



## Research Article

# THE JOURNEY OF SELF EXPLORATION BOOSTS INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENTS

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## ABSTRACT

*Nowadays, lecturers tend to explore creative and qualitative methods in higher education (HE) research across international contexts to gain innovative ways of teaching. The purpose of this research is to examine a new approach to the learning journey of university students and justify how effective it is to HE students. The study was carried out with 50 first-year students at Nguyen Tat Thanh University (NTTU). The first phase involved an augmented reality task in which students created their own “lively” products and reflected on their experience through Flipgrid. Then, students were asked to carry out another task, more reflective and practical. For the task, students were asked to venture into real-life, recording good deeds of normal people or even their own actions that they considered “kind,” and reporting what they found out. Their findings were then introduced to the community around the world as part of “Everyday Kindness Project” via Flipgrid. Then, students were surveyed about their new experience. The number of interactions were analyzed to see if any international communication happened. The results show that triggering students’ self exploration gave them motivations to act and communicate internationally. The study suggests further research on integrating creative approaches into teaching HE students.*

**Keywords:** higher education; augmented reality; Flipgrid; self exploration; international communication

## 1. Introduction

Internationalizing the curriculum plays a vital role in the recognition of a higher education institution, so lecturers are empowered to explore creative teaching methods to develop themselves and apply them to their own teaching practice. At a local higher education institution, thanks to appropriate extracurricular activities, students can have opportunities to improve critical thinking skills and increase international communication.

There has been a wide range of research on promoting students’ motivation and research, which gives lecturers opportunities to gain innovative ways of teaching to

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increase students' international communication so that they can be confident to enter this globalized world.

The primary purpose of teaching is to make a positive "difference in the lives of students and to help produce citizens who can live and work productively in increasingly dynamically complex societies" (Fullan, 2001).

In order to motivate students to be willing to participate in class activities, lecturers need to explore a wide range of classroom activities and guide students to go through the process of experiential learning. Kolb (1984) provides a framework for the experiential learning model, in which learning can be gained through "the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combinations of grasping and transforming the experience." By involvement in a specific experience, learners can reflect on the experience from many viewpoints, seeking to find its meaning and solutions to a problem. Reflection can help the learners draw logical conclusions, they could possibly add the theoretical constructs of others to their own conclusions. These conclusions and constructs guide decisions and actions, which makes their learning more meaningful and authentic. In other words, students with various learning styles are dominant in the areas of concrete experience and reflective observation. Experiential learning can help people explore their own strengths when learning new things.

Dewey (1897) strongly believed that education should be a journey of experiences, building upon each other to create and understand new experiences, rather than making students learn mindless facts that they would soon forget. Dewey believed that school activities and the life experiences of the students should be connected, or else real learning would be impossible. Getting students experience real situations and socializing with each other would motivate them and make their learning journeys more meaningful and thereby make learning more memorable.

According to Brophy (2004), the concept of student motivation is used to explain the level to which students concentrate in various activities that may be the same or different with the one desired by their teachers. He points out that the introduction of new technologies to teaching can be an important asset to create the conditions of change that involves a student into more intensive learning experiences. Thus, an educational system with updated technology can be used as a complement to diversify the learning activities in the classroom.

Joseph (2012) also agrees that technology will continue to dominate many aspects of human existence and, if used to full potential, can guarantee an improvement in the teaching-learning process. The exploitation of new technologies in the classroom is always a challenge for all participants in the teaching and learning process.

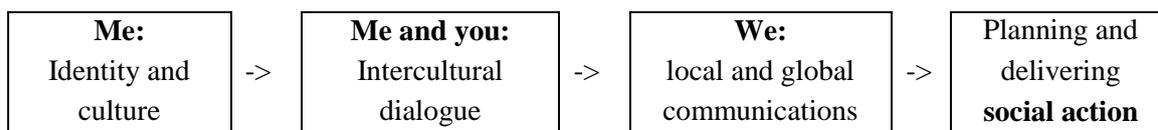
One of these technologies, Augmented Reality (AR), has attracted students' and teachers' attention. According to Nincarean, Alia, Halim, and Rahman (2013), AR is one of the emerging technologies that can have enormous impacts on learning. Shelton and Hedley (2002) also indicated that teachers are aware of new technologies, such as AR systems, for pedagogical purposes. According to Kesim and Ozarslan (2012), AR devices have been used significantly in education, the learning process can be transformed. The students when using AR technology interact with objects and information in three dimensions in a natural way, which motivates them more to learn. Recently, Sampaio, Daniel, Almeida, and Pedro (2018) also realize that the use of new technologies in the teaching and learning process, especially AR, "captures student and teacher's attention, creating the expectation that its use can provide the participants with new ways of interacting, new possibilities for collaboration and potentially an increase in motivation for learning."

It is clear that incorporating new technology to experiential learning in classroom activities can encourage students to construct their own notions of self-exploration instead of simply being fed with preformed information about certain topics. To bring their learning to a higher level, teachers face a challenge of what approach is appropriate to encourage students to actively skim a variety of media, follow curiosity, respond with awe, dwell with certain media depending on curiosity or perceived utility; seek out peers for ideas and resources. The teachers at this point should work as facilitators to model curiosity and think-aloud when interacting with disparate media, ask probing questions, withhold evaluative statements, provide exemplars, monitor, and encourage students to take actions and join the community.

As stated in the Global Toolkit (2017)<sup>1</sup> by British Council, "The Active Citizens Learning Journey" let students immerse in learning activities to "discover" about themselves, become better aware and reflective of themselves and the community they are part of, and realize how their decisions and actions affect others and vice versa. It is through the self-exploration process and the learning journey that students can be "players," not spectators, taking positive social actions for the benefits of wider communities. Thanks to this approach, individuals can fully understand themselves, improve the ability to connect individuals together, build trust, and empower people to engage peacefully and effectively with each other in the sustainable development of their communities.

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<sup>1</sup> Active Citizens facilitator's Toolkit by British Council (2017)



*Figure 1. Active Citizens Learning Journey*

This learning journey has been delivered in many different ways around the world. However, to make teaching better and better, it is necessary for teachers to do classroom research with a careful plan so that they can get reliable findings to make better and more efficient changes to their teaching in a way that it can benefit students the most.

In this research, a creative method was applied to explore the process of how the journey to self-exploration helps boost HE students' international communication. This will be explained in details later in this paper.

The research has three main objectives:

- to evaluate if the introduction of technologies (AR, Flipgrid) into classroom activities can significantly improve students' motivation and engagement in classroom activities;
- to survey students' comments on the new experience;
- to examine if there is a relationship between the students' self-exploration and international communication.

## 2. Methodology

Fifty students from Critical Thinking Class – 18DTA1C of the Faculty of Foreign Languages at Nguyen Tat Thanh University joined the study. These students did not have any experience with AR systems. All of them even did not know this type of technology. This study is an action research study, in which the researcher would like her students to experience a new approach to teaching and learning.

The research was carried out for two and a half months, which equals to the duration of the course. In the first phase, students were divided into groups to work on the project. Printed papers with different pictures were handed to students to color. Then, students were guided to use their own cellphone with an AR system to make these pictures “come alive.” In order to solve the tasks, students had to follow the guided steps to see through the screen of the mobile device the “lively pictures” that helped to complete the task. In other words, after scanning the pictures with an AR app – Quiver<sup>2</sup> installed to their cellphone, students described what they had seen and recorded their description. They could simply tell what they saw or made up stories based on those augmented reality images. These helped them remind of their childhood memories when they first knew how to paint and draw, which gives them full emotion and engagement to their learning. Then,

<sup>2</sup> **Quiver 3D Augmented Reality coloring apps:** print, color and see your drawing in beautifully hand-animated 3D worlds.

with the facilitation of the lecturer, students used Flipgrid to record their “products” along with a specific explanation of what they saw and uploaded them to the link that the lecturer already created before. Students were encouraged to view and comment on each other’s clips. Interactions and comments from international students were welcomed.

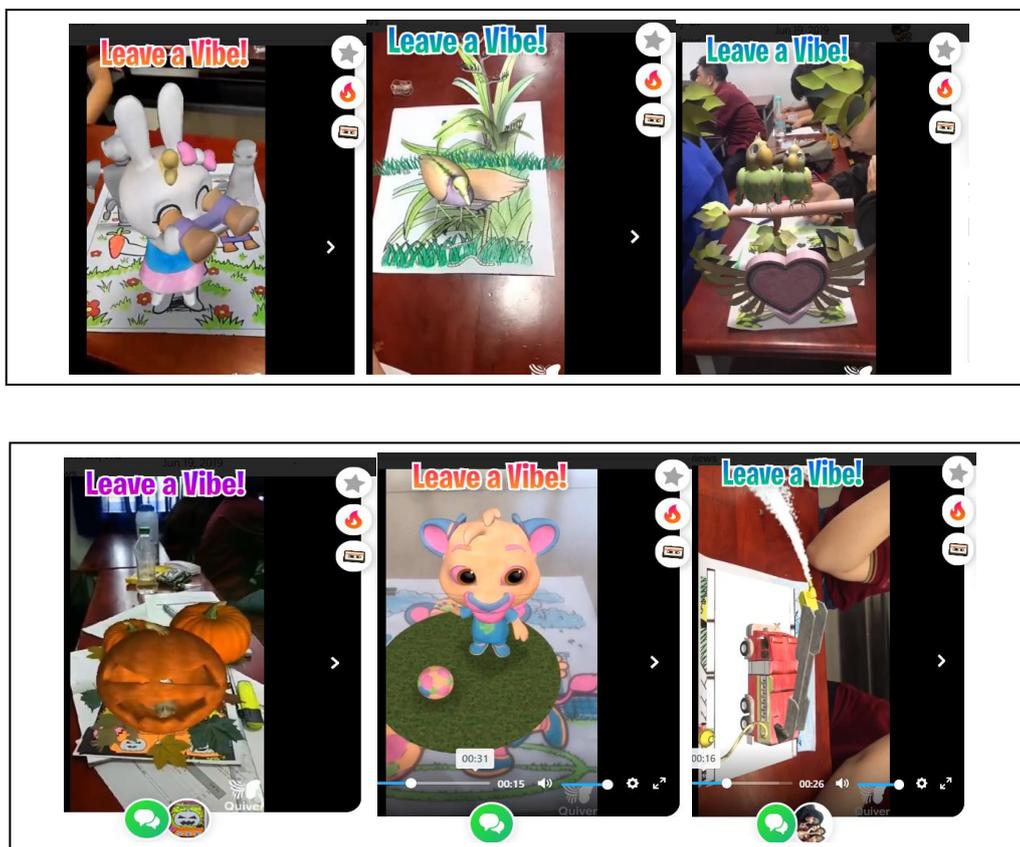


Figure 2. Students’ Augmented Reality Works

For the second stage of the research, students were given a more reflective and practical task. It was to venture into real-life, record good deeds of normal people or even their own actions that they considered “kind,” and reported what they found out. Their findings were then introduced to the communities around the world as part of “Everyday Kindness Project” with the help of Flipgrid.



*Figure 3. Students and the Everyday Kindness Project*

At the end of the research, the students were asked to complete an online questionnaire about the new experience anonymously. Thanks to group discussion, students' motivation in engaging in activities could be considered. The interaction times for each stage's clips were analyzed to give the researcher a deeper view about the relationship between the students' self-exploration and international communication.

### 3. Findings

Following are the findings of the study:

For the effectiveness of the new teaching approach, the mean is 4.8/5. Eighty per cent of the respondents said that learning by experiencing things was the most effective to them. Students also showed high levels of participation. They mentioned that the use of technologies in the classroom activities made them more curious and motivated them to solve the tasks by the lecturer.

When being asked about their feeling of this new experience, 85% of students said that they loved to "be challenged and participate in practical activities." They also admitted that after exploring the activities themselves, they could understand more about their strengths and weaknesses. Most importantly, they could confidently raise their voice and dared to interact with their classmates. They also confessed that they were willing to communicate with international students.

The results of this project were beyond the researcher's expectation. When the project was over, one female students admitted that, "I would like to work in projects like this because I not only have chances to explore things myself, understand myself and my friends better, cooperate with friends, and express my opinions, but also feel rewarding when doing something useful to society", and one male student said, "I wish that we could study the same way again."

### 4. Discussion

Once students are given tasks by exploring things themselves, they are motivated to discover more before taking actions on certain things. This can serve as a "bridge" exercise: students first explore the use of technology and get familiar to it. Later, they can transfer this understanding to new situations and apply what they have known to "raise their voice" and bring it to the world.

When being empowered to venture into real life and record what was considered to be kind actions, students tended to pay attention to those with good actions around them and recorded what they saw. Two groups of students were even creative when thinking of some good deeds like giving water to poor street vendors on scorching days or just simply collecting rubbish after class and recorded themselves along with reflections to complete their assignment. The fact that students recorded their voices, shared their voices, and respected the diverse voices of the others shows that self-exploration plays an essential role in giving students a careful preparation, which not only gives them confidence but also pushes them to “raise their voice” to the world. The researcher realizes that the use of Flipgrid to spread students’ voice, if well-planned by co-managing with teachers around the world, can help students to have more opportunities for international communication, which she will apply for future classes.

Earlier studies have shown that Augmented Reality is a “tool” to capture student and teacher’s attention and encourage students to follow curiosity and respond with surprising excitement. However, a surprising finding is that none of the respondents chose the very first activity with an experience through Virtual Reality as their favorite one even though after the first stage all of them asked for more papers to color and expressed their “willingness to do more.” Further research in Augmented Reality can do so so that suitable AR contents could be selected and used effectively in certain educational contexts.

In terms of international communication, the interaction times recorded on the “Everyday Kindness Project” were twice as many as the times of interaction students did on Augmented Reality Works, 1,441 views and 627 views respectively. The recording of 70.5 hours of engagement for the voices about kindness, which was nearly 10 times higher than 7.7 hours of engagement for the sharing about the augmented reality work, suggests that the researcher should carefully choose topics for students’ tasks in order to maximize their chances of communicating internationally.

There are some limitations to this research. The students, first-year students, were not good at English to perform the tasks well. Language was a barrier to the interaction between NTTU students and international students. The theme “kind people” might not attract international students. However, choosing students from the critical thinking class and getting them experience the tasks can reveal how difficult to get them involved in the tasks and how they responded to the tasks from different perspectives and most importantly, show their motivation in communicating internationally.

## **5. Conclusion**

Getting students experience real situations and socialize with each other would create motivation for them, make their learning journeys more meaningful and therefore make learning more memorable. Once students have “explored” enough, they will be willing to share their voices with others.

It is through the self-exploration process and the learning journey that students can become “influencers” who are skilled and motivated to promote trust; and with the lecturer’s facilitation, they “dare” to take useful social actions, “raise their voices” and finally communicate with wider communities, which is a positive sign for increasing students’ international communication – an indispensable factor for the success of learning in this modern time, and inspires further creative and qualitative approaches to researching practice in higher education.

❖ **Conflict of Interest:** Author have no conflict of interest to declare.

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**HÀNH TRÌNH TỰ KHÁM PHÁ THỨC ĐẨY  
KHẢ NĂNG GIAO TIẾP QUỐC TẾ CHO SINH VIÊN ĐẠI HỌC**  
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**TÓM TẮT**

Ngày nay, giảng viên có xu hướng tìm hiểu các phương pháp sáng tạo và định tính đối với nghiên cứu giáo dục đại học (HE) trong bối cảnh quốc tế nhằm đạt được những cách thức giảng dạy đổi mới, sáng tạo cho sinh viên. Mục đích của nghiên cứu này là thử nghiệm một cách tiếp cận mới đối với hành trình học tập của sinh viên đại học và kiểm tra tính hiệu quả của nó đối với việc giảng dạy sinh viên đại học. Nghiên cứu này được thực hiện trên 50 sinh viên năm nhất tại Trường Đại học Nguyễn Tất Thành (NTTU). Giai đoạn đầu của nghiên cứu là một hoạt động trải nghiệm thực tế ảo, sinh viên tự tạo ra các tác phẩm "sống động" của mình và đưa ra mô tả cũng như cảm nhận về trải nghiệm ấy bằng tiếng Anh thông qua ứng dụng Flipgrid để chia sẻ đến bạn bè quốc tế. Sau đó, sinh viên được trải nghiệm thêm một hoạt động thực tế khác là "dấn thân" vào đời thật, ghi nhận lại những hành động tử tế của những con người bình thường xung quanh mình hoặc tự ghi nhận lại những hoạt động của bản thân mà mình cho là "tử tế" và chia sẻ như một thông điệp "mỗi ngày hãy làm một điều tốt" với bạn bè thế giới thông qua ứng dụng Flipgrid. Phản hồi của sinh viên về trải nghiệm này cũng như những tương tác ghi nhận được giúp nhà nghiên cứu kiểm chứng "năng lực giao tiếp quốc tế" của sinh viên đại học. Kết quả của nghiên cứu này cho thấy "kích hoạt" khả năng tự khám phá của sinh viên sẽ tạo được động lực cho sinh viên hành động và thúc đẩy năng lực giao tiếp quốc tế cho sinh viên. Điều này góp phần định hướng cho các nghiên cứu sâu hơn về việc tích hợp các phương pháp đổi mới sáng tạo trong giảng dạy nhằm nâng cao chất lượng đào tạo cho sinh viên đại học.

**Từ khóa:** giáo dục đại học; thực tế ảo; Flipgrid; tự khám phá; giao tiếp quốc tế