



Enhancing ELT students' oral communication skills using video podcasting: A Mixed-Methods Case Study in an Online Speaking Course

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Abstract

Owing to unexpected events such as natural disasters or pandemics, an immediate transition to online education may be essential. Moreover, some universities now deliver particular courses online. Therefore, there is a special need for fresh methods to improve EFL learners' language proficiency in online settings, especially their speaking skills, which are still difficult to develop in virtual environments [1] [2]. The study investigated the potential of student-created video podcasts as an instructional tool for speaking skill development in an online course from the perspective of students. Although the research was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, its findings bear continuing relevance to current and future digital learning environments. This mixed-methods study was conducted with 60 first-year ELT students at a state university in Turkey. In the online course called "Oral Communication Skills", the students were required to create video podcasts, in pairs and individually on a given topic, and to evaluate both their own and their peers' speaking performance based on a specific rubric. Data were obtained from a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire and semi structured Zoom-based interviews carried out with 14 students. The questionnaire responses were analyzed descriptively, whereas a thematic analysis was applied to the interview data. The results indicated that video-podcasting tasks were perceived as valuable in developing communicative functions. Additionally, interview data highlighted that watching their own video podcasts enabled students to recognize mistakes in pronunciation, accuracy and fluency. This study suggests that video podcasting may be integrated into online speaking instruction across a range of foreign languages besides English to enhance learners' communicative competence.

Keywords: video podcasts, speaking skills, online language learning

1. Introduction

1.2 Introduce the Problem

As a productive skill, learners generally perceive speaking as a notably difficult aspect of foreign language learning. Similarly, EFL students have difficulty in developing their speaking skills due to a number of relevant factors such as affective variables and insufficient linguistic competence [3] [4] [5]. Not only cognitive load of speaking but also psychological aspects such as low self-confidence and anxiety can inhibit students' oral performance. In addition, learners in non-English speaking countries have limited opportunities to be exposed to the target language and foster pragmatic competence outside the EFL class. In this regard, the use of technology assists learners in receiving authentic input and practicing speaking.

Technology integration into the instructional process serves to enhance oral proficiency through providing learners with considerable opportunities to experience real-life communication beyond the classroom. Recent research has shown that digital tools can contribute to developing language areas, including grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation and fluency [6] [7] [8]. Crucially, they help learners to develop confidence in their speaking performance [8].

Foreign language anxiety is regarded as a crucial factor in hindering speaking proficiency [9] [10] and decreasing learners' willingness to communicate [11] [12], thus limiting their overall language learning process [13]. An increase in self-confidence in speaking has been positively associated with real benefits for foreign language learners. Learners with greater assurance in oral communication are generally likely to carry out speaking tasks more willingly, which offers them a favorable opportunity to practice further and develop their speaking proficiency [14] [15]. Moreover, it has been underlined that learners feel more confident tend to take communicative risks, which allows them to use the language



in creative ways [15]. It seems that the incorporation of technology into language pedagogy can help learners to gain self-confidence in speaking that may also support instructional process, in particular in online and out-of-class environments.

With regard to online foreign language courses, the literature reveals that it is possible for learners to enhance their speaking skills productively in online settings by employing different pedagogical methods. It has been suggested that interactive online courses are more instrumental in developing non-language major learners' oral proficiency than traditional methods [16]. Likewise, in their study, Miyamoto et al. (2024) proposed a curriculum designed for online language courses at university level [17]. The instructional framework comprising "asynchronous self-learning modules, weekly small-group synchronous sessions, and performance-based assessments"(p.55) was developed to enhance learners' speaking skills in Japanese. The findings revealed that this integrated curriculum allowed online language learners to attain oral proficiency levels similar to that of in-classroom learners, and even better in particular speaking activities [17]. In line with these findings, another study conducted by Benjelloun (2021) with English learners in online courses in higher education focused on evaluating the effectiveness of "Think-Pair-Share" technique in promoting speaking skills. The results indicated that the technique contributed to the development of oral communication skills through enhancing participants' confidence, lexical knowledge and overall discourse competence [18].

Considering the challenges facing foreign language learners in fostering oral proficiency and the supportive role of technology in speaking skill development, particularly within online courses, this research focuses on the use of video podcasting as an instructional tool to develop ELT students' oral communication skills in online learning environments. The study specifically investigates how student-produced video podcasts can facilitate speaking skill development across online education and learners' reflections about this educational experience.

1.3 Video Podcasting and Speaking Skill Development in Foreign Language Education

A podcast can be defined as a form of digital media delivering mainly serial spoken audio content that can be downloaded or streamed over the Internet. Podcasts are also easily accessible for both listening and production irrespective of time and place [19]. In addition, podcasts can contain video content and these video podcasts are also referred to as Vodcasts or PodClips [20]. Podcasting, addressing a wide range of topics, can be incorporated into teaching in two principle ways. The initial approach involves employing podcasts as listening materials for learners. The second approach entails student-generated podcasts, where students produce their own audio or video content [20].

Previous studies have underlined the benefits of video podcasting in foreign language education. Such podcasts provide students with authentic input that helps comprehend listening [21] [22], facilitate vocabulary acquisition [22], and practice in speaking [23]. They serve to motivate the learners by virtue of an attractive content and flexible access [24]. Moreover, ICT tools such as video podcasts contribute to the development of digital competence, a much-needed skill in the learning context of today [25].

Recent studies suggest that video podcasts, or vodcasts, offer several benefits to foreign language learners in promoting speaking skills. These benefits pertain to overall effectiveness in progress in certain linguistic elements, addressing varied learning styles and developing autonomy. Video podcast have a notable positive impact on improving oral proficiency [26] [23]. They demonstrate a greater positive influence on advancing students' speaking abilities irrespective of their preferred learning styles compared to traditional methods and even audio podcasting [27]. Video podcasts play an important role in enhancing various assessable aspects of speaking, including fluency, pronunciation [27] [23], vocabulary and grammar [27]. In addition, they assist learners in organizing their ideas for speaking better and in expressing their thoughts more clearly through providing them with authentic and diverse input [23].

Previous studies in the literature indicate that developing speaking skills is generally challenging for foreign language learners, and this challenge becomes even greater in online learning environments. During the COVID-19 period, educators faced significant difficulties in supporting students' speaking development. While there are studies showing that video podcasts can contribute to the improvement of speaking skills in foreign language education [26] [27] [23], research specifically examining the use of student-produced video podcasts to enhance language skills in foreign language instruction is still scarce [28] [29]. For this reason, this study particularly investigated the role of student-produced podcasts in improving speaking skills, not only during times of necessity such as the pandemic but also in the context of online education, which is now implemented in many educational institutions. The study focused on the experiences and reflections of students who created their own video



podcasts as part of their language learning process. In this regard, this study addresses the following research question:

- How do ELT students reflect on their experiences of producing video podcasts to enhance oral communication skills in online speaking courses?

2. Method

This study employed a mixed-methods case study design [30] to evaluate the effectiveness of student-produced video podcasts as an instructional tool to develop oral proficiency in English in online education from the perspective of ELT students.

2.1 Setting and Participants

This study was conducted during the COVID-19 period in an online course offered to first-year students of the Department of English Language Teaching (ELT) at a state university in Turkey. The course was titled “*Oral Communication Skills*”. The participants were 60 students, divided into three sections, whose ages ranged from 18 to 21. Of these, 17 were male and 43 were female.

2.2 Instruments

The data for this study were gathered through a questionnaire consisting of 13 items on a five-point Likert scale, administered via Google Forms, and through semi-structured interviews conducted with 14 students (seven female and seven male) on Zoom. Both the questionnaire and the interviews were carried out with students who voluntarily agreed to participate in the study. The items in the student questionnaire and interview questions were designed in Turkish to allow students express their ideas clearly on video podcasting. They were adapted from an earlier survey conducted by the researcher [31]. The reliability of the questionnaire was assessed through Cronbach’s Alpha for 13 items, which produced a coefficient of .948, indicating excellent internal consistency. To ensure content validity, the questionnaire and interview questions went through evaluation by three specialists in foreign language education and the data collection tools were completed based on their feedback.

2.3 Procedures for data collection

The *Oral Communication Skills* course was given to first-year ELT students during the fall semester of their undergraduate program. The syllabus was prepared by the researcher following the Bologna Process guidelines. The overall aim of the course was to develop students’ oral communication skills. To achieve this goal, throughout the semester in the online learning environment, students were required to produce a series of video podcasts. Each student created a total of four podcasts: two in pairs and two individually. The students shared their video podcasts with the lecturer through the course page on the Moodle platform.

For the pair-work podcasts, students were asked to incorporate the speaking expressions given to them by the researcher into their utterances while they were discussing, to watch the produced podcasts, and to evaluate both their own speaking performances and those of their partners by using a rubric. As for the individual podcasts, which involved a persuasive speech and a presentation, the students similarly viewed and assessed their own oral productions using the rubric. In addition, after the video podcasts were created, some class time was spent watching the video recordings and providing feedback both from the lecturer and from peers. The detailed information about the video podcasts produced in the course is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. An Overview of the Student-Produced Video Podcasts

Podcast Number	Topic	Task Type	Duration	Evaluation
1	Student discussion: The effectiveness of online learning	Pair-work	3–5 minutes	Self- and peer- assessment & lecturer feedback
2	Student discussion: Differences between spoken and written language	Pair-work	3–5 minutes	Self- and peer- assessment & lecturer feedback



3	A persuasive speech on a controversial topic in the field of EFL	Individual	3–5 minutes	Self- and peer-assessment & lecturer feedback
4	Making a Presentation on a Selected Topic in English Language Teaching	Individual	10–15 minutes	Self- and peer-assessment & lecturer feedback

Following the creation of video podcasts, after the final week of the fall semester, students expressed their views in a questionnaire and 14 students were interviewed.

2.4 Data Analysis

The data gathered from the study were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. Questionnaire data were subjected to descriptive statistical analysis using MAXQDA and Excel, considering the frequencies and percentages. The interview data were analyzed through thematic analysis.

3. Results

To address the research question, the data obtained from the questionnaire and the semi-structured interviews are presented separately.

3.1. Quantitative Analysis (Student Questionnaire)

Descriptive statistics were employed to examine the responses provided in the student questionnaire. The Likert-scale items were analyzed quantitatively in terms of frequencies and percentages, and the descriptive analysis was conducted with the support of MAXQDA software. Table 2 shows the results concerning the perspectives of ELT students on the use of student-generated video podcasts to develop oral proficiency. The 13 Likert-scale items (5 = strongly agree, 1 = strongly disagree) were reported with combined categories, where A/SA refers to 'agree/strongly agree' and D/SD to 'disagree/strongly disagree'.

Table 2: ELT students' reflections on video podcasting

		A/SA	N	D/SD	M
		%	%	%	
Q1	I believe that producing video podcasts contributes to the improvement of my English speaking skills.	83.3	5	11.6	4.13
Q2	I have a positive attitude towards producing video podcasts in English classes	88.3	1.7	10	4.25
Q3	I believe that video podcasting is a useful tool for improving my English speaking skills.	83.3	6.7	10	4.22
Q4	Video podcasting helps me learn to use appropriate expressions during speaking (e.g., giving opinions, discussing, agreeing or disagreeing)	86.7	3.3	10	4.25
Q5	Video podcasting helps improve my English pronunciation	73.3	11.7	15	3.98
Q6	Knowing that my video podcast will be watched by others increases my motivation to produce it.	30	31.7	38.3	2.98
Q7	I enjoyed collaborating with my peers in producing a video podcast	50	23.3	26.7	3.32
Q8	I enjoyed producing a video podcast individually.	76.6	11.7	11.7	4.12
Q9	I find producing English video podcasts engaging	76.7	10	13.3	3.87
Q10	I find producing English video podcasts enjoyable	73.3	10	16.7	3.80



Q11	I had no technical problems while creating the video podcast	51,7	23.3	25	3.35
Q12	I liked the activities of producing English video podcasts	76.6	11.7	11.7	3.97
Q13	I would like to take part in such video podcast production activities in English classes	70	13.3	16.6	3.73

Note: M: Mean Number of Students: 60

A: Agree, SA: Strongly Agree, N: Neutral, D: Disagree, SD: Strongly Disagree

The descriptive analysis reveals the participants' overall positive reflections concerning the incorporation of video podcasting into speaking instruction. Most participants strongly felt that producing video podcasts contributed to the development of their speaking skills ($M = 4.13$; $A/SA = 83.3\%$) and they were a useful means of improving oral performance ($M = 4.22$; $A/SA = 83.3\%$). They also emphasized the supportive role of video podcasting in learning to use appropriate speaking expressions ($M = 4.25$; $A/SA = 86.7\%$). Pronunciation was also perceived as one of the areas in which students benefited ($M = 3.98$; $A/SA = 73.3\%$).

As regards the attitudes, the participants stated that they enjoyed the process of video podcasting, either collaboratively ($M = 3.32$; $A/SA = 50\%$) or individually ($M = 4.12$; $A/SA = 76.6\%$), and found it both engaging ($M = 3.87$) and enjoyable ($M = 3.80$). However, it seems that students favored producing individual video podcasts over collaborative ones. More than half of the participants mentioned that they did not experience any technical problems ($M = 3.35$; $A/SA = 51.7\%$), though a significant number reported having had some difficulties. Notably, a lower level of motivation was observed when podcasts were created for an audience ($M = 2.98$; $A/SA = 30\%$).

Overall, the findings indicate that ELT students perceived student-generated video podcasts to be beneficial for fostering their oral communication skills in online courses, particularly with respect to speaking improvement, language use, and learner engagement.

3.2 Qualitative Analysis (Interviews)

The semi-structured interview questions asked to 14 first-year ELT students focused on receiving in-depth information about their experiences with video podcasting in an online speaking course, regarding perceived benefits and challenges of producing video podcasts, collaborative and individual video podcast tasks, and its potential use in both online and face-to-face foreign language classrooms. The thematic analysis of the interview data revealed four major themes developed from the codes identified, based on interview responses. The themes were as follows: *contributions to oral proficiency, enhancement of linguistic competence, difficulties in podcast production, and the pedagogical integration of student-generated podcasts*.

As regards the first theme, almost all of the students (interview responses: 13/14 students) considered student-produced podcasts to be beneficial to their speaking development. However, one student emphasized that video podcasting was neither completely useless nor particularly helpful for enhancing oral communication skills. This perception seemed to be associated with the student's spending long hours on the production of a particular video podcast.

"When I created a video podcast, I watched myself again and noticed my mistakes, then tried to correct them in my videos several times. For this reason, I definitely think it was useful"

"To be honest, I don't really think so. In the video podcast task, I spent nearly five hours trying to record a three-minute video. I kept recording and watching again, but I couldn't really identify and correct my mistakes to improve my speaking. That's why I don't feel it helped me much."

Considering the perceived benefits of video podcasting for oral performance, some participants pointed out that video podcast tasks allowed them to be exposed to the target language and to practice oral communication in online education through providing peer and teacher feedback, self-reflection opportunities and management of speaking anxiety. In addition, it was stated that this video podcasting experience helped them start thinking in English during the speech and foster interaction skills:

"I think language is very fragile, and if I don't speak even for a short period, I notice a serious decline in myself, no matter how good I am. This has been the case for years, especially in English. During this period, we had no classroom interaction and my speaking time decreased. Outside of school, I had no place to practice speaking. Through these podcasts, I found the chance to keep speaking without long pauses, which helped me not to forget what I had learned. That's why I can say it was useful"



"I definitely think it was useful. By doing these tasks, we improved our ability to think simultaneously while speaking. Later, when interacting with someone, the podcasts helped us realize how to adjust our posture, manage the time we had, and make the most of it. This was especially true for the ones we did in pairs"

With respect to the second theme, *enhancement of linguistic competence*, students reported that video podcasting process supported students in developing their vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation (including stress and intonation), and fluency, and even contributed to their pragmatic competence development. Interview responses revealed that all participants found video podcasting useful for improving pronunciation, especially stress and intonation.

"I think it also improved my stress and intonation. Normally, when talking to myself or a friend, I wouldn't pay much attention to it, but in a presentation I focused more on stressing important parts and using intonation. This really helped me express myself better when speaking"

"Of course I tried to be more careful with pronunciation. In class, I might just speak and mistakes could be overlooked, but in a video they stand out and you feel you have to correct them. I think that was really useful"

Most of the students (interview responses: 8/14 students) emphasized noticeable improvements in fluency, especially a decrease in unnecessary pauses:

"For example, when giving a presentation, I realized that I needed to pause less. In my second recording I paused less than in the first one, which helped me speak more fluently and think faster"

"It helped me in terms of fluency and pronunciation, because I learned to adjust my speaking pace better. I also started to use stress more effectively, and my speech became much more fluent. Before, I used to pause and think for too long, partly because I was afraid of making mistakes"

As regards the development of grammar knowledge, half of the participants (interview responses: 7/14 students) reported that, producing video podcast assisted them in gaining grammatical awareness and improving grammar:

"I often make small grammar mistakes while speaking, but the video podcasts made me notice them more clearly. In face-to-face situations I used to think I could cover them up with stress or facial expressions, but I realized this was not the case. Watching myself, I saw that the mistakes I thought were minor were actually not so small. So now I am more careful"

"At first, when doing pair work, I felt that my fluency and pronunciation really improved, because I focused on making myself understood by my partner. I tried hard to form correct sentences. Later, when I had to give a more formal speech, I paid special attention to grammar. Pronunciation was also important, but I believe my grammar improved thanks to this process"

Considering vocabulary development, some participants (interview responses: 5/14 students) mentioned that video podcasting also helped them to expand their vocabulary, particularly highlighting its role in fostering academic vocabulary use:

"I learned different words to talk about the topics in a more academic way. I also consulted different sources, which is why I feel this video podcasting task was useful in every way"

"We not only learned how to present the content but also expanded the words we could use, including more academic vocabulary. In this way, I think we showed a different attitude in our speeches — something I had never done before"

With regard to the third theme, a vast majority of the participants (interview responses: 11/14 students) reported that they did not face any technical difficulties during the podcast production process. Some students mentioned minor technical problems that resulted from poor Internet connectivity and insufficient equipment:

"The first two video podcasts were a bit like practice, since this was something new for us, but afterwards it generally went well. The quality was a little low, though. I personally had no major problems because I had both internet and a computer, but I know some friends at other schools who struggled with similar assignments due to lack of equipment. Apart from that, I don't think there would be any serious difficulties"

As regards the last theme, the pedagogical integration of student-generated podcasts, nearly all of the participants (interview responses: 13/14 students) stated that they are willing to take part in such video podcasting tasks and these tasks should be integrated into both online and face-to-face language courses focusing on developing learners' oral proficiency. Some students suggested that producing video podcasts should be offered as a separate course:

"I think it definitely should be included. It could even be offered as a separate course"

"It definitely should be included. When we return to face-to-face education, it could be used as an alternative to support classroom learning"



With respect to the task types that can be incorporated into the curriculum, some students mentioned that both individual and collaborative work had specific benefits:

"Both pair work and individual tasks should be included, as all of them are useful. I can also add that maybe a full group assignment could be tried as well. Instead of just two people, it could be six or seven, like a round-table activity. It might be more difficult, but it would still be a nice experience for us"

"Pair work helped me improve, because speaking with a partner made my speech more fluent."

Overall, the questionnaire and interview findings were consistent, which indicates that students considered the use of this method in online education beneficial for developing oral proficiency.

4. Conclusions and Discussion

This study focused on assessing the effectiveness of student-generated video podcasts as an instructional tool to foster first-year ELT students' oral communication skills in online language courses. The results indicated that students reflected positively on video podcasting, particularly in relation to the development of their linguistic and communicative competence. Participants mentioned some minor technical challenges facing students during the podcasting process and stated that producing video podcasts for an audience is not a motivating factor for them to create video podcasts. A possible reason for this finding could be related to speaking anxiety, particularly when students are aware that their performance will be watched by others. However, it is clear that the overall attitude is very positive. The participants suggest that video podcasting tasks should be incorporated into the curriculum of online and face-to-face speaking courses. It is also noteworthy that students prefer producing video podcasts individually rather than in pairs although they think that each task type offer distinct benefits for students.

Previous research also indicates that video podcasting contributes to the development of foreign language learners' oral proficiency through developing some aspects of language such as grammar, vocabulary [27] pronunciation and fluency [27] [23]. However, the number of studies focusing on the role of video podcasting in fostering speaking skills in foreign language instruction is very limited. It is apparent that speaking is one of the most challenging skills to develop online, especially in cases of emergency distance education such as times of pandemic or earthquake. In this regard, this study recommends the use of student-generated video podcasts as a tool to promote oral communication skills in online learning contexts in a pedagogically sound way, providing sample podcast tasks.

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