

PEER FEEDBACK THROUGH DIGITAL TOOLS FOR DEVELOPING SPEAKING SKILLS

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ABSTRACT

The increasing adoption of online learning in education poses challenges for educators, particularly in encouraging student interaction and engagement. In response, digital tools have emerged as potential solutions to enhance these interactions, especially in peer review activities. However, their effectiveness in facilitating peer review sessions and students' attitudes toward their use remain underexplored. This study employs quantitative and qualitative methods to investigate students' attitudes towards giving and receiving feedback through online peer review on Flip as a digital tool and their perceptions of its effectiveness in facilitating these sessions. Among other digital platforms, Flip was selected for its ability to facilitate speaking practices, enable students to share video responses and foster peer feedback through comments and likes. Data was collected through a post-activity survey from 148 undergraduate students enrolled in an English professional communication course at the National University of Malaysia. The data was then analysed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis to understand students' attitudes and perceived learning through peer review activities on Flip. Results indicate a favourable attitude towards giving and receiving feedback on Flip among students, which boosts their confidence when participating in peer review activities. Moreover, students considered Flip an effective platform for conducting peer review sessions as it fosters a more interactive learning environment. The study concludes that Flip is an effective digital tool that can be integrated into speaking activities to enhance students' active participation and interaction, offering valuable insights into the use of digital platforms in online English language teaching.

Keywords: Peer review; speaking activities; digital tools; students' attitudes; online learning

INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of digital technologies has significantly reshaped the educational landscape, particularly in online learning. According to Obeng and Coleman (2020), a unit improvement in the levels of technological innovation brings a remarkable 55 times improvement in the features of e-learning systems, leading to a threefold enhancement in online learning outcomes. As a result, online learning has seen growing adoption, especially at the tertiary level, driven by its flexibility and adaptability in meeting diverse teaching and learning needs. Additionally, online learning offers benefits such as accessibility, self-paced learning and a wide range of resources, which contribute to its increasing prevalence.

However, online learning also presents drawbacks, such as difficulties in fostering student interaction and engagement in class activities. In response to these challenges, educators are turning to digital tools like Flip, Padlet and Quizizz, which offer innovative ways to enhance students' engagement. While digital tools offer numerous benefits, their effectiveness in facilitating peer review sessions and students' attitudes toward their use remain underexplored. Understanding students' attitudes towards giving and receiving feedback in an online environment is critical as these perceptions can significantly influence the quality of peer interactions and their overall learning experience. Additionally, evaluating how students perceive the effectiveness of Flip as a platform for peer review is vital as this can determine its potential as a reliable educational tool.

To address these concerns, this study investigates students' attitudes towards giving and receiving feedback through online peer review on Flip, as well as their perceptions of its effectiveness as a platform for facilitating these sessions. Flip, a video discussion platform that supports interactive learning, is utilised to encourage oral engagement in online English language classes. The platform was selected for its ability to facilitate speaking practices, enable students to share video responses, and foster peer feedback, making it a promising resource for promoting active learning and collaboration in the digital age. Moreover, these features enable peer feedback on Flip, giving students the opportunity to benefit from each other by engaging in constructive discussions, offering diverse viewpoints, and providing targeted feedback that helps reinforce understanding. By examining these aspects, the study aims to contribute valuable insights into the use of digital platforms in education, particularly in enhancing student engagement and improving learning outcomes in online English language teaching.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Speaking Practices in Online Learning

Speaking skills are often a central focus in language learning, and online environments present both challenges and opportunities for their development. In traditional classroom settings, speaking practice usually involves real-time interactions, where immediate feedback can be provided. In online learning, the asynchronous nature of communication can limit spontaneous speaking opportunities, as mentioned by Hammond (2019). To address this challenge, digital tools like Flip offer platforms where students can engage in speaking practices through video responses and peer feedback.

The incorporation of online learning poses unique challenges as it can inadvertently create barriers to students' active participation. This is because some students hesitate to engage fully in speaking activities, where they feel exposed behind their webcams. This has become a cause of concern to educators as speaking skills are generally considered the most difficult to master compared to the other three fundamental language abilities: reading, writing, and listening (Masuram and Sripada 2020, as cited in Al Sarairh 2022).

Digital Tools

As teaching and learning progresses in the 21st century, the adaptation of digital tools in learning is of paramount importance. The availability of digital tools for educational purposes are abundant

as teachers and learners explore the varieties of digital tools in their teaching and learning process. Google Classroom, Padlet, Kahoot, Edmodo as well as Quizizz are some examples of digital tools that are widely used in the classroom. Due to the rapid advancement of technologies, the Malaysian Ministry of Education (MOE) through its Malaysian Education Blueprint, has urged teachers to leverage the usage of digital tools in classrooms as it embarks on transforming the national education landscape through integration of technology. (Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013).

Through the alignment of Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) in teaching and learning of English language in Malaysian schools and universities, teachers are further urged in maximising digital tools in language learning. In reference to CEFR, it has introduced new scales of online interaction that involves multimodal activity, which refers to learning involving more than one stimulus such as visuals and audios. In this case, digital tools have seen its prominence as teachers adopt relevant teaching methods such as game-based learning, flipped classrooms as well as hybrid learning (CEFR 2020).

Digital tools such as Flip play a role in addressing issues in the teaching and learning of speaking skills. Flip is an online video-based discussion platform that incorporates interactive elements such as sharing of comments and likes among its users. According to a study by Keiper et al. (2020), their findings indicate that Flipgrid is an effective learning platform. A mixed approach was used in which ten undergraduate and graduate students considered Flip to be useful and helpful in language learning.

Feedback and Peer Involvement

Brown (2019) emphasises the crucial role of feedback and its significance in fully developing students' language skills. Recent studies have shown that apart from teachers, students can also partake in a more active role in assessing their peers (Brooks et al. 2021; Van der Kleij 2021) which can be done through peer review activities (Evans 2015; McConlogue 2015).

According to Lopez (2023), peer feedback promotes collaborative learning as students are given the opportunity to identify each other's weaknesses, thus, enabling them to acquire a more sophisticated understanding of the learning process. This supporting learning environment is often correlated with more effective learning outcomes (Hollister et al. 2022; Chatterjee & Correia 2019; Redmond et al. 2018). Tang et al. (2024) asserts that students' critical thinking can be fostered when assessing their peers while encouraging reflection on their own performance.

Despite its significance in students' language learning process, there is a significant lack of studies in peer feedback classroom practices (Nawas 2020). Sridharan and Boud (2019) highlighted the gaps in research regarding how feedback influences the development of soft skills and the impact of peer assessment in settings where face-to-face interactions were substituted with online or digital technologies. This calls for more studies on the impact of peer feedback activities, particularly in online settings.

While many ESL teachers would incorporate peer feedback activities with writing tasks, the importance of it is often disregarded when the teaching and learning of speaking skills is concerned. Rodríguez-González and Castañeda (2018) argue that the process approach, which includes peer feedback activities, has the potential to further enhance students' speaking skills with its learner-centred approach. Studies have shown that there is a positive outcome to students' speaking ability after they have gone through the peer feedback process (Chekol 2020). The reported improvements should propel the need for more research to be done on the effects of peer feedback to enhance L2 learners' speaking skills.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative and qualitative approach to assess students' attitudes toward the use of Flip application when engaging in peer-reviewed speaking activities.

Participants

A total of 148 undergraduate students participated in the study, comprising a diverse mix of majors, academic years and nationalities. The respondents were enrolled in an English professional communication course in the National University of Malaysia, which is compulsory for those who obtained MUET band 4.0 and 4.5, IELTS 5.5 to 6.5, or equivalent. The study was conducted in accordance with ethical guidelines as informed consent was obtained from all students prior to data collection.

Data Collection

Throughout the course, students were given instructions to participate in several speaking activities, as part of practice to improve their skills in using English in professional settings. The speaking activities included pitching products and ideas and conducting a meeting.

1. Students were provided with questions to guide them with constructive feedback.
2. They were then required to upload their videos on Flip and share their feedback on their classmates' videos through the comment section.
3. At the end of the semester, the students were given a post-activity survey to be completed.

Research Instrument

The researchers administered an online post activity survey after utilising Flip as the digital platform to conduct peer-reviewed speaking activities.

1. Online digital platform – Flip

Flip was chosen as the digital platform to conduct peer-reviewed speaking activities due to its unique features. The platform allows students to post and edit videos with additional features similar to social media applications such as liking and commenting. These features are deemed to be suitable for peer-reviewed speaking activities.

2. Online survey questionnaire – Google Form

- (i) The survey consists of 3 sections. Section 1 focuses on students' attitudes towards giving and receiving feedback through online peer review on Flip.
- (ii) Section 2 focuses on the perceived effectiveness of Flip as a platform for conducting peer review sessions.

- (iii) Section 3 - A total of four open-ended questions were included to elicit detailed responses from the respondents.

The survey included sets of 4-point Likert scale questions. The response options for the 4-point Likert scale questions ranged from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 4 (Strongly Agree). A descriptive statistical analysis was derived from the data tabulated by Google Form. These descriptive statistics provided a clear picture of the overall trends and patterns in the data. The responses from the open-ended questions, on the other hand, were analysed by using thematic analysis. The initial codes were generated with the assistance of Atlas.ti. The emerging themes derived from the codes were then reviewed and refined. The summary of these data provided a more detailed-insight to students’ perspectives towards the use of Flip for peer-reviewed speaking activities.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of students' attitudes towards peer feedback in speaking activities shows a mix of different perceptions, experiences, and outcomes. The study used both quantitative and qualitative methods to understand how effective and well-received these activities were.

Quantitative Analysis

The survey provided the quantitative data, which were analysed to identify patterns and significant differences in attitudes. Open-ended survey responses provided the qualitative data, giving deeper insights into students’ personal experiences and opinions. Table 1 and 2 show the respondents’ attitudes and perceived feedback as gathered in the study.

Table 1 provides an overview of their responses to four key questions. A total 96.6% of students feel confident providing feedback on Flip, with 52% strongly agreeing. Most students (95.3%) believe giving and receiving feedback on Flip becomes more constructive than traditional methods, and 96.6% feel more open to receiving constructive criticism through Flip. Additionally, 95.9% agree that peer feedback on Flip helps improve their speaking skills. These results indicate that students find Flip effective for peer review and beneficial for developing their speaking abilities.

Table 1 Student Attitudes towards Giving and Receiving Feedback on Flip

Statements	Strongly Agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly Disagree %
1. I feel confident when providing feedback to my peers on Flip.	52	44.6	3.4	-
2. The feedback I provide on Flip is more constructive than traditional methods.	41.9	53.4	4.7	-
3. Flip has made me more open to receiving constructive criticism.	50.7	45.9	3.4	-
4. Peer feedback on Flip helps me improve my speaking skills.	49.3	46.6	4.1	-

Table 2 Perceived Effectiveness of Flip as a Platform for Conducting Peer Review Sessions

Statements	Strongly Agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly Disagree %
1. I find it easy to navigate through the Flip application.	54.7	41.9	3.4	-
2. Flip encourages me to participate more actively in peer review sessions.	52.7	41.2	6.1	-
3. I find Flip to be an effective tool for peer review.	53.4	45.3	1.4	-
4. I prefer using Flip for peer review over traditional methods.	49.3	45.3	5.4	-
5. Flip could benefit from additional features to enhance peer review activities.	54.1	43.9	2.0	-

The data from Table 2 illustrate students' perceptions of the effectiveness of Flip as a platform for conducting peer review sessions. 96.6% of students find Flip easy to navigate. Most students (93.9%) feel Flip encourages active participation in peer review sessions, and 98.7% consider it an effective tool. Additionally, 94.6% prefer Flip over traditional methods, though 98% believe it could benefit from more features. Overall, students find Flip effective and user-friendly for peer review, with some room for improvement.

Qualitative Analysis

The qualitative data analysis of user feedback on Flip highlighted several recurring themes that address both positive and negative aspects of the platform. These themes provide insight into the user experience, interaction, and suggestions for improvement.

1. Usability and User Experience

A key theme that emerged was the usability and user experience of Flip, which was mentioned by participants with a high frequency (Total Groundedness: 34). Ease of use was a dominant sub-theme, highlighted by 18 respondents. Many users appreciated the platform's intuitive design, describing it as "user-friendly" and "easy to navigate." For instance, one participant commented, "The interface is simple to use, and I had no issues finding my way around the platform."

This sentiment was echoed in feedback on the user-friendly design and overall user experience, which appeared 12 and 6 times respectively in the data. Participants found the interface clean and straightforward, with one respondent commenting, "I particularly liked the way the user interface was laid out—it made learning much more enjoyable."

The findings suggest that Flip's usability is a core strength of the platform, contributing significantly to user satisfaction. Issues such as occasional difficulties with the user interface were also reported, indicating areas where improvements could be made to further enhance the user experience.

2. Interaction and Engagement

Another prominent theme was interaction and engagement (Total Groundedness: 20). Participants praised the platform's ability to foster an engaging learning environment through features such as interactive learning and social interaction. For example, 7 participants mentioned that the platform's interactive nature encouraged them to engage with the content. One of the respondents commented, *"Flip offers a dynamic and interactive platform that encourages students to participate in discussions via video, which can make learning more engaging."*

As for social interaction features, 4 participants commented that Flip enabled peer-to-peer communication and collaborative learning. A respondent commented *"Flip has the same features as other social media, so it is flexible just like using social media but Flip is more educational. It's also easy to read the comments without needing to navigate further down the screen."* These insights reveal that engagement-driven features of Flip are a major attraction, enhancing the educational experience for users.

3. Organisation and Layout

The platform's organisation and layout also garnered attention, with a total groundedness of 14. Users appreciated the well-structured layout, which facilitated ease of navigation and content consumption. One user explained, *" [Flip is] easy to use, user-friendly interface to upload and view others' recordings. I can review videos from other groups and read the feedback comments on their videos."*

However, some users noted that the layout design could be improved in certain areas. Suggestions included making content sections more visible and improving the way materials are categorised. These findings highlight that while the current organisation is generally effective, better changes could enhance the overall user experience.

4. Areas for Improvement: Technical Issues and Feedback Mechanisms

Despite the positive feedback, respondents highlighted several technical issues that impacted their experience. These technical issues included delays in loading or uploading content, glitches, and compatibility issues on mobile devices. One respondent shared, *" Users sometimes experience technical difficulties, such as slow loading times, compatibility issues with different devices, or problems with video uploads."* Another respondent added, *"I do not like the occasional technical glitches, limited customisation options, and sometimes slow loading times."* The need for improvement in these areas was frequently mentioned, suggesting that technical stability is an important concern for users.

The respondents expressed dissatisfaction with aspects of the user interface (UI) design. Some found that the UI was outdated, particularly mentioning elements like old-school thumbnails and a cluttered comment section. Limitations such as video time restrictions and advertisements were pointed out as areas that could be improved to enhance the overall user experience.

The respondents clearly expressed the feedback mechanisms on the platform. While some appreciated the peer review system, many suggested that anonymity in feedback could improve participation and provide a more comfortable environment for honest critique. As one participant mentioned, *"It would be nice to be anonymous when leaving feedback too."* This insight suggests

that adjustments to feedback features could improve user satisfaction and engagement with the peer review process.

5. Suggestions for Educational Improvements

The final set of themes emerged from participants' suggestions on how to improve peer review activities and the platform's educational value. Many respondents emphasised the need for enhancements in user experience and feedback mechanisms. Suggestions included introducing features that facilitate better peer comparison and reflection. Additionally, some users identified a lack of creative activities as a barrier to engagement, stating, "There needs to be more creative ways to participate in peer reviews; it gets repetitive."

There were also concerns regarding the platform's use in an academic setting. Participants noted that while Flip is effective for general learning, it could be better tailored for educational technology use cases, including features that support student engagement and academic applications.

The findings from this study provide several insights into user preferences and areas for improvement on the Flip platform. Usability and user experience were consistently praised, aligning with existing literature on the importance of intuitive design in educational platforms (Miya, Keith & Govender 2022). Platforms that are easy to navigate tend to promote higher user satisfaction and engagement, as observed with Flip. The significance of interaction and engagement also supports research that shows interactive learning tools can enhance cognitive retention and student participation. By incorporating interactive elements and fostering social interaction, Flip is well-positioned as a tool that aligns with best practices in online learning. The technical issues reported by users highlight the need for improvements in platform stability and responsiveness. Technical problems such as slow loading times and glitches can detract from the user experience, and addressing these issues will be crucial for maintaining user satisfaction.

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CONCLUSION

On the whole, students were receptive in using Flip as they conducted peer review activities. It is worth to note that interactive elements using specific digital tools and student participation play a role in fostering effective learning in the classroom.

Currently, Flip has been integrated with the features of Microsoft Teams. This can be seen as an enhancement of its usability as Microsoft Teams is still and widely used in learning lessons across the globe. Further research could focus on students' and teachers' perspectives on its feasibility after the integration and its effectiveness in enhancing language learning in the classroom. In addition, more in depth qualitative studies can be conducted to explore improvements in the use of Flip in online language classrooms.

Digital tools play a very transformative role in language learning. Through maximising the use of digital tools in the classroom, teachers will be able to hone specific language skills such as speaking with their students. This can further enhance their capability of acquiring the language effectively.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to extend their sincere gratitude to all the respondents who participated in this study.

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Received: 1 October 2024 / Accepted: 11 October 2024 / Published: 15 December 2024