

Get your students to talk with the speaking practice app

## CASE STUDY

# The Universidad de Montevideo is a private university located in Montevideo, Uruguay.

UM has been ranked as the number one University in Uruguay by the QS World University Rankings for the last four years. As of 2019, the Universidad de Montevideo has reached the top 500 in the general rankings according to the international organization. It offers undergraduate courses in Engineering, Law, Business Administration, International Affairs, Humanities as well as MA courses.

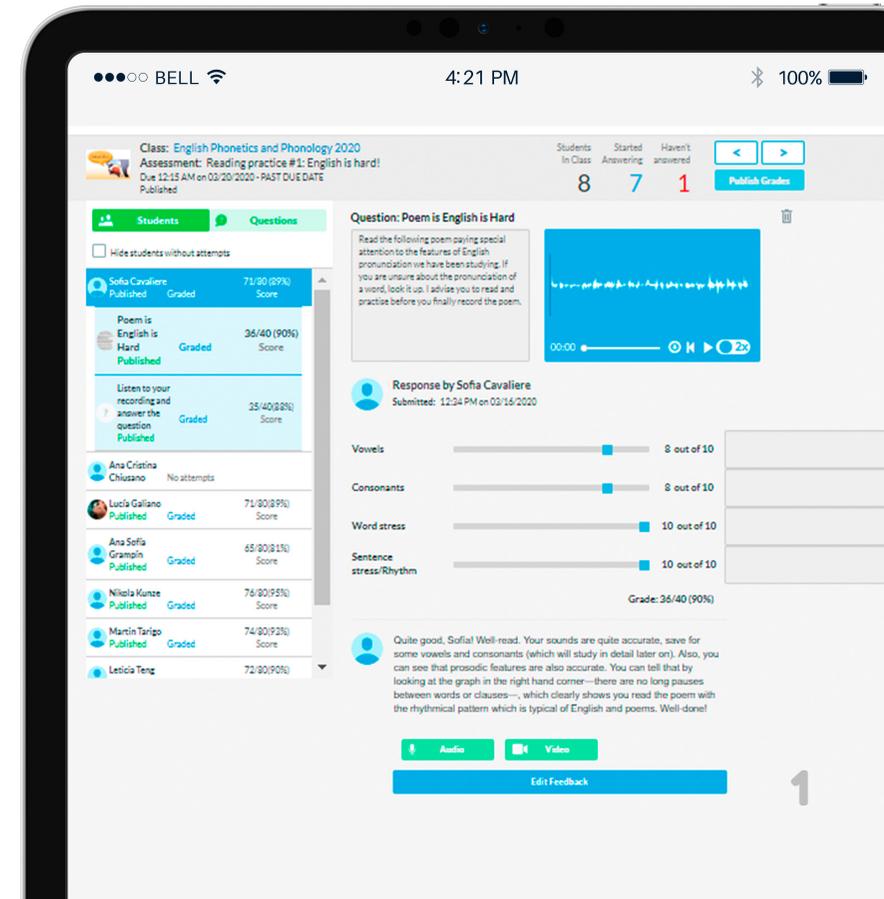
UM has an enrollment of 3500 total students. Of those, 350 take a language course each semester, where they take courses in English for professional purposes, like translation or teaching English as a foreign language. Many students will also study French, Portuguese and Chinese in addition to English courses.

## Extempore at UM

UM began using Extempore in the Fall 2018 semester as an alternative to Voicethread and their traditional language lab. The faculty at UM readily adopted Extempore, finding it easier to use, and more flexible than previous options. They particularly like how Extempore allows for multiple kinds of feedback and the ability to create different speaking environments by configuring timing parameters on the Extempore platform.

Currently at UM, the platform is used weekly in advanced English courses; learners will have homework sets on Extempore to complete on their mobile devices. Extempore's design allows students to complete assignments outside of the classroom within the comfort of their homes or dorms.

After completing the assignment, students receive text and audio feedback from their professor instructing them to relisten to their original submission and the corresponding corrections. Instructors at UM frequently favor using audio feedback, as it's a simple way to provide direct, individualized feedback. It also has the added benefit of building rapport with students and naturally lends itself to correcting pronunciation.



The screenshot shows the Extempore app interface on a mobile device. At the top, the status bar shows 'BELL' with signal strength, Wi-Fi, and battery at 100%. The time is 4:21 PM. Below the status bar, the app header displays 'Class: English Phonetics and Phonology 2020' and 'Assessment: Reading practice #1: English is hard!'. It also shows 'Due 12:15 AM on 03/20/2020 - PAST DUE DATE' and 'Published'. On the right, there are statistics: 'Students In Class: 8', 'Started Answering: 7', and 'Haven't answered: 1'. A 'Publish Grades' button is visible.

The main content area is divided into two sections. On the left, a 'Students' list shows a table of student performance:

Student	Status	Score
Sofia Cavaliere	Published	71/80 (89%)
Poem is English is Hard	Graded	36/40 (90%)
Listen to your recording and answer the question	Published	25/40 (62%)
Ana Cristina Chiasano	No attempts	
Luca Gallano	Published	71/80 (89%)
Ana Sofia Gramolin	Graded	65/80 (81%)
Nikola Kunze	Published	76/80 (95%)
Martin Tarigo	Published	74/80 (92%)
Leticia Tenz	Published	72/80 (90%)

On the right, the 'Question: Poem is English is Hard' section displays the question text, a video player with a progress bar, and a 'Response by Sofia Cavaliere' section. The response includes a 'Vowels' slider (8 out of 10), a 'Consonants' slider (8 out of 10), a 'Word stress' slider (10 out of 10), and a 'Sentence stress/Rhythm' slider (10 out of 10). The overall grade is 36/40 (90%). At the bottom, there are 'Audio' and 'Video' buttons, and an 'Edit Feedback' button.

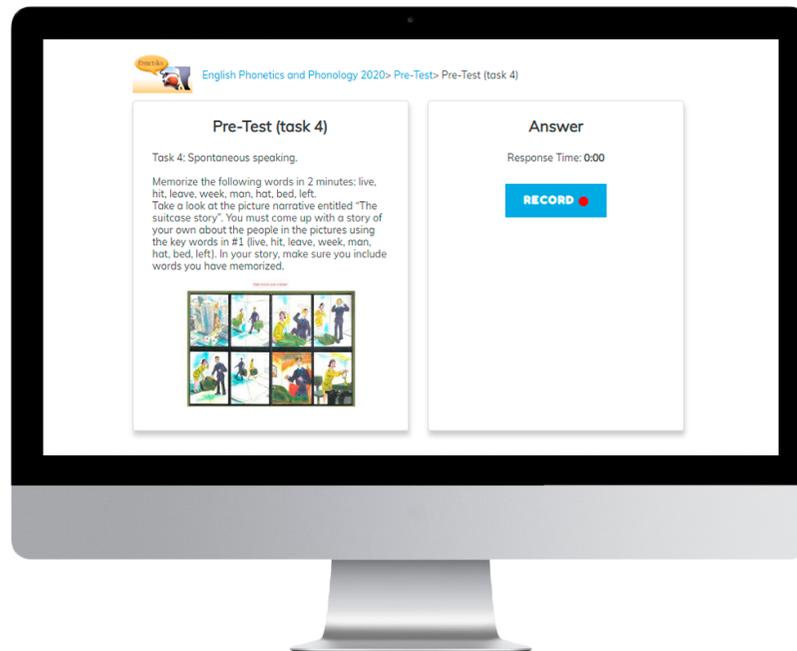
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## CASE STUDY Universidad de Montevideo

Additionally, before each unit, students complete a pre-test which consists of a variety of tasks and questions. These include words to read out loud and picture descriptions (after memorizing a set of words). At the end of each unit, they also complete a post-test containing the same tasks and questions; this allows students and teachers to compare progress and the instructional impact.

### Instructor Perception of Extempore

Overall the faculty see Extempore as a very practical tool. The platform has become a flexible and convenient alternative to their previous language lab. Tasks on Extempore are versatile and are easily used to drill down on areas of weakness.



**"We see significant improvements in fluency and reductions in the number of pauses." - Soledad Miranda Beltrán, MA Applied Linguistics**

The faculty also report improvements in pronunciation and a higher level of engagement in their classes, which the personalized audio feedback brings to the student experience. Since the platform expands options for student speaking practice, students benefit from these additional opportunities.

Lastly, a pleasant surprise has been how responsive and helpful the Extempore Support Team has been during the use of the platform.

**"What we appreciate the most is how the Extempore Support Team has been always ready to answer our queries timely. I have even had to work on weekends, and there was always someone there to help me out until I got to understand how the app works. That is invaluable!" - Dr. Cristina Chiusano**

### Student Perception of Extempore

After the conclusion of the course, all students were polled on a variety of questions covering their experience with Extempore. Students reported the greatest benefits of using Extempore in the classroom were increased speaking opportunities and the benefits of instructor feedback. Students also displayed an

interest in using Extempore more routinely, where 67% reported wanting to use the platform more.

**“It’s been great in that it has everything, that is, you can listen to yourself and the teacher’s feedback, and also read their comments, see the grade, etc.” -  
UM English Phonetics and Phonology Student**

## Impact of Task- Based Instruction with Extempore

The faculty at the University of Montevideo also conducted a small-scale study to measure the extent to which two different pedagogical approaches (Traditional versus Task-based) have on the development of the pronunciation of the English front vowels, i.e., /i: ɪ e æ/. Sophomores who were enrolled in the English Phonetics and Phonology course were divided into two groups described below.

Experimental group 1 was exposed to focused instruction on said English vowels following a traditional approach based on the repetition, imitation, and the reading out loud of isolated words, minimal pairs, or sentences with the target sounds. These participants were never given the chance to use the language in free communicative contexts.

Experimental group 2, on the other hand, received focused instruction as well, but this time, the flipped-classroom and task-based approaches were favored. Digital portfolios were a core pedagogical tool for this group. Students were required to complete a battery of controlled and communicative (rehearsed and spontaneous) tasks (N=18) on Extempore, which also

included self and peer assessment questions as a way to foster metacognition and critical thinking.

A post-instruction test was administered to assess whether students showed improvements or regression in the pronunciation of the target vowels. The test consisted in reading sentences with the target vowel sounds in a consonant-vowel-consonant (voiced/voiceless) setting.

Finally, two additional tests were run to confirm the statistical significance of the results. The analysis showed that the task-based methodology, which incorporated the use of digital portfolios and fostered metacognition and critical thinking through self and peer assessment, proved beneficial, and thus Experimental group 2 outperformed Experimental group 1.

## Future Plans

Within the university’s pronunciation classes, there are plans to expand the lessons on rhythm and word stress. A recent update to Extempore was the inclusion of a spectrogram of the students’ audio responses. This update allows instructors to simply look at the graph and see where pauses occur, the duration of the pauses, and the students’ intonation, etc.