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Flipped classroom approach in EFL context: Some associated factors

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Abstract

Foreign language teaching is one field that is changing and being updated to meet the needs of learners and recent advances lead to consider new perspectives, directions and approaches. As an example of blended learning, flipped classrooms have gained prominence in recent years owing to the interest in crucial impacts of online and learner-centred learning on foreign language learning process. Traditional teaching process is reversed which means that class time is dedicated to homework and activities whereas learners construct their own knowledge at home. In a flipped class, learners are encouraged to improve their critical thinking skills and evaluate their own learning since teachers take a role as a coach and mentor in this process. On the other hand, in a traditional class, the content of the lesson is delivered by the teachers directly and learners are passive receivers of the knowledge in the classroom.

Keywords: Biotechnology, teaching biotechnology, thematic content analysis, analysis of articles, academic achievement.

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1. Introduction

Flipped classroom approach has received a great amount of attention all over the world owing to its crucial focus on learner-centred learning. The idea of flipped classroom originated in the 1990s through the efforts of Eric Mazur who was a professor at Harvard University. He designed a program that prepared students with text files, interactive demonstrations and solved their problems in an interactive manner before the class (Mazur, 1991). Similarly, Baker (2000) delivered lectures online to create an active and collaborative classroom setting. Lage, Platt and Treglia (2000) coined a term 'inverted classrooms' which means that actions in the classroom and outside the classroom replace by each other. Students were provided with videotaped lectures and slides to study outside the class whereas they engaged in peer group work activities in the class. In 2006, Salman Khan created a website, known as the Khan Academy, which offers free videos about numerous academic subjects to everyone in the world. In 2007, Bergman and Sams (2012) recorded their lectures and shared them online for absents students. This study resulted in improvements in test scores and increasing interaction between students and teachers. Such a successful approach attracted the attention of educators in the world and flipped classroom approach became gradually popular.

With its theoretical background, requirements, suggestions and implementations, flipped classroom approach differs from traditional teaching methods. It has recently been discussed and become popular in educational settings. Although its popularity in recent years, there is a limited amount of research on the challenges that may be faced, differences between traditional teaching methods ...etc. Thus, the aim of this study is firstly to reveal some facts related to the flipped classroom approach, secondly to demonstrate how different it is from traditional classrooms and finally to present the challenges in a flipped classroom.

This study was conducted to seek answers to the following research questions:

1. What is the nature of the flipped classroom approach?
2. Does it make a significant difference when English is taught in a traditional classroom or flipped classroom?

2. Literature review

2.1. *What is flipped classroom approach?*

Flipped classroom approach is a kind of model, in which learners both participate in-class activities and they also deal with their online self-learning (Afrilyasanti, Cahyono & Astuti, 2017). With these two classes, learners get a chance to build knowledge at home and they attend engaging activities as well as collaborating with peers in the classroom setting (Afrilyasanti et al., 2017). The simplest definition of a flipped classroom approach is probably given by Bergmann and Sams (2012, p. 13) as that 'which is traditionally done in class is now done at home, and that which is traditionally done as homework is now completed in class'. This means that the sequence is reversed. In other words, in a flipped classroom, learners acquire the knowledge before the class and the class time is dedicated to practice the knowledge through active learning and problem-based learning without spending time on presenting the content (Zainuddin, 2017).

2.2. *The benefits and drawbacks of flipped classroom approach*

With the help of its supportive properties and contributions to the teaching and learning processes, the flipped classroom approach offers some major benefits. One of the advantages of a flipped classroom is that the class time can be managed more efficiently and creatively and it also saves time for engaging and collaborative activities for learners (Baker, 2000; Cole & Kritzer, 2009; Fulton, 2012; Milman, 2012; Halili & Zainuddin, 2015). Learners come to class prepared by watching online instructional videos, reading the texts and passages or solving the quizzes and exams delivered by

their teachers. This allows teachers to utilise class time for discussions; problem-solving activities, peer or group works which enhance the success of learners.

Another advantage of this model is that it has a positive influence on the interaction between learners and teachers (Arnold-Garza, 2014; Bergmann & Sams, 2012; Lage et al., 2000; Roehl, Reddy & Shannon, 2013). Teachers play a significant role in the lives of learners. They are guides, facilitators, helpers or mentors for them. Hence, an assistive interaction between their teachers directly affects their success and performance in the classroom. Flipped classroom approach maximises face-to-face interaction between learners and teachers. This aids learners to make contact with their teachers whereas it allows teachers to observe their learners in a more detailed way. Furthermore, the flipped classroom approach helps teachers immediately monitor learners' performance and support struggling learners (Fulton, 2012; Lage et al., 2000; Millard, 2012). In a flipped class, teachers don't sacrifice the time to teach the knowledge of the content instead the lecture consists of hands-on activities, homework, engaging activities or collaborative tasks. Hence, teachers can give personalised assistance when they are stuck on a problem and clarify miscomprehended points (Uzunboylu & Karagozlu, 2015). Teachers can also revise some parts of the videos if learners need and provide feedback for them. This means that teachers can update their curriculum based on learners' needs and preferences (Fulton, 2012). Obstacles which impede learners' performance are annihilated and learning setting becomes more efficient and supportive for learners. In addition to these advantages, a flipped classroom approach enables learners to progress at their own pace according to their needs related to the content of the course (Arnold-Garza, 2014; Basal, 2015; Bergmann & Sams, 2012; Fulton, 2012; Li, 2015). In traditional learning setting, learners are expected to comprehend all of the presentations prepared by the teachers. However, some of the learners fall behind and can't figure out the necessary knowledge to accomplish activities and they need to review the information whereas quick learners are ready to progress and get bored waiting. In this case, a flipped class is regarded as an ideal option as it provides their own speed for both types of learners. Struggling learners can pause or rewind the instructional videos to understand or to correct their misconceptions while quick learners can accelerate based on their schedule. In addition to self-paced learning, learners are responsible for their own learning as they are always active in the class (Al-Harbi & Alshumaimeri, 2016; Basal, 2015; Bergmann Overmyer. & Wilie, 2011; Uzunboylu & Karagozlu, 2015;). In this model, the teacher is a facilitator instead of a guide and this means that learners control their own learning process.

Although the flipped classroom approach is viewed as a learner-centred model and offers opportunities for learners, some challenges have been asserted by some studies. According to Moffett and Mill (2014), flipped learning requires learners to be motivated to acquire the knowledge and endeavour for their success in the class; thus, if learners aren't willing to experience online learning, the outcome of this model won't be efficient for both learners and teachers. Similarly, Moore and Chung (2015) explained that each learner has a different learning style and flipped learning may not respond to the needs and preferences of learners. Some of the learners can't comprehend the knowledge from instructional videos or other additional online resources and they prefer traditional learning setting owing to the opportunity for face-to-face interaction with their teachers. Jawawi, Matzin, Jaidin, Shahrill and Mundia (2015) stated that learners need to have access to computer and technology to view the lectures; however, the availability of required instruments can be limited. This implies that accessibility to the technology is demanding for learners from low-income families since they may not have the means and also some rural or urban areas have a limited Internet connection which inhibits flipped learning (Kissi, Nat & Idowu, 2017). Furthermore, Milman (2012) criticised flipped classroom approach about the possible negative impacts of poor-qualified videos on learners' success and added that if the learners both watch the instructional videos and also play computer games at the same time, learners are distracted by them and the process of learning is hindered. In their study, Halili and Zainuddin (2015) highlighted the increasing workload of the teachers. In a flipped classroom approach, teachers have to create high-quality videos, design good materials, find appropriate resources and monitor their learners both inside and also outside of the classroom. This

means that teachers spend much more time and work harder for the successful implementation of the flipped classroom approach.

2.3. Components of a flipped classroom

A successful implementation of a flipped classroom teaching model is achieved through the combinations of some key elements and vital components related to this model. Two of these components are direct teaching via instructional videos outside the class (Ahmad, 2016) and engaged—learning inside the class (Sharpless et al., 2016). Instructional videos or video lectures are regarded as fundamental elements of flipped learning (Educause, 2012); they, therefore, deserve a great amount of attention by the teachers. Teachers can create such videos on their own through some free or paid helpful applications or they can select to share suitable educational videos from some websites such as YouTube or Khan Academy (Halili & Zainuddin, 2015). The main objects of utilising video lectures are to provide learners content and enable them to constitute their own knowledge before the class. In this respect, some implications can be offered which are concerned with the use of video lectures in a flipped classroom. For instance, videos should be short and relevant to the content of the lesson (Neaupane, 2017; Slomanson, 2014; Umutlu & Akpınar, 2017). Lengthy videos lead learners to distract their attention and get bored easily, whereas information overload in videos has a debilitating effect on the performance and motivation of learners. Another example is that instructional videos should promote interactive, collaborative and engaging activities for learners (Ash, 2012; Bergmann & Sams, 2012). Furthermore, teachers should add humour to the videos and make them attractive and exciting for learners (Bergmann & Sams, 2012; Neaupane, 2017). Such videos increase motivation and enthusiasm to learn, hence learners sufficiently concentrate on the task.

Although video lectures play a vital role in the implementation of the flipped teaching model, the flipped classroom approach is more than video-based lessons (Demiralay & Akdenizli, 2017). Tucker (2012) explained that not only the videos but also the ways of their integration into the class are prominent aspects of the flipped learning. Such an explanation highlights the importance of the second component: class time (Slomanson, 2014). Learners are allowed for more interactive and engaging activities during the class hours (Chen Hsieh, Wu & Marek, 2017). They solve questions and make discussions with their teachers. In a flipped classroom, learning environment encourages collaborative peer or group works which accelerates the process of learning.

In addition to these components, there are also other elements that should be incorporated in a flipped classroom. Flipped Learning Network (2014) defined four pillars illustrated as F-L-I-P which are necessitated in a flipped class; flexible environment, learning culture, intentional content and professional educators.

1. **Flexible Environment:** The physical conditions of the classroom should accommodate different types of activities and assignments. Teachers should make necessary arrangements in the classroom in which learners will decide how they learn.
2. **Learning Culture:** Teacher is a facilitator instead of a guide in a flipped classroom. This means that learners take charge of their learning. They build their own knowledge, apply the knowledge presented in the content and evaluate themselves.
3. **Intentional Content:** Teachers spend time on finding efficient and appropriate ways to enhance learner's knowledge. They prepare lectures for learners which can be acquired at home and create the contents which can be practiced in the class. Teachers, therefore, must plan what learners need and what materials are necessary to support the learning process.

4. Professional Educators: The role of a Professional Educator is quite demanding as they experience work overload in a flipped classroom. They always observe their learners, provide feedback spontaneously as well as doing exercises in the class. Although their role seems to be diminished in a flipped classroom, they are still one of the most vital ingredients of a successful implementation of this model.

Bergmann and Sams (2015) listed four components of a flipped classroom as relationship building, personalised learning, passion-based learning and project-based learning. In terms of relationship building, they emphasise the significance of positive relationships between teachers and learners and how such relationships directly affect the performance and attitudes of learners. With regard to personalised learning, the flipped classroom approach should respond to diverse learning styles and preferences. It should be noted that each learner acquires knowledge in different ways and paces. Passion-based learning offers learners to discover their enthusiasm and passion to learn which is high on Bloom's Taxonomy level. Finally, project-based learning allows learners to solve real-world problems which will improve their communication ability in an authentic context.

2.4. Flipped classrooms versus traditional classrooms

Traditional teaching models have always been debated and compared with recent educational models, methods or approaches. In this regard, it is inevitable to compare traditional classrooms with flipped classrooms. Cuban (1984) listed four characteristics of a traditional classroom:

- a) Teachers deliver instructions directly, make explanations and control the process of learning in the classroom. They are more active than learners; therefore, teachers talk more than learners during class hours.
- b) All of the learning processes is mostly conducted with the whole class rather than personalised or group-based instructions.
- c) The organisation of the course is determined by the teachers according to their existing curriculums.
- d) Learning occurs in the classroom environment.

According to Alhasani (2015), traditional classrooms rest upon textbooks and homework to teach the content of the lesson and he also adds that teachers are administrators whereas learners are just passive receivers of the knowledge who put all their focus on their teachers. In addition to these studies, Chen Hsieh et al. (2017) described traditional classrooms as a setting in which learners acquire the necessary knowledge in the classroom and apply the knowledge via homework outside the classroom. However, Afrilyasanti et al. (2017) criticized such a learning setting on the grounds that learners won't have any assistance to solve the problems at home and teachers won't be able to recognise the misunderstandings of the learners which deteriorate their progress.

Flipped classrooms differ from traditional classrooms in terms of some aspects ranging from materials, activities to its implications. Bergmann et al. (2011) described a flipped classroom as a learning setting in which all of the learners can get a personalised instruction and experience engaging activities which support their improvement. From the point of Kenna (2014), flipped classrooms create a student-friendly environment that motivates learners, and classroom time is used for improving what learners have acquired at home through worksheets, debates or interactive activities which contribute to their critical thinking skills. However, Halili and Zainuddin (2015) expressed that learners might not be ready for such inverted learning, it therefore may be challenging and learners react negatively against flipped classrooms. Similarly, Jawawi et al. (2015) state that flipped classrooms require learners to take charge of their learning; however, if learners have not acquired the lesson at home, they could have difficulty in comprehending and attending the activities in the classroom.

3. Conclusion

Today, technology has become essential tools of education. It has already begun to play significant roles and impact teaching methods. Thus, educators have needs to update themselves, their teaching methods and materials. As a result of these innovative steps, the term flipped learning has aroused and gained popularity with its learner-centred and online learning models.

Flipped classrooms differ from traditional classrooms in terms of some major concepts. In traditional classrooms, teachers are the authority and active whereas learners are just passive receiver of the knowledge. Teachers deliver the instructions directly in the class and learners are supposed to learn at the same pace with their classmates. Homework is assigned to the learners without the assistance of their teachers. However, in the flipped classrooms, the teacher is a facilitator who guides the learners, whereas learners are always active participants of the process. They are responsible for their own learning. In this respect, they form their own knowledge at home via instructional videos and additional materials whereas class time is devoted to discussions, activities and feedbacks. Flipped learning contributes to the foreign language learning process positively; hence it is significant to conduct more studies on the flipped learning. This present study adds to the literature about the flipped classroom approach.

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