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## Exploring L2 pronunciation development in an advanced English course in Argentina: Insights from a mock trial simulation and its potential across diverse contexts

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**Resumen:** En este estudio se investigó el uso de una tarea de simulación de juicio para mejorar la conciencia sobre la pronunciación en una segunda lengua (L2) y las habilidades comunicativas en un curso de desarrollo lingüístico en Argentina. Reflejando el cambio hacia enfoques comunicativos en la pedagogía de L2, la tarea involucró a los estudiantes en un contexto realista, fomentando un enfoque incidental en aspectos de pronunciación como la inteligibilidad, el ritmo y el acento, al mismo tiempo que desarrollaban sus habilidades argumentativas y persuasivas. Participaron diecinueve estudiantes argentinos de nivel avanzado en L2, quienes proporcionaron comentarios a través de un cuestionario evaluativo. Los resultados mostraron que los estudiantes percibieron mejoras en la claridad y fluidez de la pronunciación durante discusiones complejas y reportaron mayor confianza para articular ideas de manera persuasiva. No obstante, identificaron desafíos como las limitaciones de tiempo y las dificultades para integrar la retroalimentación en su desempeño. El estudio concluyó que las tareas de simulación proporcionan una práctica lingüística significativa y auténtica, y pueden mejorar efectivamente la pronunciación en L2. Asimismo, destacó la importancia de realizar más investigaciones sobre su impacto a largo plazo y propuso integrar más actividades centradas en la pronunciación y retroalimentación estructurada en las diferentes fases de la simulación para fomentar una mejora sostenida. Además, el estudio sugirió adaptar estas tareas a contextos donde las barreras culturales y las particularidades individuales dificulten el hablar en público. En estos entornos, los estudiantes podrían beneficiarse al desarrollar mayor confianza, mejorar sus habilidades argumentativas y lograr una pronunciación clara e inteligible.

**Palabras claves:** simulación de juicio- conciencia de pronunciación en L2- práctica lingüística auténtica- percepciones de los estudiantes- adaptabilidad de tareas en contextos diversos.

**Abstract:** This study investigated the use of a mock trial simulation task to enhance awareness of L2 pronunciation and communication skills in a language development course in Argentina. Reflecting the shift toward communicative approaches in L2 pedagogy, the task immersed students in a realistic context, encouraging incidental focus on pronunciation aspects like intelligibility, rhythm, and stress, while also developing their argumentative and persuasive skills. Nineteen advanced L2 Argentinian learners participated and provided feedback through an evaluative questionnaire. The results showed that students perceived improvements in pronunciation clarity and fluency during complex discussions and reported increased confidence in articulating ideas persuasively. However, challenges included time constraints and difficulties integrating feedback into their performance. The study concluded that simulation tasks provide meaningful, authentic language practice and can effectively enhance L2 pronunciation. It highlighted the importance of further research on their long-term impact and advocated for integrating more pronunciation-focused activities and structured feedback throughout the different phases of the simulation to support sustained improvement. Additionally, the study suggested adapting such tasks for contexts where cultural barriers and individual idiosyncrasies make public speaking challenging. In these settings, students could benefit from developing greater confidence, improving their argumentative skills, and achieving clear, intelligible pronunciation.

**Keywords:** mock trial simulation- L2 pronunciation awareness- authentic language practice- student perceptions- task adaptability across diverse contexts.

## Introduction

In recent years, there has been a paradigm shift in second language (L2) pronunciation teaching, moving away from traditional methods focused solely on accuracy toward more communicative approaches that prioritize intelligibility and interaction. This shift reflects a growing recognition that language learners benefit from tasks replicating real-world communication, enabling them to use language in dynamic and meaningful ways (Derwing & Munro, 2015; Luchini, 2005). Pronunciation

teaching, once confined to drills and mechanical repetition, is now more integrated into communicative contexts where learners can practice pronunciation in conjunction with other linguistic and cognitive skills, fostering a more holistic approach to language learning (Levis, 2020). As a result, pedagogical models increasingly emphasize the importance of teaching pronunciation in ways that promote both linguistic-intercultural competence and communicative effectiveness (Luchini, 2024).

Simulation tasks align closely with this modern approach to pronunciation teaching, as they provide learners with opportunities to engage in authentic communication that mimics real-life scenarios (Devos et al., 2021). These tasks require students to handle complex, interdisciplinary discussions, which push them to focus on the clarity, rhythm, and stress of their spoken language in order to be understood. Celce-Murcia et al. (2010) argue that interactive activities like simulations and debates foster the integration of pronunciation skills with overall communicative competence, including intercultural aspects. Such tasks prioritize intelligibility and the persuasive articulation of ideas while shifting learners' focus from isolated sounds to the broader communicative functions of speech. This approach aligns with contemporary trends in L2 pronunciation instruction (Thomson & Derwing, 2014).

This article provides an in-depth exploration of the use of simulation tasks in the L2 classroom, focusing on their role in enhancing both pronunciation and communicative skills. It begins with a review of the theoretical background surrounding task-based language learning and its application to pronunciation teaching. The methodology section outlines the context and participants, along with the data collection methods used to gather student feedback on the simulation task. Following this, the results and discussion sections examine the perceived benefits of using simulations to enhance pronunciation, as well as the challenges and limitations encountered. The paper concludes with recommendations for further research, particularly on the long-term impacts of simulation tasks on L2 pronunciation and communication development. It emphasizes the importance of understanding how such tasks contribute to sustained improvements in learners' intelligibility, fluency, and confidence over time. Additionally, the article highlights the potential benefits of implementing simulation tasks in diverse educational contexts. In these settings, students could gain significant advantages, including increased self-confidence in public speaking and the ability to articulate ideas persuasively.

### *Theoretical Background*

Simulation tasks are a powerful tool (Levine, 2004) for enhancing pronunciation in second language (L2) learning because they combine the need for clear and accurate pronunciation with meaningful, contextualized communication. By placing learners in real-world, interactive scenarios such as mock trials, debates, or role plays, these tasks create an authentic demand for clear pronunciation to ensure intelligibility and effective communication.

The shift from a nativeness paradigm to the intelligibility principle represents a substantial evolution in pronunciation teaching (Levis, 2005). Traditionally, the goal was to achieve native-like pronunciation, but this approach has been increasingly criticized as unrealistic and unnecessary (Thomson, 2014). The intelligibility principle, on the other hand, argues that effective communication should be the primary focus, emphasizing clear segmental (vowels and consonants) and suprasegmental (stress, rhythm, and intonation) features over achieving native-like accents (Derwing & Munro, 2009, 2015).

According to Levis and Moyer (2014), intelligibility-based instruction produces more substantial communication improvements than accent reduction, particularly in global contexts where English serves as a lingua franca. Pronunciation instruction centered on intelligibility reduces learner anxiety

by shifting the focus to communicative success rather than native-like perfection. This more attainable goal has been shown to improve learner engagement and confidence (Thomson, 2014).

Simulation tasks align well with the intelligibility principle by promoting real-time communication that forces learners to adapt their speech to be understood. Learners must negotiate meaning, manage turn-taking, and interact with others in high-stakes, realistic scenarios such as mock trials, requiring them to be intelligible while navigating pronunciation challenges (Devos et al., 2021). Ellis (2003) notes that task-based learning, through simulations, encourages the integration of pronunciation skills with fluency, supporting long-term improvement.

Gass and Mackey (2006, 2007) highlight that sustained oral interaction in simulation tasks allows learners to focus on both meaning and form (Levine, 2004), offering repeated opportunities for implicit pronunciation practice. These interactions help learners improve their accuracy in pronunciation, with simulations providing feedback that promotes refinement of problematic features such as vowel sounds, stress, and rhythm.

In more recent work, Ellis (2017, 2020) reflects on how Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) continues to evolve and support L2 acquisition, emphasizing how tasks promote both fluency and accuracy in language use, which are crucial for pronunciation (Luchini, 2006). Simulation tasks, as part of TBLT, provide learners with opportunities to refine their pronunciation while focusing on meaningful communication.

Levis (2018) highlights that simulation tasks enhance both segmental and suprasegmental features of pronunciation. They allow learners to practice stress, rhythm, and intonation in authentic contexts, helping them address the complexities of connected speech. By engaging in tasks that mimic real-world environments, learners are challenged to modify their pronunciation to meet the communicative demands of the task, improving overall comprehensibility.

Simulations also offer implicit feedback, a critical component of pronunciation development. As learners engage in extended oral activities, they receive cues from peers and instructors about their pronunciation effectiveness, prompting self-correction and improvement. Derwing and Munro (2009) emphasize that this implicit feedback encourages helps learners develop heightened awareness of pronunciation issues, such as vowel production and stress placement, and allows them to adjust their speech for clearer communication.

Moreover, simulation tasks reduce anxiety about achieving native-like standards by focusing on intelligibility. Studies by Thomson (2014) and Levis (2018) show that L2 learners who prioritize intelligibility experience better engagement, lower anxiety, and perceive pronunciation gains as more attainable. This is particularly effective for adult learners, who benefit from an instructional approach that aligns with real-world communicative goals rather than accent reduction.

In conclusion, simulation tasks may intersect with pronunciation practice by providing the real-world context and sustained interaction that can contribute to meaningful pronunciation development. They appear to promote both segmental and suprasegmental accuracy, offer opportunities for valuable feedback, and may help shift the focus from achieving native-like pronunciation to enhancing intelligibility, suggesting their potential as an effective method for advancing L2 learners' pronunciation skills.

## Research question

This research study was guided by the following question: How do student teachers perceive the role of a mock trial simulation in enhancing their L2 pronunciation skills, particularly in terms of intelligibility, sound production, stress, rhythm, and intonation, in the context of an advanced language development course?

### *The Study*

#### *Context*

The simulation task took place within *Advanced Communication II* (ACII), which is the final language development course in the fourth year of the English Teaching Education program at the Universidad Nacional de Mar del Plata, Argentina. Students enter this course after having successfully completed all prior language courses. The main goal of ACII is to further enhance students' abilities in the four primary language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—while placing particular emphasis on vocabulary acquisition and the development of critical and logical thinking abilities. The course lasts for one semester and involves 8 hours of instruction per week.

To pass ACII, students are required to demonstrate a level of English proficiency that exceeds C2, as established by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). This advanced level indicates that students are capable of using the language effectively in both academic and professional settings.

The course materials include a collection of essays and a novel. ACII is taught by a team of four instructors, each with their own focus. The lead instructor covers theoretical components related to academic writing and speaking development, while the other instructors focus on essay analysis, speaking skills through novel discussions, and grammar and vocabulary instruction, respectively. None of the instructors, however, focuses exclusively on a systematic approach to teaching L2 pronunciation.

At the time of this study, the mock trial simulation was introduced as a non-graded practice activity. Participation in this task was not required to pass the course. To successfully complete the course, students had to fulfill two midterm assessments: one was a timed argumentative essay, and the other was a group-based multimodal oral presentation. Additionally, students need to complete at least 75% of four in-class assignments, including a process essay, another timed essay, an oral interview on the novel, and a grammar/vocabulary quiz. These tasks ensure that students fully engaged with the course content and met its high standards.

#### *Participants*

The mock trial simulation involved 19 students, consisting of four males and fifteen females, with ages ranging from 21 to 50 years ( $M = 31$ ). All participants were L1 speakers of Spanish, specifically from the River Plate variety. Each participant voluntarily completed an evaluative questionnaire that was designed to assess the effectiveness of the mock trial simulation. Participation in the simulation and the questionnaire was voluntary, and all students provided written consent.

#### *Instrument for data collection*

At the end of the simulation task, students completed an evaluative questionnaire designed to assess the effectiveness of the mock trial simulation. The instrument focused on multiple key areas, including students' comprehension of legal terminology and procedures, language proficiency—

especially in terms of pronunciation—development of argumentative skills, interdisciplinary knowledge, and intercultural awareness.

The questionnaire included both closed and open-ended questions. Four closed questions employed a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Not at all) to 5 (Very much), allowing students to rate the effectiveness of the activity in improving pronunciation skills. One open-ended question gave students the opportunity to expand on their experiences and offer recommendations for future simulations.

For the purpose of this study, only the responses concerning pronunciation development were analyzed, which focused specifically on intelligibility, sound realization, stress, rhythm and intonation. All responses were kept anonymous to maintain confidentiality, and students were informed that their feedback would be used exclusively for research and evaluation purposes. Prior to participating in the activity, they were required to sign a research consent form aligned with research ethics standards, ensuring they understood the nature, purpose, and voluntary nature of their participation.

## Results

### *Descriptive and inferential analysis*

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics for each aspect of pronunciation improvement (Intelligibility, Sound Production, Stress Accuracy, Rhythm, and Intonation) as rated by the 19 participants, offering an overview of the central tendencies and variability in how students perceived the impact of the mock trial simulation on their pronunciation skills.

**Table 1.** Central tendencies for each aspect of pronunciation development

Pronunciation aspect	MEAN	SD	MIN	MAX
<b>Intelligibility</b>	3.21	0.98	1	5
<b>Sound production</b>	3.26	0.81	2	5
<b>Stress accuracy</b>	3.37	0.96	2	5
<b>Rhythm</b>	3.16	0.90	1	4
<b>Intonation</b>	3.26	0.87	2	5

Mean scores range from 3.16 to 3.37, indicating moderate perceived improvement across all areas, while standard deviations range from 0.81 to 0.98, showing some variability in responses but not overly large discrepancies. Minimum and maximum values reveal that some participants perceived minimal improvement (as low as 1 or 2), while others rated their improvement quite high (up to 5). This consistency across the different aspects suggests that the mock trial simulation was effective in fostering balanced development in various areas of pronunciation, without one area standing out as significantly more improved than the others, indicating a well-rounded approach to pronunciation enhancement.

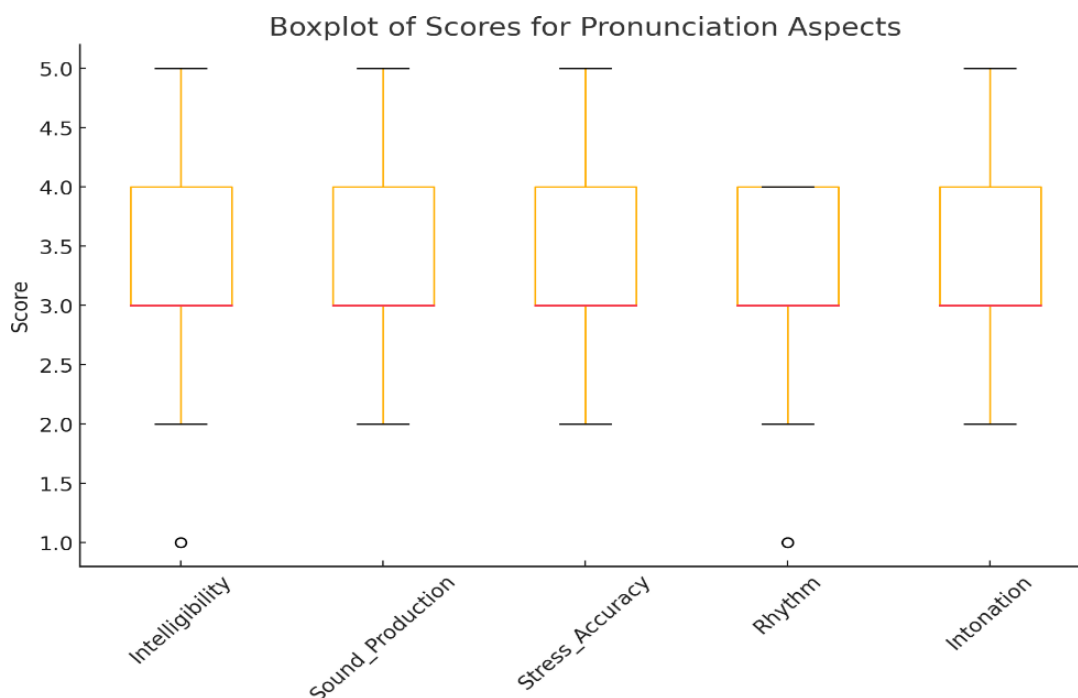
The Friedman test yielded a statistic of 4.00 and a  $p$ -value of 0.406, indicating no statistically significant differences between the five areas of pronunciation improvement. This suggests that the

mock trial simulation had a uniform impact on all aspects of pronunciation as perceived by the participants.

### *Boxplot analysis*

Graph 1 shows the boxplot analysis which visualizes the distribution of scores for each aspect of pronunciation enhancement due to the mock trial simulation. Each box represents the interquartile range (IQR) of the scores, encompassing the middle 50% of the data. The line within each box marks the median score. These medians are fairly consistent across the aspects, demonstrating that participants rated all areas of pronunciation similarly. The whiskers extend from the boxes to the smallest and largest values within 1.5 IQRs from the lower and upper quartiles, respectively. This range indicates where most of the data lie, with longer whiskers in 'Stress Accuracy' and 'Intonation', suggesting greater variability in these aspects. The circles outside the whiskers indicate outliers. An outlier in 'Intelligibility' suggests that at least one participant rated their improvement as significantly lower compared to others.

**Graph 1.** Boxplot of scores across aspects of pronunciation enhancement



The near-equal median scores and similar box heights suggest that the mock trial simulation had a uniformly moderate impact on all measured aspects of pronunciation skills. This uniformity aligns with the results from the Friedman test, which found no statistically significant differences among these aspects, indicating a balanced improvement across all areas. The outlier in 'Intelligibility' could indicate that for some individuals, the simulation was less effective in enhancing intelligibility. This might warrant further individual assessment or tailored interventions.

The results from this boxplot corroborate the descriptive and inferential statistical findings, supporting the conclusion that the mock trial simulation provided a holistic benefit across different pronunciation skills without disproportionately favoring any particular aspect.

### *Interpretative findings*

The qualitative analysis of the open-ended response from the 19 participants was conducted using a coding pattern developed through NVivo (QSR International, 2022). This thematic analysis allowed us to categorize the feedback related to pronunciation development during the mock trial simulation. The analysis revealed that students perceived improvements in various pronunciation-related aspects such as speaking fluency, intonation, stress accuracy, and pronunciation clarity.

One of the key components of the mock trial simulation was the active participation in speaking roles such as witnesses, lawyers, and jury members. This provided a rich opportunity for participants to practice and improve their pronunciation in real-time, formal speech contexts. To illustrate this point, Student 1 shared the following thought:

"I believe the mock trial is an instance that, I would say, fully develops all skills and areas of the language: ... speaking and pronunciation skills (testimonies, statements, jury discussion)..."

This comment highlights how the roles required participants to articulate their thoughts clearly and accurately, contributing to overall pronunciation improvement.

Participants indicated that the nature of the mock trial, with its focus on legal arguments and formal dialogue, helped improve their ability to use stress and intonation appropriately. Stressing words correctly in English, especially in a legal setting, can significantly impact meaning and clarity. To demonstrate this, Student 12 commented as follows:

"Argumentation in both writing and speaking (defense witnesses, defense, prosecution witnesses, prosecution)..."

Through the process of presenting arguments, participants had to pay attention to the rhythm and intonation patterns in their speech, which are critical aspects of effective communication, especially in formal settings like trials.

The mock trial also involved discussions within the jury, which required clear and concise pronunciation to ensure that all members could participate effectively. Some participants noted that this aspect helped them improve their overall clarity in speaking. In this respect, Student 9 provided an example by stating:

"...speaking and pronunciation skills (testimonies, statements, jury discussion)..."

Jury discussions, requiring constant interaction among participants, provided a platform for practicing spontaneous speech and ensuring clear pronunciation to convey arguments effectively.

The immersive nature of the simulation, with participants taking on various roles, contributed to their overall pronunciation development by encouraging continuous speaking practice in a high-stakes, yet supportive, environment. Student 18 highlighted this by sharing this testimony:

"I felt this experience was enriching, and I could improve my language skills in an engaging yet challenging way."

This last comment reflects the broader impact of the mock trial on pronunciation skills, emphasizing the active and challenging nature of the exercise, which pushed participants to focus on their pronunciation throughout the activity.



The qualitative analysis of student feedback revealed that the mock trial simulation had a positive impact on students' perceived pronunciation improvements. Categories such as speaking in formal settings, improving stress and intonation, enhancing clarity in discussions, and overall pronunciation development were frequently mentioned by participants. The feedback supports the conclusion that role-playing in the mock trial was an effective tool for developing and improving various aspects of English pronunciation.

## Discussion

In response to the research question, both quantitative and qualitative analyses of the mock trial simulation consistently revealed its perceived benefits for pronunciation development. The descriptive and inferential analyses pointed to moderate perceived improvements across all targeted pronunciation areas—intelligibility, sound production, stress accuracy, rhythm, and intonation—with no statistically significant differences among them. This finding suggests that participants experienced balanced perceived gains in their pronunciation skills and indicated that the mock trial simulation impacted each area equally, as highlighted in the statistical and visual data representations.

Addressing the research question further, qualitative findings supported the quantitative data by indicating that participants perceived improvements in speaking fluency, stress accuracy, intonation, and overall pronunciation clarity. Participants frequently reported these perceived gains across all aspects of pronunciation, reinforcing the idea that the mock trial simulation promoted a holistic enhancement of their L2 pronunciation skills. This alignment between quantitative and qualitative findings affirms that the simulation was beneficial across multiple dimensions of pronunciation, as perceived by the participants.

However, in response to the question, an area of divergence emerged between the quantitative and qualitative data regarding intelligibility. The quantitative analysis detected an outlier in this area, suggesting that at least one participant perceived less improvement in intelligibility than in other pronunciation aspects. This divergence may indicate that the simulation's effectiveness varied slightly among participants, with intelligibility perceived as less impacted for some. Nevertheless, the qualitative analysis did not reveal specific concerns about intelligibility, which suggests that this issue was not broadly perceived by the participant group, yet it remains a point of consideration in the evaluation of the simulation's overall impact on pronunciation as perceived by students.

### *Cross-checking data from multiple sources*

The convergence between these two methods enhanced the reliability of the results and confirmed the overall perceived positive impact of the mock trial on pronunciation development. Identifying areas of divergence, such as the issue with perceived Intelligibility gains, was equally important, as it highlighted the need for further examination of individual experiences to ensure equitable learning opportunities. By comparing data from different sources, researchers were able to form a more detailed and accurate understanding of how educational interventions were perceived by participants, which ensured that the findings were not only statistically sound but also reflective of personal experiences and feedback.

### *Limitations and benefits*

The study identified several limitations and benefits associated with the use of simulation tasks, such as a mock trial, in the development of L2 pronunciation. One notable limitation was the time constraints, which limited the amount of practice and the opportunity for students to receive detailed, real-time feedback on their pronunciation. Additionally, the complexity of the simulation required high cognitive engagement, which could distract students from focusing on specific pronunciation features such as sound accuracy, rhythm, and stress. This made integrating feedback into performance

more challenging, potentially affecting the overall effectiveness of the task in targeting pronunciation improvement. As a recommendation for future implementations of this simulation task, we suggest incorporating pronunciation-focused activities interwoven with other linguistic components to help students maintain awareness of this critical element in establishing effective and purposeful communication. If these tasks had been planned beforehand and integrated into the various phases of the simulation, the results could potentially have been even more impactful.

Despite these limitations, the benefits of simulation tasks were significant. The authentic, real-world communication scenarios provided by simulations allowed students to practice pronunciation in a meaningful context and emphasized intelligibility and fluency. As shown in this study, the task was highly beneficial for Argentinean students, helping them build confidence in persuasive communication and improving clarity, rhythm, and stress. Similarly, this task could prove particularly valuable in educational contexts where cultural barriers and individual idiosyncrasies make public speaking challenging. In such settings, many students may struggle with self-confidence and fear of making mistakes, which can hinder their ability to communicate effectively (Liu, 2012). By providing a safe and engaging environment for spontaneous speech and continuous practice, simulation tasks could help learners overcome these obstacles while developing their pronunciation and communication skills (Shariq, 2020). Overall, the immersive and interactive nature of simulation tasks may make them a powerful tool for fostering linguistic and soft skills across diverse cultural and educational contexts.

## Conclusion

This study examined the use of a mock trial simulation to enhance L2 pronunciation and communication skills, in line with the shift towards communicative approaches in language teaching. By placing learners in realistic, high-stakes environments, the task encouraged students to focus implicitly on key pronunciation features such as intelligibility, sound production, rhythm, and stress, while also developing broader communicative abilities. The mock trial provided an opportunity to integrate pronunciation practice with critical thinking and argumentation, which may represent a comprehensive approach to language development.

The findings appear to carry important pedagogical implications and suggest that simulation tasks may serve as an effective tool in L2 pronunciation teaching by providing learners with meaningful opportunities for real-world communication. Educators may consider incorporating more simulation-based activities into their curriculum to promote not only pronunciation but also overall linguistic and intercultural competence. Adjustments to feedback methods, task design, and the integration of explicit pronunciation-focused activities could provide stronger support for students' progress in this area. The study highlights opportunities for further research, particularly in contexts in which students may face challenges communicating in front of others due to cultural norms, societal expectations, or individual anxieties. Simulation tasks could be especially beneficial in such settings by creating a supportive and low-pressure environment that encourages learners to engage in public speaking. These tasks may not only help build self-confidence but also provide focused opportunities to practice and enhance L2 pronunciation and communication skills, potentially addressing both linguistic and socio-emotional barriers to effective communication. Expanding these tasks to these other educational settings would allow for meaningful comparisons and insights into their adaptability and effectiveness. Furthermore, refining the simulation model could uncover its long-term benefits in developing critical linguistic abilities and essential soft skills.

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