, the first two were of utmost importance. The foundation for the platform were instructional recordings made to explain how Voicemod/Vocal and Snap Camera could be downloaded, launched, and set up to be the sources for the sound and visuals. Hypervideos allowed us to place pauses and to bookmark the important sections to be conveniently accessed at any time, introducing ‘control features’. (Ibid, p. 3) Thus, the participants could manage their ‘information intake’: stop to process new data, go back to review directions, or simply skip a part they did not think was necessary (e.g. an explanation on how to install a program they already have) (Ibid, p. 3). Additionally, the people who agreed to take part in the experiment wanted to practice a number of different languages, namely English, Estonian, French, Portuguese, and Russian. They also had varying levels of experience in them. The nonlinear nature of hypervideos provided a convenient way to include multiple version of speaking tasks along with the timer to keep track of preparation time, and the bookmark option served as a way for us to include one instructional video for an

array of exercises where, after the common introductory part, one could skip to their target language without having to fast-forward through others or trying to discover them in a multitude of rooms.

Hyperlinks were another feature of the tool that we benefited from. As the training design incorporated multiple applications that had to be installed and set up, or simply filled out, it created a multitude of web addresses to store. The platform allowed us to embed the links directly in the moment of the video when the apps in question were being discussed. Being ‘spatially determined’, web-addresses also performed ‘an attention directing role’. (Ibid, p. 4) That function was used to create continuity and make sure the participants are not skipping any steps, especially the surveys. The links to the following task were therefore provided at the ends of the preceding ones. The first link to the Introductory hypervideo was sent to all participants’ emails. The videos also featured links to the Zoom call with an examiner, giving the participants a more acute sense of exam pressure. The tool is compatible with Voicemod/Voxal and Snap Camera and has the advantage of being familiar to most adults.

Intervention and Stages of Implementation

Figure 3. Stages of Implementation



DESIGNING A TRAINING PLATFORM FOR A LANGUAGE TESTING SPEAKING
SECTION: A CARNIVAL IN TIME OF EXAM 22

Public speaking in an official environment consists of multiple sources of stress. According to Castelli & Sarvary (2021), the main and most frequently selected reason why students keep their cameras off during online lessons was the them being concerned about their looks and appearance on camera. Relieving students from this source of discomfort in the initial phase of preparation for a test is meant to limit the mental and cognitive load to allow the student to concentrate on other potential issues connected to exam stress, such as language insecurities or lack of familiarity with the procedures. To address this issue, the implementation process was divided into four stages intended to take a learner from complete anonymity to complete authenticity (Figure 3). Thus, students would be enabled to get comfortable with the setting and the procedures before having to address additional concerns such as their view of self.

The first stage required the participants to hide their individual features, namely their personal image and voice, and appear ‘at the exam’ without video feed and with their voice masked with a filter to provide anonymity. The application they downloaded with its free version offers an array of voices they can use and play with. Following Jordan (2019), we recognize the twofold nature of anonymity as a force promoting security and canceling personal responsibility. With this, a student achieves complete detachment from his authentic persona, and with it, freedom from judgment.

During the second stage, we asked the students to enable the imagery, but mask both their voice and their appearance with filters. In such a way, we allowed the participants to slowly transition from complete anonymity, that is, using the most generic features that could belong to just about anybody, to a more personalized approach, which, however, was not their authentic one. While using video and audio filters, one conceals their face, manners, clothes etc., can assume an alter ego, and act on behalf of it. What it also was meant to achieve is to add the game element as a way to counter stress, as one can experiment and assume any personality they wanted, however serious or ridiculous it may be. Multiple studies have shown that playfulness is closely linked with the ability to deal with stress, both in children and adults. “Playful adults experienced less perceived stress and engaged more frequently in adaptive coping styles than their less playful peers” (Magnuson, 2011, p. 81).

In the third stage, students would use filters to alter their personal image but reveal their authentic voice. At this point of the experiment, students are expected to reach a certain level of comfort with the exam procedures, as well as a reasonable understanding of the

actions they are expected to take. Thus, a new problem can be introduced for them to tackle: using their own voice. However, the presence of filters still allows the participants to solve certain individual issues related to self-image. In case a learner has not reached the level of comfort with the examination enough to reveal themselves or the previous attempts were not perceived by them as particularly successful, they can still opt for an alter ego by masking their image completely and completing the training as someone or something else. Alter ego as a major form of self-distancing has been proven to aid in “processing negative experiences in adaptive ways’ (Etzel, 2017, p. 61).

Entering the fourth stage, the participants were asked not to use any filters and appear as selves. Approaching the completion of an exam training, learners would have developed an understanding of the concrete sequence of events and steps they are meant to take in the course of the exam. They would also have got more confidence with public speaking as a skill through practice. Thus, the element of personal image as potentially stressful could be safely re-introduced for the students to address and overcome.

Preceding the experiment, we provided all participants with an instructional video on how to install applications, access the training platforms and record themselves. In addition, they had to complete a set of questionnaires before the implementation and after each stage.

Middle School Students

One of the authors of this paper was the educator who carried out the experiment in her classroom of twenty 9th grade students of English in a middle school of Peetri, Estonia. The average age of the participants was 16. They engaged in the experiment as part of their curriculum in the course of preparation for a basic school certification in English.

All the steps required to complete the four stages were introduced through interactive objects in the school space we created in Gather Town. The set-up instructions were delivered in a series of videos students could access via bulletin boards. In the exam classrooms, students would play an oral exam video through the TV sets and run Vimeo screen recorder to tape themselves speaking (the recorded materials are not considered to be part of this intervention and were for the instructor's use only). Having completed the recording, the students were asked to post them as links in the space embedded in Gather Town desks. Feedback, which serves as the main source of data for this study, was obtained through Google Forms questionnaires that students accessed via the bulletin boards as well.

Adults

The other author of the paper conducted the experiment as an open call for adults wishing to improve their foreign language speaking skills. The participants were 12 people aged 27 through 58 with a minimum of a Bachelor's Degree currently engaged in professional activities. The speaking tasks were taken from standardized international language tests, namely the speaking section meant to assess the skills of monological speech.

The participants were provided with links to 5 hypervideos. The first contained the instructions of how to download and install applications (Zoom, Voice Mod/Voxal, Snap Camera), as well as a general description of the next steps. The following four videos corresponded with the four stages outlined above and set out what applications had to be enabled before each attempt. Each of them featured a link to a Zoom conference with a single participant – the examiner. They had to record the call and speak on the outlined topic for three to five minutes. After that, the participants were asked to go back to Hypervideos and access the link to the questionnaires.

Data Collection Procedures

In this study, five questionnaires in Google Forms were used to collect feedback and make sure every stage of the experiment was under control. All of the forms were created and stored on Google Drive. For the first edition of the training design, the questionnaires were written in plain English. For the second version of the design, they were also translated into Russian for the convenience and most accurate understanding of the participants. All of the questions were formulated in a neutral and non-country-specific way (i.e. without cultural references) to accommodate a wide variety of countries of origin (Estonia, Russia, Macedonia, Italy, the USA, South Korea) and a broad age group (16 through 58 years old).

Each of the surveys contained questions with scale and open questions. The former would typically start with “How strongly...” to inquire about the level of emotion, or with “Was it/would it be more/less...” to describe experienced feelings in relation to the previous level as the respondents could recall them. The open ended questions typically followed the numeric ones and read “Why?” to clarify the evaluation. Additionally, questions like “What scares you the most...” or “What are you most comfortable with...” prompted the participants to engage in self-reflection and to share their thoughts on the matter. Questionnaires two

through five also contained yes-or-no questions with an added third option of 'indifferent'. Those were posed to discover if the filters had any effect on a person's confidence and comfort, as well as the desire to use such an approach during a real examination.

Generally speaking, the first survey was created to establish the starting point for each of the participants before the experiment began. Its purpose was to establish whether participants experience the problem the design is meant to address, and if so, to what extent. The following forms were destined to track the perceived effect of the filters on confidence, fear and anxiety. The final questionnaire is a combination of the first one and the following ones, as it seeks to collect opinions on both the preceding task experience and the overall dynamic in the attitudes and feelings of the participants.

The key concepts of the surveys were confidence, anxiety and fear. All of them were further attributed to the general self-evaluation ("How confident do you feel with your selected spoken language?", "Are you usually afraid of making mistakes when speaking your selected language?"); to a formal and stressful setting ("Would you be ready to take a speaking section of an international examination in your selected language? "); to the presence of 'an audience' ("Do you think the examiner will make you feel intimidated when speaking the selected language?", "Does speaking your selected language with people you do not know make you feel anxious?"). In the course of the study, the questions called on the participants to examine the same concepts in altered circumstances: the level of doubt in personal language skills with growing amount of practice ("How much were you afraid of making a mistake?", "Do you feel more self-confident about speaking after completing this practice exam?"); the response to making a situation less formal and tense ("Was it more relaxing to speak with your voice and image masked?", "Would you use this filter to take the real exam if it was possible?"); the effect of appearing in front of the audience as not one's true self ("Were you comfortable speaking knowing that the examiner could not see you or hear the 'real' you beyond the filter? ").

Chapter 4: Results

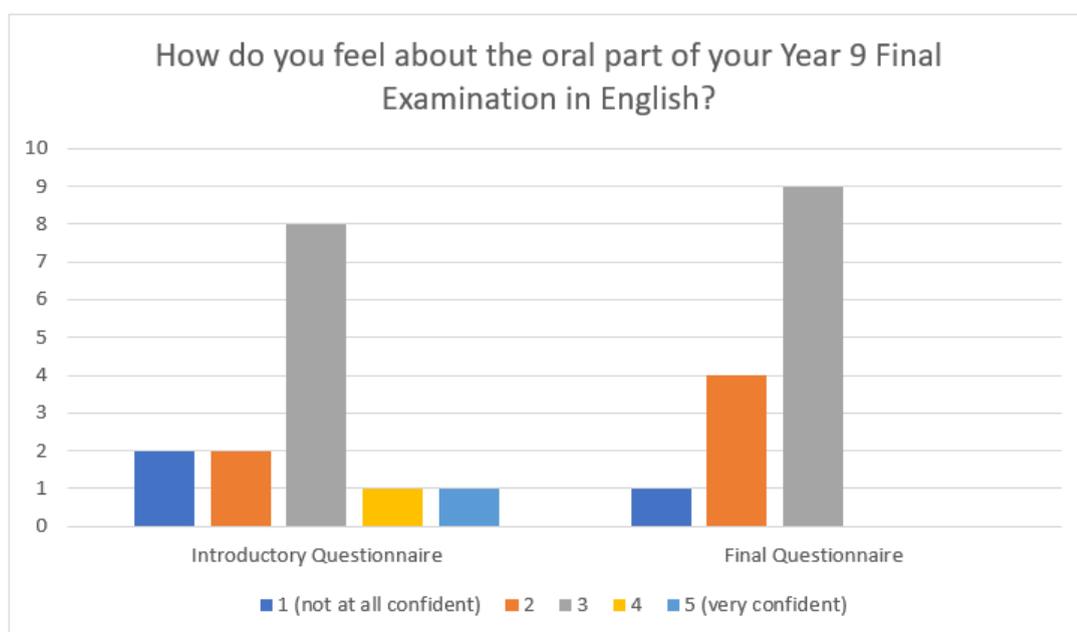
The first case study concerned 14 middle schoolers practicing for their 9th grade oral exam on the Gather Town platform. A simulation-type of the oral exam was created on the platform. The second case study had 12 adults engage with Hypervideos and connect to an

‘examiner’ through a Zoom call. All students completed 4 stages and filled in 5 questionnaires.

Middle School Students and Gather Town

The experiment started with two participants feeling rather confident in their ability to pass the examination, eight expressing uncertainty, and four feeling rather self-conscious about it. By the end of the experiment, more students felt unsure of their level of success during the examination, and one participant improved their self-perceived preparedness.

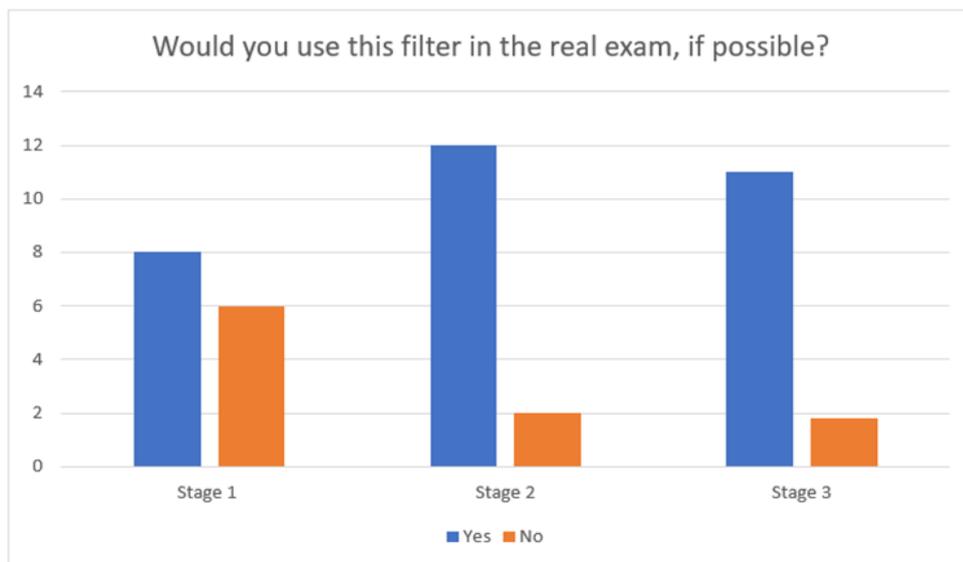
Figure 4. Middle Schoolers on Confidence in Speaking Examination



By the end of the experiment, 50% of students said they would like to continue the preparation for their oral exam, and 43% voted to continue using the same format, while the other 43% leaned “indifferent”. Those who said “yes” to proceeding with the training platform felt comfortable and acquainted with the procedures. One student said “I have understood how to use these things, so I think that this format is the best version right now.” The main reasons for students to change the format were the desire to receive corrections. One student said “We should do it in class so then you can give us feedback”) and the wish to try the exam in front of a real person, one student said “I would rather do it in class” and another one said “I would love to practice it in real life”.

The participants noted the gamification element, connected with using image-altering software, e.g. one student said “I liked the filter because it was just fun,” and another one added “It was kind of funny because I used a peppa pig filter while doing the exam”. These were among the best things of the intervention. Two students said that the voice-changing app was the highlight of their examination training. The majority of students said they would like to use the same filter for the real exam (Figure 5). The highest number of students marked ‘yes’ at the stage when both their voice and camera were masked. The proportion changed insignificantly in the following stage, where the students only used the image-altering application.

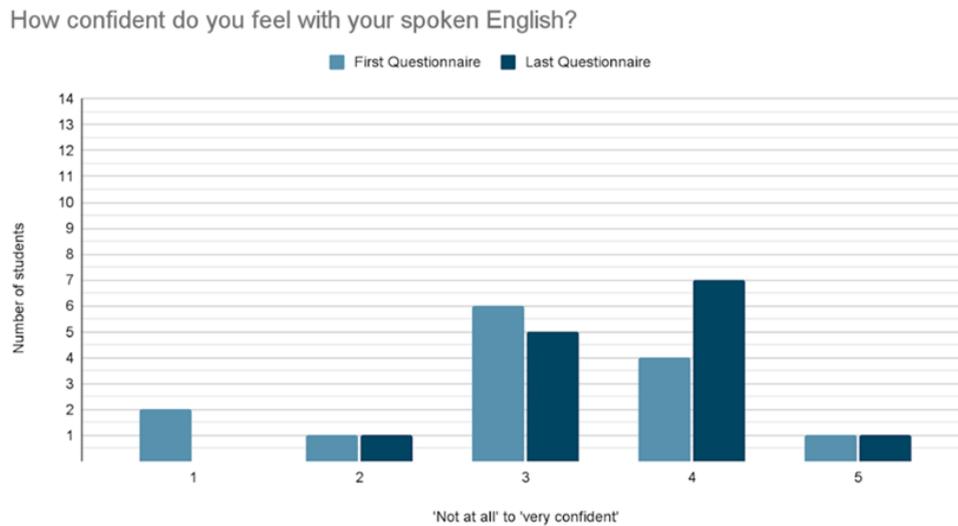
Figure 5. Middle Schoolers on Using Filters



The participants also highlighted the most problematic aspects of the experiment which were connected with technical difficulties as well as the fact that the video feed of the examiners was not adjustable and would sometimes cut off one’s response. When asked about the worst aspect, One student responded with “trying to set up the camera in the software” and another one “having to deal with snap camera”.

Self-perception of language skills

Figure 6. Middle Schoolers on Confidence in English



According to the initial form, most participants were concerned about their performance during the examination: as shown in the table above, 9 out of 14 scored below 4 (confident). There were students that left comments such as ‘I am scared I will fail the exam,’ or said that the speaking part was the hardest for them. Five students were also worried about making mistakes (Figure 6). Major concerns included language comprehension (‘I won’t understand some exercise or that I am not prepared for the exam enough’), grammar, and the use of vocabulary. One comment generically referred to the student’s self-perceived abilities: they mentioned the fear of ‘not being as strong as in other exams.’

The students consistently mentioned the fear of making a mistake as the hardest or worst parts of going through each stage of the training. However, while the majority of initial concerns revolved around theoretical knowledge, after stage two it shifted to fluency and the ability to retrieve vocabulary. In the initial questionnaire, only one person noted that they were unsure about “finding words fast enough.” In the following surveys, students noted that it was hard ‘to talk fluently’, e. g. One student said ‘... I tried to explain myself, but these words just didn't come out.’ In the final survey, a participant wrote about their main concern: it is ‘mostly grammar, because when you are writing something you can always delete it and correct yourself, but while talking, it seems messy if you correct yourself or if you are unsure

how to use something in a sentence,” which indicated trouble with speech production skill more than lack of theoretical foundation (as the student can and wants to correct themselves).

In the final survey, the overall level of confidence increased with 8 people out of 14 marking above 3 (‘confident’ or ‘very confident’), and only one participant selecting below 3 (not confident). Two students mentioned that ‘nothing scares them’ about the examination, and one student noted their progress as well as said that ‘it has got better.’ 6 out of 14 students said that nothing has changed for them and what they were most comfortable with before is the same as what they are most comfortable with now. 5 students in total said that their fears regarding their worries when it came to their English level haven’t changed.

Procedural and Environmental Anxiety

Procedural and environmental anxieties are the fears that people experience when they do not know what is expected of them and what the best course of behavior is. In this experiment, students were faced with the full run of the examination, including introductory questions, explanation of the procedures, and precise timing they had to fit into when giving answers. In the initial survey, none of the students were concerned about those issues.

However, after having done the first run of the experiment, the participants began to recognize this area as a source of anxiety. Some of the worst parts of the exam according to one student were ‘waiting when to talk’ and another student “I had to speak longer to fill the gaps” which indicated that the student did not meet the length requirement, or ‘when the teacher didn’t let me finish’ – the student exceeded the time allocated for their answer. Such comments also included preparation time, as one student said “the time of looking at the picture was very long for me”.

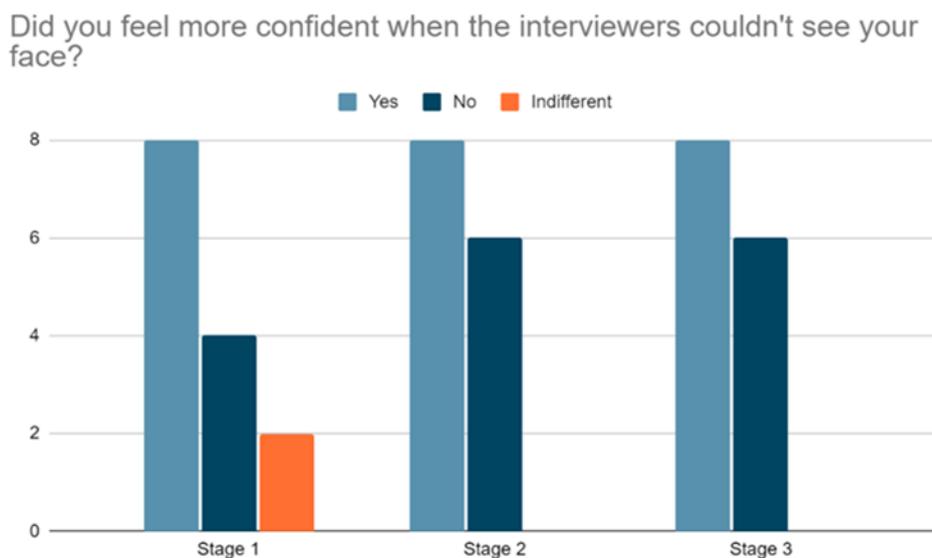
The feedback on timing and procedures changed starting with the second questionnaire following the second attempt. Over 50% of students evaluated their level of confidence higher than in the previous run and motivated it in the following manner: “mostly because I knew more about what I had to do and how I had to do it”, “because it was not that different from the last one,” “because I already knew how the exam looked like,” “because I knew what was coming.” These answers persisted throughout the next questionnaires. For example, in the third, penultimate survey a student wrote: “I was a lot comfortable with [the teacher] talking because I am used to it and I understood a lot more than the previous times. Also, I already knew when I had to talk and I was ready.”

In the final questionnaire, none of the participants expressed concern with the length of their speeches or uncertainty with questions or the procedures. When asked about the part of the examination students felt most comfortable about, many mentioned concrete parts with procedural details that affected their sense of preparedness: “I feel most comfortable describing the picture because I can think about it first.”

Burden of Personal Responsibility

‘Making mistakes’ was a common response to the question of what students are concerned about during the exam, but one response is particularly notable: “maybe there will be someone from my English group, because they would probably laugh if I did something wrong.” Another person said they were afraid of “not being as strong as in other exams”.

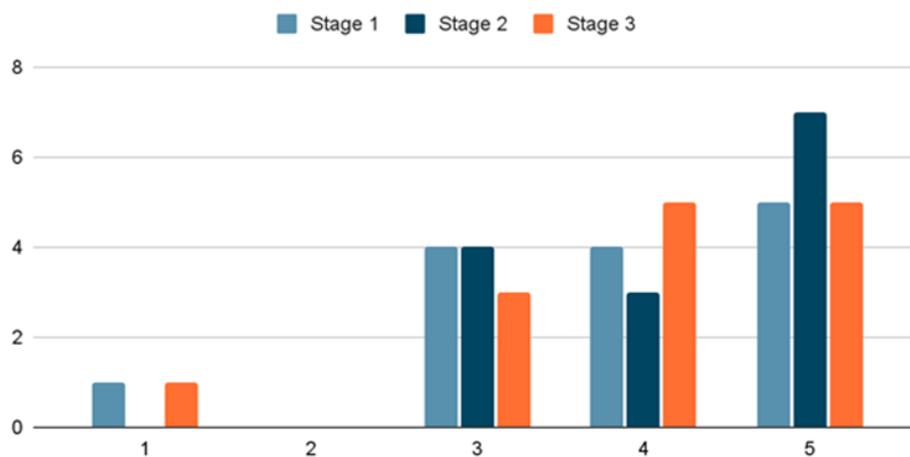
Figure 7. Middle Schoolers on Appearing as an Alter Ego



Throughout the questionnaires, students mentioned the use of image-altering applications as a source of their confidence (Figure 7). After stage 1, 55% of the surveyed said it was less intimidating to take an exam with their voice and image hidden. In response to switching from voice only to voice and the camera, one student said their confidence went down because “you had to use a camera”. Participants said the best part of stages 1 through 3 was “that u can say what ever you want and nobody else is watching you,” “my identity was still hidden,” “because you still couldn’t see my face.”

Figure 8. Middle Schoolers on Filters in the Exam

Do you think it would be less intimidating for students to take an exam with a filter?



The majority of the participants (9 after stage 1; 10 after stages 2 and 3) said the examination would be less intimidating if the participants appeared with filters (Figure 8). In the final questionnaire, a person wrote that they are uncomfortable with “the interviewers and I am scared i won`t remeber some words and then it just comes out awful”.

The Instructor’s Experience

Dealing with a platform like Gather Town was the highlight of the experience. It was very interesting going through the whole process of designing the school and planning how to incorporate a real-life exam into a virtual one. Moreover, the free version of the tool offers a lot of options to do so. It was the perfect blend of entertainment and education.

Consequently, using the online computer-based platform was very time-saving when it came to the practice of the oral exam. It allowed for 6 practice runs by 19 students within one school year, and it helped in teaching the students how to cope with the oral exam better. Moreover, once everything was created in the tool, there was no need for more explanations in class, and the lesson flow was much smoother and more organized as compared to doing exam practice in class. Also, the tool provided the students with even more versions of the exam to independently practice at home, without the whole class needing to come to school and meet individually.

The shortcomings that the experiment demonstrated is that generalized instructions do not work and students pay more attention when instructions are personalized. Also, compared to what was thought before, a lot more support was needed for participants to navigate the training platform and complete the stages.

Moreover, not all students had the means to complete the experiment, since some of them did not have the tools such as a laptop or a camera to do the experiment at home. Also, the videos of the examiners were pre-recorded and edited, which resulted in a bit of a struggle for the participants later on, since the time intervals left between their answers were too long at times, or extremely short at the end of the interviews.

Adults and Hypervideos

When asked if they would use the online computer-based tool after the intervention, 10 out of 12 participants said 'yes'. The reasons highlighted for their answer were the gaming element, the step-by-step sequencing of exercises, and the ability to be anonymous. Three learners said the ability to appear in front of an 'examiner' helped them get accustomed to the procedures and concentrate on the exam itself. Two participants noted that they could use more time using an alter-ego. One person said: "I would like if I have my own voice but camera closed probably." Five participants would combine the use of the platform with regular language classes and felt like they needed feedback. Of the two participants who marked 'no', one would want to 'not see the examiner' and the other was annoyed with the malfunctioning of the programs and said that "trying to get them to work was stressful".

Answering the question about the best part of the experience, four people noted the ability to engage in self-reflection, analyze their mistakes and deficiencies. One of them puts it as "reflecting on what I feel comfortable and uncomfortable about speaking exams". Another participant noted that the intervention 'rekindled' their interest in the target language. Many drew attention to the ability to gain speaking practice and said that their 'capabilities' changed compared to the state before the experiment. Another common response was the ability to play with filters and multiple identities.

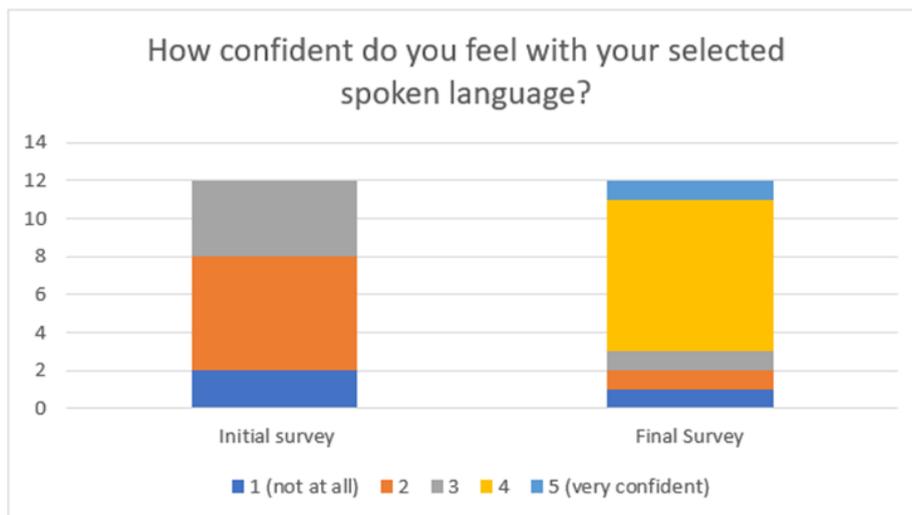
Among the worst aspects of the experiment, three people noted the difficulties with setting up technology. The number of complaints about experiencing problems with setting up tools was falling throughout the experiment, with three negative notes after the first run and one after the final one. The participants noted voice filters as entertaining and many

considered it to be the best part of the first attempt, but all said that it was more distracting than helpful. The video filters received an overwhelmingly positive reaction. Students wrote: “I liked appearing as a funny hamster”, “the funny image I chose really helped”. However two people consistently pointed out that they would have preferred no video at all.

Additionally, two participants wished the experiment would run for a longer time because “the process helped get over the initial hurdles of anxiety but it needs to be sequenced to push the participant further and further along to comfortable public speaking.”

Self-perception of language skills

Figure 9. Adults on Confidence in Speaking a Foreign Language



Before the beginning of the experiment, the authors asked the participants to evaluate their confidence in the selected language on a scale from 1 (‘not at all confident’) to 5 (‘very confident’). None of the participants marked above three, with 50% indicating 2 (‘not confident’). In the final survey, when asked how confident they felt, 10 out of 12 participants marked above 3, with 8 learners (66%) choosing 4 (‘confident’), and one – 5 (‘very confident’).

When answering if they would be ready to take a speaking section of their target language exam (Figure 10), 8 participants out of 12 marked below 3, indicating doubt in their abilities, and none chose ‘very confident’. All of them noted ‘lack of practice’ as the reason for it. In the final survey, 7 out of 12 selected 3+, with one participant choosing ‘very

confident'. Four participants wrote that with some further preparation, they would be ready. Some noted that the experiment revealed their lack of vocabulary for certain topics that they would now revise.

Figure 10. Adults on Oral Examination Readiness



Over 60% of participants consistently noted improvement in their level of confidence in each of the subsequent attempts. The main source of insecurity also shifted from grammar to fluency.

During the initial survey, the most common responses of people experiencing issues with confidence revolved around the lack of grammar and vocabulary. One participant said: "I expect to be embarrassed by my limited ability to speak correctly and at depth". 4 people out of 12 said they believed they would be able to get their point across even if imperfectly. That number doubled in the final survey, with 8 people saying they were more comfortable as they realized that they were capable of speaking even after being out of practice. Two people experienced the opposite and said they were disenchanted with their perceived level.

Procedural and Environmental Anxiety

Before the beginning of the intervention, the participants were asked to note what made them feel insecure. The most common response in terms of the examination procedures was the pressure from examiner's attention. One person noted that "I feel more self-conscious

and don't want to annoy them with not being understandable". Another expressed concerns that "the examiner would take down my mistakes and would not support me". One participant highlighted "attention of a stranger to all your insecurities". The presence of a timer during preparation and response was also mentioned.

Both of the concerns are also evident after the first attempt, as the participants were thrown out of balance by the presence of a stranger on their Zoom calls. As one person puts it, "it was somewhat comforting to be totally anonymous but I actually got nervous when I saw the interviewer". Another said that "knowing that the examiner wouldn't intervene in my speech would have helped me to better concentrate on the task at hand". The sense of timing was also pinned as problematic by some: "I felt limited by the lack of preparation time".

Starting from the second attempt, most participants noted their knowledge of the procedures as a source of additional confidence. As one wrote, "I felt more confident because I knew better what to expect in the exam". Another said they "could understand the timeframe of the exam better". Another participant noted that they "knew the algorithm so I was able to prepare and collect myself". Two people still noted the presence of the examiner as the worst part of the exam, with one writing "I would say seeing the reviewer visually was the worst, or at least most intimidating, part of the exam practice"; and the other one stating that "getting the reactions, reading judgment or disappointment that might not be there into a face - has always been the most stressful for me. To the greater extent that it can be separated from the exam, the better".

During the third attempt, 7 people out of 12 noted that they were more confident due to repetition, familiarity with the procedures, and having experience. When answering the question 'Were you comfortable speaking knowing that the examiner could not see you beyond the filter', one person wrote "I didn't really think about it until the end this time. Maybe it helped subconsciously, but I can't say that I thought about it this time".

After the final run, 6 people noted that practice made them more relaxed and comfortable with the procedures and algorithms of the examinations. One person wrote that they felt like the presence of the examiner created 'an effect of a dialogue, and having a dialogue is easier than performing alone'. Four participants noted in the final survey that the best part of taking the exam for them was the 'comfortable environment'. However, two people reported that their fear of the examiner remained the same.

It is worth mentioning that in the initial survey, few people mentioned concerns connected to the procedural aspect of the intervention. However, subsequent surveys feature an increased number of feedback involving either the discomfort of being observed, troubles with keeping track of time, or general loss of confidence due to unfamiliar procedures.

Burden of Personal Responsibility

Before beginning the experiment, all but two participants said they did not feel comfortable speaking their target language, with three of them explicitly referencing the ‘fear of looking foolish’, and one noting that “mistaking makes me feel uncomfortable and guilty”. After the first stage, seven responses mentioned being more relaxed due to anonymity. One stated “it's not possible to identify me” as the reason. Another thought “this effect covers my insecurities”. One more participant admitted that “the fact that I was able to hide my face and voice did make it more comfortable in my case to just try without hesitation or second thought”. However, many noted that the voice filter, however amusing, was not necessary since the examiner would not know their real voice anyway and therefore would not have been able to recognize them. Several participants said hearing their own changed voice was distracting,

The two subsequent stages brought a large number of positive feedback. The participants pointed out that choosing a “funny filter” (such as a potato, a pineapple, a hamster etc.) allowed them to relax and not think about their faces as they were speaking. One person wrote: “I didn't think it would make a difference, but it kind of made me laugh at myself and feel more comfortable”. The learners said the mistakes would not “affect their reputation”, they underscored “a feeling of detachment from your true self. Like to play pretend” as well as “the total anonymity helped me to personally dissociate from any mistakes”. One participant, however, wrote: “failing to produce the target language feels like personal failure whether or not the examiner knows who I am”.

Additionally, during the third stage of the intervention which took place without the voice filter, some participants noted that they became more comfortable. One wrote that they “found that the reviewer being able to hear tone and inflection but not being able to identify you visually was really helpful to cut down on nerves”. Two main effects were noted with regard to keeping the visual filter: higher levels of dissociation with mistakes and the absence

of worrying about one's looks. As one of the participants puts it, "strange as it sounds, mask is what allows one to not be afraid to be one's true self".

At the final stage of the experiment, three people noted that they felt less comfortable than before because they had to appear as themselves. Five participants stated that they cared less about making mistakes. Five said they were now more confident at communicating with strangers. One person thought they "would feel less anxious speaking to strangers than prior to the exams, but I would say the gain is marginal as of now". Four people out of 12 noted that their fear of making a mistake decreased throughout the course of the intervention, two said they were not significantly afraid from the start, others observed that their attitude did not significantly change.

The Instructor's Experience

Working with Hypervideos was a very positive experience. Firstly, the design proved cost-effective. Creating the videos was time-consuming, as it included pre-production efforts such as gathering the materials, writing a script and selecting and testing compatible applications. However, the tool interface is user-friendly and allows for all necessary functions such as pausing the videos, embedding links, and skipping to a bookmarked point. Overall, thanks to these features, one video could be used for multiple languages and levels over an unlimited span of time.

Secondly, the self-guiding feature of the Hypervideos helped in relieving the burden of doing it for each participant individually or relying on them for doing it right. The elements of the video appeared and disappeared automatically, thus creating a sense for timing. Moreover, assigning the speaking exercise for individual preparation allowed to keep the training process self-paced while also being procedurally controlled.

Finally, the tool enabled a simulation of the official (and stress-inducing) procedures of a language testing without involving a third party in the long-term. The ability to embed the direct link to a Zoom call hosted by a third party removed the component of familiarity for the participants: they were not connecting to the instructor they knew and felt comfortable with for practice, but an unknown examiner. Introducing the third party while conducting the training single-handedly would have proven impossible had the online computer-based tool not been used.

One shortcoming was that it was necessary to walk the participants through the use of online-based applications including Google Forms. It appeared difficult for many to use the computer programs intuitively, and time had to be budgeted for technical questions and trouble-shooting.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Overall, the participants' feedback was positive. The fact that most of them would want to continue the preparation following the same pattern indicates that they grew comfortable with the setup and saw value for themselves. The most notable highlights based on the reviews are the abilities to (1) gain procedural experience; (2) dissociate with one's mistakes and gain more confidence; (3) add a gaming element that would (partially) relieve situational stress; and (4) give the participants the space for self-reflection and analysis. Additionally, the two platforms proved to be beneficial for (5) saving time and resources, (6) providing semi-unlimited access to practicing, and (7) developing digital skills in both the instructors and the participants.

The process of getting accustomed to the examination algorithms and the timing proved to be essential yet underrated. The results confirm previous findings by Abdullah and colleagues (2017) and Grieve and colleagues (2021) who mention fear of external conditions. However in this study, only a few participants from both age groups and experiments recognized it as a source of stress before beginning the practice, but after the first stage, many of them pinpointed it as a major inconvenience. As the experiment progressed, so did their familiarity with the process, and the associated level of discomfort decreased accordingly. Middle school students were especially vocal about it, with many mentioning complete comfort with the pace and length of speaking, as well as how they had to behave, and name them the easiest parts of the exam.

To dissociate with one's mistakes, students had to be exposed to the third party and feel like they are being observed: as themselves or as someone else entirely (an anonymous or an alter-ego). That is why the profile of an examiner became a divisive point of the two experiments. The first one in Gather Town used a pre-taped video of the commission going through all sections of the exam. As a result, the students were aware that the examiners were in fact not able to see or hear them regardless of the voice changer and the camera, which impeded the process of getting used to the third party watching them. The students had issues

with the timing that was put in the videos, as some of them complained that they had to wait or did not have enough time to finish within the pre-recorded pauses.

It can also be said that the human element (confirming Landers and colleagues' definition of it in gamification, 2015) was missing due to the nature of pre-recorded video: the examiners were very clearly not present or able to interact. Consequently, the fear of presenting in front of a 'public' was not conclusively addressed and remained at consistent levels. However, that aspect underwent change in the second experiment with adults. They had to connect to Zoom and 'see' the examiner in front of them, ensuring a more personalized experience. In this regard, the comment made by one of the adult participants that they 'did not pay attention to the fact they were in front of an examiner' is significant, as it indicates the level of indifference that the person acquired when presenting before an assessor is no longer noteworthy to them, but rather a casual occurrence. It proves Grieve and colleagues' statement that procedural awareness is a significant component that should be introduced during exam preparation, and that the created computer-based tool adequately addressed that need. The data from middle school students also demonstrated an aspect not mentioned in previous literature: students were worried about appearing in front of each other as much, if not more, than in front of a commission.

Both adults and students appreciated the ability to escape from examination stress and treat the preparation as a game, confirming the findings of Bardone and colleagues (2019), Gallego and colleagues (2020), and Adkins-Jablonsky and colleagues (2021). Middle School students used such terms as 'fun' when referring to an exam practice, which seems like a success. The majority of those students felt more comfortable using a filter when undergoing the real assessment. Based on their answers, the filters were indeed the most fun part and they liked having their voices and faces hidden. From the instructor's point, the usage of filters seemed a success mainly because most students used cameras and showed themselves (even if altered), which they prefer not to do for an average class.

Among older participants, the ability to experiment with filters and multiple identities also proved to be popular, consistent with Kim and colleagues' findings (2014). They were as playful as middle-schoolers, appearing as fantastic creatures, and admitted that it allowed them to take their mistakes easier and relax into the exam procedures more effectively. Altogether, the findings confirm earlier results outlined by Maloney and colleagues (2020)

and Chen and Kent (2019). However, it is worth noting that the principle is not universal and one or two people from both age groups remained skeptical of it.

Launching a design that provided the participants with a level of independence and gave them an opportunity to try and observe their own skills is a highlight of the study. It demonstrated in practice what Settineri put as alter ego used as a ‘protective tool’ for self-exploration (2019, p. 5). To this end, the graph devoted to the level of confidence in the oral Year 9 Final Examination in English among middle schoolers is of special value. It decreased throughout the experiment, while according to another survey question, their level of confidence in speaking rose. It can be indicative of the fact that students went into the experiment with false confidence and a misleading idea that their biggest hurdle to overcome would be grammar or vocabulary. Over the course of completing the four stages, the students learn that their fluency, awareness of timing, responses to stress among other factors are also necessary to address before appearing in front of the real commission. That, perhaps, gave the participants an opportunity to reflect on their own experiences and address things unique to them, as opposed to a universal standard of language at a certain level.

Self-reflection was evident among adult participants. As one of the learners noted, “it is easier to be yourself under the mask”. The participants engaged in self-reflection, tried to analyze and work on their mistakes. One even re-discovered their interest in the language. With that said, the tool can be implemented for a regular self-check by the students regardless of the upcoming examinations, to prompt them to dwell on their own experiences with the language, abilities and needs.

From an instructor’s point of view, both Gather Town and Hypervideos had the advantage of affordable and enabling tools. They are user-friendly and intuitive, and do not require advanced programming skills neither from the instructor nor from the students. Gather Town allows to keep the same space up for infinitely long. Hypervideos are free to use for a period of time and allow users to download the video to re-embed it at one’s convenience which addresses the issue of limited funds and access to more elaborate tools such as VR in an average classroom. Therefore, the authors draw the conclusion that the tool can be introduced in any classroom provided that the instructor has a computer and access to the Internet, and the participants can get at least timed access to a compatible computer connected to the worldwide web. The navigation of Hypervideos was of a particular value for the instructor because one video (and the associated time-commitment) would cater to multiple

languages and multiple levels of the same language, as well as allowing for retaking the practice examination as many times as possible.

Both Gather Town and Hypervideos have the advantage of accessibility. One could run the practice on one's own, from any location and at any time. We regard the online computer-based platforms as means not only to get accustomed to the procedures, but also for self-improvement and independent work. The learner could run the same task several times, addressing new self-detected issues or instructor's comments, thus applying meta-learning and developing self-regulation skills. As some adults noted, they could complete a stage at any time, even when they do not look 'presentable', and still have the experience of dealing with examiner-related stress, while not spending time on their looks.

It is equally useful for schoolchildren as it serves as an online practice tool that they can run an infinite number of times without depending on the teacher or the curriculum. With the use of these tools, an educator in a larger classroom could run practice multiple times. Under other circumstances, training the oral part of the exam in class would have been done in a span of many lessons and could have happened only once in a school year.

Finally, we believe that both the instructors and the learners expanded their knowledge of using a computer during this experiment. They now know several new applications that they can use in their life in the future. In addition to the students learning, the educator learned as well. Creating the simulation of an oral exam introduced the educator to an array of options on how to create different types of exercises and practices using online platforms.

However, the implementation and the tool need improvement. It is worth noting that the time should be allocated for running the test intervention with students at least once for the purpose of getting them acquainted with the platform and the technicalities of it rather than training the skills in question. A number of adult participants became distressed over inability to intuitively launch the system of applications, and making it more habitual would reduce stress before the students would be faced with proper exam tasks for the first time. For future usage of the platform with teenage students with a shorter attention span, the instructions can be given in the classroom by the teacher, or the videos can be shortened and played in class. When the teacher gave the instructions to students in class separately, it seemed to have worked better. Additionally, to integrate the use of the platform into the curriculum, the instructor should take into account that not all students may be able to complete the experiments at home due to technical issues or trouble with figuring out the

applications. Help should be offered to them, which would make the experiment run longer and can create deterrence for a tight curriculum schedule.

While including the tool in the curriculum, the instructor should introduce it over a longer period of time so that on every stage, the first run is to understand the set-up, and multiple subsequent attempts are to better exam skills without a regard to the technical challenges. In addition, it would ensure that the participants are comfortable with the skill that they were concentrating on (getting used to the environment, speaking on a certain topic etc.) Many participants also noted that their grammar, vocabulary, and fluency needed attention. They said that feedback and language training would improve their experience with the tool, and the authors agree that it should be a means of enhancing the curriculum rather than an independent entity. In that way, the tool should also be used for recording the participants' performances for feedback.

Based on the participants' feedback, the voice-changing app alone was not significant to the perceived burden of responsibility. It appears as though one's voice is perceived as less of a personal indicator than one's face, as the participants did not mind using their authentic timbres as long as they would remain unseen. Combined with the complaints about technological difficulties, it can be concluded that the voice-altering component can be eliminated and the time spent with image-altering filters could be extended. However, the results demonstrate that the participants' reported levels of stress went down, while the levels of engagement and entertainment rose due to the use of Snap Camera. It allows us to say that incorporating it as a feature of our online computer-based tool was successful. Thus, removing the voice changing application could allow making the transition through image-altering applications more systemic and gradual (e.g. from a complete face substitution, such as appearing as a pineapple, to a more and more authentic visuals with only slightly improved features over multiple stages). For Gather Town, the instructional videos could be either scrapped altogether or simplified.

Further research on the topic should feature different types of online environments and expand oral training from monological speech or one type of examination algorithm to include others. The present study did not aim to examine the influence of such online practice on students' linguistic capabilities, which also presents a path forward. It could be beneficial to analyze the types of students that profit more from such training tools, and the factors that set aside the participants that admitted no progress over the course of the experiment. For the

future experiments, the authors would recommend improving the process of running questionnaires for data collection, especially with younger students. Unexpectedly, both teenagers and adults experience difficulty submitting their answers through Google Forms.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This study was intended to explore the use of online simulation of foreign language examination procedures to address student fears related to a stressful environment. The authors engage in action and reflection, including self-reflection, to analyze the impact the training design has on the educational process.

The online tools were designed by selecting a platform and building in applications and media to simulate the oral component of a foreign language examination. The research was conducted in two stages. The first was run in a 9th grade classroom of 14 teenagers. The second stage was composed of 12 adults and was not part of a course. Two platforms were selected for two experiments: Gather Town for younger learners due to its interface; and Hypervideos for adults because of their ability to use more advanced tools.

The experiment was divided into four stages, corresponding to a level of distancing from self. These stages were 1. Full anonymity 2. Altered voice and image; 3. Authentic voice and altered image 4. One's true self. Before the experiment began and after each stage participants were asked to complete a questionnaire. It was designed to discover the impact of the simulation on two understudied student fears: environmental fear and fear of judgment (which consists of self confidence issues, lack of motivation, and burden of personal responsibility) according to Grieve and colleagues (2021). The study intended to examine the fears, analyze the reflections of the students, and determine the impact the tools may have on teaching practice.

The simulations proved to be an effective tool, particularly in regards to environmental and procedural training. Student responses indicated that both age groups are not likely aware of that type of fear before the examination. Participants of both age groups reacted to the first attempt at taking an exam with distress. By the fourth stage they were comfortable and accustomed to the procedures and timing. It is of utmost importance for an instructor to foresee and address that source of fear in advance.

Results relating to self-confidence were of special interest. The students unexpectedly transitioned from expressing anxiety related to subject knowledge (grammar and vocabulary)

to subject skills (fluency and speed). This was likely due to the reflective nature of the tools. The participants were the judges of their performances and analyzed their experience, perhaps not knowingly, while also engaging in meta-cognition and discovering the best ways to deal with examination procedures.

Lack of motivation is said to be a product of fear of judgment, as people tend to avoid stressful situations. However, the simulation design sparked newfound interest in the language in some of the adult participants. Younger learners characterized the exam practice as ‘fun’ thanks to the gamification aspect of it. Gather Town served as an educational alternative to popular computer games. Meanwhile, voice modifiers and online face masking applications entertained both teenagers and adults, got them engaged in the training process, and relieved stress.

Finally, the burden of personal responsibility is the aspect of fear of judgment that was meant to be gradually introduced by increasing the level of authenticity of self. As one of the participants said ‘it is easier to be yourself when you are wearing a mask.’ Students of both groups responded well to the ability to alter their image and some showed disappointment in having to abandon the practice. The voice modifier appeared of less importance.

The instructors noted that the online simulation platforms were accessible and user-friendly. They saved time, as a tool created once could be used an infinite number of times. They also allowed the students and instructor to work relatively independently of one another. They did not have to be in the same space-time continuum to interact. Additionally, the process of creating an educational training design allowed for enhancing skills with technology. This opened a path for the future implementation of such categories of applications and tools.

The authors recognize that some areas need improvement. The design appeared to be too complex for intuitive use by both middle schoolers and adults. Thus, the set-up processes should be simplified, including by dropping one of the applications. The instructions should be more personalized and detailed, perhaps even done face-to-face. The design featuring the recording of the examiners should be substituted by more ‘human’ and personalized interaction, such as a Zoom call. More thought should be given to finding a balance between automating the student examination and keeping it as realistic as possible.

The study was limited by the number of participants willing to complete a complex sequence of steps while adhering to all of the requirements and span of time. The nature of the

platforms the authors designated as tools, as well as of the applications incorporated in the study also influenced the outcomes. The functionality assessment of the tool may be affected if the participants get to run each of the practice stages multiple times until they are comfortable with it.

The present design is not to be taken as a final product but a work in progress, as the training tool has and will continue to change. The next steps would be addressing the problems identified earlier, as well as incorporating the tool in the curriculum on a more substantial level. The authors would like to further explore the potential of improving individual elements of the tool, both pedagogically (such as speaking tasks and reviewing methods) and technologically (amplifying the ability for independent and unlimited use of the tool). Introducing an ameliorated training design to a wider audience of colleagues and learners would allow the authors to engage in reflection and self-reflection on a higher level, as well as reveal more ends to work towards.

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Authors' Declaration

We hereby declare that we have written this thesis collaboratively and have shared responsibilities equally and that all contributions of other authors and supporters have been referenced. The thesis has been written in accordance with the requirements for graduation theses of the Institute of Education of the University of Tartu and is in compliance with good academic practices. In order to start the thesis process, first meetings in person were held and afterward a Google Drive folder was shared and Google documents which were used collaboratively. This helped the writers to keep in contact throughout the process asynchronously, discussing the process and thesis research questions. The writing was split equally between the authors. The intervention material for both of the case studies was mainly created by each person separately and the authors were present for their own case studies, with the other offering crucial help and stepping up when needed. The results were interpreted by each author separately regarding their own case study. Every part of the thesis was discussed by the two authors every step of the way and revisions were done as a team.

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Appendix 1. Google Forms Questionnaires

Middle Schoolers

Introductory questionnaire

1. How confident do you feel with your English? (scale from 1-not at all to 5-very confident)
2. Are you usually afraid of making mistakes when speaking English? (scale from 1-not at all to 5-very)
3. Does speaking English with people you may not know make you feel anxious?(scale from 1-not at all to 5-very)
4. How do you feel about the oral part of your Year 9 Final Examination in English? (scale from 1-extremely uneasy to 5-very confident)
5. Do you think the interviewers will make you feel intimidated? (scale from 1-not at all to 5-very)
6. What scares you the most about taking the exam?
7. What element of the oral English exam do you feel most comfortable with?

Questionnaire 1 (After phase 1)

1. Were you more confident speaking when the interviewers could not see you or hear your real voice? (yes/no/indifferent)
2. Do you feel more self-confident after completing this practice exam? (scale from 1-not at all to 5- a lot more)
3. Was it more relaxing to speak with your voice and image hidden? (scale from 1-not at all to 5- a lot more)
4. Did you feel more self-confident when your voice and image were hidden? (scale from 1-not at all to 5- a lot more)
5. Do you think it would be less intimidating for students to take an exam with their voice and image hidden? (scale from 1-not at all to 5- a lot more)
6. Would you use this filter to take the real exam if it was possible? (yes/no)
7. What was the best part (for example, the most fun) of this exam practice?
8. What was the easiest part of taking this practice exam for you?

9. What was the worst (for example, the most boring or stupid) part of this exam practice?
10. What was the hardest part of taking this practice exam for you?

Questionnaire 2 (after phase 2)

1. Did you feel more confident taking this practice exam compared to the previous time? (yes/no/indifferent)
2. Why?
3. Were you more confident speaking when the interviewers could not see you? (yes/no/indifferent)
4. Do you feel more self-confident after completing this practice exam? (scale from 1-not at all to 5- a lot more)
5. Was it more relaxing to speak when your image was hidden? (scale from 1-not at all to 5- a lot more)
6. Did you feel more self-confident speaking when your image was hidden? (scale from 1-not at all to 5- a lot more)
7. Do you think it would be less intimidating for students to take an exam with image and identity hidden? (scale from 1-not at all to 5- a lot more)
8. Would you use this filter to take the real exam if it was possible? (yes/no)
9. What was the best part (for example, the most fun) of this exam practice?
10. What was the easiest part of taking this practice exam for you?
11. What was the worst (for example, the most boring or stupid) part of this exam practice?
12. What was the hardest part of taking this practice exam for you?

Questionnaire 3 (after phase 3)

1. Did you feel more confident taking this practice exam compared to the previous times? (yes/no/indifferent)
2. Why?
3. Were you more confident speaking when the interviewers could not see your real self? (yes/no/indifferent)

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4. Do you feel more self-confident after completing this practice exam? (scale from 1-not at all to 5- a lot more)
5. Was it more relaxing to speak with a filter? (scale from 1-not at all to 5- a lot more)
6. Did you feel more self-confident speaking with a filter? (scale from 1-not at all to 5- a lot more)
7. Do you think it would be less intimidating for students to take an exam with a filter? (scale from 1-not at all to 5- a lot more)
8. Would you use this filter to take the real exam if it was possible? (yes/no)
9. What was the best part (for example, the most fun) of this exam practice?
10. What was the easiest part of taking this practice exam for you?
11. What was the worst (for example, the most boring or stupid) part of this exam practice?
12. What was the hardest part of taking this practice exam for you?

Questionnaire 4 (after phase 4)

1. How confident do you feel with your spoken English compared to October? (scale from 1-less confident to 5-more confident)
2. How do you feel about the oral part of your Year 9 Final Examination in English? (scale from 1-extremely uneasy to 5-very confident)
3. Do you think the interviewers will make you feel intimidated? (scale from 1-not at all to 5-very)
4. What scares you the most about taking the exam? Has it changed?
5. What element of the oral English exam do you feel most comfortable with? Has it changed?
6. Would you like to practice the oral part of your English exam more? (yes/no/indifferent)
7. Would you like to use the same format? (yes/no/indifferent)
8. If not, what format would you like to use?

Adults

Introductory questionnaire

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1. How confident do you feel with your selected spoken language? (scale from 1-not at all to 5-very confident)
2. Why?
3. Are you usually afraid of making mistakes when speaking your selected language? (scale from 1-not at all to 5-very)
4. Why?
5. Does speaking your selected language with people you do not know make you feel anxious? (scale from 1-not at all to 5-very)
6. Why?
7. Would you be ready to take a speaking section of international examination in your selected language? (scale from 1-not at all to 5-yes, after limited preparation)
8. Why?
9. Do you think the examiner will make you feel intimidated when speaking the selected language? (scale from 1-not at all to 5-very)
10. Why?
11. What scares you the most about taking a speaking part of your selected language exam?
12. What element of an oral exam do you feel most comfortable with? (grammar, vocabulary, speaking skills, comfortable environment)

Questionnaire 1 (after phase 1)

1. Were you confident speaking when the interviewers could not see you or hear your real voice? (yes/no/indifferent)
2. Were you comfortable speaking knowing that the examiner could not see you or hear your real voice? (yes/no/indifferent)
3. How much were you afraid of making a mistake? (scale from 1-not at all to 5-a lot)
4. Why?
5. Do you feel more self-confident about speaking after completing this practice exam? (scale from 1-not at all to 5-a lot more)
6. Why?
7. Was it more relaxing to speak with your voice and image hidden? (scale from 1-not at all to 5-a lot more)

8. Why?
9. Do you think it would be less intimidating to take an exam with your voice and image hidden? (scale from 1-not at all to 5-a lot)
10. Why?
11. Would you use this effect to take the real exam if it was possible? (yes/no)
12. Why?
13. What was the best part (for example, the most fun) of this exam practice?
14. What was the easiest part of taking this practice exam for you?
15. What was the worst part of this exam practice?
16. What was the hardest part of taking this practice exam for you?

Questionnaire 2 and 3 (after phase 2 and 3)

1. Did you feel more confident speaking this time compared to the previous time?
(yes/no/indifferent)
2. Why?
3. Were you confident speaking when your voice and image were masked with a filter?
(yes/no/indifferent)
4. Were you comfortable speaking knowing that the examiner could not see you or hear the 'real' you beyond the filter? (yes/no/indifferent)
5. Why?
6. How much were you afraid of making a mistake? (scale from 1-not at all to 5-a lot)
7. Why?
8. Was it more relaxing to speak with your voice and image masked? (scale from 1-not at all to 5-a lot more)
9. Why?
10. Do you think it would be less intimidating to take an exam with your voice and image masked? (scale from 1-not at all to 5-a lot)
11. Why?
12. Would you use this filter to take the real exam if it was possible? (yes/no)
13. Why?
14. What was the best part (for example, the most fun) of this exam practice?
15. What was the easiest part of taking this practice exam for you?

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16. What was the worst part of this exam practice?

Questionnaire 4 (after phase 4)

1. Did you feel more confident speaking this time compared to the previous times?
(yes/no/indifferent)
2. Why?
3. Did you feel more confident speaking this time compared to the first time?
(yes/no/indifferent)
4. Why?
5. How confident do you feel with your spoken selected language compared to the state before the research? (scale from 1-less confident to 5-more confident)
6. Why?
7. Are you afraid of making mistakes when speaking your selected language as much as before? (scale from 1-less than before to 5-more than before)
8. Why?
9. Would you feel as anxious speaking your selected language with people you do not know as before participating? (scale from 1-less to 5-more)
10. Why?
11. Would you be ready to take a speaking section of international examination in your selected language soon? (scale from 1-not at all to 5-yes, after limited preparation)
12. Why?
13. Do you think the examiner will make you feel intimidated when speaking the selected language? Has your opinion changed in the course of this research?
14. What scares you the most about taking a speaking part of your selected language exam? Has it changed?
15. What element of speaking do you feel most comfortable with? (grammar, vocabulary, speaking skills, comfortable environment) Has it changed?
16. Would you like to use the same format while preparing for a real international exam?
17. Why? If yes, please specify what you liked. If not, what format would you like to use?
18. What do you think was the best (most successful) part of the journey?
19. What do you think was the worst (least successful) part of the journey?

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