Improving grammar in use learning with Flipped Learning

Cómo mejorar el aprendizaje de la gramática en uso por medio del aprendizaje invertido

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Abstract

This study analyzed the use of flipped learning to improve English grammar and the perception of students about it to develop language learning. The research was conducted at the Language Center of the Universidad Veracruzana, with high school students whose language level is A1. A video tutorial was designed for a grammar topic. A survey was applied to collect the students' opinions about the strategy. In the results, the participants expressed that flipped learning is an innovative tool for learning grammar. On the other hand, there was an improvement in the understanding of the topic, which facilitated the comprehension of the grammar in use. The designed material could benefit students' learning, as prior exposure to the topic helps students increase their confidence in participating in class.

Resumen

Este estudio analizó el uso del aprendizaje invertido para mejorar gramática del inglés y la percepción de los estudiantes sobre el mismo para desarrollar el aprendizaje del idioma. La investigación se realizó en el Centro de Idiomas de la Universidad Veracruzana, con estudiantes de nivel medio superior cuyo nivel de lengua es A1. Se diseñó un video tutorial para un tema gramatical. Se aplicó una encuesta para recolectar la opinión de los alumnos sobre la estrategia. En resultados los participantes expresan que el aprendizaje invertido es una herramienta innovadora para aprender gramática. Por otra parte, se manifestó mejora en la comprensión del tema, lo que facilitó la comprensión de la gramática en uso. El material diseñado podría beneficiar el aprendizaje de los estudiantes, ya que la exposición previa al tema ayuda a los estudiantes a aumentar su confianza a la hora de participar en clase.

Keywords: Applied linguistics, flipped learning, grammar in use, language teaching

Palabras clave: enseñanza de idiomas, aprendizaje invertido, gramática en uso, lingüística aplicada

Introduction

Developing the teaching practice now allows students to put into practice their abilities in different fields such as teaching and translation. It also allows them to find out their strengths and weaknesses to improve their knowledge and strategies in a professional environment. The latter is the main reason for developing this research to discover a strategy for teaching a second language by using technology.

It is known that students learn differently. Some are getting bored year after year and frustrated when they study English with the traditional syllabus, method, and evaluation for grading. On the other hand, technology has become a useful tool for teaching and learning English, and one example of this is flipped learning. It has been said that it improves the way students learn a second language as they can consult the information whenever they require it. Nonetheless, there is a lack of information that requires us to do some research in-depth to discover what it is; its background; and how it works when teaching grammar to determined students. It is also important to observe students' perception towards flipped learning as this teaching method focuses on them so that they can improve their self-learning.

"Jon Bergman and Aaroon Sams were the pioneers of this teaching method" (Singay, 2020, p. 2). Singay (2020) describes them as two secondary school teachers who wanted to improve the way they gave their English classes as they usually struggled with their students' absences and had to repeat the topics presented in the previous classes. He adds that to prevent this inconvenience, they decided to record their classes and then post them online so that their students were able to see them as many times as they required it. As stated by Singay (2020), they found that it helped their students to reinforce the knowledge previously acquired in the classroom. Bergmann and Sams have described this approach to instruction as a strategy where work that was "traditionally done in the class is now done at home, and what was traditionally homework is now completed in class" (Bergmann & Sams, 2012, p.13).

According to Ozdamli and Asiksoy (2016), flipped learning was mainly designed to be used in Physics, but it can also be useful within different areas of teaching as it allows students to have access to the information whenever they require it.

According to Bishop and Verleger (2013) flipped learning is a pedagogical method that looks for the self-sufficiency of students by teaching them most of the aspects related to theory at home through videos, and practice problems, among others. After that, students can practice their linguistic skills in group-based problem-solving activities in the classroom and take advantage of the time of the class (Bishop & Verleger, 2013).

Widiarini (2022) describes the situational language teaching approach, as one constructed by the theory of language and learning theory. The theory of language was developed based on the British structural model (Widiarini, 2022). Following this model, language is assumed as a system of grammatical patterns and structures that had to be mastered in learning a language (Widiarini, 2022). Ying, W. (2020) provides an accurate definition in his research:

> Situational approach refers to the process of teaching by setting up a situation that is suitable for the teaching content so that students can have an easier perception of English. It helps students acquire the most abundant English knowledge in the shortest time, and it constantly improves students' passion for learning English. The core idea of situational teaching is to provide more opportunities for students to learn and speak so that students can bring English learning into real life (p. 1).

Brega and Kruglyakova (2022) propose that self-learning involves a range of supplementary activities that a committed student voluntarily develops to enhance his understanding and mastery of a particular subject. Independent research, practice exercises, and seeking out additional learning resources are some of the extra activities that self-learning students develop rather than what is given in a formal educational setting, and, by doing so, they can achieve better grades and improve their knowledge significantly (Brega & Kruglyakova 2022).

"Digital competence is one of the most demanded skills, and includes, among other aspects, the use of technological, informational, multimedia or communication skills and knowledge" (Esteve-Mon, *et al.*, 2020, p. 29). Esteve-Mon *et al* (2020) also claim that in recent years, different institutions have included computational thinking in areas that make up digital competence.

As Tosh *et al.* (2020) hold, digital instructional materials are becoming an increasingly prominent resource for teachers. They also say that teachers consult some form of online tools and resources: Ninety-five percent of elementary and secondary teachers have reported using Google, and more than half of both elementary and secondary teachers report consulting Pinterest, Teachers Pay Teachers, and their state department of education websites to do this planning (Tosh *et al*, 2020).

Objectives

* To analyze the use of flipped learning for improving English grammar in A1 classrooms.

• To analyze students' perception of flipped learning for developing English learning.

Materials and method

In the context of this study, the dependent variable was flipped learning composed of understanding digital practices. In terms of flipped learning, it contains the digital material, and the independent variable, which was grammar in use, includes the performance of students using this strategy.

As Patton (2002) suggested, the "how" research question can be answered by qualitative inquiry. Thus, it is more convenient to obtain specific, personal, and sensitive information about the participants. This type of research selected for this study, as Liamputtong (2019) claims, refers to "a broad approach" that qualitative researchers adopt to examine social circumstances. The inquiry assumes which posits that people utilize "what they see, hear, and feel" to make sense of social experiences (Liamputtong, 2019b).

It was decided, after analyzing the context, that this research would be focused on A1 students (beginners) who, according to Leeson *et al*. (2016), are students who can introduce themselves and others; can make use of very basic common expressions to communicate a message; they can also ask and answer questions to know specific details such as places, belongings, among others. These students belong to the "Centro de Idiomas de la Universidad Veracruzana" in Xalapa, Veracruz, Mexico.

It was expected to implement the flipped learning strategy with such students and study the phenomenon by obtaining information with the use of a survey as a collecting technique.

Participants

The participants were students whose characteristics were mainly age, which was from 15 to 17 years old, most of them were high school students from different schools and all of them were beginners (A1). In the classroom, there were twenty students of whom eleven were women and eight were me. Those participants also had interesting characteristics: they were very good at working in teams, and they participated frequently. There were students of all types; some of them were introverted, others were extroverted, and some others were reflective.

Techniques and instruments

The teacher uses a book that focuses on teaching the students grammar and vocabulary through group activities in which students can make use of the language and thus, they learn by practice. Such a book was provided by the teacher of the class. Unit per unit was carefully analysed, to have a better perspective of their previous knowledge. Subsequently, some topics were selected to choose the one that fits the best for the flipped learning strategy. Finally, the topic "prepositions of place" was chosen.

According to Sangermán *et al.* (2021), the flipped learning strategy can be implemented using various physical and virtual materials: videos, infographics, podcasts, books, web pages, booklets, brochures, cards, and others. To evaluate the "flipped learning" strategy with the students, a short video was designed, (Video) taking into consideration

the grammar in use. Thus, there is a brief explanation of grammar. To develop the flipped learning strategy correctly, this video was provided to the students one day before the class so that they could assimilate the use of the prepositions of place, and then, they were able to practice actively in the classroom with their peers.

The teacher allowed us to give the class to obtain better results. Therefore, a brief presentation was designed to work with that in the class. During the class, first, the designated teacher asked students to ask questions about the video. Then, the teacher made use of the presentation. As prepositions of place are not a complex topic, it was decided to make use of some illustrations in the presentation, which showed different situations where students had to make use of prepositions of place. The teacher asked students to discuss the possible answers and finally, he asked one of them to write the answer on the board. In the end, the whole group gave at the same time the correct answers.

By the end of the class, the professor of the class and the researchers asked the students if they had any questions about the topics and then, they asked students to answer a short survey. Finally, the students provided feedback and vice versa.

Finally, the teacher provided a survey to collect the students' perspectives and opinions related to the class and the strategy applied.

Process

The students were previously informed about this survey by the teacher and most of them had no problem in completing it while a few of them informed that they did not have an internet connection to complete it at that moment, but they promised to complete it once they arrived home.

Firstly, after giving the English class that implemented the flipped learning technique, the survey was provided to the students so that they were able to express their thoughts towards the implementation of this teaching-learning technique. Then, once they completed the survey, it was necessary to verify the number of students and data were the same. Last but not least, since the survey was anonymous, the students felt free to express

the advantages and disadvantages of this strategy and to share their opinions of the class. Because of this, at the end of the day, all of them provided the answers without issues.

Results and findings

This figure was created to know the students' perception of flipped learning as an innovative strategy. This strategy was applied through a video that was uploaded to the YouTube platform.

Figure 1

The trend of the acceptance of the innovation.
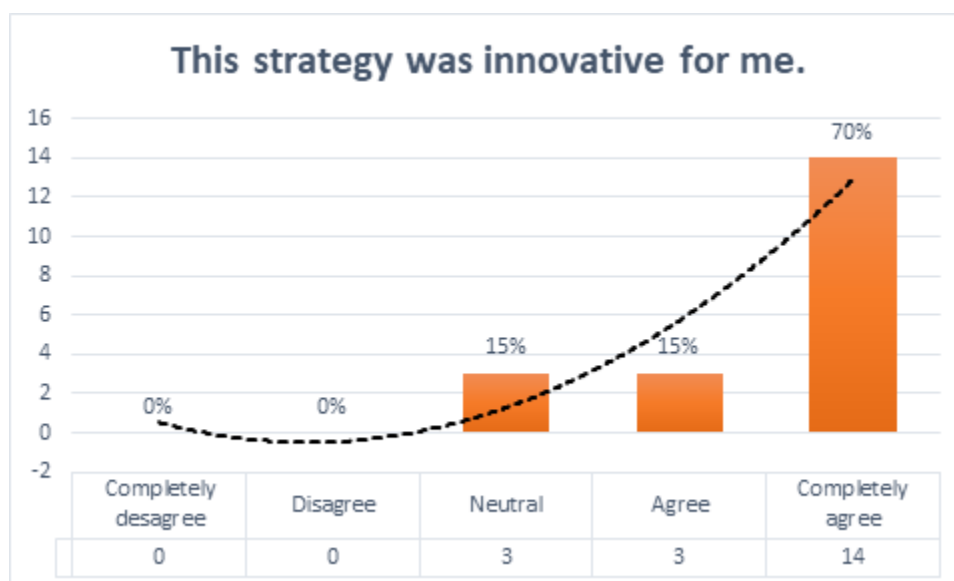
As can be seen in Figure 1 the majority completely agreed that "flipped learning" was an innovative strategy for learning. Just 15% of the students answered "neutral". It was exhibited that this strategy was innovative for the students. Even during the pandemic, most of the students had not used flipped learning.

The following figure is objective to show the student's answers with the knowledge that they acquired by watching the video used for this research.

Figure 2

Distribution of the acceptance of learning through the video.

I learnt the topic by watching the video.

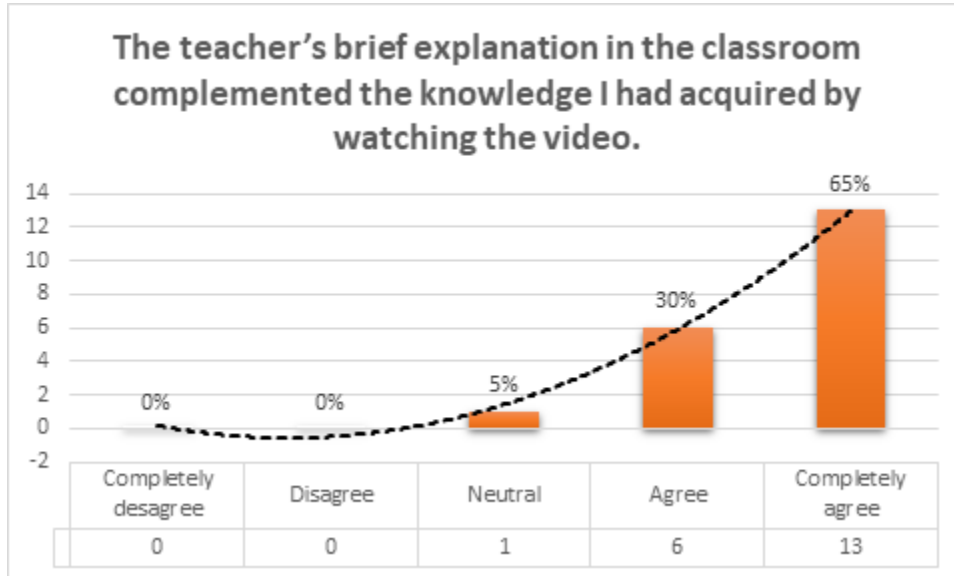| Completely desagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Completely agree
0	0	2	7	11
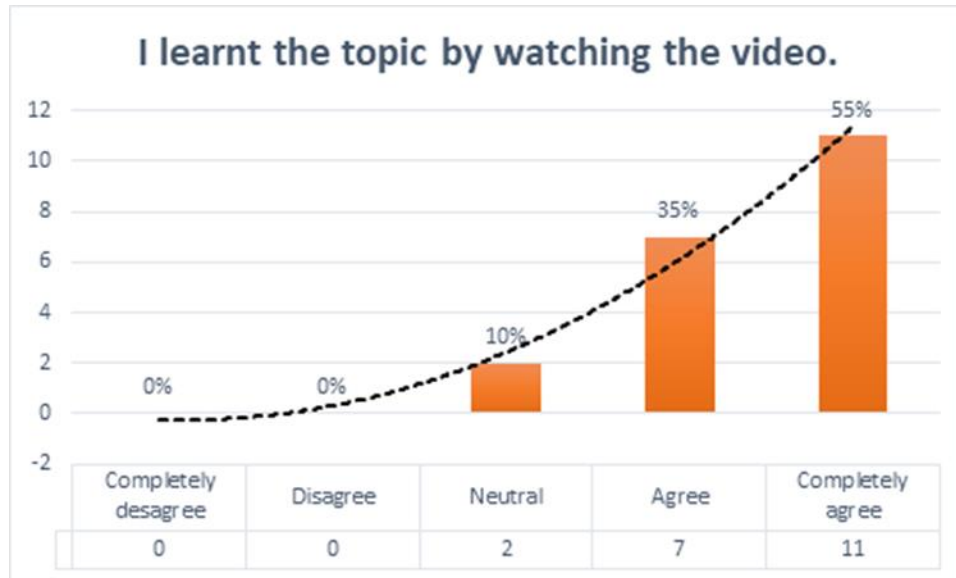
Also, in Figure 2, as it is observed, the majority agreed that they learned the topic by watching the video as the trend shows (55%). Just a few of the students were neutral (10%). During the explanation of the topic, we observed that effectively, the students had previous knowledge thanks to the video. Thus, using this strategy was a better way of learning a grammatical topic for the students as they did understand the information developed in class.

Figure 3 presented below shows the results of the brief explanation given by the teacher after the students had watched the video.

Figure 3

Teacher's efficient explanation

The teacher's brief explanation in the classroom complemented the knowledge I had acquired by watching the video.

|	Completely desagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Completely agree
	0	0	1	6	13

As we can see in Figure 3, the trend is that 65% percent of the participants completely agreed that the teacher's explanation made them consolidate their knowledge previously acquired. Only 5% was neutral. We realized that the students understood the topic after the explanation as they answered every single exercise provided at the end of the class. It was shown that the teacher has an important role when applying this strategy to consolidate what was learned before by the students.

In Figure 4, the student's perception of flipped learning as a learning strategy is presented.

Figure 4

Flipped learning as a useful strategy.

I consider this a useful strategy for learning.

	Completely desagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Completely agree
	1	0	1	4	14
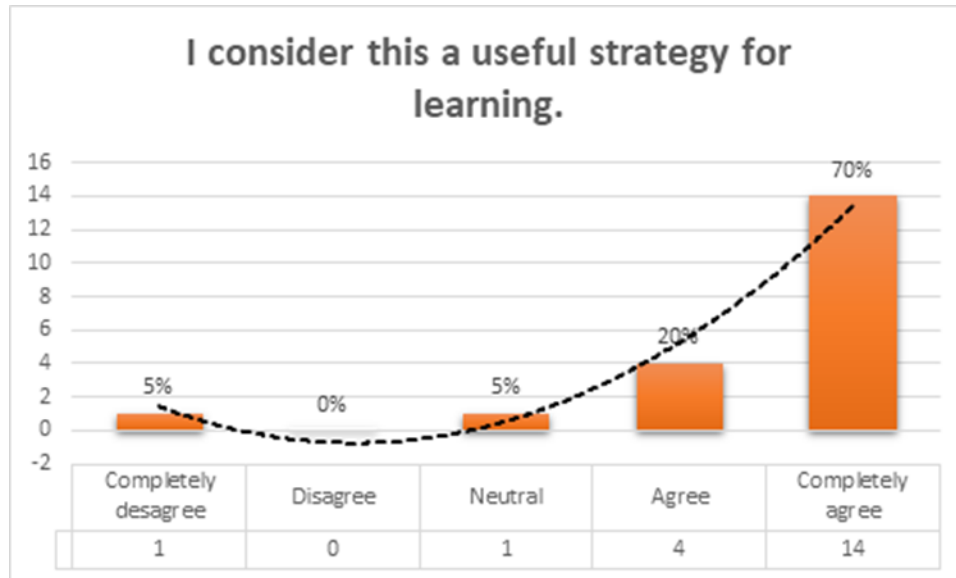
As can be observed above (Figure 4), the majority agreed that this strategy was a useful one for learning; some others (5%) were neutral, and finally, just 5% of the students disagreed. Data results showed that the students agreed on the improvement of their knowledge using flipped learning. It may also be a relevant point to determine if students would be able to use this innovative teaching strategy in the future to improve their second language by themselves. Hence, the following figure (5) gave us some significant results.

Figure 5

Grade of acceptance of the strategy

After this experience, I will consider this way of learning as a useful tool for improving my English by myself.

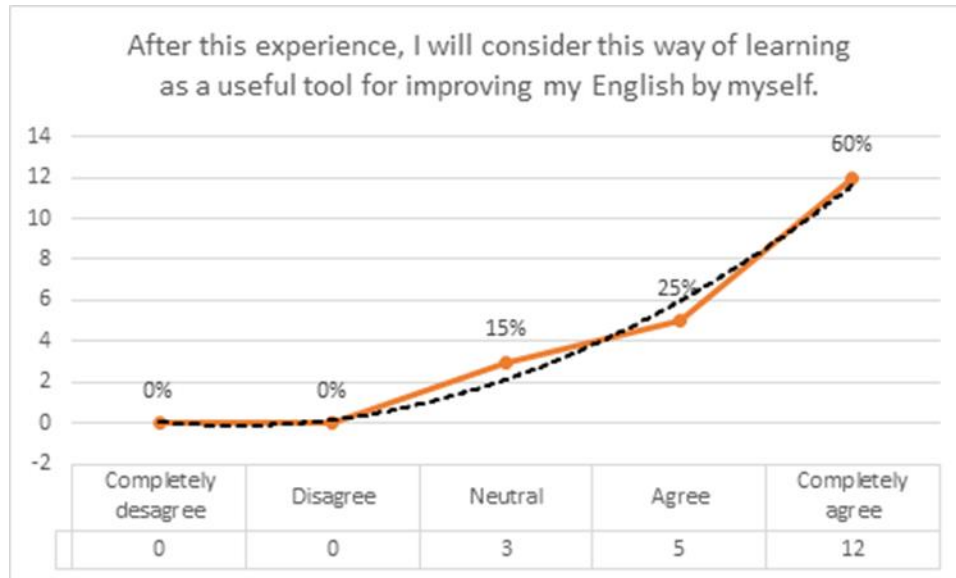| Completely desagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Completely agree
0	0	3	5	12

Figure (5) shows that 60 % of the students completely agreed that they would use this strategy to improve their second language in the future, 25 % only agreed and the rest of the students were neutral. During the class, most of the students seemed to be comfortable with the class as they seemed to be motivated and participative responding positively to the teaching strategy and the grammar in use topics. Therefore, the results of Figure 5 demonstrate that most of them will consider using this strategy in the future to improve their English by themselves. Moreover, the video used in this research was uploaded to YouTube, which promotes the use of online resources for learning English and provides a learning experience that can attract them to search for other learning content related to the topic.

Covid-19 forced students to adapt to different teaching methods, however, it was not assured that they would learn as if they were in the classroom. Therefore, it was expected to obtain negative results, nonetheless, the fact that 35 % of them were neutral and 60 % had a certain grade of acceptance demonstrates that this is a useful strategy.

In this Figure 6, the students' comfort in accessing the video is shown.

Figure 6
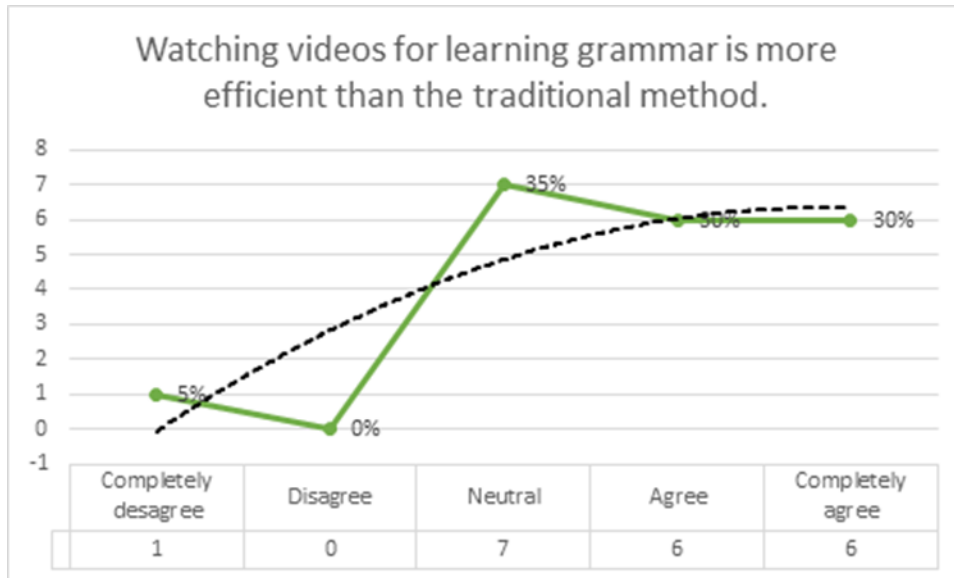
Comfort with the use of the video
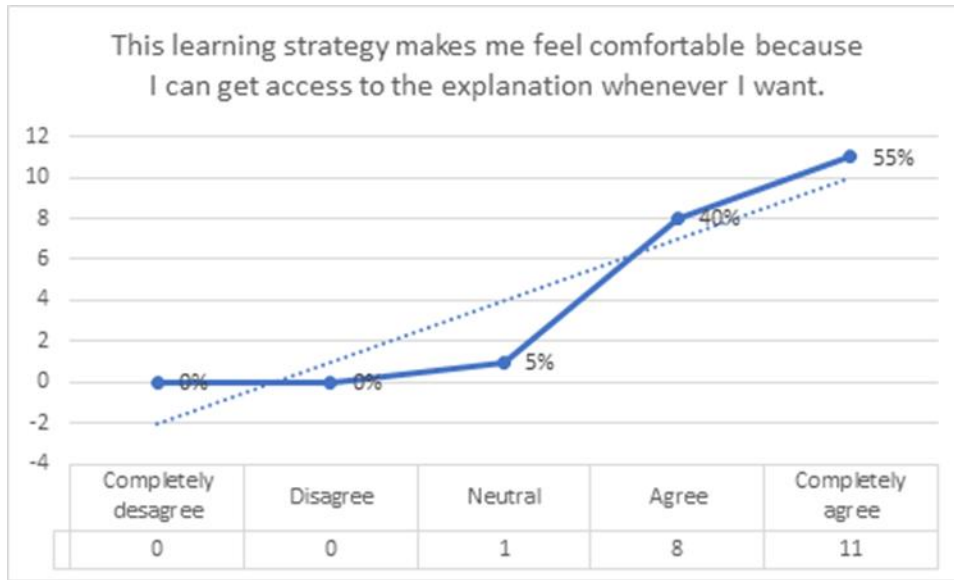
A large amount of the participants agreed that the strategy made them feel comfortable because they could access the explanation at any time. Only 5% of the students answered "neutral". Additionally, the students feel freedom with the use of digital material when they need more time to understand the topic. Also, this is related to autonomy as they study on their own. What makes them feel confident when they are working with independent material is the fact that they will receive explanations, answers, and time to replay the video to revise the information at any time. It is also important to point out that indirect instruction must be clear, accessible, simple, and iterative.

The results in the next figure (7) described the effect of the words "grammar" and "videos" to see the acceptance of this innovative teaching method against the traditional one.

Figure 7

Acceptance of media for learning grammar.

Watching videos for learning grammar is more efficient than the traditional method.

| Completely desagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Completely agree
1	0	7	6	6

Note: Figure 7 shows that 30 % of the students completely agreed with this teaching method and in the same way 30 % only agreed. Nonetheless, 5 % of them completely disagreed with this and the rest were neutral. In this question most of the students agreed that this is a good strategy for learning grammar, nevertheless, it is comprehensible to see that the rest preferred to be neutral or disagreed as they could have had bad experiences by learning this way.

The following figure (8) expresses the comprehensibility of the language used in the video since the participants were beginners and as teachers developing indirect instruction, the skill to accommodate the language, vocabulary, and register must be an important figure for the learning material developer.

Figure 8

Comprehension of the video's content
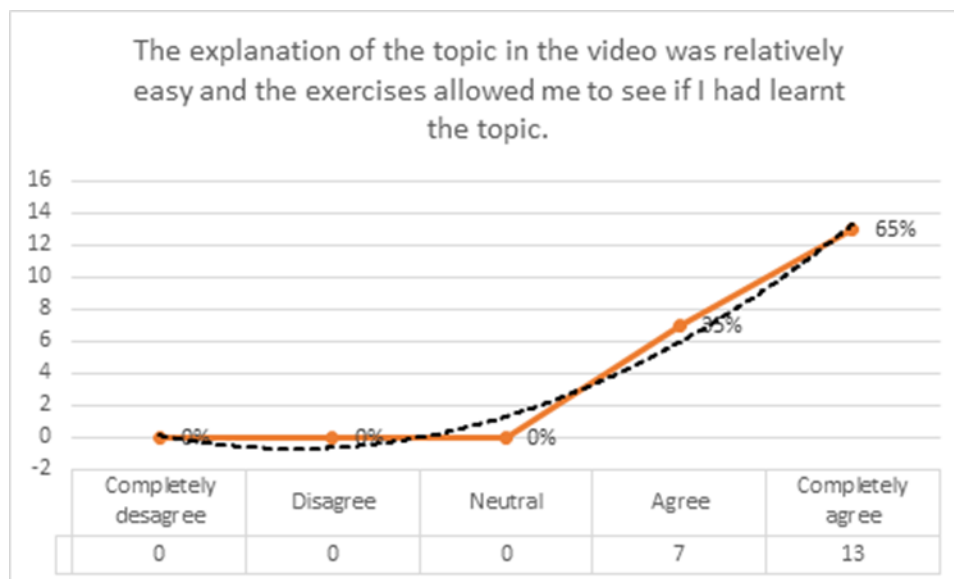
As can be seen in Figure 8, 65 % of the students completely agree that they understood the video and the rest of them (35 %) only agreed with this.

Such results demonstrate that most of the A1-level students had no problems with the explanation of the video and the language was adequate. Therefore, it is fundamental to select words in concordance with the student's level of English so that content can easily be understood and have no trouble with the explanation of a specific topic.

Discussion

It is important to take into consideration the use of flipped learning as a new strategy that is part of the evolution of the use of technology. Ruiz (2020) recovered relevant conclusions about the use of ICT in this era since ICTs "now play an essential role in language teaching and they also have a significant field presence" (p. 67). Additionally, flipped learning is a strategy that promotes the use of technology based on developing self-

learning, and helps teachers accomplish their learning goals with the use of ICT. These teaching strategies are necessary because the advancements in digital resources and applications for developing self-learning material are focused essentially on those students who are in favor of using technology. Furthermore, it is now possible to improve language learning with the use of a variety of online tools, resources, and activities for enhancing the acquisition of a language and it may be beneficial if it is used by both parties, students, and teachers.

The viability of applying this strategy seems like a good option for replacing the standard method. However, the teacher must be well capable of giving a brief class to avoid confusion, and there must be a relationship between the material (video) and the teacher's knowledge. Also, if it is possible, there must be training for those teachers who are interested in using this method through videos, since it is a difficult task (Guevara, 2021). Similarly, Guevara (2021) holds that for the method to be effective, a previous analysis of the student's learning needs is needed, as well as the technical teacher's capabilities for using the authoring tool. In summary, it is clear that the students accepted this teaching strategy, and it was useful for them during the class. Also, it contributes to the student's confidence because they can study at any time by themselves. Consequently, they do not feel stressed if something is not being understood.

Conclusion

As it was shown, the use of "flipped learning" improved the students' language learning, specifically the grammatical aspects as can be seen in the survey results which displayed positive answers. This research aimed to determine whether flipped learning allowed A1 students to acquire better knowledge about different English topics. The results obtained during this research exhibit that there was an important improvement in the previous topics and thus they understood the main topic easier than expected, which is the aim of flipped learning. It was also observed that students' confidence improved in a certain way by using this strategy: the participation in the classroom increased; they interacted more with their classmates and teacher. All this process enhances the students' autonomy as they previously learned the information by themselves in their own way. Moreover, some students found this strategy, an innovative way of learning.

Current teachers should take flipped learning as a fundamental teaching strategy, as this one was very effective and demanding during the pandemic, and it has been considered a useful strategy to promote self-learning. On the other hand, teachers can help their students with this teaching strategy so that learners do not find their classes difficult during the class and increase the knowledge the students acquire during their lessons and autonomy would increase since they study and put into practice the information that is implemented in the videos.

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