

From Watching to Speaking: Using Virtual Character Videos in Rural EFL Classrooms



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01 INTRODUCTION

1. THE PROBLEM

Developing speaking ability requires regular opportunities to use English. Yet in many rural primary classrooms, large classes and 35-minute lessons make it difficult to give every learner enough time to speak or to be heard individually.

2. THE GAP & OPPORTUNITY

Outside the classroom, opportunities to practise spoken English are also limited. Many students have little or no opportunity to interact with English speakers in daily life, and not every learner has access to a personal digital device. However, internet-connected televisions are commonly available in students' homes.

3. THE RESPONSE

Can a familiar TV become a tool for speaking practice?

The Leo project was developed in response to this question. Teacher-created virtual character videos provide textbook-aligned questions, language models, and planned pauses for students to respond aloud, practise at their own pace, and record their responses for teacher review.

03 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

01 ACCESS

How can teacher-created virtual character videos extend speaking practice for rural primary EFL learners beyond limited classroom time?

02 EXPERIENCE

How do students respond to guided, low-pressure, and self-paced speaking practice with Leo?

03 ASSESSMENT

How can students' recorded responses to Leo support teachers in monitoring and assessing students' speaking performance?

02 THE LEO MODEL



WHO IS LEO?

A friendly virtual speaking partner designed to help students practise English.

TEXTBOOK-ALIGNED

Topics & sentence patterns follow the textbook.

INTERACTIVE

Questions
Models
Planned pauses

ACCESSIBLE

Practise repeatedly at school or at home.

WATCH

LISTEN

RESPOND

REPEAT

Leo asks a question, pauses for the learner's response, and provides a language model when needed.

04 METHODOLOGY



PARTICIPANTS

74 Grade 5 students
2 classes × 37



INTERVENTION

Teacher-created Leo videos
Textbook-aligned speaking



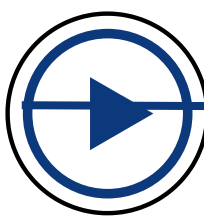
PROCEDURE

Guided speaking practice
Home recording



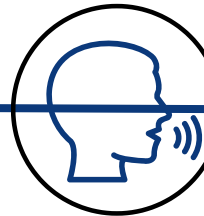
EVIDENCE

Recorded responses
Classroom observations
Teacher review



PREPARE

Leo videos created



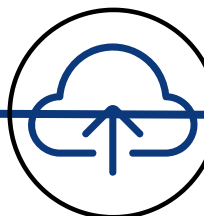
PRACTISE

Students practise with Leo



RECORD

Speaking responses recorded



SUBMIT

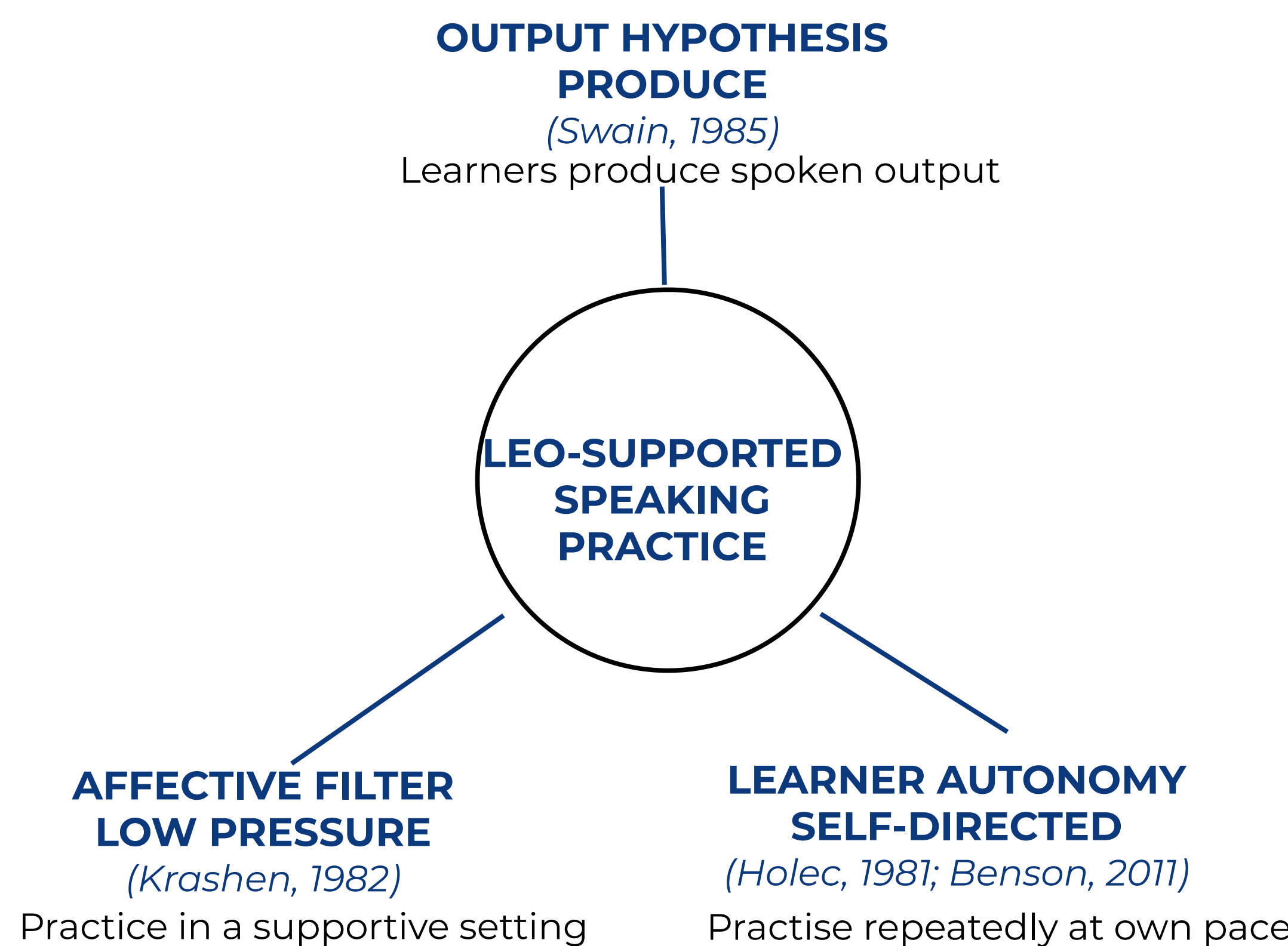
Recordings sent to teacher



REVIEW

Teacher reviews responses

05 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK



06 EMERGING FINDINGS

**WILLINGNESS
MORE WILLING**
to speak

**REPETITION
MORE PRACTICE**
at home

**PRONUNCIATION
CLEARER SPEECH**
when speaking

**VISIBLE EVIDENCE
RECORDED RESPONSES**
for teacher review



Recorded Zoom interaction showing a learner practising spoken English with Leo.

07 IMPLICATIONS

EXTEND

Speaking practice beyond classroom time

SUPPORT

Low-pressure, repeated practice at home

MAKE VISIBLE

Recorded responses for teacher review

08 TAKE-HOME MESSAGE

Virtual character videos can extend speaking practice beyond the classroom — making practice more accessible, repeatable, and visible to teachers.

WATCH → SPEAK → RECORD → REVIEW

REFERENCES

Swain, M. (1985). Communicative competence: Some roles of comprehensible input and comprehensible output in its development.
Krashen, S. D. (1982). Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition.
Holec, H. (1981). Autonomy and Foreign Language Learning.
Benson, P. (2011). Teaching and Researching Autonomy.

SEE LEO IN ACTION

Scan to watch a sample speaking-practice video

