Review of: "Enhancing Academic Spoken English Skills Through an Immersive Virtual World: A Pilot Study Focusing on Motivation, Confidence, and Teacher Presence"

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The article "Enhancing Academic Spoken English Skills Through an Immersive Virtual World: A Pilot Study Focusing on Motivation, Confidence, and Teacher Presence" by Elaine Hoter, Hannah Azulay, and Manal Yazbak explores the innovative use of immersive virtual environments for language learning. Specifically, the study focuses on Englehaven Island, built on the OpenSim platform, as a tool for improving spoken English skills. This approach addresses a common challenge in language education: providing authentic and engaging opportunities for speaking practice beyond the traditional classroom. By using a mixed-methods research design that combines quantitative pre- and post-assessments with qualitative data from questionnaires and interviews, the study offers a comprehensive evaluation of the effectiveness of virtual environments in fostering language proficiency.

The findings of the study are promising, highlighting significant improvements in fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar. Students reported feeling more motivated and confident when practicing English through their avatars, benefiting from the gamified and immersive nature of the platform. The inclusion of teacher presence within this virtual world further enhanced the learning experience, bridging the gap between traditional instruction and innovative, tech-driven approaches.

However, there are areas where the study could be further strengthened. The sample size, while sufficient for a pilot study, remains limited (41 participants, with 28 completing the assessments). A larger and more diverse participant pool would improve the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the study focuses primarily on short-term gains and does not address the long-term retention of speaking skills. Future research could explore whether the improvements achieved through virtual environments are sustained over time. Furthermore, the study does not include a direct comparison with traditional language learning methods. Incorporating a control group using conventional approaches would provide a clearer perspective on the relative effectiveness of immersive virtual worlds.