

Formative Assessments and Interventions to Develop Oral Proficiency at the Intermediate Level: Results of a One-Year Study

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INTRODUCTION

Background

The *World-Readiness Standards for Learning Language* (National Standards Collaborative Board) have been institutionalized as a guide to best practice in the world language curriculum that has authentic communicative competence at its core. The ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines (Swender et al.), Performance Descriptors (Sandrock et al.) and NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements (ACTFL) further inform best practice by aligning the Standards with specific measurement of skills according to the major levels of proficiency: Novice, Intermediate and Advanced, with the subdivisions of Low, Mid and High to indicate progress within each level. Consequently, official ACTFL proficiency assessments that determine student language ability in accordance with these guidelines can be powerful tools in program evaluation. Two basic but critical questions need to be answered for effective program assessment:

- 1) What should be set as the proficiency standard for success for graduates completing a four-year college curriculum?

2) What are the best practices to support learners' achievement of that level?

Regarding ACTFL Standard 1: "Language Proficiency: Interpersonal, Interpretive and Presentational," language programs have not been overwhelmingly successful at getting most students to Advanced Low (Huhn S167-68). Among other studies, Dan Soneson and Elaine E. Tarone (57) reported that only 42% of French, Spanish, German and Korean students at the University of Minnesota reached Advanced Low (AL) on speaking proficiency by their eighth semester, as measured by the Oral Proficiency Interview-Computerized (OPIc). Similarly, Elvira Swender reported on the OPI results of 501 juniors and seniors in Mandarin, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Russian and Spanish, observing that only 47% of all students tested reached the Advanced level (523). There is support for the argument that an Advanced oral proficiency rating may not be achievable in a four-year college curriculum that does not involve immersion experiences outside of the classroom (Rifkin, "Video" 67; Rifkin, "Oral proficiency" 587; Rifkin, "A Response" 480; Liskin-Gasparro and Henry, as cited in Tschirner and Heilenman 152). The failure of programs to produce graduates with minimum AL oral proficiency may be attributed to insufficient instructional hours in a four-year program (Rifkin, "A ceiling effect" 12-13), a limited range of language topics and tasks to promote advanced oral proficiency in upper-level content courses (Brooks and Darhower 608-09), and an emphasis on teacher-centered content delivery with little opportunity for student discourse (Donato and Brooks; Zyzik and Polio 65).

Eileen W. Glisan and Richard Donato, on the other hand, cite evidence that language programs can help students achieve advanced proficiency if they "plan meaningful classroom experiences in which students collaborate with one another, make meaning with the target language as they formulate and engage in interesting tasks and topic-directed interaction, assume greater responsibility for their own learning, and receive guided assistance from the instructor and more capable peers" (475). Frank B. Brooks and Mark Anthony Darhower cite the need for more research on specific strategies to prepare students for the OPI (596) and the need to "to provide abundant opportunities for students to speak the target language within and beyond the classroom" (608) if students are to reach advanced proficiency.

In 2012, the Kutztown University of Pennsylvania Department of Modern Language Studies began using the official ACTFL OPI as a

summative assessment of oral proficiency for all BA and BSED students exiting the program. Data gathered from 2012 to 2017 showed that an Advanced rating was challenging for second-language (L2) learners to achieve unless they had authentic L2 experiences outside the classroom. Indeed, all students who scored Advanced High (AH) or Advanced Mid (AM) were either native/heritage speakers or had considerable contact with L2 communities, either locally or through a minimum one-semester study abroad experience. Most students scoring AL had at least a short-term (four- or five-week) study abroad experience. Using the OPI as an exit interview provided valuable summative data on our students, along with evidence of the importance of authentic L2 experiences beyond the classroom.

To determine a realistic criterion for success upon completion of a four-year language program, formative assessments on third-year students offer important details about the progress of learners toward the oral proficiency learning outcome. Research supports the Intermediate Low (IL) to Intermediate High (IH) range of oral proficiency as a reasonable expectation after two years of college study, based on investigations using a variety of measures. For example, Sally Sieloff Magnan's study of French students at the University of Wisconsin-Madison found Intermediate Mid (IM) to be the median proficiency score for students on a double-rated OPI at the end of two years (430). Erwin Tschirner and L. Kathy Heilenman found the median proficiency of German students after four college semesters to be Intermediate Low using the OPI, with one third of students reaching Intermediate Mid and one quarter of the students only reaching Novice High (154). Dorry M. Kenyon and Tschirner found similar results using both the OPI and SOPI: 50% and 45% of students, respectively, at Intermediate Low, with remaining scores divided between Novice and Intermediate Mid (91). Using a taped Spanish Oral Proficiency Test with 30 students at the end of the fourth semester, Lina Lee found two students at Novice High, five at Intermediate Low, 17 at Intermediate Mid, five at Intermediate High and one at Advanced (133). An investigation by Robert J. Thompson, Jr., et al. using the SOPI indicated 84% of students reaching Intermediate Mid after completing four semesters of Chinese, French, German or Spanish (661-62). That the results of these investigations differ in terms of sub-levels should not be surprising, given the difficulty in controlling variables such as learners' language background and opportunities for language use outside the classroom. Nevertheless, the data point to a minimum of Intermediate Low

as an oral proficiency target for learners entering the third year of a college language curriculum.

Objective

With the long-term goal of improving students' oral proficiency scores upon exiting the program, the aim of the current project was to measure the progress of our students in the fifth semester of their language program and to determine a realistic oral proficiency target for that level. We expected to find results comparable to those cited in the literature for third-year language learners. Interventions requiring learners to engage in authentic target-language communication were incorporated to evaluate their effect on learner performance and awareness of oral proficiency development.

METHODS

Study Protocol

With the support of a grant from Kutztown University, we integrated the following components into the third-year Spanish and German curricula:

1. ACTFL Assessment of Performance toward Proficiency in Languages (AAPPL) Interpretive Listening and Speaking: pre- and post-test at the beginning and end of the semester;
2. Language Partners (LP): twelve 50-minute informal conversations with native or heritage speakers who were also Kutztown University students;¹
3. TalkAbroad (TA): five 30-minute recorded conversations using TalkAbroad videoconferencing program;
4. Student survey: 14 questions (13 quantitative and 1 qualitative) at the end of the semester to measure student evaluation of AAPPL testing and the LP and TA interventions with respect to their speaking confidence and proficiency improvement. Students ranked the effectiveness of the AAPPL assessments, LP, and TA

¹ Due to the limited number of German students qualified to serve as Language Partners, and consequently the limited number of LP hours available, German students in each semester were only required to complete five LP sessions.

programs in increasing their oral proficiency and confidence speaking L2. They were also asked to rate the accuracy of the AAPPL test and provide overall comments and suggestions for the program (see Appendix A).

Study population

There were 46 students in fifth-semester² German and Spanish courses that participated in this study. Data were collected in four classes over two semesters: Fall 2017 (10 German and 16 Spanish students) and Spring 2018 (9 German and 11 Spanish students). All participants (14 males, 32 females) were traditional students between the ages of 19 and 25. There were no native or heritage learners. The project was described to participants and consent was obtained by the grant investigators (see Appendix B). Although the courses in Fall 2017 were taught by faculty who had not participated in writing the grant, the project requirements were explained to them and they agreed to incorporate the elements of the study into their courses.

Study interventions

All participants completed the AAPPL test A (measuring Novice Low to Intermediate Mid) in the first two weeks of the semester and AAPPL test B (measuring Novice High to Advanced Low) in the last two weeks of the semester. In order to homogenize the AAPPL testing score with ACTFL performance benchmarks, the following equivalences were applied: N4 or below—Novice; I1—Intermediate Low; I2, I3, I4—Intermediate Mid; I5—Intermediate High; A—Advanced, per Language Testing International guidelines (“AAPPL Measure FAQs”). Students received a copy of the AAPPL Measure Score Report describing the abilities represented by their score and strategies for improvement (“AAPPL Measure Score Report”). Instructors also discussed AAPPL scores and strategies in class and with students individually to support both their understanding of performance toward oral proficiency and how this skill is measured.

² *Fifth semester* is defined as having completed the equivalent of four semesters at Kutztown University. It should be noted that not all students completed four semesters at the university, as they may have been initially placed in higher levels based on high-school experience.

The LP program was initiated to stimulate the development of social networks with peers from the target-language cultures and provide opportunities for informal social interaction in L2. Students participated in LP sessions with university peer facilitators who were selected according to the following criteria: 1) speaking proficiency (speaks target language with ease and in a variety of registers; does not readily resort to English); 2) dependability (reporting as scheduled and on time); and 3) social skills (outgoing; able to lead conversations without being intimidating). LP sessions, limited to five students per session, were offered on fixed days and times each semester, and students signed up for the sessions on a weekly basis beginning in the second week of classes. Student peer facilitators were encouraged to engage participants as much as possible in impromptu conversations on themes common to university students but were provided with a range of supplemental topics and role-play activities for additional support to promote discussion as needed.

TA videoconferencing program was included as a course component to provide further opportunities for students to use the language in authentic contexts, a decision that was based on research indicating that students using TA perceived benefits from the experience in terms of conversational proficiency and confidence (Carruthers 60) and making connections with the communities of L2 native speakers (Carruthers 61-62). The TA platform was introduced between the fourth and sixth week of the semester to allow time for students to adjust to unstructured oral communication with unfamiliar partners through LP. Students chose their TA partners based on biographical information and availability. They also selected general discussion topics from a list, provided by their instructor, that was designed to provide a starting point for conversation for both the students and the TA partners.

Statistical analysis

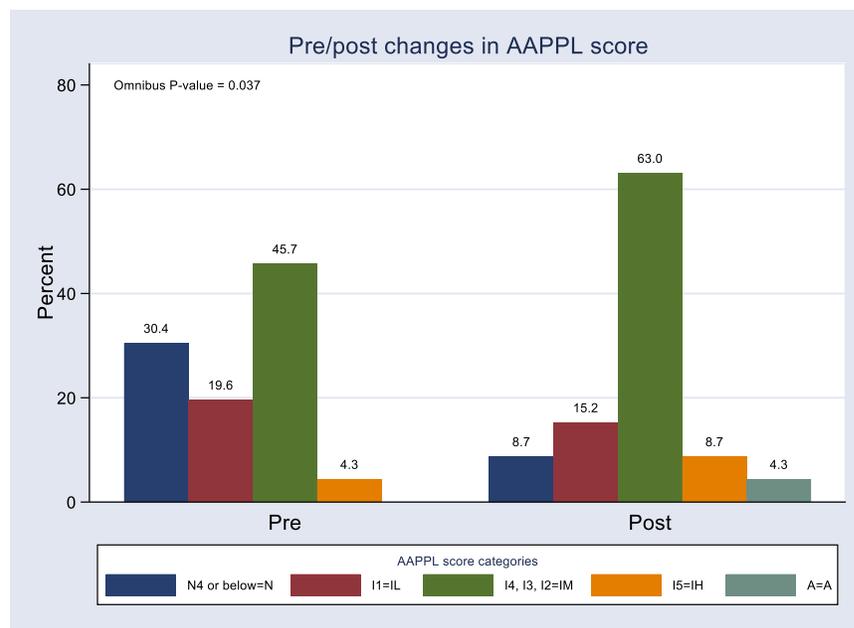
Discrete variables are presented as frequency (percentages) and compared among semester with chi-square test. Correction for clustering within participant (pre/post design) was performed. A two-tailed p-value less than 0.05 was chosen as the threshold for statistically significant. All analyses were performed using STATA 15.1 (StataCorp).

RESULTS

AAPPL Pre- and Post-tests

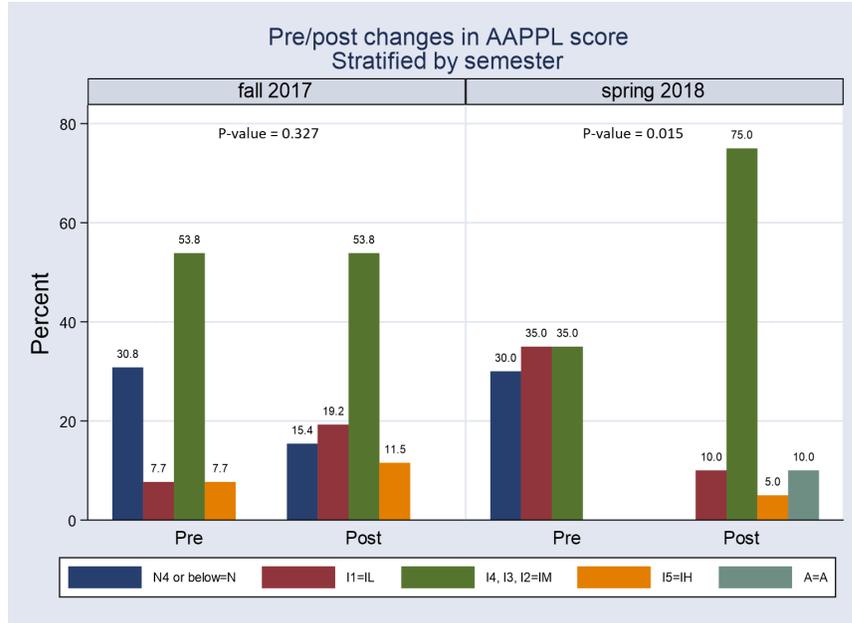
Figure 1 depicts overall improvement in pre-post testing ($p=0.037$). Most notably, there was a decrease in the proportion of students who performed at Novice level (from 30.4 to 8.7%) and an increase in those who attained IM (45.7 to 63%). There were also more students who reached a level above IM (from 4.3 to 13%).

Figure 1.



When comparing pre- and post-test results by semester, we see more progress in semester 2 (Figure 2), despite more students performing at IM or above on the pre-test in fall vs. spring (61.5% and 35%, respectively). On the post-test, 90% of students in spring had reached at least IM, compared to only 65.3% in fall.

Figure 2.



Distribution of TA and LP Sessions

As shown in Table 1, there was not a sizeable difference in the median number of LP sessions between semesters. However, the increase in TA sessions from semester 1 to semester 2 was significant.

Table 1: Frequency of LP and TA Sessions by Semester

	fall 2017 (N = 26)	spring 2018 (N = 20)	Total (N = 46)	p-value
LP				0.199
Median (Q1, Q3)	11.5 (5.0, 13.0)	7.5 (5.0, 11.0)	9.0 (5.0, 12.0)	
TA				0.032
Median (Q1, Q3)	1.5 (0.0, 5.0)	5.0 (2.5, 5.0)	4.0 (0.0, 5.0)	

Student evaluations

44 student participants completed the anonymous survey in Appendix B. Some notable differences emerged between semester 1 and semester 2, as highlighted below. Information on the language being studied was not collected.

Question 3 asked students about their perceived accuracy of their AAPPL rating. Table 2 demonstrates that students in semester 2 felt their AAPPL ratings were more accurate than in semester 1.

Table 2: Student Rating of Accuracy of AAPPL (Q 3)

	Fall (N = 24)	Spring (N = 20)	Total (N = 44)	p- value
Do you feel your rating accurately reflected your oral proficiency at the time you took the AAPPL?				0.017
too low	4 (16.7%)	0 (0.0%)	4 (9.1%)	
just about right	16 (66.7%)	20 (100.0%)	36 (81.8%)	
too high	4 (16.7%)	0 (0.0%)	4 (9.1%)	

Question 4 asked participants to rate the overall effectiveness of the AAPPL, LP and TA interventions. The results presented in Table 3³ show that both groups rated the interventions as more positive than neutral, although students in semester 2 gave more positive ratings overall. No students gave a negative rating to this question.

Table 3: Student Rating of Overall Effectiveness of AAPPL, LP, and TA (Q 4)

	Fall (N = 24)	Spring (N = 20)	Total (N = 44)	p- value
Rate the effectiveness of the interventions (AAPPL at beginning of the semester, 12 hours of Student Language Partners and 5 half hour sessions of TalkAbroad)				0.467
Neutral	11 (45.8%)	7 (35.0%)	18 (40.9%)	
Positive	13 (54.2%)	13 (65.0%)	26 (59.1%)	

³ Responses to all questions asking participants to rate effectiveness on a scale of one to six were grouped as follows: Negative: 1-2; Neutral: 3-4; Positive: 5-6.

Subsequent questions asked students to rate the effectiveness of each intervention individually for promoting oral proficiency and confidence speaking. Although there were no significant differences between semesters, student ratings of both interventions were slightly more positive in semester 2 than in semester 1, as shown in Tables 4-7.

Table 4: Student Rating of Effectiveness of LP for Promoting Oral Proficiency (Q 6)

	Fall (N = 24)	Spring (N = 20)	Total (N = 44)	p-value
Rate the effectiveness of Language Partners for improving oral proficiency.				0.628
Negative	1 (4.2%)	2 (10.0%)	3 (6.8%)	
Neutral	7 (29.2%)	4 (20.0%)	11 (25.0%)	
Positive	16 (66.7%)	14 (70.0%)	30 (68.2%)	

Table 5: Student Rating of Effectiveness of LP for Promoting Confidence (Q 9)

	Fall (N = 24)	Spring (N = 20)	Total (N = 44)	p-value
Rate the effectiveness of Language Partners for promoting your confidence in speaking the target language.				0.901
Negative	1 (4.2%)	1 (5.0%)	2 (4.5%)	
Neutral	10 (41.7%)	7 (35.0%)	17 (38.6%)	
Positive	13 (54.2%)	12 (60.0%)	25 (56.8%)	

Table 6: Student Rating of Effectiveness of TA for Promoting Oral Proficiency (Q 7)

	Fall (N = 24)	Spring (N = 20)	Total (N = 44)	p-value
Rate the effectiveness of Talk Abroad for improving oral proficiency.				0.438
Negative	5 (20.8%)	3 (15.0%)	8 (18.2%)	
Neutral	8 (33.3%)	4 (20.0%)	12 (27.3%)	
Positive	11 (45.8%)	13 (65.0%)	24 (54.5%)	

Table 7: Student Rating of Effectiveness of TA for Promoting Confidence (Q 10)

	Fall (N = 24)	Spring (N = 20)	Total (N = 44)	p-value
Effectiveness of Talk Abroad for promoting your confidence in speaking the target language (Q10)				0.328
Negative	4 (17.4%)	5 (25.0%)	9 (20.9%)	
Neutral	8 (34.8%)	3 (15.0%)	11 (25.6%)	
Positive	11 (47.8%)	12 (60.0%)	23 (53.5%)	

Question 11 asked participants to indicate a preference for TA, LP, or no preference (see Table 8). In response to this question, we observed a preference for LP in semester 1 (70.8%) vs. semester 2 (40%). Conversely, only 12.5% of students in semester 1 preferred TA vs. 40% in semester 2. Roughly one fifth of students in each semester expressed no preference for either format.

Table 8: Overall Preference of LP or TA (Q 11)

	Fall (N = 24)	Spring (N = 20)	Total (N = 44)	p- value
Did you prefer the online aspect of TalkAbroad to the in-person nature Language Partners?				0.075
I prefer Talk Abroad	3 (12.5%)	8 (40.0%)	11 (25.0%)	
I prefer Language Partners	17 (70.8%)	8 (40.0%)	25 (56.8%)	
No preference	4 (16.7%)	4 (20.0%)	8 (18.2%)	

In the open-ended responses to question 14, students explained their reactions to the AAPPL, LP, and TA interventions. A few students made the following negative comments regarding the AAPPL assessment:

- “The AAPPL was only useful because I memorized the questions and knew what the person was going to ask. I didn't feel like it was an authentic means of assessing my speaking/listening skills.”
- “I wasn't totally sure of how to work the site during the test on the first time around and scored terribly speaking little to no Spanish during it and ended up with N4. In the post test I knew how to work the site and spoke quite a bit of Spanish to reply to each question and I only scored one notch higher on the AAPPL scale.”
- “Since my score for AAPPL at the beginning and end of the semester was the same I feel as though I should get a refund for the waste of my money because I didn't learn or grow in this class.”

Students who responded positively to LP referred to the face-to-face environment as “helpful,” “comfortable,” and “easier to communicate.” Comments regarding LP peers indicated that “if you have trouble with a word they can guide you” and “they help students learn quicker and explain what needs to be worked on and how to improve.” Other students noted that it was precisely the comfort level and ease of resorting to English that made the LP program less helpful: “Language Partners wasn't helpful because we ended up speaking in English more than not.” There were negative observations about LP related to difficulty finding time to schedule the sessions, which had limited hours. Some students also referenced the need for more structured activities or topics, noting that it was at times difficult to come up with topics to maintain a one-hour conversation.

One benefit of TA over LP was reported to be the flexible scheduling and convenience of completing TA sessions from home. Students also said they liked the “selection process” of TA, as opposed to LP, where they had limited choices of conversation partners. While some students said TA was “awkward” or “nerve-wracking” at first, most indicated that it became easier with time. Others, however, never became comfortable with this format, and a few students also mentioned technical difficulties in completing the assignments. TA was described as “challenging” because it “puts me outside of my comfort zone” and “forces you to speak.” One student summarized the TA experience as follows: “I really enjoyed hearing the affirmation [...] about my speaking ability; this meant more to me than scores on tests.”

The most frequent negative comment expressed in the survey was that students overall found the time commitment required of both interventions to be excessive, with remarks describing LP and TA as “overkill” or stating that “in class conversation would be more beneficial” and that instructors should “tell people earlier that you are going to make them add extra hours to their schedule.”⁴

DISCUSSION

Oral proficiency assessment

Results from the AAPPL pre-test indicate that 30.4% of students had not reached the Intermediate oral proficiency level after two semesters. This represents a number inconsistent with previous studies that reported most language learners reaching at least IL by that point. By the end of the study, however, 91.3% of participants had moved beyond Novice, indicating that IL should be set as the minimum target level for this course.

Given that previous findings report student progress in the IL to IM range at the end of two years, we might have expected to find more learners moving beyond IM by the end of this fifth-semester course. That only 13% of our students reached IH or above on the post-test might be a result of the larger than expected number of participants beginning the semester at N, or it could be that IM is the ceiling for learners at this level. A larger sample size going forward with this project will allow us to better address this issue.

⁴ Both LP and TA requirements were on the syllabus and discussed from the first day of class.

It was expected that the AAPPL measure, with feedback and instructor support, would encourage learners by helping them understand what their oral communication skill set included and by providing strategies to develop a path for improvement. Student anecdotal comments conveying frustration with the AAPPL assessment were therefore discouraging, as was the fact that 33.4% of students in semester 1 expressed lack of confidence in the accuracy of their AAPPL score. These results remind us that intermediate learners often have unrealistic expectations of oral proficiency progress as well as feelings of insecurity about the level they have achieved after years of study. It is also clear that more attention needs to be paid to students' understanding of progress toward oral proficiency, the AAPPL assessment, and the ACTFL scale.

LP and TA interventions

The significant improvement on the AAPPL in semester 2 vs. semester 1 can be considered in light of the differences in the interventions between semesters. Students in semester 2 participated in more TA sessions and gave more positive ratings on the interventions, overall and individually. While student preferences in semester 2 were evenly distributed between LP and TA, semester 1 students strongly preferred LP. These findings suggest that instructors may have more effectively incorporated the interventions, particularly TA, into the curriculum in semester 2. In semester 2, the grant writers who taught the courses repeatedly explained the rationale behind the interventions and the gains toward oral proficiency that students might make through their participation in them. In addition, the topics that were assigned for discussion in TA were briefly reviewed in class and/or incorporated into the course content. While it cannot be concluded that a higher number of TA sessions was directly responsible for more student progress toward proficiency in semester 2, it is a factor to investigate going forward.

In both semesters, there were students who preferred LP over TA and vice-versa. This preference likely depends on a variety of factors, such as student personality, social skills, and the rapport they may or may not have with their peers who serve as LPs. Therefore, it is expected that we will continue to see variation in preferences of LP and TA, which points to the importance of continuing to integrate both interventions in the program.

As expected, students overall expressed a higher comfort level in face-to-face interactions with peers in the LP program rather than the videoconferencing aspect of TA. This was likely due, at least in part, to

being able to resort to English with a bilingual peer, although some participants did recognize that not being required to use L2 exclusively to communicate potentially hindered their oral proficiency development. The demand to stay on task in the target language apparently varied depending on the peer facilitator in the LP program, some of whom reported to the investigators that they used English to help the students. Some students apparently saw the peer facilitators as having an instructional role, evidenced by student references to the LPs helping them learn, guiding them, or explaining areas in which they needed to improve. Despite constant reminders to LPs that they were conversation partners and not instructors or tutors, some apparently saw themselves in this role and acted accordingly. In the future, LPs and students need to be more effectively prepared for these sessions by understanding their communicative objective and the ways in which peer facilitators' attempts to "guide" or "explain" may not be aligned with the intended outcome of authentic target-language communication.

There is a clear need to continue to integrate the interventions into the course in relevant ways, based on student anecdotal comments that described these sessions as "overkill" or "extra hours." Negative comments regarding the time commitment of the LP and TA programs are particularly discouraging in that they demonstrate that, while students value language learning in the classroom environment, some fail to recognize the importance of communicative tasks beyond the classroom to promote acquisition.

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Data from the AAPPL measure has helped the language studies department at Kutztown University focus on oral proficiency development and what our students can do, which may be different from their academic performance. We have emphasized this learning outcome with students in the program and have begun developing self-assessment rubrics to help learners understand and track their progress along this path. The long-term goal of increased oral proficiency demonstrated by seniors exiting the program will be observable after those students who have participated in this project complete the capstone language course. In the coming years, the department expects to determine whether Advanced Low is a realistic criterion for success for our majors based on official OPI scores collected.

It is encouraging to note both the increase of students reaching at least Intermediate Mid in this study and the decrease of students remaining at Novice level. In the second year of this project, the requirement for Spanish students has been increased to 25 total sessions: 10 LP, 10 TA, and five additional LP or TA sessions, according to student preference. A bigger sample size and increased engagement in authentic target-language communication will help determine if Intermediate Mid is the ceiling for learners in their fifth semester. The increased number of interventions also will help determine their impact on progress toward oral proficiency.

Future investigations might consider shifts in learner attitudes that result from opportunities like LP and TA to engage in authentic communication with speakers of the target language and to correlate these factors with students' oral proficiency progress. An increased desire to interact with the target-language community, in addition to positive attitudes toward the target cultures correlated with increased oral proficiency, would support research by Todd Hernández that found integrative motivation to be a significant predictor of oral proficiency (610). A pre- and post-survey on students' reasons for studying Spanish, their future plans for continuing to acquire and use the language, and the benefits they perceive from learning Spanish is currently under development to administer in forthcoming semesters.

APPENDIX A: STUDENT SURVEY

1. Did you give us permission to use the results of your survey in the study?
 - a. Yes
 - b. NoIf no, you will take this survey on paper and submit it anonymously to one of the researchers.
2. Where did you score on the AAPPL at the beginning of this semester?
 - a. Intermediate Low or below
 - b. Intermediate Mid
 - c. Intermediate High
 - d. Advanced Low and above
3. Do you feel that your rating accurately reflected your oral proficiency at the time you took the AAPPL?
 - a. too low
 - b. just about right
 - c. too high
4. Rate the effectiveness of the interventions (AAPPL with feedback at beginning of the semester, 12 hours of Student Language Partners and 5 half hour sessions of TalkAbroad) used in this semester's conversation class: (1=not at all, 6=very effective).

Please rate the effectiveness of each intervention individually for promoting your oral proficiency:

5. AAPPL at beginning of semester with feedback (1=not at all, 6=very effective)
6. 12 hours of Student Language Partners (1=not at all, 6=very effective)
7. TalkAbroad 5 half hour sessions (1=not at all, 6=very effective)

Please rate the effectiveness of each intervention individually for promoting your **confidence** speaking the target language:

8. AAPPL at beginning of semester with feedback (1=not at all, 6=very effective)
9. 12 hours of Student Language Partners (1=not at all, 6=very effective)
10. TalkAbroad 5 half hour sessions (1=not at all, 6=very effective)

Overall:

11. Did you prefer the online aspect of TalkAbroad to the in-person nature of Student Language Partners?
 - a. I prefer TalkAbroad to Student Language Partners
 - b. I prefer Student Language Partners over TalkAbroad
 - c. No preference - I liked/disliked them equally
12. Do you feel more confident and ready to possibly study abroad and/or converse with native /heritage speakers after TalkAbroad? (1=not at all, 6=very confident)
13. Do you feel more confident and ready to possibly study abroad and/or converse with native/heritage speakers after Student Language Partners? (1=not at all, 6=very confident)
14. Comments/suggestions regarding overall experience with these interventions:

APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORM

You are invited to participate in a research study being conducted through Kutztown University. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before you decide whether or not you want to participate in the study. The University requires that you give your signed agreement if you choose to participate.

This study is being conducted by Dr. Nancy Zimmerman, Dr. Lynn Kutch, Dr. Dawn Slack and Dr. Christine Núñez.

Title of the Study:

The Relationship between Increased Authentic Communication in German and Spanish together with Frequent and Consistent Assessments and Feedback: A Longitudinal Study of Students' Oral Proficiency

Purpose of the Study:

The purpose of this study is to determine if our Spanish and German conversation students' oral proficiency may be increased by adding more opportunities for authentic communication through online and live conversation with native/heritage speakers, in addition to pre and post assessments with timely feedback.

Procedures:

If you agree to participate in this study, we would ask you to do the following things: Allow us to use your AAPPL results (pre and post), your hours completed of TalkAbroad and Student Language Partners, and your post-semester survey to assess the outcomes of using the above mentioned interventions.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

The study has the following risks: No risks.

The benefits to participation are: better understanding your ability to increase your oral proficiency in the target language utilizing authentic communicative strategies to in the target language; and using assessments and feedback to determine the most appropriate strategies to use the language for authentic purposes.

Compensation: N/A**Confidentiality:**

All information will be handled in a confidential manner to the extent provided by law, so that no one will be able to identify you when results are recorded. The records of this study will be kept private. In any report or presentation, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a research study participant.

Voluntary Participation:

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. There is no penalty for not participating. You may discontinue your participation and withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is: Dr. Christine Núñez, nunez@kutztown.edu; campus address: 233 OM B Wing. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later regarding the research study, you may contact the researcher listed above. If you have any questions or concerns about the rights of research participants, please contact the IRB Committee at Kutztown University at 484-646-4167.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the information described above and have received a copy of this information. I have asked questions I had regarding the research study and have received answers to my satisfaction. I am 18 years of age or older and voluntarily consent to participate in this study.

[If participants do not receive a copy of their consent, they should receive an informational sheet with the information provided on the consent.]

Signature of Participant

Date

Thank you for your participation.

Works Cited

- “AAPPL Measure FAQs.” Language Testing International, <https://www.languagetesting.com/aappl-faqs#scores02>.
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