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Flipgrid as a Resource to Promote High-School Students' Oral Skills in English as a Foreign Language

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Abstract

This study focused on the perceived usefulness of the online platform called Flipgrid as an additional resource for learning English as a foreign language in a group of Italian high-school students. In particular, the main focus was on the usefulness of the platform as a tool to practice oral skills in English. The study included activities given to the students and their relative feedback, in written form and with group interviews. During the whole study, a diary from the perspective of the teacher was kept in order to give an account of the overall experience on both the students' and the teacher's fronts. The study showed positive results in the perceived usefulness of Flipgrid in general, but many solicitations were registered regarding the necessity of technical improvements of the website and, particularly, in the recording pages and editing tools. Moreover, it was recognized that the use of the editing tools and effects was not exploited without solicitation by the teacher by most of the participants.

Introduction

In 2021, technology has become an intrinsic part of everyday life for the vast majority of the population, especially for work purposes for the adult population, but also as the fastest mean of communication and learning for people of any age, from kindergarten children to the senior population. As Einstein once said, "intellectual growth should commence at birth and cease only at death". It is important to remember that, indeed, learning is not limited by age and the development of technology in the last decades has revolutionised this concept, spreading learning opportunities to any time-zone, or geographically remote location, through e-learning.

E-learning, which will be presented in the first chapter of this dissertation, is an invaluable tool that allows people to study, interact, and receive feedback even from great distances, or without time restrictions thanks to the possibility of learning asynchronously. Furthermore, e-learning has given the unprecedented opportunity to continue a learning path even during the most unfavourable times, such as the one that all students and educators are living in right now, since the end of 2019. The global pandemic has forced students and teachers from all around the world to reinvent themselves, discover new strategies and adapt their teaching and learning to the available conditions of the situation.

In particular, this study focuses on the importance of e-learning in relation to language learning. As many studies here presented state, it is evident that e-learning is one of the most convenient means for language learning, starting from the possibility of communicating, orally or via text, with people from all around the world. Moreover, many applications have been surfacing in the last ten years which are focused on language learning, through vocabulary, sentence formation or the explanation of grammatical topics. Furthermore, in the last years, e-learning has been being integrated to language education curricula, not only as an external saltuary resource, but as a standard support.

This study proposes to investigate the use of one particular resource that especially emerged in this time of emergency. Flipgrid is a free online platform, where students and educators can communicate, share ideas, give and receive feedback through video messages and discussions. The important added aspect of Flipgrid is the opportunity

given to the participants to create not only a video message for their classmates and educator, but a multimodal message, which represents the essence of today's way of communicating. In fact, as it will be discussed in Chapter 2., multimodality has become intrinsic to communication, since most of it is channelled through multimedia, where messages are a blend of text, images, sound effects and animation. Therefore, in this research, multimodality was considered a fundamental part of the learning path on which the students are on. The most important features and characteristics of Flipgrid will be described in Chapter 3.

The second part of this thesis regards the experimentation conducted by the researcher to investigate Flipgrid's perceived usefulness by both the students and the educator in the learning of English as a foreign language, through the personal creation of video presentations and with the addition of considering the multimodality factor in the students' products. The analysis examined the students' feedback from questionnaires and group interviews. Moreover, the researcher kept an observation diary to account for the educator's point of view of the experience. Finally, the student's products were analysed to investigate their successfulness according to parameters set by the researcher herself, including those in reference to multimodality.

The results from this small-scale study will be discussed in relation to previous studies and to the research questions that the researcher had set at the beginning of this experimentation. Finally, conclusions on the study will be provided, together with some suggestions for future research.

Part 1. Theoretical Background

Chapter 1. E-Learning

Technology has undoubtedly evolved and revolutionised whole fields around the world and, in particular, it has impacted the field of education, its methods of teaching and learning as a result of the Internet becoming a channel for collaboration and communication between unlimited groups of learners, who are not bound by geographical distance (Al-Fraihat, Joy and Sinclair, 2019). An important result of the technological development applied to education is the term e-learning (electronic learning), a new alternative to the traditional method of sharing information between teachers and learners. Since the early years of the twenty-first century, many papers have been written on e-learning as a resource that has been making its way into schools and education in general. Its origins actually come from the 1970s (Waller and Wilson, 2001), however the recent changes in technology have completely transformed its uses and forms. Holmes and Gardner (2006) investigated extensively the meaning of e-learning and where, in their opinion from the early 2000s, it was going to head. There still is open discussion on how to best define e-learning (Arkorful and Abaidoo, 2015) and could be differently defined based on the question of its role as studied by Dublin (2005) or, as Holmes and Gardner state, "There may be as many definitions of e-Learning as there are academic papers on the subject, […] however, our preferred definition would view e-Learning simply as: *online access to learning resources, anywhere and anytime*" (2006: 14). Therefore, it seems that the tool of e-learning can be viewed with an extremely large range of possibilities, that allow people, from young students to adults of any age, to have access to different areas of interest thanks to online resources now available on the Internet. The authors go on to point out another important factor that impacts the use of technology even in today's schools, such as the evident need for technical competence on the part of teachers introducing e-learning in their classrooms as well as the need for "ease of access to the technology and its costs" (2006: 33). Further on, at the centre of focus of their

publication, Holmes and Gardner list the principal features that an e-learning activity should account for to guarantee the engagement of the learners and the support given by the teacher. Among these are the development of the capacity for self-assessment and reflection, the importance of fostering motivation, encouraging curiosity, promoting understanding of learning goals and assessment criteria as well as scaffolding and creating an authentic learning environment. Finally, one of the last aspects analysed reflects on two tools necessary to help learners feel closer to communal learning: the building of new knowledge through discussion in groups working on the same areas of studies and guaranteeing the scaffolding of such discussion (2006: 160). The authors' trust in the future of e-learning is evident as they hypothesise at various stages the great prospects and possibilities of its growth thanks to the development of technologies that, not thirty years ago, where thought of as "straight out of sci-fi ventures" by them.

Nowadays, the leaps of technology from the last twenty years are nearly taken for granted and thanks to the accessibility to the Internet, information from around the whole world, social networks and Apps to communicate by text, video or audio messages, are the normality. For this reason, more recent papers have examined new terminology such as m-learning and d-learning, which accompany e-learning in a complementary way. Basak et al. (2018) explore the definitions of these terms to clarify their roles to improve the educational outcome associated with the use of technological means of learning. "M-learning (mobile learning) is the subset of e-learning and d-learning (digital learning) is the combination of e-learning and m-learning" (2018: 194). The three are connected by common characteristics, such as delivering the learning through text, images and video clips which can be updated, and secondly, considering teachers and students as the main users, who are provided learning opportunities (2018: 206). Bahera (2013: 69), listing the advantages of e-learning, points out that it is learner centred:

> E-learning provides individualized instruction suited to the needs, abilities, learning styles and interests of the learners. E-learning has much potential to make the education, instruction and learning opportunities provided to the learners adaptable to the local needs and resources at their hands.

Moreover, e-learning can reach areas far from schools and colleges, ensuring the possibility of learning beyond the barriers of time and space and allows learners in

disadvantageous conditions, such as physical or psychological impediments, to have easy access to the learning material. Bahera also points out that "e-learning can cater to different learning styles and promote collaboration among students from different localities, cultures, regions, states and countries". It is flexible, interesting, and motivating and finally, e-learning can contribute to self-learning and evaluation through teachers, peers, or auto-instructional software.

1.1 E-Learning and Covid-19

Since March 2020 e-learning or distance learning have become a fundamental part of education, because of the epidemic that involved the whole world. The Covid-19 pandemic, so defined by the World Health Organization[1] last March, forced a lockdown for two months in Italy and the closure of the schools made new ways of teaching necessary, in order not to lose the scholastic year. Therefore, school began again through *Meet* or *Zoom* meetings online and teachers and students had to work together to find suitable solutions for teaching, learning, and evaluating their work, all done from their own homes. With the start of the following school year in September 2020, it became apparent that the difficulties were not over. In fact, in Italy, the directions from the State changed every month, hence changing the students' routines and habits as well. For the most part of the year, high-school students have experienced what is commonly called "50/50 school", where half of the class is present at school and the other is connected by an online meeting to the lessons. At one time, last March, all students went back to having school from home because of the increasingly problematic situation of Covid-19 spreading. For the purpose of this study is it important to point out that, while e-learning has been an emerging resource over the last twenty years, it has taken on a whole new role for today's students, because its use has not been a choice as much as it has been a need. In fact, these considerations are made by other researchers and teachers around the world, where the situation was similar. Dietrich et al. (2020) consider the success and failures of distance learning in their paper, stating that "the sudden decision to impose lockdown obliged educators and students to stay at home, thus inducing inequalities,

[1] From the WHO media briefing on March 11th 2020, retrieved from https://www.who.int/

ominous for both students and educators". They also highlight the fact that this generation of students was born in the world of technology and is used to it, but at the same time today's high-school students are not likely to be as motivated as learners who chose e-learning before the pandemic, because it was imposed on them.

1.2 E-Learning and Language Learning

Giving a more specific look to e-learning, research has been conducted on how it has influenced language learning and in what way technological features can be exploited for the learning of a second or foreign language. Kukuslka-Hulme (2009) investigated how technology could affect language learning through mobile learning, which is, as mentioned above, a subset of e-learning, or MALL, mobile assisted language learning. The author found that this type of learning is mainly characterized by the fact that it is not usually learner centred. However, the few studies analysed where the learner was intentionally established as the leader of the learning bring to light interesting aspects. In Song and Fox (2008) the activity showed the advantage of sharing information between learners and their teacher outside of the classroom context, therefore enabling them to have more frequent feedback and proactive communication. Michealsen (2008) also designed a study to promote students to be at the centre of the activities, self-directing and based on a virtual community. Finally, Kukuslka-Hulme (2008: 161-162) explores the need to rethink pedagogy and learning taking into consideration the technology available. She considers how difficult, yet useful, it would be to envisage learners not only executing m-learning activities, but creating activities especially intended for a digital community, employing their creativity to build content that other learners would feel engaged to study. Kukulska-Hulme and Traxler (2007) focus on the importance of m-learning as a learner's experience, thanks to its informality and its accessibility, which is even greater than conventional e-learning. As Kukulska-Hulme states:

> The key attributes of mobile learning are identified as the potential for learning to be personalized, situated, authentic, spontaneous and informal. […] In other words, a mobile learning experience is an occasion to capture a moment of interest […] with the goal of continuing to build on that interest in another place, at a later date."

Another study on mobile learning conducted by Andujar et al. (2020) begins with a list of some of the advantages of the union between traditional language teaching and e-learning or, even in a border sense, d-learning. As already stated by many researchers, the first assets are the possibility of learning at any time and in any place and the opportunity of real and virtual interaction between learners. However, the authors point out how digital learning is not always integrated with the rest of the class activities. Burston (2014) published an article about a survey on MALL and its real integration with the curriculum. The percentage of success appears to be proportional to the percentage of projects which implemented MALL integration into the curriculum, also after the initial stages of the activities. It seems that difficulties contributing to the problem can arise from lack of financial and technological support, the inflexibility of the curriculum and overall, the lack of teachers' willingness to help the integration of MALL in the classroom. Stockwell and Hubbard (2013) also identified some issues as the ones mentioned above and proceeded to find ten principles for teachers and learners to effectively integrate digital learning and in particular m-learning in language learning and avoid misunderstandings or misuses of the learning devices. To name a few of the principles, the authors focused on maintaining equity in the language learning setting: it is important to evaluate the possibilities of every learner in regard to having the necessary devices and act accordingly; language learners' different learning styles are to be taken into account when planning the tasks; and finally guidance is fundamental for the success of the integration both in training effectively the devices and in giving motivational support to learners to prepare them to the activities.

The principles just mentioned can be found as the focus of research in the study by Heil et al. (2016), where the researchers compiled a list of mobile language learning applications based on their pedagogical focuses and on whether these apps "adapt to individual needs, language proficiency levels and styles of learning of the users" (Heil et al., 2016: 33). Their work starts from the distinction between a behaviourist approach and a constructivist theory of learning. The first, common practice in the 1950s, was characterized by the importance given to memorization, drilling practice and repetition (Brown, 2007) where the key elements were stimulus and response associations, which led to learning. On the other hand, Heil et al. consider that language learning does not simply mean "knowing words and structures" (2016: 34) but they support Hymes' (1972)

communicative competence as fundamental in order to consider a learner as proficient in his or her learning. The analysis of the fifty most used language learning apps available for iOS and Android revealed that the majority of the apps mainly focus on vocabulary, most of the time without context. This condition is not ideal for the understanding of how to properly use the terms. Whereas, where there is context, for example in *DuoLingo*, the grammatical information relative to the task is mainly taught implicitly, rather than with the presence of explicit metalinguistic information about the words encountered, as in *Babbel*. Therefore, the authors, in regard to this first factor of classification, affirm that "it is essential to move beyond vocabulary drilling" (2016: 41) to ensure a more effective approach to language learning. Secondly, Heil et al. focus on the advantage of the ability of software to adapt learning content to the user's needs: some apps, such as *Memrise* and *Mindsnacks*, register the users mastery of terms based on the quantity of questions answered correctly containing them. In this manner, learners are repeatedly reminded of all the terms they have yet to master. The researchers propose that combining adaptability to effective feedback could help learners gain knowledge and awareness of how to improve their performance (2016: 42). Indeed, feedback appears to be structured and not personalized to the needs of the learners, because the majority of the apps do not engage writing skills in a productive way. Usually, users are asked to select already written words instead of actually writing them, but if they were to do that, the types of mistakes could be more evident and more intelligent feedback could be provided. Overall, the authors recognise the great opportunities of emerging technology for language learning, but also point out that most of the apps currently available have a more behaviourist approach to language and that a more holistic model needs to be considered for language acquisition. In 2013, an experiment was conducted by Gutiérrez-Colon Plana et al. using the free message application *Whatsapp* to test its usefulness in improving reading skills in English as a foreign language. The study exploited the possibility given by *Whatsapp* of creating a group chat where reading exercises were linked for participants to complete. This platform was helpful to the teacher, who in a previous study had found the difficulty of receiving individual responses by each student through SMS, whereas small group chats granted a more orderly system to the researcher (Gutiérrez-Colon Plana et al., 2012). Even though the new platform was helpful to simplify the process, the authors found it would be necessary to create a "teacher-independent application" (2013: 83) where messages

are sent automatically, and feedback is not directly connected to the constant availability of the teacher. Apart from the mentioned area in need of improvement the results were overall positive, since students showed high levels of satisfaction concerning the activity and reported that their motivation and willingness to read in the foreign language increased.

As explained above, many studies have been conducted in order to evaluate the use of technology for the benefit of education and in specific, e-learning has become part of language education as well. In the last ten years, the use of smartphones has triggered the development of applications that could be compatible with computers and phones, hence the developments of apps for language learning such as the ones mentioned above.

Chapter 2. Multimedia, Multiliteracy and Multimodality

Lamy and Hampel (2007), published a book on online communication and language learning, when the rise of new technologies had started only a few years earlier. However, the two authors provided insightful views on many topics concerning language learning and teaching, linking it to technology and how it can influence them. They begin by offering definitions of media and the rise of *multimedia*, presenting theories and opinions of various researchers on the presence of new literacies and the term fabricated to describe them, which is multiliteracy, and finally the fact that online communication is characterized by a multiplicity of modes of communication, all intersected with each other.

As previously stated, technology has been playing a fundamental role in the society of the last twenty years and an added feature to the use of technological devices for communication, education, and many other economic sectors, is the rise of multimedia. Multimedia has been defined as "a woven combination of digitally manipulated text, photographs, graphic art, sound, animation, and video elements" by Vaughan (2011: 1) and the authors mentioned above stated that "language is the main mediational tool in all social human learning" (Lamy and Hampel, 2007: 33), nevertheless it is not the only one, as it will be discussed later. Moreover, the definition of multimedia shifts to *interactive multimedia* when a viewer of a multimedia project is permitted to control the elements that compose the product, deciding what elements to be delivered and at which time (Vaughan, 2011). In particular, Vaughan underlines the important aspect of connecting multimedia to school education. In fact, the author advocates for the priority of the necessity for schools to have access to this resource in order to completely change teaching methods, and allowing students to experience learning, rather than passively receiving it, thus becoming active learners. A second intuition by the same author concerns the role of the teacher, who should not be the primary provider of learning, but take the role of guide and facilitator of learning. In this manner learning is not teacher-centered, but students, teachers and content become altogether the core of education. Moreover, as Mayer (2005) states, multimedia can also be linked to other important notions, such as *multimedia learning* and *multimedia instruction*. The first term

indicates the process of "building mental representations from words and pictures", which can be images, videos, maps and any other form of visual material. The second term can be defined as the presentation of words and pictures intended to promote learning. (2005: 2). The studies by Mayer are relevant because of his thesis that learners are more likely to understand the material presented and integrate it to their previous knowledge, when stimulated to be involved in the process of learning. In fact, the author states (2005: 14-15):

> Meaningful learning depends on the learner's behavioural activity during learning. […] However, behavioural activity per se does not guarantee cognitively active learning. […] well-designed multimedia instructional messages can promote active cognitive processing in learners, even when learners seem to be behaviorally inactive.

Therefore, it can be concluded that learning through multimedia and technology is an effective tool to promote students' involvement and active learning and understanding. For example, Hung (2011) investigated the pedagogical implications of having a group of undergraduate students practicing English as a foreign language through vlogs (video-blogs). The findings were positively presented in the study and ackowledged the propositive attitude of students towards the use of such technological tools in which language is merged with video and written input. The study observed that this modality encouraged students to become reflective learners, in merit to their own learning process, by examining their performance in terms of presentation skills, pronunciation and mimics, but also by viewing classmates' videos and learning from their performances as well. Video-Mediated Communication (VMC, Figure 1.) is an example of how learning can be multimodal and, as explained in this paragraph and the study just presented, multimodality has become part of everyday life of today's learners, therefore it is only correct that it is included in the field of education as tool for practice of skills acquired in the time of a learning course. VMC is an effective tool through which students and educators can grow thanks to self-assessment and group discussion (Manstead, Leah and Goh, 2011).

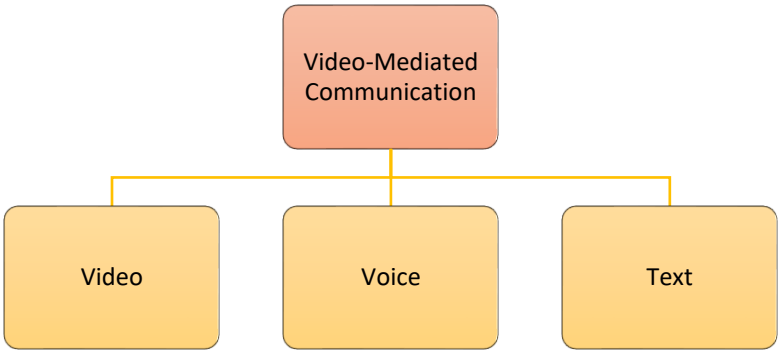


Figure 1. Video-Mediated Communication (Manstead, Leah and Goh, 2011)

However, multimedia is not the only key term which needs to be taken into consideration when connecting technology to education. In fact, the New London Group coined a term in the mid-nineties which is equally important in this field of research. *Multiliteracy* is central to the question of new ideas of communication through languages, devices, and different social constructs. When discussing the implications of multiliteracy for teachers and institutions, Lamy and Hampel (2007: 45) write:

> Multiliteracies go beyond dealing with the technical aspect of the electronic medium and include engaging with others through the new technologies and using these creatively as well as critically.

Since 1996, a group of researchers have analysed the changes that time and technology had brought to their manifesto: *a pedagogy of multiliteracies*. Their work consisted in defining multiliteracy through three 'wh-' questions: 'why, what and how?'. The first question was an investigation of the changes in work environments, citizenship, and personal lives, which being so drastic have rendered inevitable the change in education as well. Specifically, they also focused on the growing significance of multilingualism, which in their opinion deserved a more adequate educational response. Moreover, discourse differences within a language were to be taken into account as well, such as English being taught as a singular standard, whereas it was evident that multiple 'Englishes' were arising from professional, social, ethnic or subcultural contexts. (Cope and Kalantzis, 2013). As for the second question, in Cope and Kalantzis (2013: 107) it is

explained how meaning making needs to be considered as a "dynamic transformation of the social world" and that its forms vary from linguistic, visual, audio, gestural and spatial modes, and that all these modes are increasingly integrated in everyday media communication. At this point another 'multi-' comes to light: *multimodality*.

> We communicate using a complex system made up of written, spoken and visual resources, each with its own modes had affordances. In the case of CMC, […] now computers provide access to environments bringing together a number of modes, including those based of text, speech, gestures, images and icons.

Lamy and Hampel (2007: 37) discuss the characteristics of Computer-Mediated Communication, in agreement with The New London Group's authors, who argue that meaning is not expressed in a written-dominating form anymore, instead it is interfaced with oral, visual, audio, gestural, tactile and spatial patterns of meaning. This leads to the recognized need of awakening the education system to the necessity of presenting a 'synesthesia' of learning, switching from visual representation, to sounds, to written concepts in a continuous cycle of different means of communication. Finally, the 'how' explains that "the essential idea in the multiliteracies approach is that learning is a process of 'weaving' backwards and forwards across and between different pedagogical moves" (Luke et al., 2004 cited by Cope and Kalantzis, 2016). In fact, they observed the limitations of traditional literacy teaching through the transmission of language rules from models, implementing overt instruction, as well as the limitations of progressivisms which considered situate practice to be sufficient for literacy learning. They suggested that "a pedagogy of multiliteracies would involve a range of pedagogical moves, […] also entailing "critical framing" and "transformed practice" (Cope and Kalantzis, 2013: 107).

As the New London Group has extensively sought to define, multimodality is the definition of a product that combines two or more modes of meaning making. While language and literacy have always had a connection to multimodality due to the fact that communication always requires different modes of meaning making, it is indisputable that the rise of new technologies and social media have increased the production of multimodal texts (Mills and Unsworth, 2017). Kress also approaches the topic of multiple modes of communication as a consequence and a need for new theories of meaning to account for twenty-first century communication, in a book dedicated exactly to

multimodality, in 2010. Bryan (2010) described Kress' work as impressive not only for analysing accounts for contemporary communications across cultures and modes of meaning, but also for raising the right questions about the future of making sense of meaning (2010: 414). In fact, the whole book is focused on meaning and how any banal everyday example can be used to anchor the social semiotic theory of multimodality: for example, the comparative analysis between salt and pepper airplanes sachets proves, according to Kress, that all signs are socially motivated. His research reaches the conclusion that we live in an era where older values of communication have been challenged or negated, therefore every socially functioning group needs to find a social-semiotic theory of communication, based on shared resources and purposes (Kress, 2010: 19).

Further studies have been made on the definition and application of multimodality in particular to language learning. Grapin published an article in 2019, in which he described different conceptualizations of multimodality and their consequence in English language classes. Specifically, the author calls them the weak and strong versions of multimodality. The first version has to do with the fact that non-linguistic modes are seen as supports to the development of the language that is being learned. They are not constantly used, independently of the learner's level of competence, instead they are considered only as temporary scaffolds. While, on the other hand, oral and written language are privileged forms of communication. The critic made to this view of multimodality is that of regarding writing and speaking as 'central' in language learning and seeing other modes, for example drawing, only as periphery rather than "legitimate meaning-making resources in their own right" (Graping, 2019: 34). The second version of multimodality is characterized by the fact that other modes of meaning making are considered fundamental as the 'standard' ones. The research that the author mentions proposes that the strong version is much more frequently adopted in disciplines that focus on content, making deliberate use of multiple modes, while automatically keeping in mind their limitations and providing for them. An example cited from (Lemke, 1998) is that graphs and charts are central to communicating meaning in science. In fact, Grapin states that "they are the essential semiotic tools of the disciplines" (2019: 34). The author's intention in his paper is to urge teachers to consider "their students' multimodal products as intentionally designed and imbued with meaning" (2019: 51). Moreover, the paper

invites researchers to examine and standardize a view of language as embedded within a wider semiotic frame (Jewitt, 2017: 2, cited by Grapin, 2019).

Another interesting paper, by Schmerbeck and Lucht (2017), confirms the thesis about multimodality and language education being strictly connected. The authors presented a case study of a photo-project for online portfolios, whose aim was to prove the support that different modes of communication can give to language learning, and in specific, to its more exploited modes, writing and speaking. The authors state that while some educators focus heavily on vocabulary and grammar, some students experience difficulties, especially at a beginner or intermediate's level and a motivation is given by the fact that meaning has a multidimensional nature, in which language is culturally and socially embedded. Moreover, as already mentioned in this chapter, today's social media surroundings are the living proof of meaning being conveyed through text, which is explained in turn by visual aids, sound effects, or voices.

> The multiliteracies approach is particularly suited for language courses, as it helps learners become aware of relationships of images to text and context as well as develop their critical analysis skills.

The citation above is stated in Schmerbeck and Lucht (2017: 33), adding to the evidence provided to this point, that the presence of multiliteracies in today's society has brought to light the essential role of multimodality of meaning making, which needs to be recognized, valued and exploited in education, and in particular, in language learning.

To summarize, the difference between multiliteracy and multimodality can be described as the fact that multiliteracy focuses on global changes, such as those which have been influenced and which keep evolving due to the transformation of society, communication and technological discoveries. On the other hand, multimodality functions as a subset of multiliteracy concentrated on the evidence that communication is a construction of layers of different "realities of representations […] simultaneously supporting each other" (Cope and Kalantzis, 2020). Given all the information above, it becomes evident how multiliteracy and multimodality have entered and are now part of communication, and e-learning as well requires specific rules of communication.

As presented in Chapter 1, nowadays many applications and online platforms are available to anyone in possession of an internet connection, but since the limitations were

reviewed as well, it is evident that not every platform is ideal, and some apps appear to be more useful than others, depending on the objectives proposed. In this study, the importance of e-learning has been strictly connected to the concept of multimodality which was just delineated. Therefore, the choice of platform to be analysed was restricted to these important parameters. Flipgrid is an interesting resource thanks to the features it includes and especially because these features, such as the effects that can be added to the personal video response of the learners, render it one of the best free platforms with characteristics that allow for the creation of multimodal content. In the next section, Flipgrid will be presented as a platform and application for learning. For the purposes of this study, Flipgrid has been exploited as a resource for language learning thanks to its versatility.

Chapter 3. Flipgrid Platform

Flipgrid is a free online platform that allows people to share their opinions, their creativity and in the case of school students, to also simply deliver homework in an alternative form to standard oral tests or written assignments, thanks to the possibility of creating a video instead. Flipgrid seems to be a useful tool for the building of a student-centered community of learners, and it is cited in many review websites and educational journals, such as *WebSights*, where it was proposed as resource to physics teachers for formative assessment via the Internet (MacIsaac, 2020).

Flipgrid is designed in 2014 by Jim Leslie and Charlie Miller, as a start-up. It received so much attention from investors since its early stages that it was soon acquired by Microsoft. It was designed as a tool accessible to teachers at all school levels, from pre-kindergarten to PhD educators, in order to reach students of all ages. As the "Getting started" section on the website states: "Flipgrid […] helps educators see and hear from every student in class and foster fun and supportive social learning" (Flipgrid, 2021). In fact, teachers are able to watch and listen as many times as necessary to their students' individual contribution on the subject thanks to the dashboard called "Grid", where learners can post a recording, which is denominated as Response to the input assigned by the teacher. Thanks to the introductory page mentioned above, teachers and students can learn how the platform works through short video-tutorials, written instructions available for download or some coloured sketch-note maps in English and Spanish. These guides accompany educators with step-by-step directions and assist learners to the creation of their first Response video.

First of all, the educator needs to sign up with an account, with the possibility of using the *G Suite* platform for education and directly connect a Classroom group to the Flipgrid group, therefore eliminating the process of adding every student individually. Moreover, Tan (2019: 23) explains that there are three different ways of accessing Flipgrid from the students' point of view. The first was just presented, but in the circumstance in which the group of learners involved did not possess the same email domain, the teacher can choose to insert them through a *Student ID list.* In this case the teacher can add the students by entering their names and creating an identifier, based on

their student IDs or names. If the section is left blank, the website automatically generates a random ID. Furthermore, a CSV file can be uploaded, with the help of a template present on the website. Once the teacher has uploaded it, QR codes are generated for each student to access directly into their profile, to the Grid selected. Finally, Flipgrid provides the possibility of a more public Grid, thanks to a Flip Code which allows anyone in its possession to view the responses uploaded. To engage in the discussion, however, participants have to log in their account. This modality is under the option denominated *PLC and Public Grids.*

Once the group is formed the educator creates a topic and writes a description in which the general directions of the activity are presented to learners. An interesting feature is present beside the title of the topic called "Immersive Reader": by clicking on it, learners are redirected to a page where the description is written in larger characters, adjustable as well as spacing and font. The grammar options allow learners to see words divided in syllables and highlighted in different colours according to their grammatical category. The text can be translated in almost one hundred languages (considering languages spoken in different countries). Underneath, a play button allows students to listen to the description.

Then, they can record their response directly on the website where they can find many tools to edit and craft their video. First of all, when recording a response, above the video box, the topic and description can be reviewed and beside it a post-it note image indicates that it is possible to create "sticky notes" to write down notes to look at while recording. The first options available are to upload a clip from the computer, to record the screen (for example to film a tutorial) and to record only the video or only the audio. The other section is called "effects", here learners can use their creativity to embellish their response with screen filters, texts in many fonts and styles, a pen tool to draw on the screen, different kinds of boards that divide the screen in two, a great number of stickers with its own search filter, photos uploaded from the computer and finally several frames (see Figure 2.).

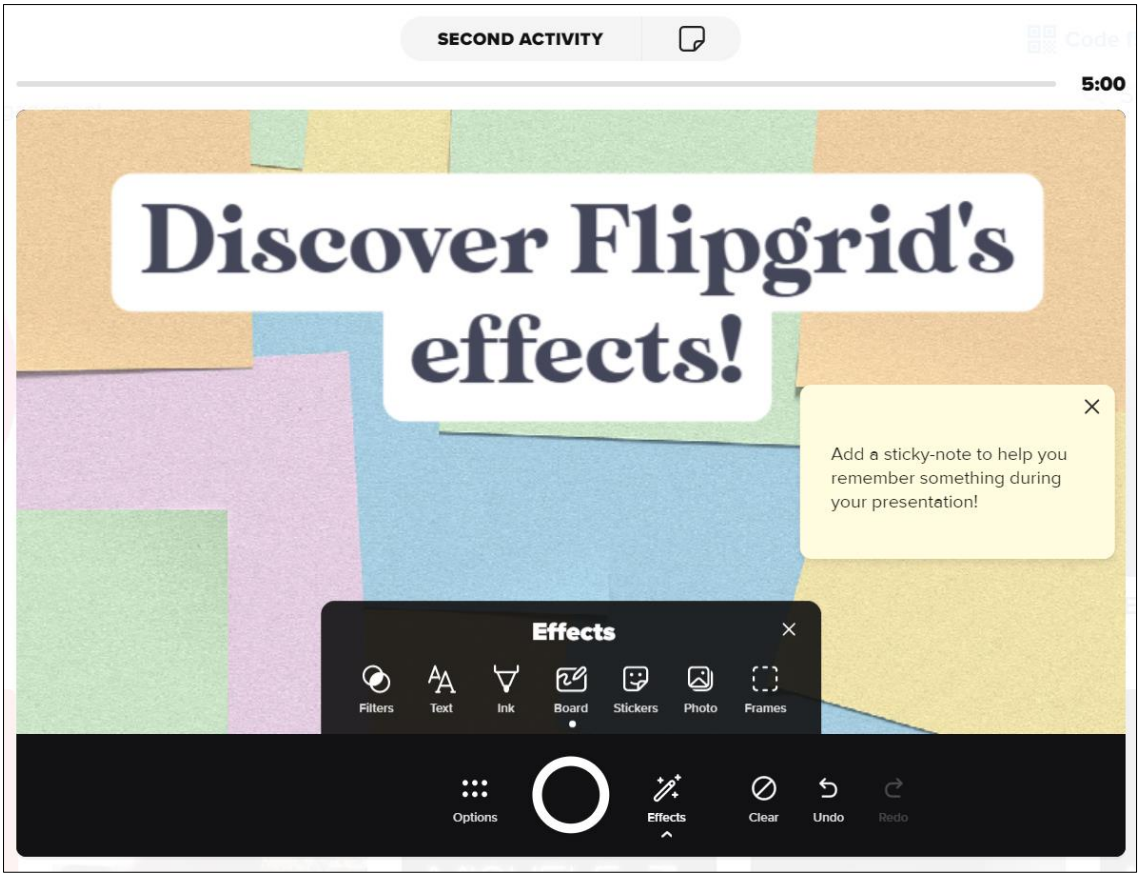


Figure 2. Flipgrid effects section.

Now, once the clip is filmed, it can be cut from the beginning or from the end, it can be deleted or confirmed. In this way, learners can decide if they want to add other clips after saving the first one or, if they have completed the assignment, they can go on to the final touches: writing their name and optional descriptions or external links and deciding a thumbnail for the video. Once all this is done, students submit the video and wait for its upload. When a video is uploaded, there are two different possibilities depending on the settings chosen by the educator: the video can be immediately visible by every member of the group, or it can remain private until the educator approves it and renders it public. This second option guarantees that all material posted on the group is pertinent to the topic and if necessary, the teacher could send a private message to the student's email, before sharing the video with the rest of the class. As just mentioned, below the video the teacher can add a public comment or send a private message with its feedback and moreover he or she can download captions from the video, which are automatically

generated and manually modifiable. The layout of a Group's Grid appears as showed in Figure 3.

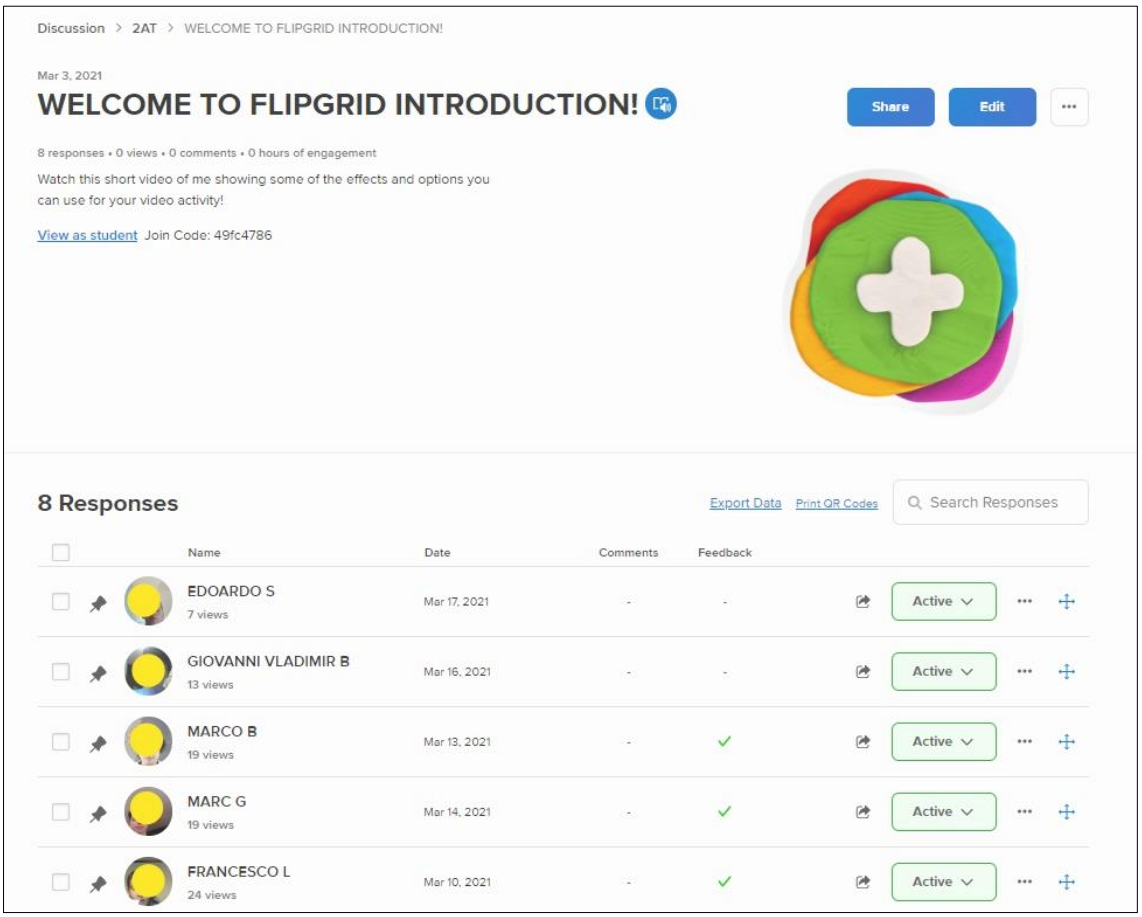


Figure 3. Flipgrid Grid layout

The Flipgrid platform is fairly recent, nonetheless, in the last few years it has been used by many educators around the world. They understood the opportunity that Flipgrid presented for their classes, overcoming geographical distances, schedules differences and providing students with a different resource for learning, which could bring new advantages to the traditional classroom environment. Moreover, the use of such platforms is extremely relevant, due to the world-wide pandemic critical situation. The presence of technological devices has been the only tool for communication and in particular, for a chance for education to proceed, as already discussed in the previous chapter. Flipgrid has also become popular as a resource for distance learning during the recent pandemic

time, to overcome some of the difficulties that learners from around the world have experienced.

Along with practice, also research on Flipgrid has been carried out, focusing on many education-related aspects. What can inform our research are those studies focused on foreign language learning and, in particular, on recent investigation concerning how oral skills can be practiced and improved through Flipgrid. In 2018, an experimentation was conducted by John Stoszkowski from Central Lancashire University and published an article in the technology section of a research journal. The study involved a group of undergraduate students using Flipgrid as a support to virtual face-to-face workshops and discussions modulated in video responses. The author outlined a list of strengths and potential barriers that during the use of the platform might arise. First of all, the accessibility of the platform was praised. Moreover, the convenience of the discussions being asynchronous, and therefore neither time- or place-dependent, was recognized by the author and the students, who appreciated the flexibility of Flipgrid. The modality of discussion and interaction between learners is optimal for the participation of more introvert or shy students as well as those who have no trouble with speaking in a traditional class discussion. Finally, among other advantages listed, there is the compatibility of the platform with many other educational platforms, such as *Google Classroom, Microsoft Teams, Youtube* and more. On the other hand, some possible drawbacks were pointed out as well. The author noticed the possibility of competitiveness arising, when features similar to those of social media platforms such as the 'likes' or 'hearts' which can be sent to the video responses, are activated by the educators. However, it is specified that such features can be deactivated if preferred. The second disadvantage is the need for suitable equipment, such as digital devices provided with camera and microphone. Moreover, the author found that some students' products could not be considered as authentic as the activity proposed, because they had prepared a script and read it aloud, leading to the appearance of some discussions as insincere. Finally, the last drawback observed on Flipgrid could involve some students who feel uncomfortable about 'being on screen', despite other research found that introverted students usually prefer communicating via social media instead of in person (Voorn and Kommers, 2013 cited by Stoszkowski, 2018). The researcher concluded the article confirming his thesis that Flipgrid is a useful tool to facilitate learning, and in particular, social learning, thanks

to the possibility of asynchronous discussions. Moreover, the author foresees Flipgrid to be used complementarely to the module of the course, encouraging direct peer interaction and discussion.

Another study was conducted in the Indonesian English Education faculty, by Amirulloh et al. (2020) to investigate methods to improve students' speaking performance. In particular, the researchers' focus was on the necessity of substituting educator's techniques to help students improve their speaking skills in English, with activities such as discussions, simulations, role-play, brainstorming, storytelling and describing pictures, as proposed by Kayi (2006) cited by Amirulloh et al. This requirement was caused by Covid-19, which forced school closures and the implementation of distance education programs in order to deny the least opportunities possible to learners all around the world. The author chose to focus on Flipgrid as a platform used in speaking classes and conducted a qualitative analysis of the participants' experience, based on data gathered through interviews, focus group observation, content analysis and discussion. The researcher selected six students, with highest, average, and lowest score from a collection of speaking video assignments. The results of this study showed that the majority of the students considered their oral abilities improved from the beginning of the experience thanks to Flipgrid features, but also as the main reason, because before uploading their videos, students would practice and repeat their presentations many times. The author's conclusions state that Flipgrid is a platform designed to participate in video and audio conversations easily and it can improve pronunciation, communication among students and their gestuality.

Another study conducted on Flipgrid regarded a business English writing class in South Korea, by an assistant professor, McLain (2018), where the platform was selected because of the author's statement about the necessity of an educational technological tool, which would permit the following conditions (2018: 68):

> To give students more opportunities to practice speaking and allow instructors the ability to measure the engagement, a video capture tool is needed that will enable students to have conversations asynchronously and produce the language vocally outside of class.

Therefore, Flipgrid was chosen to engage in speaking practice in English as a foreign language and it was evaluated based on the results of the videos of the class group. The

researcher's focus is on the fact that students in a small-group environment might have enough opportunities to listen and produce their target language, however once the groups begin to grow, it is constantly more difficult for students to have equal opportunities to express themselves as well as the possibility of exposing themselves in front of their classmates. The author considered the advantages of technological tools such as Skype, or more in specific, YouTube, VoiceThread and Flipgrid. These last mentioned in fact, are favoured because as Dunn (2012, cited by McLain, 2018: 69) states "these types of tasks allow the learners to take their time and re-read, re-listen, and re-record before constructing their message". McLain further presents Flipgrid as a program which has the advantage of associating aspects similar to those of social media platforms and a video capture tool. The class examined for this study was comprised of seventy students, double the average class that the teacher was used to having, therefore, the need for a new course structure was evident. The educator of the class elaborated a gap analysis in which an assessment of the students' needs was considered as the first of the two 'legs' of a metaphorical bridge, which part was occupied by the use of Flipgrid, and on the other side, the overall goals formed the other 'leg'. For example, the first need observed was the difficulty students had verbalizing in English when asked a question on their written production and a goal was to increase the number of students verbally participating in class. The bridge between the two "legs" is given by the possibility of students having back and forth video conversations via Flipgrid. The objectives of the study were to provide an easy-to-use technology to students, to increase the speaking time through spoken assignments at home and the reduction of communication anxiety when speaking English as a foreign language. The first goal was reached, since the participants found the platform easy to use and it did not interfere with their products. Moreover, students reported that their speaking time between classes increased, but the data provided by Flipgrid on speaking times was inconclusive since it did not consider preparing, practicing and re-making of the videos, therefore the author stated that more research was needed on this point. Finally, the third objective was reached thanks to the feedback questions on which the majority of students agreed upon, affirming that the extra practice and modality used in Flipgrid was helping them improve their confidence in speaking their target language. McLain offers a final implication, at the end of the paper, proposing

the idea of creating new tasks which incorporate responses and dialogues, in order to allow students to interact with each other and increase their speaking time even more.
Further research was conducted on the influence of Flipgrid on affective aspects connected to oral production in English as a foreign language. Tuyet and Khang (2020) produced a study which chose to focus on the anxiety that high-school students might feel when speaking in English and, in particular, how Flipgrid can influence it. Moreover, the authors investigated the learner's attitudes towards the use of the platform. As McLain considered in his study, the two authors considered the issue of students' insufficient proficiency in the target language, in this case in English. Even though there are many factors that can be involved, such as linguistic or cultural barriers, an important one comes from the anxiety that most of foreign language students feel, which may hamper their learning process as well as their oral production (Macintyre and Gardner, 1991 cited by Tuyet and Khang, 2020: 129). The results of this study showed that Flipgrid was an efficient tool to high-school students in regard to the anxiety that comes from speaking in a foreign language. Interestingly, the students involved revealed to have positive attitudes towards the use of Flipgrid as a tool to improve speaking skills in English, for example thanks to the opportunity to listen to their voice, identifying mistakes in the pronunciation. The authors point out the students' answers also focused on the advantages of teachers submitting activities through Flipgrid, on its features, on its positive effects on their speaking skills and on the expectation of using more the Flipgrid platform to learn a foreign language. Moreover, the researchers stated that Flipgrid helped increase communication with their teacher and classmates. It also encouraged reflective, individual and collaborative learning according to the participants. Finally, the pedagogical implication described by the authors point out the importance of increasing opportunities to practice the students' oral skills, exploiting technological tools such as Flipgrid, which is recommended for its flexibility and appropriacy for shy students or learners at low levels of competence in a foreign language oral production.

Given all said so far, Flipgrid can be considered a good example of how an interchange through technology can be composed of different means of meaning making. In fact, when uploading a video response on Flipgrid, learners engage in oral production (in a foreign language, in this study's specific case), to which a video animation is added: learners can move and use their body or surroundings to integrate their oral presentation,

and moreover the option of adding texts to the video, delivers a written input, through which certain concepts or key words are highlighted and immediately perceived by the rest of the group watching the response. Finally, the overview on the emergence of the role of e-learning, its growing uses in language education and its contemporary characteristic of being a tool for multimodality has made Flipgrid a valuable subject for a study intending to explore the role of e-learning in the current school situation and particularly its usefulness in the process of foreign language learning. As stated in a Flipgrid integration guide available on its website[2], Flipgrid wants to "give students a fun and creative avenue to develop their voice and provide educators with a simple way to integrate it in their classroom." (Flipgrid, 2018).

[2] *Building higher education Flipgrid Community* retrieved from static.flipgrid.com/docs

Part 2. The Research

Chapter 4. The Study

In the first part of this thesis the outlines of e-learning, especially for language learning, were delineated. Consequently, in Part 2. the theories presented will be taken into consideration in regard to the study here illustrated. The broad goal of this was to investigate how the use of a technological platform for language learning (i.e. Flipgrid) is perceived by students and the teacher.

It is important to specify the context in which the experience took place and to highlight some key points which affected the study. Firstly, the author of this research conducted the study while working in a local high-school as an additional teacher. There, she took the opportunity of gathering data for her master thesis thanks to the collaboration of the students, the English colleagues, and the school in general. She will therefore be referred to as 'teacher-researcher' in this study.

Secondly, given the fact that the study concerns the use of technology, it must be said that the technical conditions in which the experience was carried out were favourable, thanks to the presence of interactive whiteboards in every class of the two school buildings. It is important to underline these premises since the students involved had a rotating week schedule and changed classes frequently, therefore, the teacher-researcher had to ascertain that in the different occasions of meeting with the students, a screen was available to show the online platform and to communicate to the students attending lessons remotely, from home (due to social distancing reasons, as explained in Part 1).

Thirdly, soon after the teacher-researcher had presented the project to the participants, the school closed. In fact, the Italian governament deemed it necesssary to contain the Coronavirus to keep all students at home for a month, instead of the 50/50 modality that had been implemented a few months earlier. Given the situation, the teacher-researcher contacted the participants exclusively via video calls on *Meet* for the whole duration of the two activities proposed. Only in April were the schools re-opened

and the teacher researcher was able to finish the project data collection in person, interviewing small groups of students according to their schedule, which established that they would attend lessons in person every two weeks.

In order for students to practice speaking skills in English as a foreign language, it was decided to adopt Flipgrid because it allows the creation oral presentations via video. The ample development of twenty-first century technology has brought the gradual integration of applications and digital platforms in school curricula as a basic component, useful for learning. Fortunately, the studies now being conducted and published are more and more great in number and the purpose of our own research is to contribute to this field. Since the experiment here proposed was limited by the amount of time available and the small number of participants, the study does not claim to be able to reach any generalizable conclusions. However, it can focus on the usefulness of the online platform employed as it was perceived by both students and teacher and therefore, discuss the implications of the opinions gathered. The self assessment data gathered proposes to provide information on Flipgrid's usefulness and effectiveness, its advantages and disadvantages as to language learning and teaching, as perceived by the different parties involved in the activities. The topic appears especially relevant in today's world situation. There is a major need for research in the field of distance learning since the most part of high-school students has had to deal with it, due to the ongoing pandemic.

The Flipgrid experimentation consisted in an educational project made of two online activities, which had been agreed upon by the teacher-researcher and the regular English teacher. The content for the first activity was chosen in line with what was being studied in class at that time, which means that the students already had some knowledge of the topic and vocabulary that was part of the experimentation. In fact, both the English teacher and the teacher-researcher had access to the students' book *Identity A2 to B1*, by Oxford University Press. Therefore, the teachers agreed on the use of grammatical and lexical content from Unit 10 of the book mentioned. These premises were supposed to encourage students to review the work studied in class and give them a chance to practice the situations proposed. The activity presented two options, one to be developed individually and one in pairs: the first assignment was an oral presentation of a city chosen by the student, whereas the second was a dialogue between a city tourist asking for directions and a local. The second activity provided two options as well, connected with

the results of the first, which will be discussed further on. The first option from the first activity was now reproposed with some additional directions, while the second option asked students to pretend to be a tv news reporter, talking about distance learning in the present situation. At the end, the activities were meant to be graded according to parameters set by the teacher-researcher and the regular English teacher: i.e., the correct completion of the activities, its pertinence, and to what extent the indications had been followed.

What students were supposed to achieve through these activities was: 1. to create an original video product and 2. to be able to correctly use the Flipgrid platform. In particular, the first objective was to be able to first write a small text or set of sentences about the given topic and, second, to present it orally, through Flipgrid's video response functionality, avoiding reading it aloud, but rather trying using their own words to explain what they had written. The second objective was to be able to use visual aids such as key-words, stick-notes or the half-screen whiteboard, tools which are considered as offering an important advantage to help students stay focused on their reasoning while giving the presentation. Moreover, the correct and effective use of clips was part of the technology related objective, since it functions as a tool to divide, using separate clips, the main areas of focus of the presentation. In this way, when a clip stops and the following begins, it appears evident to the viewer that a different aspect of the chosen topic will then be presented. It also allows them to take breaks and look over their notes between a clip and the next one.

4.1 Research Questions

The interest of the present study is set on to what extent and how technology can be used in every-day teaching and if it could have a more effective role or be better integrated with the whole. In order to provide a specific goal to this research, the focus was set on the use of a free online platform where students can practice their oral skills in English as a foreign language. Furthermore, the centre was not on the students developing new grammatical structures and vocabulary, but to allow them to put into practice what they had already encountered via the standard tool that is the English

textbook and had already been presented and explained by their English teacher. Therefore, given the possibility of engaging only one class group in the use of the platform Flipgrid, the focal point of this study is to collect the opinions and perceptions of said group of high-school students, in order to compile an overview of the positive aspects as well as the limits of Flipgrid and the possibility of its integration into the main language learning curriculum. To have a more comprehensive final result, the students' point of view is combined with the teacher-researcher's perceptions of the whole activity. Finally, the research questions which are taken into consideration and are attempted to be answered in this study are:

1. *What is the usefulness of Flipgrid as a resource to be integrated in the curriculum, for the development of oral skills in a foreign language, according to the students and educator's perceptions?*

2. *Did the students manage to use Flipgrid's features in order to create a satisfying multimodal product?*

4.2 Methodology

The study consists of a mixed methods research. As Cresswell and Clark (2017) discuss, a mixed methods research allows the researchers to use both qualitative and quantitative data, in order to take advantage of both kinds and reduce the limits that would result from the use of only one of the two.

To answer the first research question, the opinions of a group of high-school students were examined regarding the integration of a new learning app (Flipgrid) in foreign language learning. Since this study involves the opinions and perceptions it is evident that the data should be qualitative. However, before gathering the necessary data, part of the questions of the students' questionnaire were planned to be answered with a precise scale of agreement, similar to the Likert scale. Moreover, to achieve a more complete overview of the impressions about Flipgrid, observations in the course of the entire experience were collected by the teacher-researcher and provide the second point of view in the experiment. The multifocality allows for a better chance of accurately answering the research question, granting less subjectivity.

To answer the second research question, the students' product were analysed, and compared to the learning objectives which had been decided by the regular English teacher and the teacher-researcher at the beginning of the project.

Flipgrid Project Description

The project consisted of three main sections to develop in the course of a month: the presentation and first approach to Flipgrid, the first activity and its feedback and finally the third activity and its feedback. In the first part of the experiment, the teacher presented the platform to the students. The class was divided in two groups due to the school restrictions underway, to guarantee the necessary social distance, therefore, half of the class was taking classes from home, via *Meet.* The modality to reach both groups chosen by the teacher-researcher and the teacher was to be present in class, with a personal laptop, connected to the video call. Thanks to the option of screen-sharing, it

was possible to illustrate the layout of website of Flipgrid to students at home and to students present in the classroom using the interactive whiteboard. The teacher-researcher guided the students through the steps they would after have to take as well and prepared a video introduction, demonstrating how a simple video could be considered complete and ready for the upload. Finally, the students were assigned the first task, which consisted of a brief video presenting themselves, to ensure the possibility of each participant to successfully create and upload a video on Flipgrid. Once the first section was completed, the first assignment was published on *Classroom* and the students were given seven days to complete it. Then, the first feedback was presented to the class and uploaded. Lastly, the second activity was assigned and the second feedback carried out during the week after the deadline for the upload.

As already mentioned, the *Google* platform for education, *Classroom*, was exploited as a tool of connection between the teacher-researcher and students, both at home and in presence at school. A specific classroom was created on the platform, named "Flipgrid Activity", where students were directly inserted thanks to the *G Suite* automatic connection to the class' institutional emails. In this group, the teacher-researcher published all links to the activities, in order to facilitate the students' access to the correct Flipgrid topic. The *Classroom* group was also used to post reminders when the deadline was approaching or had already passed and finally, students could leave comments underneath the announcements to ask for clarifications of any doubts or difficulties encountered.

In the next paragraphs an account of the participants and instruments chosen for the activity will be presented, followed by the analysis of the data collected from students and from the teacher.

4.2.1. Participants

The study involved a class of 20 people of a professional technical high-school from north-east Italy. The students were in their second year, between the ages of fifteen and sixteen. All the participants had studied English since primary school, and had now

reached an A2/B1 level, according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

First of all, a letter was sent to the principal of the school to ask for permission to conduct the experiment in agreement with an English teacher and ensuring, just as for the participant, the respect of the school privacy by maintaining its anonymity. Afterwards, in consideration of the participants' age, parents' authorization was required in order to get formal agreement for their sons and daughters to be part of the experiment, which meant they would share videos of themselves on the platform presented and recordings of their answers in the feedback would be collected for the study. After the presentation of the project, the privacy of the participants was guaranteed by the anonymity of any feedback gathered.

4.2.2. Instruments

To collect data to answer the first research question, the study required the use of three separate instruments. All instruments were prepared and presented in Italian, which is the mother-tongue of both students and teacher-researcher. Zammuner (1996) explained that there are specific characteristics to be taken under consideration regarding the context in which the instruments are presented to the participants. Some conditions might influence their answers, making them less reliable. Therefore, these aspects were taken into consideration, in order to avoid them having any effect on the data. Specifically, the age variable was valued since it is known that in the "teen" ages it is more difficult to expose oneself or to give different opinions from one's classmates. This, however, was considered only for the feedback required after the first activity, where an individual questionnaire was delivered to the students. For the second activity the teacher-researcher opted for the possibility of speaking directly with small groups of participants, without the concern about the influence of one's answer on the other, since the class context appeared to allow for it. Moreover, the level of education was to be taken in consideration, however no particular difficulty was found since the participants were all part of the same class, with reasonably similar academic pasts.

As already mentioned, the first instrument was used to gather the feedback of the first activity. The teacher-researcher considered the most effective way to collect answers and compiled a questionnaire for the participants. Given the evidence mentioned in the first part of this thesis and the general understanding that technology is a great resource to easily reach many people at the same time, also for educational purposes, the questionnaire was created on *Google Forms,* a free online platform that allows anyone to create surveys of many kinds, with the possibility to personalize them to one's specific needs. The use of this online platform allowed the teacher-researcher to approach all students at the same time, avoiding the problem of having only half the class present at school due to the social distancing restrictions.

The questionnaire is an instrument that allows researchers to compile large quantities of data in a fast and effective way. In fact, if the questionnaire is composed only of closed questions, the percentages of answers will be quickly recoverable, analysed and interpreted. On the other hand, open questions necessitated a more careful review, where every answer needs to be read individually and categorized according to fixed parameters, to allow the researcher to compare it with the others and later interpret it correctly. In the case of the questionnaire created for this study, the total of questions was seventeen and mainly required a closed answer, with the exception of the last section which included three open-answer questions. The questions were divided into groups of three or four, with relevance to separate points of interest: the first group consisted of three questions on the participants thoughts about the Flipgrid platform in general; secondly, four questions specifically regarded the recording and uploading of the personal response videos; then three questions on the content of the video, the vocabulary and grammar used for the oral presentation; four questions investigate the students' opinions on the overall usefulness of the activity based on time and effort required; finally, three open questions asked for personal opinions or comments, and an explanation in case the student had not completed the activity as asked.

After the second activity, the teacher-researcher chose to collect the feedback through direct interviews to the participants. Specifically, the students were divided into five groups of four people and they were asked five questions. To collect the information in a clear and orderly manner, one question was asked, and each participant gave their answer, before moving on to the next question. The interview was semistructured, in the

sense that the five questions were asked and regarded the main points of interest. However where the teacher-researcher saw the necessity for clarification, examples or follow-up questions, additional questions or information was added to the initial statements. The teacher-researcher recorded the audio of each interview, using a mobile phone vocal-notes application and at the same time wrote notes on a notebook, to keep account of the information that appeared to be relevant to the questions asked.

Along with the data collected through the students' feedback, the teacher-researcher kept a diary throughout the whole project, noting down her observations, impressions on the activities, perceived advantages and disadvantages presented by Flipgrid to the students (showed through questions or doubts that were communicated by email to the teacher-researcher) and to the teacher-researcher as well. Moreover, the historic period in which the educational project took place demanded that observations on its effects were considered along with the technical complications that might arise. Gibbs (2007: 24) states:

> There is no substitute, throughout the whole period of analysis, for writing about the data you have collected and using writing as a way of developing ideas about what the data indicate, how they can be analyzed and what interpretations can be made.

In fact, as Gibbs writes when describing a research diary, it is useful at any stage of development of a study to keep a reflective diary, discussions and notions about the actual process of data collection. Moreover, the teacher-researcher also kept in mind the importance of writing all surrounding specifics about a certain entry in the diary, for example the date and reason for the entry, or the indication of time spent focused on something to keep track of the periods of times necessary during the activities.

To collect data to answer the second question, the students' products created through the use of Flipgrid during the two activities proposed were considered and analysed according to specific categories, which were defined by the teacher-researcher.

4.3 Data Analysis

In this paragraph the data collected will be presented and analysed to provide a clear overview of the results to be reviewed in the Discussion section. First, an account for the first activity feedback will be given, analysing the answers collected through the questionnaire. Secondly, the answers from the second activity's feedback, consisting of interviews' answers recorded by the teacher-researcher, will be presented as already categorized. Then, relevant observations from the teacher-researcher's diary will be presented. Lastly, an analysis of the students' products in the two activities will be given, based on categories formulated by the teacher-researcher after carfully watching all video responses.

As a note to the readers, it is important to highlight that the questions and answer options were translated from Italian to English for the compilation of the analysis section of this study. The teacher-researcher tried to convey a faithful translation of the questionnaire and interview questions and answers, however some questions in English language could appear to not have the most appropriate answer in English. Therefore, it is important to guarantee that in the original format the questions and answers were as comprehensible as possible. The same reasoning applies to the second feedback analysis and the teacher-researcher's diary.

4.3.1. Students' Questionnaire Analysis

In this previous paragraph the first instrument used for the experiment of this study was presented. The questionnaire was composed of five sections, which correspond to five areas of focus. The first point of interest regarded the Flipgrid platform in general: three questions were presented about the intuitiveness of the website, about the level of difficulties encountered after the registration on the platform to follow the indications which had been given by the teacher-researcher on how to find the topic and description

for the first activity and thirdly, the level of difficulties encountered when recording their video response.

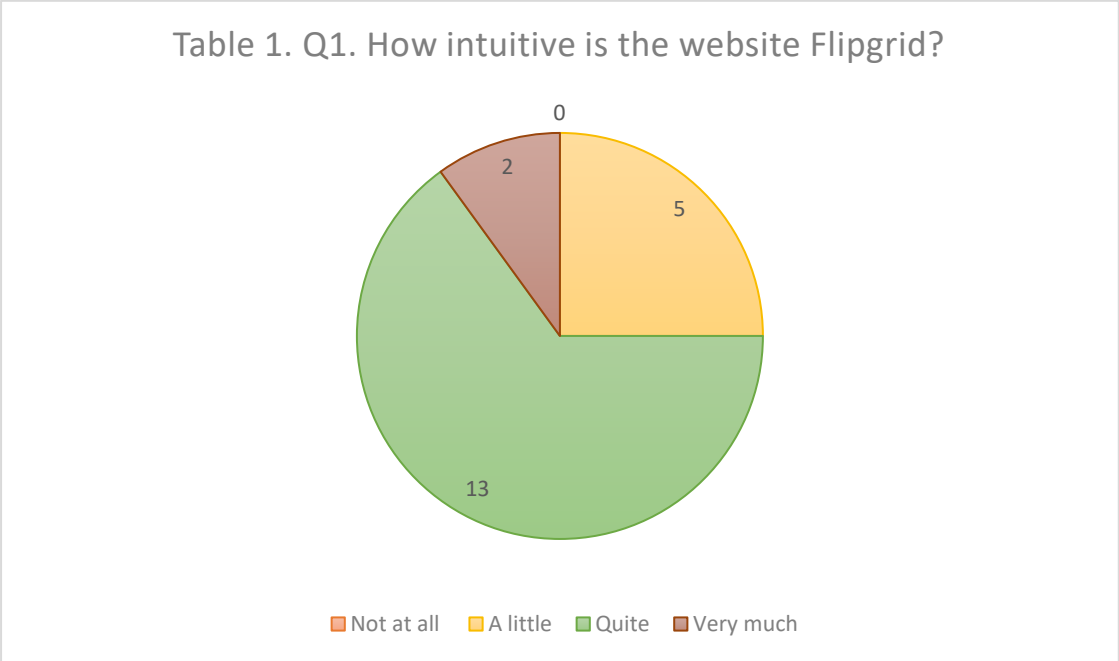
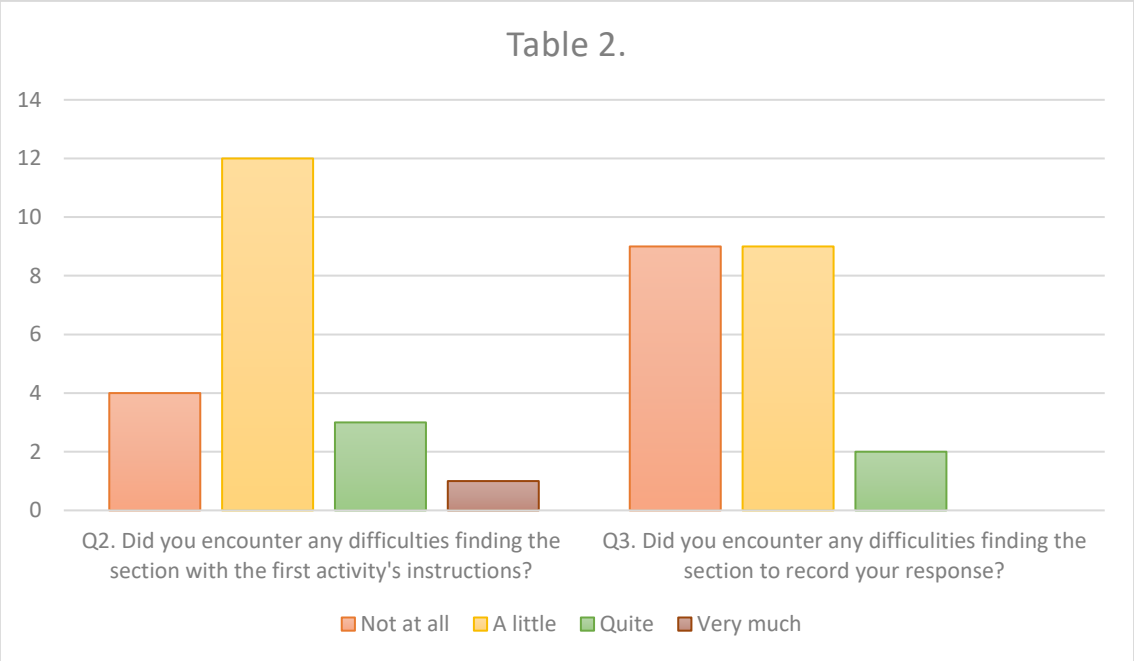
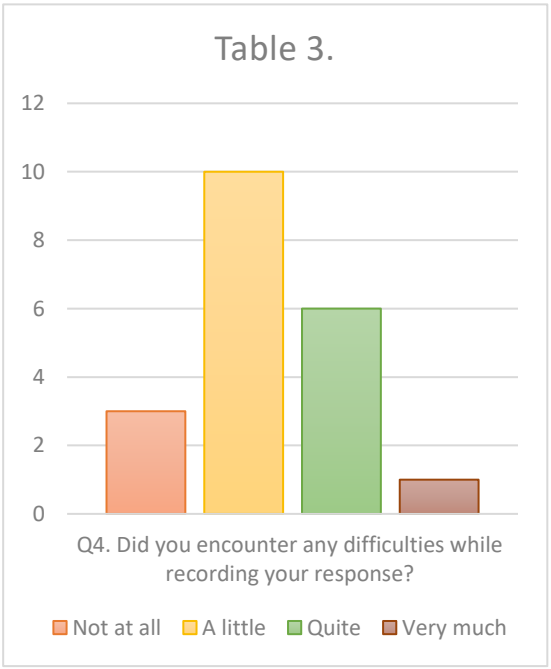


Table 1. shows how many of the participants feel that the website is intuitive, based on four degrees. The highest percentage affirmed that Flipgrid's website is quite intuitive. A quarter of the students involved answered with the second least favourable option available. Only two people out of twenty believe that Flipgrid is a very intuitive platform and finally nobody chose the option considering Flipgrid not intuitive at all.

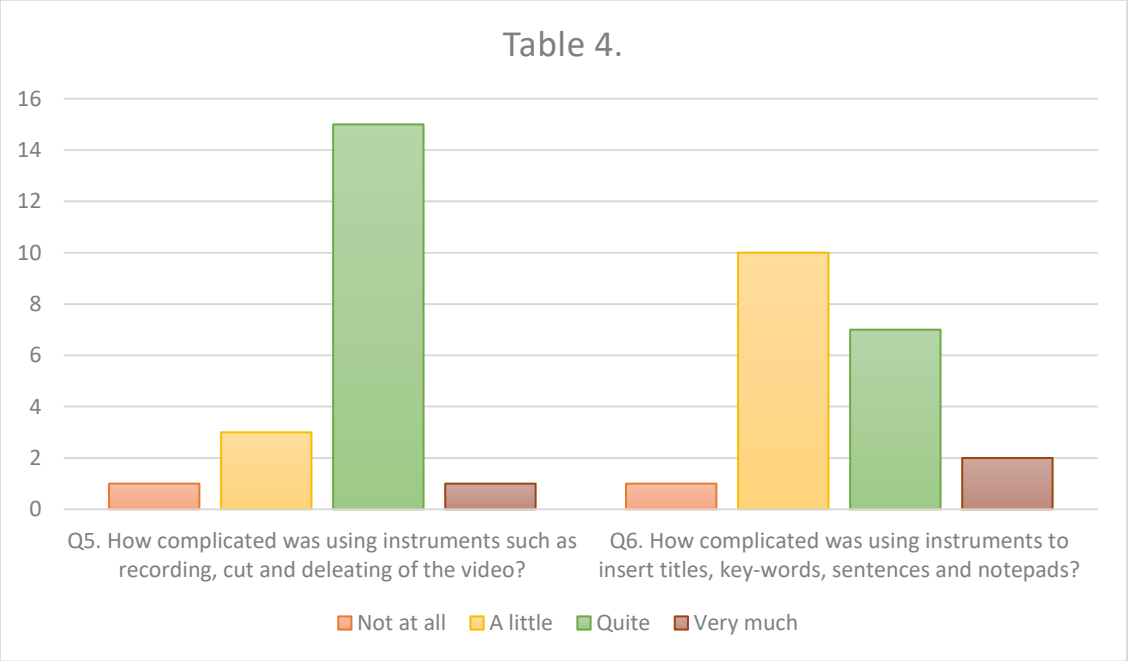
Table 2. shows the answers to the other two questions from the first section of the questionnaire, about the platform in general. When asked about the difficulties in finding the correct section where the activity was (Q2), 60% of the participants answered that they found some. While 15% answered they encountered many difficulties, only one person answered with the highest option of existing complications. Finally, four students had no problems finding the correct section, indicated by the teacher. The same question was posed to identify difficulties finding the correct section to record the response (Q3. 45% of the participants found no problems and the exact same percentage answered they had "little" problems. Two people found more problems than the majority, however no participant answered with the option of having found a great amount of problems in finding the correct section to record their video response.



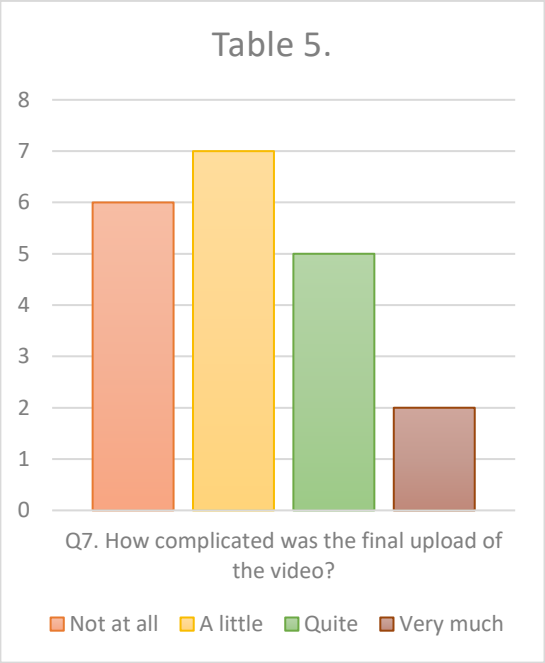
After the first section dedicated to gather general information on the platform, the questionnaire moved on to the specifics of recording the video response to complete the first activity of the experiment of this study. This second part is composed of four closed answer questions. In Table 3., the first question of the second section investigates the extent of difficulties found by the students during the video recording (Q4). As the yellow bar of the histogram shows, 50% of the participants answered that they found some problems during the development of the video response. 30% of the students found more difficulties than the majority, but one person chose the highest option to communicate the presence of many problems he or she found when recording the video.

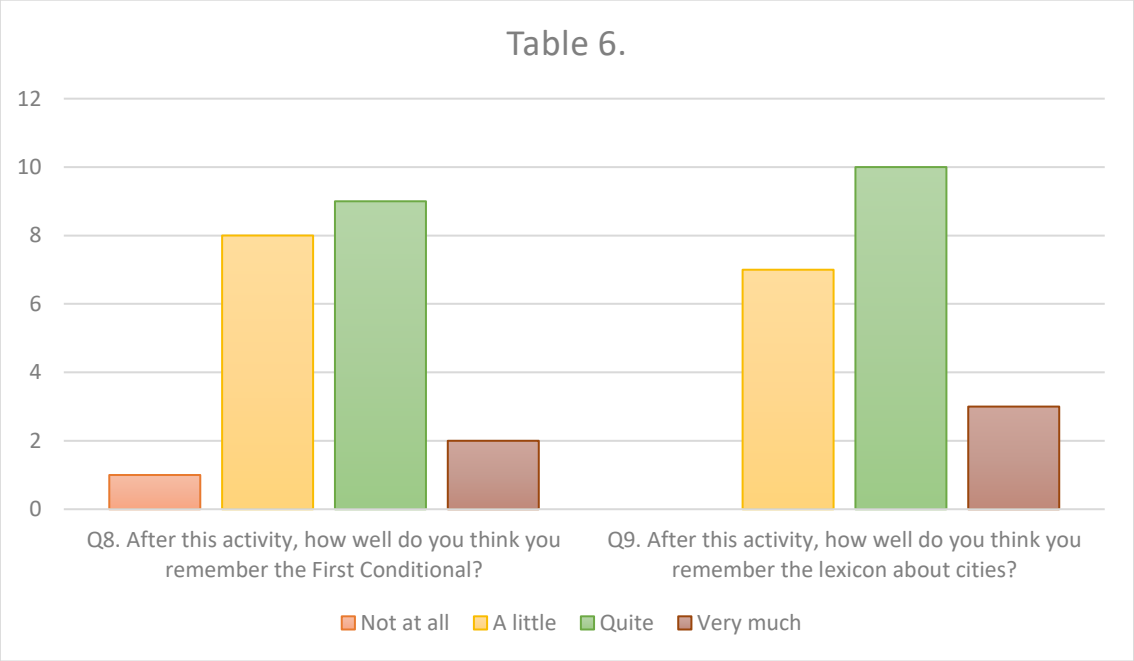


In Table 4., two histograms show the answers to the second and third questions of the second section of the questionnaire. Both questions inquire about the level of difficulty found in the use of instruments necessary to complete the first activity. These are recording, cutting of the video, deleting clips, and the added features as well, inserting headlines, titles, key-words or notepads. The histogram showing the answers to the first of the two questions (Q5) shows a high percentage of answers where students came across difficulties in the process of recording. In fact, 75% of the students chose the second highest option of answer. Whereas three participants found the use of the instruments mentioned less complicated than the majority. Finally, one student stated that he or she found them very complicated, while only one other student found the instruments not complicated at all. The second histogram in Table 4. shows that the majority of students found the second set of instruments, the "effects" features, less complicated than the first. The yellow bar in the second histogram (Q6) shows that half of the participants found little problems with the use of the features mentioned, while another 35% of the students found them more complicated than the majority. Again, a small percentage, of two participants, found them very complicated and finally, only one person found the features not complicated at all.



The second section of the questionnaire is closed by a question about the final upload of the video response (Q7). The answers are found in Table 5. The bars show that 35% of the students considered the upload not very complicated, whereas 25% found it more complicated than the majority. Two people answered that the upload was very complicated, however 30% of the participants found no problems at all in the final upload of their video response.

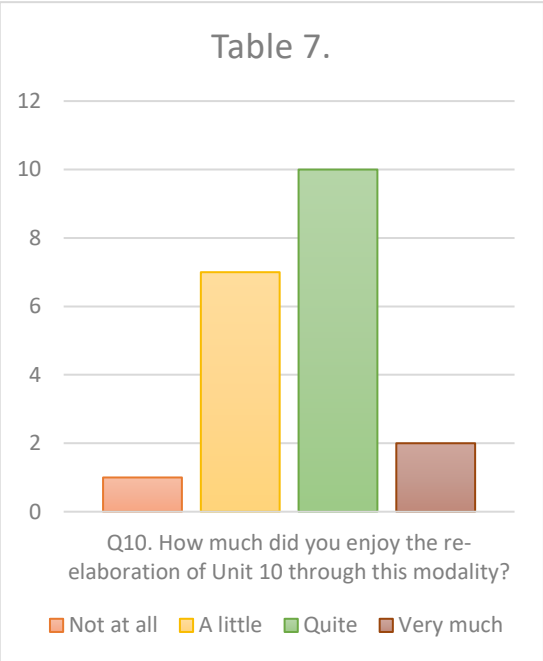


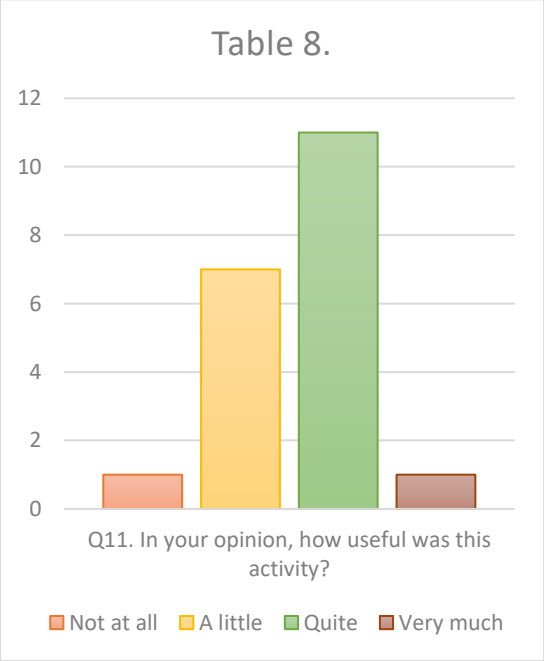


At this point, the questionnaire focused on the content of the video response, investigating the effect of the activity on the material studied by the students to complete the assignment and furthermore, the level of appreciation of the activity in regard to the topics utilized. This section was composed of three questions. The students' answers to the first two are displayed in Table 6. The histogram on the left (Q8) shows that nine of the twenty participants feel they remember the First Conditional Tense well enough, whereas almost

as many students (eight out of twenty) think they remember a little about it. 10% answered they remembered it very well and finally, one person did not remember any of it. On the second histogram (Q9) similar results appear in regard to the lexicon utilized for the oral production. Half of the students stated they remember it well enough and a smaller percentage (35%) remember the city vocabulary a little less than the majority. Three people out of twenty answered that they remembered the lexicon very well and finally, nobody chose the lowest option, meaning they did not remember anything about the lexicon used in the activity.

The last question (Q10) of the third section engaged the topic of the level of overall enjoyment of the work unit re-elaboration in the activity. Table 7. shows the results. As the green bar displays, half of the students say they quite enjoyed the re-elaboration of the work unit content in the online activity. Another 35% chose to answer that they enjoyed it a little. One person did not enjoy the modality of re-elaboration at all, whereas two people enjoyed it very much.

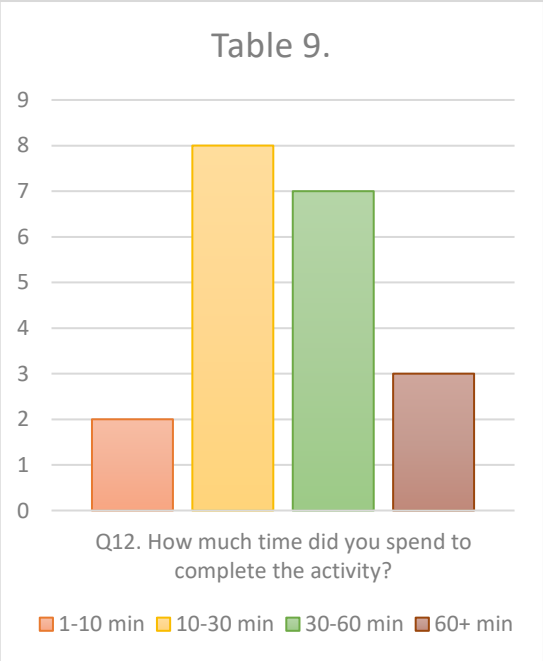


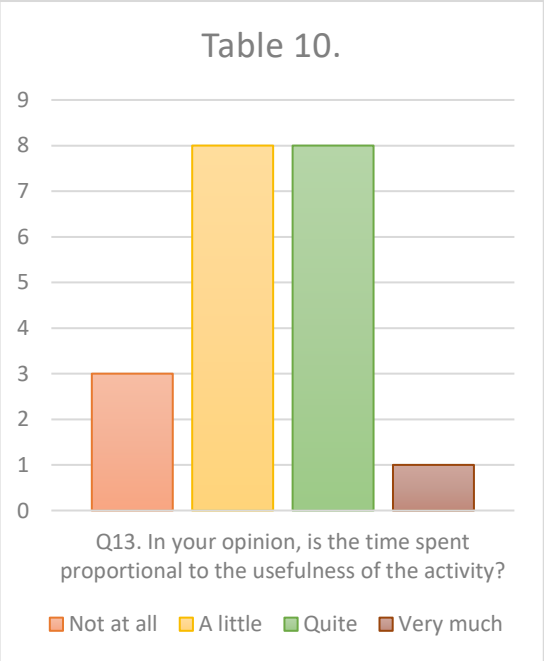


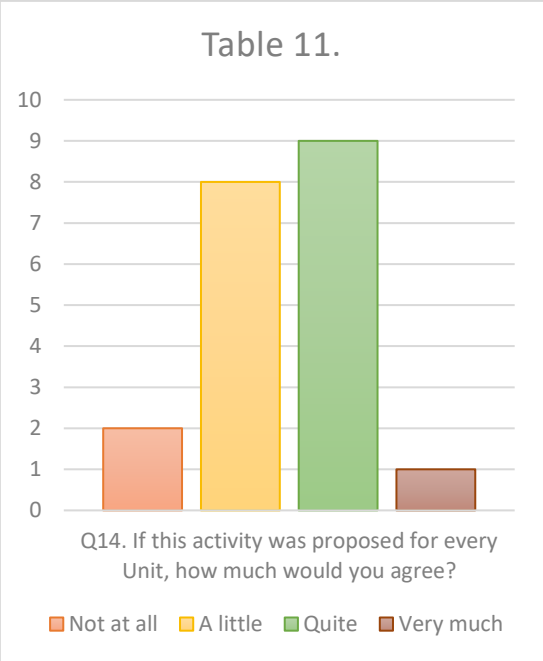
Moving on to the fourth section of the questionnaire, four questions were proposed to investigate the usefulness perceived by the students of the activity submitted. This also involves the time necessary to complete the activity and the agreement of the use of such

activities in class at a regular rate. Table 8., illustrates the answers on the usefulness of the activity as perceived by each participant (Q11). The table shows that 55% of the students considered the activity quite useful, whereas other seven people found it a little less useful than the majority. Moreover, one person found it completely useless and on the other hand, one other person chose to answer that he or she found it very useful.

The following two tables focus on time. Q12 investigated on the amount of time the participants spent to complete the activity. Table 9. shows that 40% of the students spent between 10 and 30 minutes on the activity, while it took between 30 and 60 minutes for a smaller group (35% of the participants). Two people completed the activity in under 10 minutes, and three participants actually needed more than one hour to finish the activity. Instead, Table 10. shows the results of Q13, which focuses on the opinion of the students on the rightfulness of time necessary to conclude the activity and its usefulness. What is evident here is a tie between two groups composed of 40% of the total of the participants. One group believes the relationship is quite proportional, while the other believes that the time spent on the activity is a little proportional to the usefulness of the activity itself. Only one person believes it completely proportional, and three people actually considered it not proportional at all.







In conclusion of this section, the results of the last question (Q14) are displayed in Table 11. They show that almost half of the participants (45%) would quite agree to the possibility of regularly repeating the activity proposed for every work unit. 40% of the students answered they would agree a little less than the majority. Only one person would completely agree to it and finally, two people would not agree at all with the possibility of repeating the experience on a regular basis.

The final section of the questionnaire was composed of three open questions. The online *Form* chosen for this part allowed the participants to freely write a very short paragraph to answer in a personal way. Since open-ended questions result in individual and different answers for every student, the teacher-researcher analysed them in order to create content-based categories. First of all, the answers were all read individually. Secondly, a few general categories were identified, for example positive, negative, or neutral answers. At this point, to provide richer descriptions, some sub-categories were isolated. Finally, it is important to notice that the total number of answers can be different from the total of participants, since one student could express more than one opinion in their answer, and this was mapped separately in each category mentioned.

The first open question (Q15), reported in Table 12., investigated the reasons why the participants did not use the "effect" features to insert written elements into their video response. The answers can be divided in three many groups: a few (six out of twenty, to be exact) students revealed they had difficulties using the features or the website itself, therefore they could not use them; a second group of answers showed that students did not consider the use of the features as obligatory for the correct completion of the activity, in fact nine participants wrote that they did not think the features would improve their video; finally, a third category of answer comprises those who actually used said features (two students) in their video and three people which left the space unanswered.

Table 12.

Q15. If you didn't use the features to insert written elements in your video response, why not?	
Because they are too complicated.	2
Because I don't know the application.	2
Because I had troubles with the upload and the added features took up too much time.	2
Because I didn't think they were necessary.	7
I didn't think they would fit with my video.	2
I used the effects.	2
No answer.	3

In Table 13., the second open question (Q16) is presented. Students were asked to give a preference between the "traditional" oral test conducted by the teacher in class and an online activity such as the one proposed, where students give an oral presentation, record it and upload it for the teacher to evaluate. The results can be divided in four main sections: the first group of answer was supported by five answers, in which the "traditional" oral test is preferred, in two cases with the explanation that it is better to speak directly to someone; the second group comprised of ten negative answers, prefer the alternative of creating a video, some for the advantage of re-making it when they make

mistakes and five people because of the added interest of creating a product instead of a normal oral test; two people did not choose a preference, stating they agreed with both methods; finally, three people gave no actual answer to the question.

Table 13.	
Q16. Would you have preferred a "traditional" oral test in class instead of the production of a video as in this activity? Why?	
Yes.	3
Yes, because you can communicate directly, improvising.	2
No.	3
No, because you can re-make it if you make a mistake.	2
No, because it's more interesting creating a video.	5
Both.	2
I don't know.	1
No answer.	2

The last question (Q17), explained in Table 14. in the next page, investigated on further comments the participants might like to add to the feedback. Five main groups can be separated: the first outlines problems encountered by the students with the Flipgrid platform in general (three students), two people underlined difficulties for the posting of the video and four out of twenty students noticed problems during the editing of the video; one student commented on the difficulty of talking on one's own when recording the video; moreover, five people commented that the app and filters are quite interesting and work well; Finally, one person explicitly stated he or she would not repeat the experience and eight people did not leave an answer in the comments section.

Table 14.	
Q17. Comments	
There are problems with the editing of the video.	4
There are problems with posting the video.	2
Not intuitive settings on the platform.	3
It’s hard to talk on one’s own.	1
The app is interesting.	4
The filters and features work nicely.	1
I wouldn’t do it again.	1
No answer.	8

4.3.2. Students' Interview Analysis

In the second step of the experiment, a second activity was given, quite similar to the first one. The participants had to choose between two topics to develop in the form of an oral presentation to be recorded on the Flipgrid platform. The video had to be created with the use of the editing tools and the integration of the "effects" features to include images and or written text, and without reading. For the collection of the students' feedback for this second activity, the teacher-researcher chose to conduct semi-structured interviews with groups of four students at a time. The answers were recorded during the interview and will now be presented, not as transcripts of the interviews, but as coded and categorized data. In fact, as Schneider (2013: 133) states, written data can be analysed with a variety of methods. One of these is categorisation:

> After line-by-line coding, or scanning of paragraphs, the abstracted codes are then grouped logically – 'like with like'—and a tentative label is allocated. This process is called *categorisation*. […] The categories are labelled to signify the interpretation represented by the grouping of the codes. The categories may be temporary as there might be revision in the light of further analysis […]. The final step is to establish relationships conceptually by establishing a hierarchy of categories and subcategories. A category will tend to have multiple subcategories; sometimes there may be more than two levels in the hierarchy with the third level sometimes referred to as 'properties' of the sub-category.

Moreover, Schneider explains that the order of the categories can be cyclical, rather than in orderly levels (Noble and Smith, 2014 cited by Shneider, 2013).

One final note is necessary to avoid misunderstandings: just as for the open questions in the first feedback's questionnaire, students could give more than one opinion in their answers or no opinion at all, therefore the following data will no be presented as percentages of a whole, since the total number of data collected would not reflect the total number of participants.

Interview question 1.

Did you notice any difference between the first and the second activity?

The first question of the interview was meant to investigate the students' opinions on any differences they might have noticed while they completed the first and the second activity. The students' answers can be categorized in three different main groups:

- The first, is composed of the largest quantity of similar opinions on the second activity being more demanding than the first. In particular, six participants stated that the use of the effects features and having to insert written text as well was more demanding than it was in the first activity and three people answered that it also took more time than the other. Finally, three students also noticed that the second activity was more demanding because they had to learn their text, instead of reading it as they had done for the first activity.
- In the second group of answers, the second activity was found more entertaining by four people, who stated that the features were not complicated, but easy to use. Moreover, five students believed that the more the effects were used the easer it became.
- Finally, four people stated that they found no difference between the first and the second activity, some specifying that they had approached both with the same level of commitment.

Interview question 2.

Did you find it difficult to speak on your own, in front of the camera, and without the teacher present?

The second question inquired about the students' perceptions on having to give an oral presentation, without the teacher and classmates in the same room, and if they found any difficulties in speaking on their own, in front of the camera. Their opinions were given clearly. In fact, in this case, it is possible to categorise the answers in three distinct and numbered groups:

- The first group, composed of half of the participants, stated that giving the oral presentation at home was easier than the confrontation with the teacher in class. In particular, this group of students mentioned the lack of anxiety, due to the fact that in case they made mistakes they could delete the video clip and try again, without it being known by the teacher.
- The second group of answers gave the opposite opinion from the first. In fact, six people prefer to be in class, in front of the teacher, when giving an oral presentation. The common motivation behind this opinion is that the presence of the teacher can be of help in cases such as the mispronunciation of a term, or if a student finds himself or herself in difficulty continuing with their speech, students affirmed that the teacher could help them re-elaborate or start again.
- Finally, a smaller group of four people found the distinction to be indifferent to them. Two students specified that both situations have their advantages, such as the help that could be given by the teacher and the possibility of learning small sections of the text and recording one clip at a time, when filming the oral presentation from home.

Interview question 3.

Do you think this activity influenced your learning of the necessary topics, compared to a standard approach?

The third question of the interview was composed of different "sub-questions" to investigate more into detail, the topic of interest. Therefore, the teacher-researcher formulated a general question to discover the students' perceptions on the influence that the proposed activities had on the process of learning of the topics presented in the work unit of their book, in comparison to the standard approach to the units of the book. To lead the students, follow-up questions were proposed as prompts, such as "do you remember the topics used during the activities?" or "did it help you to remember them?". The results to such inquiries brought into light two main opinions:

- The first group gave positive opinions on the influence that the experience of the online activity had on them and on their learning. In particular, two subcategories

can be found for those who gave a broad and general answer on the positive aspects of such an experience and the other who gave more specific account of its advantages:

- Seven students stated that this kind of activity is different from "normality", therefore less monotonous and more stimulating, especially since they are given the opportunity to do research and focus on specific aspects that might interest them more than others.
- The second sub-category comprises the majority of the participants' opinions. Six students highlighted the efficacy of the online activities in respect to the goal of learning how to use the First Conditional and the lexicon associated with visiting new cities. The repetition of the text to record the video response was considered effective. Moreover, nine students stated they still remembered the First Conditional Tense, used in their video responses. Two people noticed that this method is an easier approach to grammar than the traditional way. Finally, two people stated that the exercise of giving the oral presentation helped their pronunciation as well.

- The second group, comprised a quarter of the participants, answered that they did not feel motivated to learn the topics of the unit. The only influence was dictated by the fact that the activity was going to be evaluated and marked.

Interview question 4.

Do you think that Flipgrid had some influence on you linguistic, technological, or oral competences?

The fourth question of the interview is linked to the previous one, since it focuses on the influence that the experience and the use of the Flipgrid platform has had on different competences of the participants. A few examples were given to guide the students, such as technological competences, research competences, and finally, in particular the help that such activities might have given to improve their oral production skills in English. In the categorisation of these answers two groups could be individuated as well:

- The first group of answers focuses on the fact that it was useful, in the students' opinions, to learn and practice on a new online platform. Eight participants stated that the platform was intuitive, simple to use and therefore an advantage to their technological competences. Two people specified, however, that they did not find any new concept on the Flipgrid platform that they did not already know.

- The second category of answers regards the fact that this experience helped the students to practice their oral skills in English as a foreign language. In fact, all twenty students recognised that, on different levels, creating a video on Flipgrid was an opportunity to improve their spoken English. As already mentioned in another answer, some considered the repetition of the presentation to record the video a good exercise for language practice and to enhance one's vocabulary, since they had to research terms and notions outside their workbook. Finally, it was mentioned by a student that there are not many opportunities to practice oral skills at home, even through homework. Therefore, activities such as creating a video presentation from home, can provide for a chance that is not usually contemplated.

Interview question 5.

Would you agree to the use of Flipgrid in other English language work units?

Finally, the fifth question investigated the opinions of the participants on the possibility of integrating Flipgrid as a resource in aid to foreign language learning. The two categories of answers are simply distinguished by those who would agree to the use of Flipgrid for other activities in the future and those who do not agree:

- Twelve people answered positively to the possibility of integrating Flipgrid to the traditional method of studying the units of the book. The reasons some students specified consisted of the fact that the use of Flipgrid would be a change from "normality", outside of the typical frame of studying and exercises given as homework. Again, the advantage of practicing the foreign language oral skills was highlighted together with the importance of recording and listening to one's

speech, because of the possibility of hearing the mistakes made, modifying and correcting them. Two more students agreed to the idea of using more Flipgrid, but at the condition of not being assigned an activity too often, since they require time and energy.

- The other six participants gave firm negative answers, stating they prefer to continue with standard oral tests in class. They also specified that the opposition to the integration of Flipgrid to the regular curriculum is also due to inefficiency of the platform itself. In fact, they stated that the drawbacks of the platform would prevent them from creating a worthy product. Therefore, they opted for the possibility of keeping the idea of creating oral presentations online, however using another platform.

In conclusion to the interviews' analysis here are transcribed some of the students' more frequent complaints recorded during the feedback. The complaints regard the Flipgrid platform and the problems the students encountered while utilizing it for the activities. The first and most common dissatisfaction is with the platform's interface, in fact some students affirmed that it was not intuitive as many other websites or apps today available. Moreover, the difficulties in the loading of the pages and the final upload of the video response disappointed some of them, especially those who do not possess a very efficient internet connection, who were penalized by this because the website would crash and prevent the upload. More in detail about the creation of the video, students registered some difficulties when editing the video, since the clips can only be cut at the beginning or at the end, when instead, some students would have preferred to film the entire presentation and later edit it into clips. Finally, another complaint on the creation of the video regards the fact that any text or image cannot be inserted at one point of the video, in order to have them change and proceed with the presentation. Instead students could insert additional features only at the beginning of the clip, before starting to record and the image or text would remain until the end of the clip.

4.3.3. Teacher-researcher's Diary Analysis

As already mentioned, the teacher-researcher kept a diary of observations during the entire length of the experiment, from the preparation to the final feedback received. Therefore, the information collected can be organized following the steps of the project's process. Nine main moments can be separated: preparation, presentation, first test, first activity, first feedback, doubts and clarifications, second activity, second feedback, evaluation. In this section the relevant observations made by the teacher-researcher during the whole experiment will be transcribed and selected. The researcher wrote and observed the successions of the activities' steps in the role of teacher-researcher.

1. Preparation:

   The project development required first of all, a deep knowledge of the platform chosen, in order to understand what the activities could comprise. The teacher-researcher created an account on Flipgrid and followed the beginner's tutorials both for teachers and students in order to be prepared and to be familiar with the material that would be assigned to the participants. The teacher-researcher acknowledged the clarity of the website and the opportunity of utilizing it for a research about the use of e-learning for English as a foreign language.

   The second stage of the first step of the experiment was to ask the necessary authorizations to proceed with the experiment. The figures involved were first of all the English Language colleagues, the principal of the school, the students and their parents. First, the teacher-researcher asked her colleagues which class could be involved in the project. The factors considered were firstly the teacher's agreement to collaborate, if the class was ahead enough in the program of the year so as not to jeopardize the progress of the class by spending time on the project and finally, the students' predisposition. The teacher-researcher was greatly helped by the support of the English teacher of the second-year class that would participate in the experiment. The class was ahead and well predisposed to the idea of a new experience in their English Language class. Secondly, the teacher-researcher drafted a letter to the principal of the school asking for her permission

to carry out the educational project presented in the same letter. Once the approval was granted, an individual authorization was sent to the students' families, containing the presentation of the activities and a personal authorization slip for them to fill out, stating that they allowed their children to participate. The teacher-researcher found little difficulty in these processes, with the only exception of the long times necessary to receive confirmation from the school's administration office and from the families. Finally, once all the needed documents had been collected, the teacher-researcher created a connection between Flipgrid and *Google Classroom* to directly link the classes email addresses to the website. Overall, the first step of preparation for the experiment was completed over the course of three weeks and the teacher-researcher considered it appropriate in proportion to the importance of the experiment and the necessity of receiving the appropriate authorization before the start of the activities.

2. Presentation:

   At this point, the teacher-researcher created a video on the platform to illustrate to the participants the final result they would have to present at the end of the two activities. The video was filmed by the teacher-researcher exactly as the students would have to do later. The video contained several separate clips and text such as key-words or the explanation of the concept presented orally. The teacher-researcher found some difficulty during the editing of the video, considering the tools are not very intuitive. This observation allowed her to notice the drawback and to signal it to the students when presenting the platform. Moreover, after the upload, the teacher-researcher had some delays when trying to retrieve the correct access code to share with the students, necessary to enter the Group on Flipgrid. The same happened when trying to use the direct link option between the platform to *Classroom*. The teacher-researcher observed that the Flipgrid platform presented some technical imperfections that could discourage educators and learners from its use. At this point, the teacher-researcher presented to the class the platform and the activities. She showed them how to sign up and warned them about the possible technical difficulties they might encounter. The students asked only a few clarification questions.

3. First test:

   The first trial was set to ascertain that every participant was able to film and upload a response on the platform. The teacher-researcher asked them to record a very brief personal presentation. The aim of this pre-activity was to let students get to know the platform and its uses before having to submit the real activity. The results were that only eight out of twenty students uploaded a video response. The teacher-researcher realised that students were often distracted due to the unusual learning situation due to the pandemic restrictions, which obliged the class to be split into two groups, one attending lessons onsite and one from home. It was observed that reaching all students at the same time, keeping the interest high both in class and at home could be demanding and complicated.

4. First activity:

   The first activity was assigned the next week when a substantial change occurred at the school level: all the school buildings closed because of the rapid increase in the number of Covid-19 infections, therefore, all students had to attend classes from home. This change of situation visibly decreased the students' determination and interest in the activity and in school lessons in general. However, the teacher-researcher and the English teacher thought that because of forced distance, a positive stimulus to continue with the activity could be useful: since it was more complicated to have oral tests in class as well, it was agreed that the video presentations produced by the class would be evaluated.

   After the presentation of the activity, one week was given to the students to answer the Flipgrid topic. At the end of the week, not all students had uploaded the video, therefore the teacher-researcher solicited the remaining students who had not completed it. Some stated they had done the upload but could not see their video on the website. The teacher-researcher investigated the possibility and after a second try some videos were uploaded, but two students still could not do it. The teacher-researcher resolved to have the video sent directly by email and noticed the presence of the observed uploading problem on the platform.

When all videos had been uploaded or otherwise sent to the teacher-researcher, she watched them and analysed them according to some categories, which will be presented into detail in the next section (4.3.4. Students Products Analysis). The oral productions were correctly presented, but almost no student had included any editing or effects features to complete the products. Other two observations arose from the viewing of many videos: students read their texts instead of naturally speaking and some texts did not appear to have been written by them, instead some sounded similar to tourist guides or articles about the city presented. These last observations convinced the teacher-researcher and her English Language colleague that the presentations could not be considered as real oral tests, comparable to those in class. Therefore, the evaluation was moved to the end of the second activity, in order to examine the progress from first to second video, after having explained to the class they could not read their texts during the recording and that it was mandatory for them to create the oral presentation, without copying it.

5. First feedback:

   After the first activity, the teacher-researcher posted on *Classroom* the link to the online questionnaire that constituted the feedback of the activity. The participants were also notified in class, and they were given a few days to complete it. The deadline was set on the same day as when the second activity was going to be presented. However, on said day, only half of the questionnaires had been filled in. Therefore, their teacher allowed them ten minutes at the end of an English lesson to complete the feedback. This method however could have prevented some students from filling out the questionnaire earnestly. The teacher-researcher hypothesizes that the open questions left blank could have been from those students who had to complete the feedback in a few minutes in class.

6. Doubts and clarifications:

   Between the first and the second activity, the teacher-researcher met again with the class and reiterated the elements that the video should have included, such as at least two separate clips, visual elements such as key-words or images and a

natural presentation of the topic, without reading. Many students stated they had not known that the elements cited above had been obligatory, therefore, both teacher and teacher-researcher repeated them to ensure that the second video contained them.

7. Second activity:

   The second activity was assigned after one week from the previous and was developed following the same indications as for the first. The students were given a week's time to upload their video. Since the results from the first activity showed that many students had read their texts aloud, and some might have copied them from the internet, in the second activity the teacher-researcher gave the possibility to those students to repeat the same topic as the first activity, discovering a new city, changing all necessary details that had not been present in the previous video response. The upload of the second round of videos revealed the same problems discovered the first time: students with weak internet connections could not upload the video, since it became too heavy and many students lamented that after uploading it, they could not rewatch their response, because it was not visible. In this way, the teacher-researcher found out that no confirmation of the upload is given to the students, in the case in which the educator chooses to keep the video private until viewing it and allowing it on the Group's response page.

8. Second feedback:

   The teacher-researcher observed that the first feedback had not brought to light completely satisfactory answers. For this reason, the second feedback modality was changed to oral questions to five groups of four participants in the study. This modality was chosen because it gave the possibility to the teacher-researcher to add follow-up questions when answers were not clear, or too vague. A second reason for choosing this modality is given by the fact that the teacher-researcher felt that the students might engage in a more significant way with the teacher-researcher and the questions asked, if in small groups and given the possibility of taking the necessary time to reflect and elaborate on the experience just past.

9. Evaluation:

   Finally, the teacher-researcher compiled a checklist of elements that were recognized as necessary in order to consider complete a video response. This analysis will be described in the paragraph below. The sum of the elements present in both videos and the effort showed in the second video, in case the first had not been completed according to the given indications, gave the teacher-researcher an overview of the accomplishments of the students. At this point, she shared her evaluations with her English Language colleague, which, being the class' curricular teacher, had the task of choosing the mark for the students' work.

4.3.4. Students Product Analysis

The last element composing this study is constituted of the students' products. The videos they created are evidence of the outcome of the activities of this experiment. Therefore, they have been analysed and categorised according to a check-list made by the teacher-researcher. In this paragraph the summary of the teacher-researcher's analysis on the students' video response is presented, divided into two categories: video structure and content. The first category includes the use of the First Conditional Tense and the vocabulary relevant to their topic. In particular, since the second activity presented a second option, for the students who had correctly completed the topic from the first activity, the tags of the table do not specify the tense and vocabulary necessary, however the analysis considered their relevance to the alternative topic chosen by the students. The general fluency and precision in the oral production in English was not considered as a requirement to consider the activity a success on account of the students being at different levels of proficiency regarding the oral skills in their foreign language. The second category includes the use or absence of the editing tool present on the platform, which gives the possibility of dividing the video in separate clips; moreover, it tracks the use of written elements to specify or clarify the concept explained orally and the images or visual effects exploited for the same purpose.

Table 15.	
First Activity Video Responses.	
Students used the First Conditional Tense.	13
Students correctly used the vocabulary on the topic “cities”.	16
Students used clips in the video response.	4
Students used written text in the video response.	0
Students used images/visual effects in the video response.	3

Table 15. above shows the results of the categorization of the products of the first activity. As can be observed from the table, the first category of analysis shows good percentages of answers. In fact, 65% of the participants used the main grammatical topic on which the work unit focused, the First Conditional Tense, in their video responses. Moreover, 80% of the students showed a satisfactory competence in the use of the lexicon associated with visiting a new city or giving directions to someone. The other 35% of the class, which was not counted as presenting the First Conditional Tense, either used the tense in an incorrect way or completely avoided using it, preferring the Present Simple Tense to describe the city or the Future Tense to talk about their intentions when visiting. In respect to the students who are part of the 20% of the group who did not use the appropriate vocabulary, they avoided going in specific detail about the city and how they would spend their time visiting it. When considering the second category, however, the results are completely different. In fact, very few people took advantage of the website editing feature or of the possibility of adding images and texts to complete their video. As the table displays, only 20% of the students used the clipping tool, to divide the video in sections. 15% of the participants used visual effects to modify their video. However none had any actual purpose other than a decorative one. Finally, no student included key-words, written explanations or bullet points to guide their presentation.

In Table 16., the video responses from the second activity were analyzed and coded according to the predetermined categories. As can be observed from the first part of the table, 75% of the students used the correct tenses according to which of the two topics proposed they had chosen for this activity. The other 25% percent was not included in consideration of the fact that the students used the incorrect tense in their presentations.

Table 16.	
Second Activity Video Responses.	
Students used the correct tenses for the chosen topic.	15
Students correctly used the vocabulary on the chosen topic.	18
Students used clips in the video response.	8
Students used written text in the video response.	16
Students used images/visual effects in the video response.	16

However, one student did not submit the second video response, therefore could not be included into the categorization. The vocabulary was chosen and used correctly by 90% of the participants, as shown in Table 16., at the second line. Again, the 10% who did not fit the criteria described is actually composed by one student who did not upload the video and one person who did not show a sufficient competence of the necessary vocabulary. In regard to the second category of analysis, the table shows a general improvement from the first activity's use of the editing tool and effect features. In fact, 80% of the students inserted key-words or titles in their video responses. Specifically, three people wrote an effective bullet-point list, which introduced the focus points of their oral presentation. The same percentage of participants inserted images, stickers, or *GIFs* (animated digital images), representing skylines of the cities described or details of objects or entertainment they would find in those cities. Finally, the clipping tool present of Flipgrid was exploited more than in the first activity, but still not in a very high percentage. In fact, only eight students out of twenty uploaded a video response which contained two or more separate clips, in which they presented different focus points of their presentations. One last observation was made about the manner in which the students gave their oral presentation in the video. In the products from the second activity, seven students were reported again for reading the text from a notebook or their computer while recording, instead of speaking freely.

5. Discussion

In this final chapter, the researcher will summarize the key findings that the study presented above has brought to light, thanks to the experiment conducted in a second-year high-school class from the researcher's school, in order to answer the two research questions stated at the beginning of the study. The highlighted findings will be interprete by the researcher, in order to be able to discuss some of the implications that the results found can lead to. Moreover, it is necessary to acknowledge the presence of some limitations in the study, in order to account for possible missing certainties in the results. Finally, in light of the study here presented, the researcher will state her recommendations for future investigations on the topic and specifically, on the use of online platforms such as Flipgrid as a resource for the learning of a foreign language in high-school. As introduced above, the key findings of the experiment conducted will now be outlined, starting from the research problem that was considered at the beginning of the study. In fact, the research emerges from the evident need to investigate the role of technology in educational contexts, such as secondary school levels. In consideration of the fact that there are innumerable points of view from which technology can influence learning, and in particular language learning, this small-scale study focused specifically on the impact that an online platform could have on foreign language oral skills practice, based on the opinions and perceptions of the participants, who belonged to a second-year class.

5.1 First Research Question Discussion: Students and Educator's Perceptions

The first research question investigated the perceptions both of learners and the educator about the free online platform named Flipgrid, in particular, for its role in oral skills development and practice in a foreign language. The results of this investigation indicate that Flipgrid is overall considered by the participants as a useful tool in support of the traditional language learning curriculum to assist learners in their oral skills practice. In fact, from the two forms of feedback with which the data necessary was gathered, together with the observation diary kept by the teacher-researcher, it is

demonstrated that the website Flipgrid is a valuable platform, that can be used to practice grammatical topics, various areas of lexicon and, more importantly, it promotes the development of oral skills through oral production. These findings are in line with previous studies, such as the one conducted by McLain (2018), where the ease of use of the platform's features were praised and students appreciated the increase of time spent speaking in the foreign language. In fact, the participants in this study too stated having appreciated the opportunity of speaking in English from home and of exploiting some of the main advantages which Flipgrid offers, such as the possibility of re-watching their video and their classmates', deleting and re-making clips of their videos and practice and repeat their presentation before recording it. Similar findings were acknowledged in Amirulloh et al. (2020) and Tuyet and Khang (2020).

As observed in Stoszkowski's (2018) study, in this our study as well the flexibility of the platform and lack of time and space constraints were perceived as an advantage by both students and teacher-researcher during the activity. In fact, the possibility of delivering and communicating exclusively online was the only way in which the experiment could have been executed, because of the social distancing restrictions in place at the time. These findings confirm the thesis by Holmes and Gardner (2006) about the importance of e-learning, and its increasing indispensability from fifteen years ago.

Moreover, the entire activity that constitutes the event in which e-learning is introduced in a standard curriculum is also developed in order to give space to the learners. In fact, after the first indication given by the educator in the Topic section for the activity, the students are allowed to express themselves in whatever way they choose, with the possibility of focusing on the areas of their interest and communicate them through the video presentation and the multimedia elements that can be inserted. This analysis supports Bahera (2013), who underlined the potential of e-learning being learner-centred and the theory proposed by that Kukulska-Hulme (2009) and Michealsen (2008): the role of the learners needs to be an active one, where they can be at the center of the experience and, once the guidance given by the teacher is completed, they are free to explore and re-elaborate the material presented how they best see fit.. The data collected with the analysis of the students' products suggests that Stockwell and Hubbard's (2013) principles are not only relevant but actually fundamental in order to avoid misunderstandings and impossibility of carrying out the activities for the whole class. In

particular, the results show that is it is very important to consider the possibilities of each student and their access to the necessary devices and resources for the experience. As displayed above the lack of such conditions led to the impossibility for some of the students to complete the assignment in the same way as other students, as noticed by Stoszkowski (2018) as well, when listing some of the disadvantages that might be encountered when using Flipgrid in a classroom.

Another fundamental principle confirmed by this study is the one concerning guidance by the teacher to her or his students, an issue also mentioned in Stockwell and Hubbard's (2013) work. The concept of leaving a range of choices to the students that was just reiterated does not mean that the students are left on their own, from the assignment of the activity to its deadline, rather they need to be constantly given the opportunity of asking for clarifications or help to their teacher. Vaughan (2011) as well underlined the importance of the role of the teacher as a guide and facilitator of learning, when engaging in e-learning and multimedia products' creation.

Another important element that was brought to light by the experiment conducted is that Flipgrid is not a platform that could be associated with a behaviourist approach, as many language learning applications have been found to be predisposed for, as mentioned in a study by Heil et al. (2016). In fact, many platforms focus predominantly on vocabulary and on the formation of out-of-context sentences, whereas Flipgrid is an extremely versatile platform, and it requires a personal elaboration of the vocabulary and grammatical topics necessary to complete the activity. It is not predisposed for drills or out-of-context recognition of grammatical structure, but instead it allows the use of the elements available to engage in meaningful learning through individual or group re-elaboration of the material. The results from the data gathered after the activities show that the participants appreciated the modality in which they had to learn, review, and put into practice the vocabulary and the grammatical topics proposed.

Furthermore, Flipgrid was chosen for this study as a versatile tool, appropriate for the investigation of the research problem presented at the beginning of the study and in fact, it was proved that Flipgrid is a valuable resource for education, thanks to its simplicity and versatility. The presence of effects and tools that allow students to create multimodal content, simply strengthens the researcher's opinion on the platform's value.

5.2 Second Research Question Discussion: Multimodality Exploitation

As just mentioned, the second research question was interested in exploring another result of the experiment, the element of multimodality. As Cope and Kalantzis have explored in various papers (2013; 2016), learning is nowadays inevitably linked to the concept of "synesthesia" of modes of communication. The experiment conducted greatly considered this notion, by the use of a platform where different means of communication were available to the students, such as the addition of texts and images to their oral presentation. However, the results show that the use of such tools is not an immediate consequence of their being available. In fact, the participants of this study had various difficulties in using them, not being satisfied by them, or not contemplating them completely. The answers to the first open question of the questionnaire, showed that a part of the group found the use of the effects quite complicated, and the majority of the group considered them not necessary. Therefore, it is possible to affirm that the multimodality aspect of the experiment was not completely satisfactory, even though after the first activity, the role of the elements mentioned was explained again to the students and the second activity showed some improvement in their use. However, only few students showed a real understanding of the improvement that the use of clips and bullet-point lists of key-words could provide to their videos. A possible explanation for this result is given by the fact that the study was set in a limited amount of time and, therefore, the possibilities of practicing using the tools of the platform were limited. This might have conditioned their products, not being proficiently competent in the use of the platform, as was reported in the feedback from the first activity. Moreover, the students experienced the whole activity in the difficult times of social distancing and school closures, because of the Coronavirus raising infections. The researcher hypothesized that the context's conditions did not help students to feel motivated to engage in additional activities, and therefore, the quality of their products was influenced by unavoidable negative external factors.

The results just mentioned about multimodality, as already stated, were not completely satisfactory, meaning that the students' products did not show a consistent use of the tools proposed, even with the support of the teacher-researcher. However, since improvement was registered it is important to notice that the teacher participation, after

witnessing the difficulties encountered during the first activity, brought some positive results. Holmes and Gardner (2006) as well as Stockwell and Hubbard (2013) underlined the importance of guidance and scaffolding during the whole process of learning through a technological platform, such as Flipgrid. The evidence found in the experiment conducted provides an insight on the importance of the educator's role, even during a learner-centered activity. The researcher found that her initial support and presentation of the platform and tools was not sufficient for the students to correctly complete the assignment, therefore, further scaffolding was provided before entering the second activity of the experiment and this was prompted not only by the results of the first video responses, but by the students' interest and questions about the features and tool they had not been able to exploit during the creation of their presentations.

The results of the experiment considered above constitute the evidence needed to investigate the research question proposed at the beginning of this paper. The usefulness of the Flipgrid platform as a resource for language learning to be integrated into the curriculum, based on the perceptions of the students involved and the teacher-researcher who accompanied them, was confirmed by the participants' answers to the questionnaire and to the interview. The data gathered through these instruments shows that the students appreciated the use of Flipgrid, firstly, for its main purpose of creating a video instead of having to be tested orally in class. In fact, the students expressed their interest in the integration of the modality experienced with Flipgrid, as an escape from the too regular curriculum or method of applying the material studied through standard exercises on their workbook.

5.3 Implications and Limitations of the Study

With the findings so far discussed, it is now possible to highlight some implications which could be relevant for language education.

Given that Flipgrid has been considered as a useful resource for the development of oral skills in English as a foreign language, by both students and teacher-researcher, in line with other previous positive research findings (see Chapter 3), the first implication to be outlined here is that Flipgrid should be integrated as a valuable resource to practice

speaking in a foreign language, increasing the students' opportunities to produce it vocally. Moreover, it has the advantage of saving time in class, since oral presentations can require a lot of time. In this manner, all students can view each other's videos from home. Furthermore, it is important that, as noticed by Andujar et al. (2020), the online component of teaching is not detached from the rest of the learning activities. It needs to be an intrinsic part of the curriculum and, as such, it requires guidance from the educator. Students should not only receive initial dispositions for the online activities and be evaluated at their end. Instead, the process must be scaffolded and explained by the teacher, who has to accompany learners throughout the activities, structuring them in order for them to be comprehensible and with a logic, according to the topics which are being studied. This last concept is fundamental also in relation to the second research question, to which the answer was not as satisfactory as it was for the first research question. The researcher realized that the students needed more scaffolding and practice with the features of the platform to be able to complete the activities in a proper way and fully reach the learning objectives. Therefore, the recommendation for a better result in terms of multiliteracy and multimodal products' creation is for the educator to plan extensive practice exercises, in class, in groups and eventually, individually at home, in order to support the students' progress and familiarity to the Flipgrid platform.

In addition, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of the study. The experimentation here presented was confined by small time frames and, therefore, involved only a small group of students, of the same age and technical professional field of study. Far from allowing for large-scale generalizations on the platform analysed, this study proposes to be a small contribution to current research on the opportunities that Flipgrid offers to language learning classes. The hope is that more extensive research will be conducted in the future so as to bring to light advantages and limits of this platform as well as of other new similar resources, and to support those who are interested in bringing forward e-learning, as the integral part of today's language teaching that it is.

Finally, a mention to the current historical period needs to be also done. The pandemic times in which students live today have brought great changes to both teaching and learning. The presence of technology and communication devices allowed for education to continue, adapting alternative learning modalities to the students' school

grades. However, these new learning strategies and approaches inevitably brought an increase in workload for the students as well. The preparation of the class of participants and becoming accustomed to the new platform introduced by this experimentation required more time and a more relaxed context, that due to last spring's schools' closures were impossible to obtain. Therefore, the groundwork for the activities planned had to be rethought to be done virtually. It is possible that this circumstance had some negative effects on the overall outcome of the experimentation, because of the lack of motivation of the students, who were already burdened by other subjects' homework and forced to stay at home all the time for a month.

All this considered, the project proposed had general positive outcomes when the difficulties and misunderstandings were dealt with and therefore cannot but be considered by the researcher as a success for its intent of research.

Conclusions

This research aimed at investigating the use of the free online platform named Flipgrid, as exploited at the high-school level with the purpose to enhance student's oral skills in the foreign language. The study also took into consideration the potential of Flipgrid supporting multimodal communication, which, as the studies presented in this paper state, has become a fundamental part of nowadays communication. The importance of e-learning through an online platform such as Flipgrid has hugely increased since last year's pandemic break out. Therefore, the researcher conducted a small-scale study in a real high-school class going through distance-learning due to social distancing restrictions. The investigation revealed that Flipgrid was considered a helpful resource by students and by the teacher-researcher as well, who kept an observation diary to keep track of the platform and the activities' advantages and disadvantages. The fact that the students stated their willingness to repeat the experience and incorporate it as standard practice in the foreign language curriculum, is proof that Flipgrid can be a useful and practical tool for practicing oral skills outside of the classroom and to review and put into use the topics studied in class. As for the multimodality aspect, the researcher found that it is not a simple task to complete for students. Without practice and guidance, students tended to avoid adding multimodal features to their videos. However, the lack of motivation due to the closure of the school might have had a negative effect on the students' commitment to the activities. Therefore, the results on the second research question are not completely satisfactory but would require further research.

In general, more research should be conducted on the potential of Flipgrid as a resource to be integrated into foreign language curricula. Its flexibility and versatility have already made Flipgrid become a platform used by students of every level and age, for purposes such as speaking practice, vocabulary learning and discussion. It would be very interesting to investigate other functions for which Flipgrid could be useful since, as some of the studies cited in this thesis considered, this platform could be valuable for language practice as well as for other subjects. What all the papers considered in this thesis and what this study aimed as well to confirm is that the importance of e-learning

has grown exponentially in the last twenty years, from its time and space advantages to today's essentiality of a medium of communication due to the global pandemic. Flipgrid has proved to be a useful mean of communication and learning in this ever-changing world, both for circumstances in which no traditional learning can be carried out and as an integrated resource that can enrich the foreign language curriculum.

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