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Unpacking the Effect of Flipped Learning to Enhance EFL Learners' Sociopragmatics Knowledge: Speech Acts of Refusals in Focus

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ABSTRACT

Although previous studies have acknowledged the significant effect of flipped classrooms in language learning, few studies have been concerned about its potential impact on EFL learners' sociopragmatics knowledge. The present study aims to examine the promising role of flipped learning assisted by WhatsApp applications (i.e., WhatsApp-integrated flipped learning) in enhancing EFL learners' appropriate use of refusals in English. Another objective is to examine EFL learners' perception of the WhatsApp-integrated flipped learning activity in facilitating learning. This study employed a quasi-experimental with pre-test and post-test design of experimental and control groups. The experimental group (N=36) was taught in a WhatsApp-integrated flipped learning, while the control group (N=36) was enrolled in a similar class but did not experience the use of any digital platform. The intervention was conducted in eight meetings, including the process of data collection using Discourse Completion Tests, semi-structured interviews, and a TAM questionnaire. The results revealed that WhatsApp-integrated flipped learning was proven as an effective strategy to enhance EFL learners' speech acts of refusals, indicated by a significant difference in the post-test scores of the experimental group compared to the control group. They showed positive acceptance toward the use of the WhatsApp application to facilitate flipped classrooms for teaching sociopragmatics. In addition, the semi-structured interview further disclosed that the learners positively perceived WhatsApp-integrated flipped learning activity. Implications for English language teaching and suggestions for future research are further discussed.

KEYWORDS:
Flipped learning; Speech acts of refusals; Communicative competence; EFL learners; Sociopragmatics knowledge.

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Introduction

The role of pragmatic competence, the ability to use language in an appropriate context (Taguchi, 2009), has increasingly been significant in general communication using a

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second/foreign language. The primary objective of communicators during the communication process is to successfully convey specific information within a particular sociocultural setting, ensuring that the recipients accurately comprehend the intended message (Chen & Wu, 2022; Kentmen et al., 2023). Hence, understanding sociopragmatics knowledge and its functions in interpersonal interactions is crucial to our comprehension of how foreign language learners can acquire the ability to develop their pragmatic competence in order to gain successful communication (Ellis & Shintani, 2023). In order to successfully communicate with others, it is essential to possess knowledge beyond just grammar and vocabulary. Gaining an effective interaction requires individuals to have an understanding of relational and socio-contextual factors that govern the appropriate use of speech acts (Cohen, 2005; Yuan & Lyu, 2022). Speech acts, which are actions performed through language, are a crucial component of pragmatics knowledge used by individuals to convey particular messages (Grundlingh, 2018).

In the era of communicative language teaching, speech acts play a crucial role in achieving language learning languages. There is a commonly held belief that speech acts can be effectively taught in EFL classrooms with appropriate pedagogical approaches (Nicholas, 2015; Sadikov, 2021). However, studies have also disclosed that teaching speech acts in a classroom setting is challenging due to several reasons. First, as pointed out by Hussein and Albakri (2019), many instructors lack familiarity with pragmatic principles that underpin successful communication, which leads them to rely on their personal knowledge of pragmatics rather than developing an understanding of L2 pragmatic competence. Consequently, they may use unreliable methodologies that reduce the quality of learning instruction. Second, textbooks cannot always be relied upon to provide sufficient pragmatic inputs due to inadequate interpretation of language use (Bardovi-Harlig & Griffin, 2005). Third, the classroom environment, especially an EFL setting, is not a perfect simulation of a real-life communication context that can meet the pragmatic needs of learners (Webb, 2013). Therefore, the classroom may not be able to offer a lot of exposure for all possible interactions with the target language community.

Despite such obstacles, it has been a common goal that EFL learners must be well-equipped with the ability to communicate in a foreign language; hence, developing EFL learners' pragmatic competence becomes a thought-provoking issue in language classrooms. Addressing this matter, some previous studies have begun to acknowledge a number of teaching strategies to enhance language learners sociopragmatics knowledge (Cunningham, 2017; Haghighi et al., 2019; Hazaymeh & Altakhaineh, 2019), one of which is flipped learning. Flipped learning is a type of blended student-centered approach that offers more learning time to students in pre-, whilst, and post-activities due to its reversed learning process through the assistance of digital technology (Bergmann & Sams, 2012). Under the procedure of flipped learning, learners do lessons at home and work together with their instructor and peers to master learning materials during class hours (Hwang & Chang, 2023). The primary goal of flipping a classroom is to provide learners with a more profound educational experience as well as application skills instead of just comprehension (Chai & Hamid, 2023). This learning strategy has numerous advantages, including giving learners greater opportunities over their learning, fostering collaboration and student-centered learning, and providing access to lessons outside the classroom (Bi et al., 2023; Lo, 2024). In a flipped classroom setting, learners are provided with instructional materials (such as instructor-recorded lecture videos or downloaded from websites) prior to the class, and

during class hours, collaborative activities, projects, and discussions are prioritized over traditional lectures (Sointu et al., 2023). Thus, one of the key successes of conducting flipped classrooms relies on the effectiveness of pre-class activities.

Current studies have shown that flipped classrooms have a positive effect on language learning. Andujar and Çakmak (2023) stated that flipped learning, with the assistance of the Instagram application, could enhance the language learning process. Li et al. (2022) disclosed a positive contribution of flipped learning to EFL students' development of five aspects of communicative competence: lexis, syntax, cohesion, pragmatics, and discourse. Moreover, Judy Shih and Huang (2022) revealed the flipped classroom design helped EFL students to develop reading metacognitive strategies. Similarly, the study of Shafiee Rad et al. (2022) also portrayed the effectiveness of STAD (Student Team Achievement Division) flipped learning in enhancing EFL students' expository writing skills. In a similar direction, Fathi and Rahimi (2022) found the significant impact of flipped classrooms on EFL students' writing complexity, accuracy, and fluency. Not only has flipped learning been proven to have a positive impact on language performance but it has also been identified to have a significant contribution to improving learners' affective variables. A study by Bi et al. (2023) found that flipped classrooms contributed to language learners' reflective thinking, academic self-efficacy, and achievement motivation. Likewise, Li and Li (2022) showed that flipped learning could promote language learners' engagement in the sustainable development of language skills. Given the above-mentioned results of previous studies, the authors emphasize that flipped learning is a promising teaching method/strategy to enhance the language learning process.

Moreover, studies have also been conducted on the area of developing EFL learners' speech acts. Recent research highlights innovative approaches to enhancing students' ability to perform speech acts, such as refusals, across different languages and contexts. Yu et al. (2024) and Su and Fu (2023) applied the local grammar approach to analyze speech acts in Italian and Chinese, respectively. Their studies demonstrated that local grammar patterns could effectively describe and facilitate cross-linguistic studies of speech act realizations, providing both theoretical insights and practical applications for second-language instruction. Meanwhile, multiple studies in Iranian EFL contexts emphasized the pedagogical potential of flipped classrooms. Alibeigloo et al. (2021 a) investigated flipped and debate-oriented flipped instruction, finding significant improvements in learners' production of refusals, apologies, and requests compared to non-flipped approaches. Similarly, Haghighi et al. (2019) examined the use of Telegram as a mobile-based platform for flipped instruction, not enhanced engagement and pragmatic competence in refusals among EFL learners. Their findings suggest that combining digital tools with communicative activities can improve both participation and performance. Additionally, Alibeigloo et al. (2021 b) revealed that flipped instruction positively influenced learners' appropriate use of refusals and requests, further underscoring the method's effectiveness. These studies highlight the importance of developing language learners' speech acts.

While the previous studies explored the impact of flipped learning on language learners' performance and achievement (Andujar & Çakmak, 2023; Bi et al., 2023; Judy Shih & Huang, 2022; Li & Li, 2022; Shafiee Rad et al., 2022), it appears that studies in the effect of flipped learning on sociopragmatics knowledge, especially on speech acts, remain unexplored. Precedent literature on this area has only acknowledged Alibeigloo et al. (2021a); Alibeigloo et al. (2021b), and Haghighi et al. (2019), who scrutinized the contribution of

flipped classrooms to develop EFL learners' productions of speech acts of requests and refusals. The study of Haghighi et al. (2019) made use of Telegram to assist the practice of flipped learning to enhance Iranian EFL learners' production of refusals. In a similar context of the Iranian EFL setting, the studies of Alibeigloo et al. (2021 a) and Alibeigloo et al. (2021 b) utilized flipped classrooms to enhance learners' speech acts of requests, refusals, and apologize. Several research gaps are observable in these studies. First, almost no research examines flipped classrooms' use to enhance EFL learners' speech acts in Indonesian EFL settings, even in ASEAN contexts. Second, other types of digital platforms (such as WhatsApp applications) have not been explored to facilitate the flipped learning process in teaching speech acts. Third, very limited studies on enhancing EFL learners' production of speech acts of refusals in a pedagogical context make exploring the effect of innovative teaching strategies (such as flipped learning) on learners' development of refusal acts a worthy inquiry to contribute to the literature enhancement about pedagogical implication in teaching sociopragmatics knowledge.

This study focuses on speech acts of refusals, a unique type of speech act because they involve rejecting or declining a request, invitation, or offer, which often carries an inherent social sensitivity. Unlike other speech acts, such as requests or compliments, refusals require the speaker to manage both the content of the refusal and the interpersonal relationship with the listener (Kramsch, 2014). This makes refusals particularly challenging for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, as they must not only navigate the linguistic complexity of the language but also understand the subtle cultural norms that govern politeness, respect, and face-saving strategies in different social contexts (Bardovi-Harlig & Griffin, 2005). For instance, in English-speaking cultures, direct refusals are often softened with mitigating phrases like "I'm afraid I can't" or "I would love to, but I have other commitments" in order to reduce the risk of offending the listener. EFL learners, however, may not be familiar with these nuanced expressions or the importance of hedging when rejecting someone, which can lead to overly blunt or inappropriate responses (Kentmen et al., 2023). Additionally, learners must take into account the relative social status, power dynamics, and the formality of the situation, as these factors influence the choice of language used in refusals. For example, a refusal to a superior may require more elaborate politeness strategies than one given to a peer. As a result, mastering refusals involves both language proficiency and cultural competence, making them a particularly complex aspect of communication for EFL learners. Hence, it is crucial to integrate teaching speech acts of refusals in EFL settings.

Addressing the above-mentioned research gaps, the present study offers a novel concept by examining the effect of flipped learning on Indonesian EFL learners' appropriate production of speech acts of refusals. This study makes use of the WhatsApp application, the most frequently used digital platform by Indonesians, to assist the implementation of flipped classrooms in teaching speech acts of refusals. Due to the positive outcomes of flipped classrooms observed in various language skills, it is valuable to investigate how effective it is in developing speech acts of refusals, which is a crucial element of pragmatic competence. Furthermore, while previous studies only focused on whether flipped classrooms have a significant impact on language learning outcomes, this study also looks at EFL learners' perceptions about teaching speech acts using flipped learning. What sets this study apart from previous research is how it explores the efficiency of the WhatsApp application (using TAM questionnaire) as a digital platform for material delivery in the flipped

classroom. Thus, the in-hand study is directed to respond to the current gaps in flipped learning practice by scrutinizing its effect on the production of speech acts of refusals in an EFL setting in Indonesian higher education. To ensure the objectives, this study is guided by the following research questions: Does WhatsApp-integrated flipped learning significantly impact EFL learners' appropriate production of speech acts of refusals? Inaddition, what the EFL learners' perceptions are about flipped classroom practices in teaching speech acts of refusals.

Method

Study design and participants

A two-group pre-test and post-test design, often called quasi-experimental research (Phakiti, 2015), was adopted in this study to explore the potential impact of WhatsApp-integrated flipped learning on EFL learners' appropriate use of refusals. This study gathered both quantitative and qualitative data to answer the research questions. The quantitative data was collected using pre-tests, post-tests, and TAM questionnaires, while the qualitative data were obtained from semi-structured interviews.

Creswell (2014) asserts that this research model is a sequential explanatory design, where qualitative data can be collected to support the findings of quantitative data. A total of seventy-two (72) EFL learners enrolled in a speaking course in the odd semester of the academic year 2022/2023 at UIN Raden Mas Said Surakarta Indonesia participated in this study. They were second-year students in undergraduate programs who had already taken a TOEFL-like test, called Test of Standard English (TOSE), developed by the university, and were recognized as having upper intermediate levels of English proficiency. In the first meeting, they were asked for their consent to be involved in this experimental study and were required to do a pre-test to examine their speech acts of refusal acquisition before experiencing treatment. According to the results of the pre-test, they were classified into three levels: low achievers, intermediate achievers, and high achievers. Considering equal distribution of high, intermediate, and low achievers, they were divided into two groups, experimental (N=36) and control (N=36). Hence, the two groups have equal characteristics in terms of the learners' academic performance.

Instrumentation

Three types of instruments were used to gather data for this study: Discourse Completion Tests (DCT), an interview protocol, and a TAM questionnaire. First, the DCT was directed to measure the EFL learners' production of English refusals. The DCT consisted of 12 scenario items (6 items for the pre-test and 6 items for the post-test), a modified version of DCT developed by Beebe et al. (1990). A few modifications were made to make the items more appropriate to the Indonesian context. The modification was made in terms of contextualization to familiarize the participants with the context of the scenario. For example, Beebe's et al. (1990) DCT item mention locations such as 'restaurant in New York', then it was modified into other words that the participants of this study familiar with. Each scenario took into account different social status, rank of imposition, and politeness. To maintain the scoring validity and reliability, two raters (one of them is a native English speaker) were invited to score the students' production of English refusals. The assessment was based on Hudson (2001) appropriateness score, consisting of five scales in which a scale of 5 means

'completely appropriate', the scale of 4 means 'mostly appropriate', the scale of 3 means 'generally appropriate', the scale of 2 means 'not very appropriate but acceptable', and the scale of 1 means 'not appropriate and not acceptable'. Below is an example of the DCT item:

In terms of age, you are a junior compared to your classmates. You are a diligent student and always attend classes regularly, so you are good at taking lecture notes. On the other hand, there is your classmate, whose age is older than you, who often misses classes and asks you for lecture notes many times.

Your classmate : Tomorrow is our exam, but I missed some lecture notes. I am sorry to ask you, could you please lend me your notes once more?
You : …….
Your classmate : Ok then, I will ask somebody else.

Second, an interview protocol was developed to examine the EFL learners' perception of WhatsApp-integrated flipped learning activity. The semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 (namely S1-S12) out of 36 students in the experimental group directly after the administration of the post-test. They were selected as interview informants since they conveyed willingness when performing the post-test. The interview protocol consisted of five questions scrutinizing the EFL learners' attitudes, opinions, and perspectives toward WhatsApp-integrated flipped learning activity (see Appendix B). To ensure accuracy and alignment with the objective of this study, the questions were checked and validated by an expert in qualitative research so that the required information could be obtained from the informants.

Third, a Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) questionnaire was utilized to depict the EFL learners' acceptance of the use of WhatsApp application as a digital platform to facilitate flipped learning activity. The questionnaire was a modified version from Davis (1989) consisting of 16 five-point Likert-scale items ranging from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'. The questionnaire portrays the EFL learners' acceptance of perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, attitude towards use, and behavioral intention. The questionnaire was reviewed by two experts in technology-enhanced English language teaching and showed a reliability consistency of 0.81 as a result of Cronbach's alpha coefficient.

Experimentation

The intervention was conducted in eight meetings, including the pre- and post-tests. Both experimental and control groups received the same class hours and materials about producing English refusals. Both groups also experienced the same learning method inside the classroom; the only difference was that the experimental group was given pre-class activity with the assistance of WhatsApp application, while the control group was not. Table 1 presents the course materials used in eight meetings to develop EFL learners' production of English refusals.

Table 1. *Course materials*

Meeting	Materials
1	Pre-test on DCT and classroom orientation
2	Overview of English speech acts of refusals
3	Types of English refusals
4	Producing refusals in formal and informal contexts
5	Considering age, social status, and politeness in producing English refusals
6	Conversation practice (in pair)
7	Role-play (in group)
8	Post-tests, semi-structured interviews, and TAM questionnaire

Procedure in the Experimental Group

The success of flipped learning is highly dependent on the efficacy of pre-class activities in preparing students with particular course material before attending the class (Bergmann & Sams, 2012). During class hours, the students are directed to follow learning activities that mostly emphasize activating students' critical thinking and creativity (Lo, 2023). The flipped learning procedure should include several key stages. First, students must receive an orientation on how flipped learning is structured. Second, pre-class activities should be assigned to prepare students for classroom engagement. Third, in-class activities should focus on fostering creativity and critical thinking through collaborative efforts, such as problem-based learning, discussions, peer feedback, and group projects.

Following the procedure, the experimental group was taught using pre- and in-class activities. At the first meeting, the students were given a course orientation about how the learning process would be conducted under the procedure of flipped learning. The instructor created an online forum using the WhatsApp application and enrolled all class members in the forum or a WhatsApp group). The WhatsApp group was used as a platform to deliver course materials and pre-class tasks/instructions a day (or sometimes two days) before attending the classroom in every meeting during the intervention process. The students must do pre-class activities related to the lesson topic given by the instructor in various forms, such as case studies, watching and analyzing videos, and summarizing, both in groups and individually.

Furthermore, the instructor and the students always used the first thirty minutes of classroom activity to review, discuss, and follow up on the pre-class tasks, and peer feedback and discussion often occurred. The rest of the class hours were allocated to understand the lesson topic in that meeting based on collaborative works such as presentation, performing dialogue, role-play, group work, etc. At the session's end, the instructor provided feedback and comments to ensure the students' understanding.

Procedure in the Control Group

The control group experienced the same class hours and course materials as the experimental group. They followed similar in-class teaching activities such as discussions, presentations, and group projects. The control group's class used the same lesson plans, list of topics and materials, and syllabus as the experimental group. The only difference was that the control group did not come into contact with pre-class activity using a particular digital platform.

Data analysis

The data gathered from all instruments in this study were further analyzed by following several stages. At first, statistical analysis of the results of pre- and post-test scores was conducted using the SPSS program. To answer the first research question, descriptive statistics of the scores gained of both groups were demonstrated. To examine the homogeneity and causal-effect relationship, an independent sample t-test was further administered. In the significance test, the cutoff value of 0.05 was utilized. Second, the data from semi-structured interviews were analyzed inductively in terms of patterns, themes, and categories to answer the second research question.

Five themes/categories were found related to the EFL learners' perception of WhatsApp-integrated flipped learning for teaching speech acts of refusals. The categories were (1) EFL learners' attitudes toward the WhatsApp-integrated flipped learning, (2) challenges/problems they encounter, (3) suggestions for better implementation of flipped learning, (4) the potential impact of flipped learning on developing speech acts of refusals, and (5) the most favorite part during the learning process. Third, descriptive statistics were also conducted to analyze the results of the TAM questionnaire to answer the third research question.

The mean score of each construct in the TAM questionnaire was examined to determine to what extent the EFL learners accept the use of WhatsApp applications to facilitate the pre-class activity in the flipped learning process. The conclusion was drawn by looking at the overall degree of the mean score in each construct in the TAM questionnaire.

Results

Effect of Flipped Learning on EFL Learners' Speech Acts of Refusals

In response to the first research question about the impact of flipped learning on EFL learners' production of refusals, first of all, descriptive statistics of pre- and post-test scores for both experimental and control groups were conducted. The descriptive statistics showed that in both modes of instruction, the mean scores of the post-tests were higher than the pre-tests (see Table 2). Specifically, comparing the post-tests, the mean score of the experimental groups (M=20.63) was higher than the mean score of the control group (M=18.11). This indicates that the EFL learners taught in the flipped classroom perform better than those taught in the non-flipped classroom.

Table 2. *Descriptive statistics of pre- and post-tests*

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Min	Max
Pre-tests	Experimental	36	14.22	3.65	0.57	8	24
	Control	36	14.63	3.02	0.51	9	25
Post-tests	Experimental	36	20.63	4.21	0.59	14	27
	Control	36	18.11	3.06	0.60	14	26

Note: *the maximum score of pre- and post-test was 30 (5 x 6 items in DCT)*

Moreover, Table 3 demonstrates descriptive statistics of the gained scores of experimental and control groups. It depicts that the score gained a mean of the experimental

group (M=6.63) was much higher than the control group (M=3.47). It implies that the EFL learners joining the flipped classroom experienced more significant improvement in terms of post-test scores compared to the pre-test than the EFL learners in the non-flipped classroom.

Table 3. *Descriptive statistics of the gained scores*

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Experimental	36	6.63	1.775	.295
Control	36	3.47	1.812	.302

An independent sample t-test was further carried out to determine the normality and homogeneity of the data as well as to examine if there is a significant difference between the mean scores of post-tests in experimental and control groups. As presented in Table 4, the significance value of Levene's test for equality of variances was 1.000 (> 0.05), which means that the data were normal and homogeneous. Table 4 further reveals that the post-test scores of the experimental group were significantly higher than the control group (p= .000 < 0.05). The finding suggests that the flipped classroom promotes EFL learners' production of appropriate refusals and contributes to better learning outcomes.

Table 4. *Results of independent sample t-test*

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	.000	1.000	7.489	70	.000	3.16667	.42284	2.32224	4.00999
Equal variances not assumed			7.489	69.970	.000	3.16667	.42284	2.32334	4.01000

To strengthen the results, the effect sizes (Cohen's d) was also conducted. We use the following formula to calculate the Cohen's d:

$$\mathrm{d} = \frac{X1 - X2}{Spooled}$$

Where X1 and X2 are the means of the two groups and Spooled is the pooled standard deviation. From the analysis, it was obtained that the pooled standard deviation is approximately 1.794; hence, Cohen's d is approximately 1.762. A Cohen's d of 1.762 indicates a very large effect size, suggesting that the WhatsApp-integrated flipped learning intervention hsubstantially impacted EFL learners' speech acts of refusals compared to the control group. This is well above the "large" threshold (d=0.8) set by Cohen's guidelines.

Furthermore, we examined the extent to which the learners acknowledged using WhatsApp applications to assist flipped learning in teaching sociopragmatic competence. The findings from the TAM questionnaire demonstrate that EFL learners have a favorable attitude toward using WhatsApp applications for language learning, i.e., developing English

speech acts of refusals. The statistics from the TAM questionnaire are presented in Table 6, indicating that integrating WhatsApp as a means to support flipped learning is well-accepted by the learners, which could result in a more successful learning outcome. Among the constructs, perceived ease of use (mean score of 4.52), perceived usefulness (mean score of 4.01), attitude toward use (mean score of 3.67), and behavioral intention (mean score of 3.59) were highly rated. These findings imply that the learners have a high level of acceptance toward the use of WhatsApp to assist flipped learning activity in developing English production of refusals.

The EFL learners acknowledged that WhatsApp has benefits in promoting a flipped learning environment and considered it a promising digital tool for language education. Given the learners' familiarity with WhatsApp and their willingness to engage in continuous learning through the application, integrating it into the language curriculum is feasible. The instructor's instructional materials, including video lectures and web-based resources, improved the learners' language, focusing on their capacity to effectively produce refusal speech. WhatsApp facilitated highly interactive learning both before and during class, leading to improved production of request speech acts among the learners. Overall, the results indicate that the learners have a positive attitude towards incorporating WhatsApp and flipped learning into language education.

Table 6. *Descriptive statistics of TAM questionnaire*

Construct	Number of items	Mean	Std. Deviation	Min.	Max
Perceived ease of use	4	4.52	3.45	3	5
Perceived usefulness	4	4.01	4.01	2	5
Attitude towards use	4	3.67	3.90	1	5
Behavioral intention	4	3.59	3.56	1	5

Note: *The mean score was derived from a five-point likert scale (4.51-5 'strongly agree'; 3.51-4.50 'agree'; 2.51-3.50 'neutral'; 1.51-2.50 'disagree'; 0-1.50 'strongly disagree')*

EFL Learners' Perceptions of WhatsApp-Integrated Flipped Learning

As the answer of the second research question, the summary of semi-structured interview findings is displayed in Table 5. The findings about EFL learners' perceptions of WhatsApp-integrated flipped learning to enhance speech acts of refusals could be categorized into several themes: (1) EFL learners' attitude toward the learning activities; (2) challenges encountered by the learners; (3) their suggestions for better implementation of flipped learning; (4) the learners' perspectives on the potential effect of flipped learning; and (5) the learners' most favorite part during the flipped learning process.

Regarding the learners' attitudes toward WhatsApp-integrated flipped learning, S4 stated that it could facilitate students' collaborative learning activities. This is due to the nature of flipped learning, which offers pre-class activity through a digital platform, and the classroom devoted to collaborative work such as discussion, conversation practice, peer and group feedback, etc. In line with S4, S9 confessed that flipped classrooms made students felt more comfortable during the learning process.

> Yes, sure. I think this flipped learning using the WhatsApp application facilitates us to have more collaborative activities. Before we enter the classroom, the teacher give

> us task and assignment through the WA group, and most of the tasks are done collaboratively. And in the classroom, we also perform collaborative activities. (S4)
> The classroom activities become more interesting because we are working together to solve some tasks and projects. It makes me feel more comfortable during the learning activities. (S9)

In addition, S1 and S6 pointed out that the WhatsApp application could make the learning process more interactive since the learners were able to communicate with their classmates and teachers anytime and anywhere.

> It is interesting because we use WhatsApp application to follow some learning instructions. It gives us more interactive learning activity. (S1)
> The integration of WhatsApp really helps us interact with classmates and teachers even before the class starts, making the whole process feel more engaging. (S6)

Despite the positive attitudes, the learners further revealed some challenges encountered during the flipped classroom activities. S3 and S8 said that following the procedure of flipped learning required more time consumption since it comprised both pre and in-class activities. Some students also admitted that limited internet connection still became a constraint, especially for those living in disadvantaged area, as experienced by S12.

> It [flipped learning activity] is interesting, but it consumes much time to follow all activities because we have to do a lot of works. (S3)
> In my opinion, the problem is internet connection in my village. I have to go to public spaces like the village office or a coffee shop. (S12)
> Sometimes, managing time for both pre-class tasks and assignments during class feels overwhelming, especially when other responsibilities pile up. (S8)

In line with the challenges, the learners offer some recommendations for the better improvement of the flipped learning practice. S5 suggested that the students should be more active in joining the learning activities. Thus, the classroom will be more alive. On the other hand, instructors are required to design a wider variety of tasks and learning activities, particularly for the pre-class activities, as stated by S11.

> I think there are some of my friends who do not actively join the class, so it will be better for all students to perform active participation during all process of flipped learning, to make the classroom more alive. In my opinion, the teacher should also give more interesting pre-class activities. (S5)
> It would be great if teachers could introduce more creative tasks, like interactive quizzes or games, to make the pre-class sessions more fun and effective. (S11)

The EFL learners further acknowledge that flipped learning through WhatsApp application offers more exposure and opportunities to enhance the production of speech acts of refusals. As stated by S3 and S7, the instructional materials (videos, short stories, etc.) given by the instructor provided the learners with adequate inputs of sociopragmatics knowledge, especially on how to convey refusals in English. Regarding their favorite part of the flipped classroom activities, most learners chose pre-class activity and the use of WhatsApp application. S10 said that pre-class activity effectively boosts his learning motivation and engagement, so it became his favorite part. Moreover, S2 and S9 acknowledged the use of WhatsApp applications in the flipped learning process. They were

happy learning by communicating through this most frequently used digital platform; she was already familiar with it.

> "In my opinion, it [flipped learning] has a significant effect to the development of my refusals in English. The materials in the pre-class activity make me enhance my delivery of English refusals since they are authentic and I get a lot of input enhancement." (S7)
> "The videos and examples given helped me understand the subtle ways to refuse politely, which is something I struggled with before." (S3)
> "I enjoy using WhatsApp for these activities because it feels less formal but still very effective for learning and collaborating." (S9)
> "My favorite part is the pre-class activity, which consists of watching videos, analyzing short stories, summarizing films, etc." (S10)

> "I think the most favorite part for me is when I can communicate with my friends through WhatsApp. I like chatting, and I can spend a lot of time to chat with my friends." (S2)

Table 5. *Summary of semi-structured interview findings*

Theme	Sub-theme	Description
EFL learners' attitudes toward WhatsApp-integrated flipped learning	Communicative/ collaborative learning activities	The learners perceive WhatsApp-integrated flipped learning activities as an effective way to enhance learning through collaborative works
	Learning enjoyment	The learners acknowledge WhatsApp-integrated flipped learning as an approach which can foster learning enjoyment
	Interactive activity using WhatsApp-integrated learning process	The learners' state that technology integration (e.g., WhatsApp application) create a more interactive learning activity
Challenges/problems encountered by the learners	Consuming more time to follow flipped learning	The learners' confessed that following flipped learning activity requires more time investment
	Lack of internet connection and resources	For some learners who lived in disadvantaged area, internet connection became a serious challenge
The learners' suggestions for better implementation of flipped learning	More active engagement in the learning process	The learners suggest that more active engagement during flipped learning activity is highly needed.
	More elaborative tasks, particularly the pre-class activity	The learners recommend the instructor to provide more elaborative tasks for pre-class activity.
Potential impact of flipped learning on developing the learners' production of speech acts of refusals	Flipped learning offers ample opportunities to develop refusal act production	The learners express that flipped learning offers more exposure and opportunity to enhance English refusals
The learners' most favorite part during the learning process.	Pre-class activity (e.g., watching videos)	For most learners, pre-class activity especially watching videos about producing English speech acts is the most favorite part during flipped learning.
	The use of WhatsApp application	The learners appreciate the use of WhatsApp as a digital platform to facilitate flipped learning

Discussions

The main result of this study shows that WhatsApp-integrated flipped learning could enhance EFL learners' sociopragmatics knowledge. There could be several explanations for such findings that flipped learning promotes EFL learners' production of speech acts of refusals. This finding could be clarified with regard to the pedagogical aspects of flipped learning. The EFL learners in the experimental group were provided with pre-class instructional materials outside the classroom, and the class hours were devoted to interaction and collaboration. The effectiveness of flipped learning highly depends on whether the learners follow the preparatory activities outside the class. The availability of lecture videos, movie clips, and other authentic materials containing natural conversation in English might contribute to the better sociopragmatics knowledge of EFL learners. As a result, they achieved significantly higher scores in the post-test. In addition, the use of WhatsApp might also account for the enjoyment experienced by the learners since they are already familiar with this digital platform. As Liang's (2022) point of view, technology integration into the L2 learning environment has the potential to foster learners' motivation, which could have played a vital part in the success of the experimental group, as shown in the present study. Indeed, the increase in learners' motivation due to utilizing technologies in the learning environment was apparent in the current study, as most of the learners in the experimental group actively engaged in both pre-class and in-class activities.

This finding is consistent with Andujar and Çakmak (2023); Bi et al. (2023); Judy Shih and Huang (2022), and Shafiee Rad et al. (2022). However, these precedent studies were carried out to examine the significant impact of flipped learning on various language skills such as speaking, reading, writing, and vocabulary. With regards to the effect of flipped learning on interlanguage pragmatics, this study supports the finding of Haghighi et al. (2019) that flipped classrooms could effectively enhance EFL learners' acquisition of English refusals. The difference between this study and Haghighi's et al. research lies in the digital platform used to facilitate the flipped classroom and the research contexts which are in Iran and Indonesia. While Haghighi et al. utilized the Telegram application, the current study made use of the WhatsApp application to facilitate the flipped classroom. The significant effect of flipped learning is closely related to what Hung (2015) called active learning in which fostering higher-order thinking skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making through collaborative activities during the learning process can motivate learners to understand what they learn and do.

Regarding the EFL learners' perception of flipped learning, the qualitative data obtained from semi-structured interviews revealed that the learners in the experimental group had a positive attitude about the flipped learning practice. This finding is consistent with the recent studies that resulted in the learners' acceptance of flipped learning (Andujar & Çakmak, 2023; Bi et al., 2023; Judy Shih & Huang, 2022; Li & Li, 2022; Shafiee Rad et al., 2022). Moreover, this finding validates the significant contribution of flipped learning in improving the students' sociopragmatics knowledge. It suggests that the EFL learners were quite satisfied with the implementation of flipped classrooms using WhatsApp application to facilitate teaching speech act of refusals. The finding also indicates the importance of a language teaching paradigm shift from conventional teaching models to more student-centered methods, such as flipped classrooms that foster students' learning autonomy. Therefore, the learners' satisfaction with the flipped learning practice determined the success of this research.

When comparing this study's findings with broader flipped learning research in sociopragmatics, a key insight emerges about the role of context-specific adaptations. For instance, while Haghighi et al. demonstrated the efficacy of Telegram for sociopragmatics learning, this study highlights WhatsApp's equal potential, emphasizing how platform familiarity may facilitate engagement. However, a critical limitation of both studies is the lack of a systematic exploration of how specific features of these platforms (e.g., voice notes or multimedia sharing) uniquely contribute to sociopragmatic gains. Future studies could examine whether certain platform functionalities better support the nuanced demands of sociopragmatic learning, such as managing face-threatening acts or developing cultural empathy. Furthermore, while both studies affirm the active learning potential of flipped models, the role of instructional design choices (e.g., types of pre-class materials or in-class tasks) remains underexplored and warrants closer scrutiny.

Additionally, the study aligns with broader language performance research findings, where flipped classrooms have consistently demonstrated improvements across linguistic domains. Studies like Bi et al. (2023) and Andujar and Çakmak (2023) report significant gains in productive language skills, which may indirectly support sociopragmatic competence by enhancing learners' confidence and fluency. However, unlike those studies, this research focused on the sociopragmatics of refusal strategies, requiring learners to navigate complex social and cultural contexts. This specificity underscores a gap in flipped learning literature—most studies tend to focus on general language skills rather than the intricate interplay of sociocultural norms and language use. This study thus contributes a valuable perspective but also raises questions about the scalability of its findings to other speech acts or sociopragmatic contexts. Further research could explore whether similar benefits extend to other challenging areas of interlanguage pragmatics, such as politeness strategies or indirect requests.

This study has some implications for EFL teaching. First, it provides fruitful insights for EFL instructors to adopt WhatsApp-integrated flipped learning in teaching sociopragmatics competence. Practically, instructors can design effective pre-class activities to build students' background knowledge and manage digital challenges like limited internet access. Second, it offers pedagogical inputs for language curriculum developers, policymakers, and administrators to begin acknowledging the potential use of digital platforms in language learning and integrate them into a formal curriculum for EFL teaching in Indonesia, especially for higher education. Third, it suggests that EFL learners optimize the use of WhatsApp applications for education purposes to enhance the variety of foreign language competencies. In the present-day EFL setting, learning a foreign language learning is not only available in the classroom during class hours, but it is also potentially conducted independently in an informal context from anywhere and at any time as preferred by learners.

Conclusion

The present study utilized the WhatsApp application to assist flipped learning practice in enhancing EFL learners' production of appropriate use of refusals in English. Following this, this study further examined the EFL learners' perception of the WhatsApp-integrated flipped learning activity and acceptance of the use of the WhatsApp application in facilitating the learning process. The results disclosed that WhatsApp-integrated flipped learning practice

was proven effective in fostering the EFL learners' appropriate use of speech acts of refusals. It was further depicted that the EFL learners had positive perceptions of integrating such a technological platform in teaching sociopragmatics knowledge. In addition, the findings also show that the learners acknowledged the WhatsApp application as an effective digital platform for facilitating flipped learning.

The limitation of this study is further acknowledged. First, this study relies only on WhatsApp applications to assist with flipped learning activities, while other digital platforms (such as Instagram, Facebook, and LMS) may have similar potential. Hence, future studies are suggested to test the other digital platforms in facilitating flipped learning activity in order to develop sociopragmatics knowledge. Second, this study only involved English refusals, while there might be other types of speech acts such as requests, apologies, and others. Therefore, further research is recommended to consider the other types of speech acts to contribute to more significant literature enhancement about the use of flipped learning in sociopragmatics.

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