

Flipped Model of Instruction in the ESL Classroom: A Review of the Literature

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Abstract

The initial impetus for the present paper is to examine the literature related to the possibilities of flipped learning in the ESL classroom. Search terms identified six papers reporting the empirical evidence on the impact and learning outcomes of the flipped classroom model applied to ESL settings. Despite differences among the studies, student perceptions are relatively consistent. The findings revealed positive changes in students' achievements and motivation; however, two studies found that some students still prefer teachers' explanations in-class. The methodological limitations used in the included papers as well as recommendations for further work in this field are discussed.

Keywords: flipped learning, TESL, language learning

Flipped Model of Instruction in ESL Classroom

Currently, the English language is considered to be the “dominant international language of the 21st century” as it represents a global language of technology, science, diplomacy, and business (Council, 2013). The recent British Council (2013) report revealed that English is spoken by 1.75 billion people around the globe, which constitutes a quarter of the world’s population. In fact, the non-native speakers of English outnumbered the native English speakers at a ratio of 4 to 1: approximately 625,000,000 native speakers compared to 1, 125,000,000 non-native speakers worldwide. Moreover, the British Council predicts that this tendency will increase and by 2020 two billion people will be using or learning English (Council, 2013).

The importance of English as a language of global communication is discussed on the world and national scales. World leaders understand that one of the key factors of successful integration into the global environment is English language fluency. Thus, for example, in 2007 the President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev (2007) in his video message “New Kazakhstan in the new world” addressed the need of staged implementation of the “Language Tri-Unity” program where he defined “Kazakh as an official language, Russian as a language of intercultural communication, and English as a language of successful integration into the global economy”.

In most countries, the language policy requires children to start learning English as a second language in elementary school and keep learning it until graduation from high school (Eurostat, 2013). However, previous research show that regardless of time spent for learning English, grammar, spoken and written aspects of the language remain the most difficult for the majority of the students (Liao & Fu, 2013). For example, English learners from Russia, the Ukraine, China, Kazakhstan, the United Arab Emirates, and Iran have low or very low language proficiency (First, 2014). One of the reasons for students’ poor knowledge may be

their teachers' use of traditional drill-and-practice methodology. In these countries, the teacher-centered approach is still dominant. Students are also taught the reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills separately, which does not lead to the fluency in a real language environment. Thus, to help students to enhance their language skills, teachers should shift away from passive traditional instructions and move toward active learning.

Modern Educational Paradigm

To address the needs of the 21st century learners and to speak the same language with them, teachers should move toward a new educational paradigm. Prensky (2001) argued, "Students today are all 'native speakers' of the digital language of computers, video games and the Internet" (p. 2). Due to this fact, they are not able to accept traditional instructions, which are "painful and boring" (Prensky, 2002, p. 7). In such a way, Flipped Learning can be a good supplement to a traditional classroom, because "technological innovations can increase learner interest and motivation; provide students with increased access to target language (TL) input, interaction opportunities, and feedback; and provide instructors with an efficient means for organizing course content and interacting with multiple students" (Golonka, Bowles, Frank, Richardson, & Freynik, 2014, pp. 70-71).

Flipped Learning is not a new concept. It can be traced back to 1995 when the instructor of Cedarville University started distributing the PowerPoint slides he was using in class to students, so that they could look through the materials before the class (Farah, 2014). The Flipped Learning model as we know it now introduced by Baker and Lage, Platt and Treglia in 2000, however, is usually associated with the names of Jonathan Bergmann and Aaron Sams, two high school chemistry teachers from Colorado (Doman & Webb, 2014). In 2007 they started flipping their class to help students to catch up with the materials they missed (Reinhardt, 2014). Flipped Learning Network (2014) defined Flipped Learning as:

A pedagogical approach in which direct instruction moves from the group learning

space to the individual learning space, and the resulting group space is transformed into a dynamic, interactive learning environment where the educator guides students as they apply concepts and engage creatively in the subject matter (para. 1).

In other words, at the core of the concept is the notion of reversing traditional classroom instructions: students watch video lectures at home to assist in-class collaborative interactions (Bergmann & Sams, 2012). Practitioners highlight the following advantages of flipped learning: (1) students work at their own pace (Hertz, 2012); (2) lessons and content are more accessible for students who missed the class (Acedo, 2013; Bergmann & Sams, 2012); (3) students enhance higher order thinking (Hung, 2014); (4) classroom time is used more effectively by providing opportunities for collaborative activities and problem-based learning (Ash, 2012; Hughes, 2012); and (5) students are responsible for their own learning (Bergmann & Sams, 2012). Moreover, Lindstorm (1994) argued that students who are taught visually, audibly, and actively work with the materials during instructions, understand the subject matter better compared to students who are presented information in either a visual or audio form or only visual form. Supporting the findings of Lindstorm (1994), Silverman (2013) asserts that learners who watch a video in a target language develop a deeper understanding of words and notions. In spite of the fact that the Flipped Learning model was not the intended topic of these studies, it does warrant inclusion because of the related findings on the use of video and multimedia for educational purposes.

At the same time, there are some disadvantages of the Flipped Learning model: (1) limited students' access to computers and the Internet (Butrymowicz, 2012); (2) extra workload on teachers (Acedo, 2013); and (3) increased time students spend in front of the screens (Acedo, 2013). However, recent findings revealed positive changes in the solution of some of these issues. For example, the percentage of teachers and administrators who were concerned about students' access to instructional videos declined by 11% and 18%,

respectively from 2012 to 2013. The teachers and school administrators also became less concerned about making videos to support flipped classrooms as well as finding them. For instance, the number of teachers and school administrators worried about making videos dropped by 8% from 2012 to 2013 (Yarbro, Arfstrom, McKnight, & McKnight, 2014). Moreover, in 2013 57% of children used the Internet at home compared to 22% in 1997. In 2013 about 85% of students had access to a computer at home compared to 15% in 1984 (Hamdan, McKnight, McKnight, & Arfstrom, 2013). Thus, taking into consideration all pros and cons, Flipped Learning may be a good supplemental model to traditional instructional method in the ESL classroom because it offers students the unique opportunity to practice four language skills simultaneously as well as leaves more time for collaboration between the classmates and a teacher. Moreover, as Herron and Hanley (1992) argue the use of video facilitates ESL learners' comprehension by exposing them to more contextual information and authentic materials.

Flipped Learning in the ESL Classroom

Data Collection

Studies included in the literature were derived from the following sources: ERIC, Springer, and Google Scholar. The search was focused on articles published in peer-reviewed journals, conference proceedings, and dissertations in the fields related to Education, TESL, and Human-Computer Interactions. The following key words were used to identify the literature: 'flipped classroom', 'flipped learning', and 'flipped instruction in ESL'. The following criteria were used to select the sources: (1) quantitative or mixed method studies: enough statistical data and samples size, pretest-posttest design, and experimental and control groups; (2) qualitative studies: conflicting results and enough statistical evidence. The search identified 25 papers in ERIC database, 18 in Springer, and over 1,500 in Google Scholar. However, only six of them examined the impact of Flipped Learning model on ESL

classroom outcomes and met the inclusion criteria (Table 1).

Table 1

Studies Design by Outcomes

Outcomes	Study Design				Total
	Qualitative	Quasi-experimental	Survey	Quantitative	
Academic performance		1**			
Learning attitudes/engagement	1*	4**	1***	1	
Language skills improvement	1*	2**	1***		
Total	1	3	1	1	6

Note: The same study

Results

Over the past few years, the Flipped Learning approach attracted a lot of attention from practitioners and educational scholars around the world. However, there has been relatively little exploration of Flipped Learning impact on ESL students' language skills acquisition and learning attitudes. Wang and Zhang (2013) conducted one of the first studies in this field, where they reported 16 ESL students' improvement of listening, speaking, and writing skills as well as translation. They found out that students in the flipped classroom became more active and confident in the in-class discussions. Moreover, 94% of participants liked this new method of instruction. Thirty-one per cent of students claimed that they became more interested in learning English and only 19% mentioned the difficulties in perceiving information due to their low English level proficiency. Instructors were less enthusiastic with the Flipped Learning model as it required from them more preparation time compared to the traditional approach.

A study by Hung (2014) describes an experiment of flipped learning methodology integration into a language classroom. A posttest-only quasi-experimental design was used to examine the effects of flipped learning on 75 Taiwanese University ESL students' academic performance, learning attitudes, and participation levels. During the eight week period, three

groups of intermediate language proficiency students took part in the study. The Experimental Group I was assigned to the structured Flipped Learning instructional design using WebQuest. The Experimental Group II was engaged in semi-structured flipped lessons using TED-Ed. The Control Group had traditional classroom instructions.

The research findings indicate that the structured flip lessons are more effective in terms of academic performance compared to the semi-structured and non-flip lessons. Moreover, 72% of students reported satisfaction with the structured flipped lesson design and 62% enjoyed the enhanced interaction with the teacher and classmates. Interestingly, participants from the structured flipped classroom spent about 68 minutes outside the class to study the assigned materials, which was 15 minutes longer than students in the semi-structured flipped classroom. The interview findings revealed that 80% of participants from both experimental groups spent more time and put more effort on the flipped course than on the courses with the traditional approach because Flipped Learning model allowed them to review the lesson as many times as needed for better in-class participation.

Farah's (2014) examined the impact of Flipped Learning model on the writing performance of 47 twelfth grade female students at the Applied Technology High School in Abu Dhabi. During a fifteen-week teaching program, the experimental group watched instructional videos and worked on differentiated class assignments while the control group studied the same material in a traditional way. The findings revealed that students in the experimental group performed better in a writing test than students in the controlled group. In the IELTS pre-test the highest overall scores for the experimental group and the control group was 6.5 and 6.0 while on the IELTS post-test the highest overall scores for the experimental group and the control group was 8.0 and 7.0 respectively. Supporting the Hung's (2014) findings, approximately two thirds of the Farah's participants reported that they needed more time to prepare for the flipped class. However, over half of the participants believed that

Flipped Learning model helped them to enhance their writing skills because they could get “instant feedback and assistance” in class (Farah, 2014, p. 33). In spite of the positive attitudes toward a Flipped Learning instruction and increased writing performance almost half of the students preferred teacher’s explanations in class and 59% of the students favored the traditional instruction over the flipped instruction.

Another study on the Flipped Learning model in the ESL classroom was conducted by Doman and Webb (2014). The study was aimed to investigate students’ and teachers’ understandings of the flipped model as well as to examine its effects on classroom dynamics. One hundred thirty-five students from Macau, China participated in the study. They were divided into six groups: four experimental (73 students) and two control groups (62 students). The study lasted for 14 weeks in the total number of 42 hours of instruction. Consistent with the findings in Farah (2014), Doman and Webb’s research revealed that 88.7% of students in the flipped classes and 82.5% of students in the non-flipped classes believed that in-class teacher instructions were more effective in helping them to learn. At the same time, 50% of the students agreed or strongly agreed that they preferred watching video lectures at home. Students in the flipped classroom showed more interest in learning as 50% of them completed their assignments the same day compared to 24% of the non-flipped students. Moreover, during the experiment 91% of flipped and 88% of non-flipped students agreed they have more student-student interaction in their English class. The teachers, in turn, highly recommended the Flipping Learning model but mentioned that they needed more preparation time to turn in-class instructions into the video lectures.

The purpose of Wong and Chu’s (2014) study was to investigate the effectiveness of the Flipped Learning model in ESL classroom in terms of language skills enhancement and to disclose students’ perceptions on the flipped method of instruction. Sixty-eight students of Caritas Institute of Higher Education, Hong Kong were recruited for the experiment. Thirty-

three of them were assigned to the experimental group and 35 to the control group. Students in the experimental group were required to watch one video before class and do interactive exercises while students in the control group watched video and completed interactive exercises in class. During the class, both groups were engaged in pre-listening activities, while-listening activities and post-listening activities. Afterwards, students took a post-test to test their English speaking proficiency. In contrast to Doman and Webb (2014), Wong and Chu (2014) findings revealed more positive students' perceptions regarding the Flipped Learning model as 58% of students confirmed that they liked the Flipped Learning model. Seventy per cent pointed out that watching video before class improved their listening skills, while 65% agreed that they improved speaking skills. Interestingly, 63.6% of students reported that watching a video lecture before class helped them to understand the lecture content and 63.6% believed that the interactive exercises enhanced their learning.

Jamaludin and Osman (2014) examined the Flipped Learning effects on four types of engagement: behavioral engagement, emotional engagement, cognitive engagement, and agentic engagement. Twenty-four undergraduate TESOL students of the Universiti Sains Malaysia took part in the experiment. The findings revealed that flipped classroom promotes all four types of engagement; however, emotional engagement has the highest score ($x = 5.79$; $sd = 1.02$) followed by behavioral engagement ($x = 5.62$; $sd = 0.69$), cognitive engagement ($x = 5.61$; $sd = 1.02$), and agentic engagement ($x = 5.1$; $sd = 1$). Interestingly, most of the participants reported that they "feel good in a flipped classroom"; however, they ask less questions to help them learn. Author believed that it might be caused by the fact that it was the first students' experience in the flipped settings. Thus, the study has shown that the Flipped Learning model enhances students' engagement and promotes active learning, which, in turn, may lead to the positive academic performance (Jamaludin & Osman, 2014).

Limitations

One of the biggest limitation of all of the studies is a relatively small sample size (from 16 to 136 participants) as well as a short period for intervention (from 1 day to 14 weeks); so that, the bigger sample size could provide results that are more accurate. Some of the researchers recruited participants of the same gender (Farah, 2014), probably the experiment in a mixed group would give different findings. The previous students' experience in the traditional teacher-centered classroom could also influence the findings because students might be initially hesitant about the new model. Moreover, in some studies, the control and the experimental groups were changed throughout the experiment for practical reasons, which threaten the validity and reliability of the study (Doman and Webb, 2014). Thus, all of these factors make it difficult to generalize the findings to other settings.

Recommendations for Consequent Research

Flipped learning model have shown promising results in the field of ESL. However, there is a big gap in the literature. Stronger focus on the Flipped Learning effectiveness over traditional classroom would be more beneficial for harder evidence as previous studies have yielded conflicting results. The lack of empirical data requires conducting further research on what part of the Flipped Learning model is more beneficial for ESL learners: the ability to access to the lecture material at any time, the opportunity to re-watch the video, more time for teacher-students interactions, or in-class collaborative and problem-based activities. The consequent research should be also focused on teachers' perceptions of Flipped Learning and challenges they face while implementing the model.

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