

Article

The Effectiveness of Asynchronous Learning Community on ESL Learners' Skills Acquisition

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Abstract: This study investigated the impact of an asynchronous learning community (ALC) on English as a second language (ESL) learners' skills acquisition. The ALC was designed by incorporating the community of inquiry (CoI) framework, which highlights cognitive, social, and teaching presence. The participants of this study consisted of 24 ESL learners and four ESL educators, and they were selected using a purposive sampling method. Focus groups and one-to-one semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather data. The responses were analysed using thematic analysis. The results showed that opinion-based discussions play an essential role in enhancing learners' skills, particularly their higher-order thinking skills. The study also identified some challenges ESL learners encountered in the ALC, such as improper time management skills, lack of participation, and a sense of isolation. Therefore, some effective strategies were proposed to overcome these challenges. The study recommends that the ALC approach that integrates the CoI framework should be embedded in the ESL curriculum to develop learners' skills and foster a sense of community in the virtual learning environment. This approach can lead to better outcomes for learners in terms of skill acquisition and their ability to succeed in academic and professional settings.

Keywords: Asynchronous learning community; English as a second language; community of inquiry; learning skills; social media

Introduction

The Covid-19 outbreak has impacted all walks of our lives, including the education system. Educators and learners were imposed to continue the teaching and learning process in the remote learning environment during the pandemic. This situation eventually led to a new trajectory in the education system, which is asynchronous learning was developed as an attempt to create effective and meaningful learning, especially with the advancement of social media.

An asynchronous learning community (ALC) is a group of students who learn collectively but not necessarily simultaneously. They come together based on a common component, such as a shared objective, subject matter, or learning environment (Heick, 2021). Scholars advocate that the notion of community is a social concept that entails interaction, collaboration, sharing, and trust in working towards common goals (Andreatos, 2009; Garrison, 2014; Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2014). The proliferation of technology and the widespread availability of internet access have led to the emergence of a virtual learning community (Smith et al., 2017). Fisher et al., (2014) point out that the use of Web 2.0 technologies, particularly social media, has facilitated the formation of ALC.

Heick (2021) proposes that an effective ALC allows interaction, reflection, and a sense of belonging. However, it is essential to highlight that educators continue to face challenges in developing an interactive

teaching and learning process in the virtual environment (Nussbaum et al., 2021), and this is not exceptional in the ESL context. Despite the considerable amount of research on the adoption of ALC in higher education, there is still a dearth of studies on how to establish an effective ALC in the ESL classroom. Therefore, this study aims to answer the following research questions:

- i. How does the asynchronous learning community that incorporates a community of inquiry enhance ESL learners' skills?
- ii. What are the challenges faced by ESL learners and educators in the asynchronous learning community?

The results of this research are expected to provide valuable insights into the potential of ALC as a teaching and learning approach in the ESL context and inform educators on how to effectively incorporate ALC in their instructional practices.

Literature Review

1. Asynchronous Learning Community

Asynchronous learning has become increasingly important in ensuring the continuity and effectiveness of the teaching and learning process, particularly during and after the pandemic. It provides learners with the flexibility to access course materials, engage in peer and teacher interactions, and share ideas at their own pace, allowing them to take greater responsibility for their learning in this environment (Heick, 2021). However, research suggests that the development of asynchronous learning can be challenging due to the limitations of text-based interactions, which may result in lower levels of engagement and motivation among learners (Nussbaum et al., 2021).

Research indicates that ALC can help to overcome learning barriers such as physical distance and low self-esteem (Yau et al., 2018), and they are overcome through sharing knowledge and opinions, building new ideas, solving problems, making decisions, and collaborating through frequent interactions (Bates, 2014; Gannon-Leary & Fontainha, 2008; Heick, 2021)

Creating a cohesive and inclusive learning community is key to promoting productivity in the ALC (Heick, 2021). As highlighted by Fisher et al. (2014), educators play a crucial role in achieving a sustainable community by ensuring that all learners participate in the discussions, and that none are left behind. Failure to do so may lead to fragmentation within the community, impeding the learning process. Therefore, educators must steer learners towards the intended path of the community and foster a sense of togetherness and collaboration.

Recent studies show that ALC poses several constraints. Alivo et al. (2022), who investigated barriers to learning through an asynchronous medium among radiologic technology students, found that the students were disappointed because they felt that their opinions that were shared in the asynchronous learning platform were ignored, and no action was taken in response to their feedback. Furthermore, they expressed concern about the potential negative impact on their skill acquisition through the asynchronous learning platform.

Gannon-Leary & Fontainha (2008) posit that virtual communication poses a challenge, especially when dealing with large groups, and can result in the breakdown of the community due to poor leadership and a lack of interest in specific topics or domains. Therefore, educators need to monitor, facilitate, and guide participants in the community to achieve their intended goals (Fisher et al., 2014). Gannon-Leary & Fontainha (2008) further suggest that the accessibility and acceptance of an educational technology tool that acts as a medium to gather all learners is the primary factor in building an efficient learning community.

According to Al-Said (2015), the primary challenge in creating quality asynchronous learning in the ESL classroom is producing engaging content. Inadequate content design, either too narrow or long content may hinder learners' comprehension and engagement. Studies indicate that limited technical support and resources are also significant challenges that impede learners' involvement in the asynchronous learning environment (Al-Said, 2015; Alivo et al., 2022).

2. Community of Inquiry and Asynchronous Learning

This study incorporates the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework to investigate the effectiveness of ALC on ESL learners' skills acquisition. CoI that comprises three overlapping components: social presence, cognitive presence, and teaching presence (Garrison et al., 2000), has been widely used with the integration of technology, including both synchronous and asynchronous learning (Anderson, 2017). The success of CoI is achieved through collaboration and engagement among teachers-learners, learners-learners, and learners-content (Anderson, 2017; Garrison et al., 2000). Garrison et al. (2000) highlight that the main objectives of CoI are to facilitate knowledge sharing, collaboration, and critical thinking to solve problems and make decisions.

Literature suggests that the application of CoI in the teaching and learning process promotes meaningful and continuous online discussion (Anderson, 2017; Junus et al., 2021). Recent studies show that CoI has been widely adopted by researchers in education across the globe (Castellanos-Reyes, 2020), and the framework is relevant to building an online community (Fiock, 2020). Besides, Alavi and Taghizadeh (2013) explain that the CoI framework outlines the necessary behaviours and processes for knowledge creation and collaboration in the asynchronous learning environment. The framework also explains experiences in online learning that are still being researched and developed.

However, the major challenge of employing the CoI framework is motivating students to participate in online discussion forums in collaborative learning environments. This challenge is partly due to less participation and a lack of understanding among learners regarding their role as members of a group (Junus et al., 2021).

Ideally, ALC on the CoI framework could potentially enhance learners' participation in the community through cognitive, social, and teaching presence. Research on the application of CoI in the area of ALC is currently limited, especially in the ESL context. Thus, this study aims to address the research gap by looking into the impact of ALC on ESL learners' skills acquisition by integrating the CoI framework.

Methodology

This study was carried out among ESL learners taking Academic English. This course is a general English, and it is designed to equip learners with the necessary language skills and expose them to critical thinking skills. The participants of this study learned Academic English through social media, which acts as an ALC platform to engage in shared activities and discussions after the synchronous lesson. Some of the activities that were conducted in the ALC platform were open discussion of specific topics, collaborative essay writing, individual oral presentation video uploads, and feedback sharing.

1. Sample

The participants in this study consisted of 24 ESL learners and four ESL educators who were chosen using purposive sampling. According to Creswell (2014), this purposive sampling method is commonly used in a qualitative study in which the researcher conceptualises the sampling procedure with a specific plan. In this study, the idea was to examine the effectiveness of ALC on ESL learners' skills acquisition. This notion aligns with Neuman's (2014) statement that purposive sampling is suitable for an in-depth investigation to gain a better understanding of specific cases. Besides, it also has the potential to increase the generalisability of the research findings (Jager et al., 2017).

2. Research Instrument and Data Analysis

In this study, three focus group interviews were conducted separately based on learners' English proficiency levels, such as advanced, intermediate, and beginner, to investigate how ALC, incorporating the CoI framework facilitates ESL learners' skills acquisition. Additionally, four educators were invited for a one-to-one semi-structured interview to share their perceptions of ESL learners' skills acquisition and challenges of using the ALC.

The focus group interviews (eight ESL learners in a group) lasted about 40 to 50 minutes as suggested by Creswell (2014), while the one-to-one interview sessions took about ten to fifteen minutes. The interviews were conducted through Webex, a video conference. The interviewees' responses were recorded

and analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) procedure of thematic analysis. All the participants were ensured of their confidentiality. Hence, the ESL learners were labelled from S1 to S24, while ESL educators were labelled from T1 to T4.

Results and Discussion

1. Research Question 1: How Does the Asynchronous Learning Community that Incorporates a Community of Inquiry Enhance ESL Learners' Skills?

The researchers chose Braun and Clark's (2006) thematic analysis procedure to answer the first research question. The themes from the collected data were developed based on the CoI framework: Cognitive presence, social presence, and teaching presence. Table 1 displays ESL learners' perception of how ALC impacts their acquisition of necessary skills. It is crucial to highlight that cognitive presence, social presence, and teaching presence in the ALC contribute significantly to ESL learners' skills acquisition.

Table 1. ESL Learners' views on the effectiveness of ALC towards their skills acquisition

Themes	Frequency*	Percentage Frequency
Question and answer sessions	18	8.78
Explore new information	20	9.75
Evaluate peers' feedback	13	6.34
Disagree or agree with peers' opinions	31	15.12
Self-testing	16	7.80
Cognitive Presence (Total)	98	47.80
Share personal experience	10	4.87
Share knowledge	19	9.26
Create a sense of belonging	9	4.39
Collaborate with peers	14	6.83
Authentic communication	18	8.78
Social Presence (Total)	70	34.14
Assist peers in the discussion	14	6.83
Delegate tasks to group members	5	2.43
Encourage peers to participate	7	3.41
Summarise discussion	11	5.36
Teaching Presence (Total)	37	18.05

*The frequency does not reflect the total number of participants.

Cognitive Presence

Table 1 clearly illustrates how ALC that incorporates CoI impacts ESL learners' skills acquisition. Cognitive presence (47.8%) plays an important role in enhancing ESL learners' skills, followed by social (34.14%) and teaching presence (18.05%). Most interviewees state that frequent discussion that involves argument and agreement (15.12%) through ALC was the main contributor to their skills acquisition. A beginner learner indicated:

"Discussion in the asynchronous was very useful. It gives us a chance to share our ideas and experience on current issues. We also have a chance to debate about it that helps us to think critically" (S18).

A similar view was also shared by a proficient learner:

"Asynchronous learning is an effective medium. The discussion that allows argument increases our higher-order thinking skills. Besides, continuous discussion helps us to think of a possible solution to the topic of our discussion. For example, the issue of traffic congestion" (S5).

According to Purnawarman et al. (2016), learners get engaged in interaction due to their enthusiasm and inclination to achieve their learning goals. The researchers concur with Purnawarman et al. (2016) that

learners' participation in interaction is related to cognitive processes, such as how to participate in a task and develop knowledge and skills. Purnawarman et al. (2016) further explain that learners who possess self-regulatory skills and a sense of responsibility are more likely to engage actively in learning tasks.

In this study, discussions of various topics related to current issues in the ALC eventually triggers learners' cognitive skill to share their opinions. Most of the interviewees, regardless of their English proficiency level, indicate that explaining the background of an issue, highlighting current strategies to solve problems, and proposing possible solutions have enhanced their higher-order thinking skills. A proficient learner stated:

“Yes, I agree with him. Asynchronous learning is a good platform to share views and experiences. I know how to share relevant information, which helps my higher-order thinking skills” (S4).

The findings reveal that cognitive presence in the ALC is essential in creating a meaningful discussion. Learners could share views, justify arguments, provide explanations, and give examples pertinent to the topic of their discussions. These activities eventually help learners' creative and critical thinking skills. The results align with Garrison et al. (2000) that cognitive presence has the potential in developing learners' higher-order thinking skills.

Although cognitive presence in the ALC contributes substantially towards the development of ESL learners' skills, feedback evaluation (6.34%) and self-testing (7.80%) appeared to have less impact on ESL learners' skills acquisition. The interviewees expressed their difficulties in evaluating peers' opinions as they were afraid that criticism would affect one another relationships. A proficient learner indicated:

“It is not easy to correct my team members' views. Sometimes, they feel offended that they have stopped contributing their ideas or even talking to us. That's why, as a leader of the group, I simply take in their suggestions without giving any comment and present it in class” (S2).

The interviewees also shared that busy schedules usually hinder them from examining their own opinions. Hence, sometimes their views were rejected due to their irrelevancy. An intermediate learner expressed:

“I really like learning through asynchronous, but sometimes a lot of assignments and quizzes from other courses stop me from posting ideas. Honestly, I didn't have time to interact in the asynchronous environment” (S15).

ESL learners who advocate that peer evaluation and self-testing develop their skills explained that these two activities allow them to think of logical and feasible solutions before proposing them to the group members, which inevitably shape them as problem solvers. A proficient learner indicated:

“Checking peers' essay writing actually enhanced my knowledge and at the same time I was also able to correct and suggest a better way of writing their essay” (S1).

Social Presence

Social presence in the ALC affects, positively ESL learners' skills acquisition. Table 1 depicts that knowledge sharing (9.36%) develops ESL learners' learning skills. Most interviewees stated that sharing information in the group and perceiving the shared knowledge enhance their vocabulary and writing skills. A proficient learner indicated:

“Posting information in the asynchronous learning platform enhances my language skills, especially writing and vocabulary. I improved my grammar and managed to compose good sentences, and I also learned new words from others' posts” (S4).

The researchers agree with Purnawarman et al. (2016) that posting information regularly in the asynchronous learning environment, eventually develops one's writing skills. In this study, frequent posts help learners construct error-free sentences and employ new words while composing a paragraph.

Table 1 also displays that authentic communication (8.78%) and collaboration (6.83%) influence ESL learners' skills acquisition. The researchers support Soto and Waigandt's (2017) argument that learners tend to learn more effectively when their lessons incorporate real-life situations. The results of this study emphasise the importance of active collaboration and authentic communication among ESL learners in relation to acquiring skills in oral presentations, report writing, and job interviews. These skills are deemed essential in today's working world, as they are necessary for success in various professional settings.

“Activities like report writing with team members and job interview role-play give authentic exposure. I believe more activities like these will help us to write and perform well when we start our first job. Also, viewing peers' IOP videos gives me new insights to improve my own presentation” (S1).

The responses from the focus group interviews indicated that the instructional design incorporating genuine scenarios such as report writing, presentation skills, and role-playing in the ALC improves ESL learners' language skills. The researchers concur with Too's (2017) assertion that equipping learners with the necessary skills for real-world situations will enable them to perform proficiently in an actual work environment. This includes skills such as effective communication, problem-solving, teamwork, and higher-order thinking skills, which are crucial for success in the workplace.

Although the impact of a sense of belonging in the ALC on ESL learners' acquisition was not a huge significant (4.39%), some learners indicated that the recognition of their presence in the group galvanises them to contribute to the learning community. A beginner indicated:

“I feel accepted when my team members understand my opinions. Because of that, I don't feel afraid or shy to share my opinions” (S21).

The response aligns with the idea proposed by Peacock and Cowan (2019) that learners are motivated to engage in learning activities when they feel connected with their peers in the group. Additionally, it was found that learners feel more confident and comfortable interacting with others when their presence is valued, and they feel like a part of the group.

This result matches Peacock and Cowan's (2019) notion that peers' and teachers' encouragement will attract learners to join actively in the learning activities, which eventually build their sense of belonging. The results also showed that a sense of belonging to the group assists and shapes learners to be autonomous learners through active participation in the learning community. A beginner learner stated:

“I have a good relationship with my team members. Because of that, I feel free to post my ideas and communicate with them easily” (S20).

Teaching Presence

The findings of this study showed that ESL learners who received support from peers, eventually developed their learning skills (6.83%). A beginner stated:

“I know that I am quite weak in English, but the help from my friends make me think outside of the box, especially when we work together for writing activities” (S22).

The results are aligned with Garrison et al.'s (2000) statement that teaching presence in the community does not only mean for a teacher but anyone in the community who is capable to support and assist other learners. This shows that peers' support in the ALC enhances ESL learners' creative thinking.

In this study, it was found that peers' assistance in the ALC discussions helped them take responsibility for their own learning and come up with innovative solutions, which fundamentally developed their collaborative skills. An intermediate learner said:

“My team members helped me, especially in writing activities. They showed me if the content in the essay was explained well, and they also helped in my grammar” (S16).

A proficient learner stated:

“My team members came up with a lot of ideas with strong arguments during the brainstorming session. Therefore, we managed to design an attractive and informative infographic to be presented in the class. Without the teamwork, this would be impossible” (S5).

The results aligned with Chandra and Palvia’s (2021) argument that peer-to-peer support in the virtual environment improves learners’ academic performance and teamwork skills.

It is also crucial to highlight that delegating tasks to group members (2.43%) and encouraging members to participate in the ALC (3.41%) play the least role in ESL learners’ skills acquisition. Most interviewees explained that they had difficulty assigning tasks and motivating team members to participate in the ALC. An intermediate learner stated:

“Not all members participate in the learning. Some of our team members don’t participate at all, even though we told them to contribute at least a little bit. So, we will finish our work without them” (S17).

This result is consistent with Junus et al. (2021). The result shows that most ESL learners are not prepared to be capable leaders and facilitators.

Nevertheless, some of the interviewees’ responses demonstrate that peers’ motivation stimulates passive learners to involve actively in the ALC. As a result, learners become more self-directed in their learning, which is an important skill for success in education and professional contexts. An intermediate learner indicated:

“My team leader encourages me a lot to share my opinions although I do make several mistakes. Now, I can follow the discussions, and I don’t feel afraid” (S9).

2. Research Question 2: What are the Challenges Faced by ESL Learners and Educators in the Asynchronous Learning Community?

Data were gathered from both ESL learners and educators to answer the second research question. In general, the use of ALC, incorporating the CoI framework poses several challenges to ESL learners. The main concern most of the learners showed was the difficulty of being involved in the discussion due to their tight schedules, such as meeting the assignment deadlines and preparing for quizzes and assessments of other courses. A beginner said:

“I have a lot of assignments from other courses to complete and my English teacher also gives us a lot of activities in the asynchronous learning, which I really could not cope with” (S19).

This is consistent with Sornasekaran et al.’s (2020) study that improper time management has become a significant barrier among learners to engage in virtual learning. The researchers also advocate that a busy schedule has refrained learners from participating in the learning activities or sometimes prolonged the discussion (Hollister et al., 2022) in the ALC by sharing their ideas very late. As a result, ALC becomes ineffective as it slows down interactions among the learners. In the long run, learners will be disengaged from the ALC and lose their sense of belonging. In other words, the absence of social presence will cause fragmentation in the ALC.

A dominant role in the community also impedes the contributions of other learners. It was identified that not all learners in the asynchronous community were involved actively in the discussions. Some learners tend to be silent during discussions. They acquire knowledge and understanding by observing peers’ conversations without contributing many ideas. An intermediate learner shared:

“I don’t really enjoy sharing my views because most of the time, they take their friends’ ideas. But, one thing I like from the asynchronous learning is the information shared in the group was very helpful, especially in my writing skill” (S13).

A proficient learner stated:

“Asynchronous learning is effective, but sometimes only the same people communicate in the platform. It is difficult to get others involved in the discussion” (S3).

Besides, the lack of educators’ involvement in the ALC has become another challenge for ESL learners. An intermediate learner indicated:

“My English teacher did not really involve in our virtual discussion. She actually appointed a leader for each group. Sometimes, we receive more corrections of our posts from the leader than the teacher. And....., I’m not really happy with this” (S12).

This result aligns with Kaur’s (2022) findings that ESL learners could not accept criticism and corrections made by peers. A similar result was also found in Muniandy and Shuib’s (2021) study that low-proficient learners had difficulties communicating with high-proficient learners in the virtual environment. The researchers concur with Sornasekaran et al.’s (2020) recommendation that learners should collaborate and get assistance from peers for an effective learning process because many may face challenges and feel stressed in online learning after shifting from face-to-face learning.

The result of this study aligns with Meşe and Sevilen (2021), who indicate that lack of sufficient feedback and instructions from the teachers demotivate learners from participating in online learning. The findings of this study are also in tandem with Garrison’s (2014) view that teachers’ presence in the learning community is essential to assist and motivate learners to interact and engage during the teaching and learning process. The present results suggest that teachers’ presence is required to increase the social presence in the community.

In the one-to-one interviews with educators, the researchers identified that heavy teaching load and time constraints impede the adoption of ALC in the ESL classroom. ESL educators explained that factors such as high teaching hours, large class sizes, the need to prepare teaching and learning materials, set examination questions, and attend to administrative tasks hindered them from giving full commitment to the ALC. Consequently, they find it challenging to implement ALC in all their classes because ALC requires careful observation and teachers’ presence to sustain the ALC. A teacher stated:

“In my class, asynchronous learning community is proven to be effective in enhancing learners’ skills. Therefore, it is better if we are given classes with a small number of students so that we can apply them effortlessly in all our classes” (T2).

Besides, responses from the ESL educators showed that motivating students to participate in the ALC has become another challenge among educators. A teacher stated:

“Although I embed the ESL curriculum in asynchronous learning to achieve the learning goals, some students participate, either passively or not at all in the online learning. This actually affects other students’ learning process” (T1).

Active participation from all students in the ALC is crucial for promoting continuous learning. The disengagement of even a small number of individuals can cause a disruptive effect on the entire teaching and learning process. This underscores the importance of fostering a strong sense of community and engagement within the ALC environment.

ESL educators also expressed their apprehension that learners who simply share information from external websites without fully comprehending it might not develop the necessary skills for learning. The learners tend to copy information from web search engines such as Google on the topic of discussion to post

it in the group. Hence, some of the information shared by students was deemed irrelevant to the topic at hand.

Recommendation

Based on the challenges faced by ESL learners and educators towards using ALC in the ESL classroom, the researchers proposed several strategies to sustain ALC. First, ESL learners and educators should be given adequate training in time management. This is very important to develop a meaningful learning process and sustain learners and educators' well-being. Besides, higher education institutions should pay attention to and revise teachers' workload and learners' formative and summative assessments so that both learners and educators can utilise the ALC to meet learning purposes and increase professional skills.

Next, the researchers found out that extrinsic motivation (e.g. achieving objectives of the course) alone does not boost learners' interactions. Teachers' presence in the ALC, such as giving clear instructions and adequate feedback may increase ESL learners' participation in the ALC. According to Richardson et al. (2015), teachers' presence, which is known as observable teaching practices is considered to be a crucial factor that determines students' motivation in a virtual classroom. Therefore, teachers should monitor and give necessary remarks in the ALC despite having peers to assist other learners. The researchers agree that learners who receive adequate training and clear instructions from their educators in using an educational technology tool will participate actively during the teaching and learning process (Shea et al., 2005).

Besides, involving educators can extend the longevity of ALC. The research found that a lack of communication from some learners led to a fragmented and inactive community, disrupting the exchange of knowledge within the group. Learners often delayed sharing their ideas, and some even neglected their responsibilities. Hence, educators still play a significant role in asynchronous learning environments, especially when dealing with low-proficiency learners. Their guidance and involvement are necessary to facilitate communication and ensure active participation.

The researchers also recommend that course designers and ESL educators should provide learning activities that are relevant to the course objectives and learners' proficiency levels. This initiative is necessary to encourage active participation from learners and prevent anyone from feeling excluded from the community. Since the participants of this study are from one university, it is recommended that future studies should involve a larger and more diverse sample from both public and private universities to examine the efficacy of ALC that incorporates the CoI framework in ESL classrooms.

Conclusion

In this 21st-century era, asynchronous learning has become an important medium for connecting with learners. As such, in this study, when ESL learners were interviewed about their perceptions of the use of ALC in the teaching and learning of ESL courses, most of them indicated the effectiveness of this tool in enhancing their learning skills.

The findings of this study revealed that ESL that is taught through ALC, incorporating the CoI framework gives an opportunity for learners to develop their skills such as higher-order thinking, writing, communication, and autonomous skills. The results showed that cognitive presence (e.g. opinion-based discussion), social presence (e.g. knowledge sharing and authentic communication), and teaching presence (e.g. peers' assistance) in the ALC promote learners' learning skills.

However, it was identified that some learners struggle in learning through ALC due to time constraints, the presence of dominant members, and the lack of teacher involvement in the asynchronous group discussion. Therefore, appropriate strategies should be implemented to overcome learners' challenges. For example, revising ESL learners' and educators' workload, encouraging learners' participation, and others.

This study provides valuable insights for ESL educators and course designers regarding the integration of ALC in ESL courses. This is because the application of ALC promotes higher-order thinking skills and self-directed learning and develops learners' language skills. The results demonstrate that ESL learners can take ownership of their learning in the ALC environment. Therefore, higher education institutions should invest in creating an effective ALC platform.

Moreover, the results of this study offer guidance to ESL educators on how to develop a successful and meaningful ALC in the ESL classroom. It is evident that the incorporation of the CoI in the ALC platform has the potential to enhance learners' skills, even when communication is limited to a 'read and write' platform. Overall, this study highlights the importance of ALC in ESL education and suggests that implementing ALC that integrates the CoI framework can lead to improved outcomes for learners.

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