

EFL Learners' View on the Use of Flip for Oral Practice

Perspectivas de Estudiantes de Inglés como Lengua Extranjera sobre el Uso de Flip para la Práctica Oral

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Sent: 2024/08/06
Accepted: 2024/11/22
Published: 2024/12/30

Abstract

Flip, a free video-based app, offers the potential for creating interactive discussion spaces and promoting much-needed oral practice for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. This study aimed to discover A1 learners' perceptions of Flip's usability, effectiveness for oral practice, and perceived advantages and disadvantages. Thirty university beginner students voluntarily participated in an online questionnaire comprising closed-ended questions using the Likert scale and open-ended questions aiming for qualitative data. Findings revealed that the app was overwhelmingly well-received by students who found it easy to use, practical, dynamic, and useful for oral practice. Cited advantages included utility, accessibility, and the ability to view and learn from classmates' videos. A few disadvantages were also mentioned, such as the need for a steady internet connection and some anxiety about sharing videos publicly. The study concluded that learners hold a positive view of Flip Flip and that it should be more widely utilized by English teachers in their classrooms, given its potential for facilitating oral practice and interactive discussions among EFL students.

Keywords: application software, language instruction, opinion, utility, oral expression, ICT.

Resumen

Flip, una aplicación gratuita en formato video, ofrece un gran potencial para crear espacios de discusión interactivos y promover la práctica oral tan necesaria para los estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL). El objetivo de este estudio fue descubrir las percepciones de los estudiantes de nivel A1 sobre la utilidad de Flip, su eficiencia para la práctica oral y las ventajas

Summary: Introduction, Literature Review, Methodology, Findings and discussion, Conclusions and limitations..

How to cite: Ferreiro, G. (2024). EFL Learners' View on the Use of Flip for Oral Practice. *Revista Tecnológica - Espol*, 36(2), 62-72. <https://rte.espol.edu.ec/index.php/tecnologica/article/view/1225>

y desventajas percibidas. Se recopilaron opiniones de treinta estudiantes universitarios principiantes que participaron de forma voluntaria a través de un cuestionario en línea con preguntas tipo escala de Likert y preguntas abiertas para consignar datos cualitativos. Los resultados revelaron que la aplicación fue extremadamente bien recibida por los estudiantes, quienes la encontraron muy fácil de usar, práctica, dinámica y útil para la práctica oral. Entre las ventajas citadas se incluyeron su utilidad, accesibilidad y la capacidad de ver y aprender de los videos de sus compañeros. Se mencionaron pocas desventajas, como la necesidad de una conexión a internet estable y cierta ansiedad por ser vistos por los compañeros. El estudio concluyó que Flip es muy apreciada por los estudiantes y debería ser utilizada más ampliamente por los profesores de inglés en sus aulas, dado su potencial para facilitar la práctica oral y las discusiones interactivas entre los estudiantes de EFL.

Palabras clave: software, aplicación, opinión, estudio de lenguaje, expresión oral.

Introduction

Teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) has long presented numerous challenges, particularly in oral communication. As Parr and Krashen (1986) asserted, two key factors are essential for acquiring a foreign language: ample exposure to comprehensible input and high levels of learner motivation and confidence.

A significant factor involved in learning another language is the anxiety that arises in beginner students when attempting to communicate. This feeling of unease, restlessness, and apprehension associated to a feeling of insecurity experienced by students while interacting with others can be explained by lack of vocabulary, low levels of grammatical proficiency, insufficient exposure to the language, incorrect pronunciation, and a lack of confidence (Malik et al., 2024; Wahyuningsih & Afandi, 2020).

According to Baran-Łucarz (2021), Willingness to Communicate (WTC) in a foreign language is determined by the cultural background of the students. Following Hall's description (1959, as cited in Gupta & Sukamto, 2020) culture, understood as the compendium of human behavioral patterns, perceptions, beliefs and material practices, can be classified into high-context and low context. In high context cultures, communication style is conditioned by the close proximity of the interlocutors (Gupta & Sukamto, 2020), is usually less direct and relies on non-verbal cues more than the actual verbal message. Latin Americans, typically high-context cultures (Broeder, 2021) do not like to feel exposed and dislike to be placed on the spotlight, especially if they are conscious of their limitations since they are "much more subtle, indirect, and rely more on the importance of non-verbal signals. High-context cultures also emphasize harmony, relationships, and 'face-saving'" (Levitt, 2022 p. 4) Typically, learners are very self-aware and prefer not to risk being ridiculed by peers. They are usually not comfortable with public speaking or facing big audiences. Therefore, students frequently refrain from participating in class in an attempt to avoid the possibility of making mistakes and being corrected by their instructors. They do not wish to experience embarrassment in front of their peers.

This compels educators to devise a variety of creative strategies to promote positive environments where students can feel more motivated and comfortable to interact in the target language. Lately, with the advancement of technology, the processes of teaching and learning have revitalized, enabling students to achieve greater autonomy in their learning processes. But the fact remains that extensive oral interaction is difficult to achieve in an EFL classroom, particularly in remote education (Mohd Basar et al., 2021).

In addition, low motivation, lack of interest in oral activities, and few opportunities to practice speaking are common problems for second or foreign language learners, as pointed out by Thi Lai, et al.,(2021). In the context of this study, among university students whose native language is Spanish, initial-stage learners often express self-consciousness about their limited English language skills. This insecurity frequently leads to avoidance behaviors, such as refraining from speaking in class.

Another challenge faced by language instructors is, as Al Fareh (2010) explains (cited by Al-Bogami, & Elyas 2020) that students commonly perceive EFL classes as boring and sometimes futile, especially when they have to take mandatory courses as part of their program.

In a highly technological world, teaching methods that are outdated are construed as one of the most important reasons for the low levels of performance and lack of interest in students in language classes (Mahboob & Elyas, 2014, cited in Al-Bogami, & Elyas 2020).

Among the different existing options available today in language teaching, the use of mobile technology significantly expands learning possibilities and has a considerable impact on learning activities (Eshankulovna, 2021). Technology and artificial intelligence offer endless possibilities, where Flip (formerly known as Flipgrid) stands out as an excellent tool. This is a very useful application with numerous advantages, such as easy access, no expense, and convenience, among others. In the literature, several empirical studies can be found around its utilization, but there is little information about users' perceptions on its usefulness for language practice. Therefore, this study aims to explore this tool's potential to enhance English language learning, particularly for beginners.

I have been using this application for some time in basic English (A1) classes at private universities, both in virtual and hybrid flex settings. The latter, as defined by Oxford University, is an educational model where some students attend lectures or seminars in person while others participate virtually from home. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns, the range of options for remote learning has significantly expanded. Nowadays there are many alternatives to traditional face-face interaction in education, including flip classroom, blended learning, remote instruction and e-learning.

Given its benefits, I have incorporated Flip as a supplementary tool to enhance learner participation during class. Students are asked to record video responses to simple prompts related to the class content, providing opportunities for oral practice. They are encouraged to watch their peers' videos and provide written feedback, although this practice is less common.

The current research explores students' perceptions of Flip, including its features, usefulness, and impact on oral English practice. The following research questions guide this investigation.

1. Do English as a foreign language (EFL) beginner students find Flipgrid easy to use?
2. How appealing do EFL students find the platform for its features?
3. Do learners consider the application useful for practicing and improving their oral English?
4. What advantages and disadvantages do beginner students perceive in using Flip?.

Literature Review

Promotion of speaking skills through oral practice

Proper oral communication is considered one of the most essential skills when acquiring a foreign or second language (Crisianita & Mandasari, 2022; Miranda, & Wahyudin, 2023). Being able to speak accurately and fluently frequently translates in better job opportunities, professional development, better interaction with foreigners, access to information and many other advantages.

Several studies have reported the numerous factors that are involved in the achievement of this complex task which range from linguistic domain to psychological difficulties, including hesitance and the interference of low self-esteem in the learners' success (Zainurrahman & Sangaji, 2019; Miranda, & Wahyudin, 2023). Following Krashen's comprehensible input and affective filter hypotheses (Krashen, 1982), it seems there is a logical positive correlation between exposure to language and low anxiety levels and the ability to communicate. Gökcan and Çobanoğlu (2018) in their study, for instance, concluded that more exposure to English increased test performance by diminishing the anxiety in students.

Evidently, learners need to have opportunities for interaction with other speakers of the target language. Communicative activities include those that encourage and require a learner to speak with and listen to their peers, in addition to interacting with the facilitator or being exposed to models of oral English in the form of audios and videos. These interactions are an essential component of acquiring English successfully (Shawaqfeh et al., 2024). Consequently, many strategies used by EFL teachers have been reported to minimize the reluctance of learners to interact with classmates and teachers among which Raalten and Roald (2023) mention informal activities that ensure a positive classroom environment, providing predictable routines, and praising oral participation. Instructors are constantly looking for innovative and engaging ways to promote speaking in class. To increase the oral performance, activities such as role-plays or dialogues, discussion, speeches, conversation, audiotapes, games and other accuracy-based activities can be implemented in class (Crisianita & Mandasari, 2022).

Flip app

Flip is an online video discussion platform which was designed to promote social interaction between students and enhance autonomy. It was developed in 2014 by Professor Charles Miller at the University of Minnesota, making it a relatively recent language teaching tool. In June 2018, Microsoft acquired the platform, including it as part of Office 365 for education, thus educators could easily access it. Very recently, as of July 2024, Microsoft has incorporated it to its TEAMS app making it even more accessible to facilitators who regularly use this platform.

Using this app, the teacher can create a 'grid' of topics (questions or prompts), share the link with students, and require learners to create short video responses. Traditionally, through Microsoft or a Google account the instructor created a user and from that point on could generate as many grids as needed. Now, it is even easier to use since the learners can access through TEAMS the assignments created by teachers. A topic of discussion, or a prompt as guidance to complete an assignment, is presented to the students who can access each grid at their convenience. The teacher can also record verbal instructions to accompany written ones or provide a model of what is expected from the learners (Hammett, 2021). These topics can be "duplicated" to other classes making it unnecessary to spend time creating similar or identical assignments from scratch. Additionally, the instructor can determine the length of the videos ranging from 30 seconds to 10 minutes.

To upload videos and responses to classmates' contributions, students use a simple video recorder included in Flip (Android and iOS) or do so via any web browser. Formative feedback is easily provided either written and/or video-based by the tutor and classmates. Comments can be made publicly or in private. This helps students take control of their learning (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006 cited in Stoszkowski, 2018) and promotes interactive participation while allowing facilitators to provide feedback individually, respecting the students' privacy. Facilitators can even include a rubric in the comments for the assessment of the task.

The app offers several advantages, including accessibility. Users do not need to create an account or sign up; they simply join the class on TEAMS. It is readily available for recording responses, and instructors and classmates can watch the videos.

A significant advantage is its cost-effectiveness. Unlike other applications offering limited free versions and premium subscriptions, Flip is free for educators and students. No additional costs are required to access all its features.

Convenience is another advantage. Because the discussion is asynchronous and therefore not time-or place-dependent, it clearly benefits students who live far from campus or who are working or have other commitments and have less time for assignment completion (Stoszkowski, 2018). In addition, students who need more time to process information or who might need to repeat the recording of videos several times have the chance to do so without any restriction. They can also repeatedly watch their classmates' videos for extra practice, if they so desire.

More opportunities for participation are also created. Those students who might sit back in class-based discussions are more involved because they must record some form of participation, whilst those who might otherwise dominate discussion cannot exceed the time limit set by the instructor (Hall & Buzwell, 2013 cited in Stoszkowski, 2018). The app's flexibility allows students to learn outside the classroom and not limited to a specific time or place, as long as they have access to the internet. They can join and post their responses on their laptop or smartphone.

Its appeal is another positive characteristic. Nowadays most learners are digitally literate because of their exposure to new technology. Most young adults are very familiar with applications that promote social interaction through texts, voice messages and even video (Arulogun, et al., 2020). So, videos showing instructions for tasks or the ability to present their work in this format can be more appealing than reading written material or any other type of traditional exercise which they might perceive as boring. Students who do not feel confident about their writing and reading skills also could prefer video-based interaction. The app permits music and stickers to be added to the videos as well, which is appealing to the younger users and resembles other popular social media applications.

Among the disadvantages or potential obstacles, reliable internet connectivity, adequate device hardware (including camera and microphone), and consistent power supply are paramount. As with any internet-dependent application, a stable internet connection is crucial for a smooth user experience. Those with older computers or 'lower specification' phones may also experience issues (Stoszkowski, 2018).

Competitiveness can be another drawback and depending on the situation could be positive or negative. As with many other common social media platforms, reaction to videos

such as "likes" or "hearts" can be used to show approval. This could lead to unhealthy competitiveness, and might dent the confidence of some students if they receive fewer views or likes than others (Stoszkowski, 2018). Conversely, it may boost the desire to get likes and therefore the students will be interested in creating great videos and would consequently pay attention to adequate use of language, accuracy and proper pronunciation and intonation.

Another possible disadvantage is the fact that some learners could feel uncomfortable about being 'on-screen' where their appearance or their low performance could be 'judged' by their peers.

This tool has been in the market for around ten years, yet the literature around its use is not abundant (Hammett, 2021); it is particularly limited in the case of university students (Pham, 2023). According to Hammett (2021), McLain in 2018 was one of the first to publish a study that examined the efficacy of using the app in a language-teaching context. This research found Flipgrid to be an effective learning tool for Business English Writing students in Korea (McLain, 2018). Green et al. (2021) also conducted a study based on the teachers' use of the tool in the classroom and their perception of its effect on learning. The findings indicate that even though the app was originally created for integration and to promote engagement, its uses expand to give voice to shy students and promote creativity. Furthermore, there are some studies based on the effect of using Flip in English language classes that have reported an improvement in fluency, pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary (Fajardo-Guapisaca & Argudo-Garzón, 2022; Franco-Bayas, et al., 2021; Mango, 2021).

Methodology

This study utilized a cross-sectional research design to collect data on the opinions and experience of learners regarding the integration of Flip in their educational setting. Non-probabilistic sampling was employed, aligning with the characteristics of the population consisting of undergraduate students enrolled in the mandatory A1 English course at a private university in San Jose, Costa Rica. These students were from various majors and were taking their initial EFL course.

An online questionnaire developed in the participants' native language, Spanish, was submitted to all the registered students in the course. They were informed of the nature of the study and, voluntarily, 30 completed the form. The questionnaire consisted of seven closed-ended items using a 5-point Likert-type scale which aimed at discovering the students' familiarity with the app, their opinion about the perceived usefulness and the extent of the interaction that occurred with the videos uploaded by their classmates. The second part of the instrument collected the qualitative information through open-ended questions, requesting participants to comment on the advantages and disadvantages they perceived. The inner validity of the closed-questions from the instrument was confirmed through the Cronbach Alpha coefficient, which yielded 0.875, considered an acceptable value by Rodríguez-Rodríguez and Reguant-Álvarez (2020).

Data analysis included basic descriptive statistics such as mean and thematic analysis performed for the qualitative data in the open-ended questions responses. Thematic analysis is a research method used to identify and interpret patterns or themes in a data set; it often leads to new insights and understanding (Naeem et al., 2023).

Findings and discussion

The study revealed that only 20% of participants had prior knowledge of the application before enrolling in the course. This suggests that the app is not widely recognized, leading to the conclusion that despite the time it has been on the market, educators seem to ignore its potential uses, similar to what Mango (2021) reported in his research.

An overwhelming majority of participants expressed highly positive opinions regarding the ease of use of the application, with 47% expressing complete agreement and 50% agreeing with the statement "It was easy to use," similar to Mango's findings (2021).

Furthermore, half of the participants completely agreed, and the other half agreed with the amenability of the application. It is important to highlight that there were no negative responses. 87% expressed that they did not have any difficulty using it, while 13% maintained a neutral position. This generalized positive opinion among users of Flip, expressing that it was pleasant and easy to use, coincides with the findings of Fajardo-Guapisaca and Argudo-Garzón (2022), Franco-Bayas et al. (2021), Hammett (2021), Mango (2021), and Syahrizal and Pamungkas (2021), who highlighted the easiness of its use. Similarly, Espárrago-Kalida, et al., (2022) reported that students are favorable towards the features of Flipgrid, also supported by Chien's (2021) research.

Regarding interaction with classmates' video responses, 13% of participants reported viewing all videos, 67% viewed some, and 20% did not view any. Despite the application's original intent for interaction or discussion, the purpose of this investigation was not focused on that aspect, and the students' interaction with classmates' videos was optional. Nevertheless, it appears that natural curiosity prompted a high percentage (80%) of the learners to watch at least some videos or all of them, ultimately leading to extra exposure to the language. Yet, despite the data, the participants denied commenting on the videos they watched, with only 10% acknowledging that they had left a comment. This is consistent with the participants' proficiency level of A1/A2; they may have felt uncomfortable writing in English, or they were too shy to do so. Conversely, Espárrago-Kalidas et al. (2022) reported that, in general, they found Flip to be an excellent tool to boost student engagement. Additionally, Chien (2021) mentioned among the results that participants expressed satisfaction with interacting and communicating with their classmates coinciding with Coello Vásquez et al.'s (2023) findings.

Concerning the perception of the application's usefulness for oral practice, 40% of participants expressed complete agreement, 50% with the fact that it was useful, and the remaining 10% had a neutral answer. No negative perceptions were reported. This positive attitude about the app's usefulness in oral practice is confirmed by several studies (Apoko & Chong, 2022; Chien, 2021; Coello Vásquez et al., 2023; Fajardo-Guapisaca & Argudo-Garzón, 2022; Mango, 2021; Thi Lai et al., 2021).

As for the open-ended questions, the most frequently mentioned advantage was its ease of use and versatility, followed by adjectives such as "user-friendly," "practical," and "dynamic." These perceptions are consistent with those manifested in Petersen et al. (2020) and Syahrizal and Pamungkas (2021). Students highlighted the convenience of not having to submit a video through other channels to complete an assignment. They also mentioned that it had been useful to watch their classmates' videos to improve vocabulary and pronunciation, which aligns with findings reported by Coello et al. (2023), Mango (2021), and Thi Lai et al. (2021).

No participant mentioned increased confidence as a benefit of using the app, which was one of the predominant advantages found by Thi Lai et al. (2021) and Apoko and Chong (2022), nor lowering anxiety reported by Mango (2021) and Pham (2023).

Regarding the disadvantages expressed by the learners, 30% stated that they did not find any, which reinforces the perceived positive attitude of users. Two participants mentioned that they disliked the fact that all class members could see the videos; they thought they should be private, which coincides with the findings of Hammett (2021), Mango (2021), and Stoszowski (2018) and seems coherent to cultural or personality factors of shyness and self-awareness when students know they are being overserved. One participant reported difficulties using the app on a mobile device, aligning with technical issues noted by Petersen et al. (2020). Incidentally, no participants considered the lack of immediate feedback a problem, contrary to Mango's (2021) report, where 27% mentioned this aspect. One of the features of the app is that the facilitators can take their time to evaluate the videos and provide a more detailed assessment, either as written or oral comments.

Conclusions and limitations

Conclusions

One of the responsibilities of language instructors is to encourage learners to become more autonomous in addition to creating pleasant and low-anxiety learning environments while promoting engagement and participation. New applications and software available offer a wide variety of options for more independent learning. Flip application with its numerous advantages combined with interesting and appropriate tasks provides students the opportunity to use the target language at their own pace, become aware of their performance, and take actions to improve their oral skills.

The findings of this research indicate that learners perceive Flip as a useful tool for fostering social learning and improving oral proficiency. They consider the app user-friendly, dynamic, easy to use, convenient, and accessible if there is a reliable internet connection.

Users seem to like the features and find the creation of videos fun, especially because there is no special skill needed to do so, nor there is a need to create accounts and remember passwords. It is simple and intuitive to use, and students appreciate its convenience and familiar user interface.

Participants consider that the app helped them practice, not only because they had to repeat the recording until they were satisfied with the results, but also because they watched their classmates and compared pronunciation.

In conclusion, the advantages of using Flip significantly outweigh the disadvantages. Students primarily praised its ease of use, accessibility, convenience, and utility. A few disadvantages were identified, with the main concern being technological dependence. A reliable internet connection, preferably via a computer or laptop, is essential, as some students reported difficulties using the app on mobile devices. Another aspect to consider is that shy students might not like to be exposed to public scrutiny through the videos, but this could be easily handled by teachers by working on boosting self-esteem and promoting a respectful and safe classroom environment.

EFL teachers should consider including this application in their language classes as a supplement to other techniques that enhance oral production because the general perception of

the users seems to be that Flip constitutes a convenient platform to practice and improve their communication skills in an easy and fun way.

Limitations

One limitation of this study was the relatively small sample size (N=30). Future research should involve a larger number of participants.

In addition, all participants were young adults. Therefore, it can be assumed that they are relatively familiar and probably use similar platforms or social media and, thus, found the app very agreeable to other forms of communication used by them. It would be interesting to research if the perception of older students who might not be so technologically savvy is just as positive as the one exhibited by the subjects of this research.

Finally, the study was limited to the perceptions of beginner English language learners, focusing solely on their subjective opinions. Quantitative data measuring the app's impact on oral improvement was not collected. Future research could investigate the app's influence on vocabulary and pronunciation through quasi-experimental design. Additionally, exploring the perceptions of more advanced learners would provide valuable insights.

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