



RESEARCH ARTICLE

FLIPPED ENGLISH CLASSROOMS: A CRITICAL APPRECIATION

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ABSTRACT

Computers have revolutionised the way we live by influencing every field on the globe. In the field of education, especially in learning a second language, CALL has made many miraculous changes in language classrooms. Distance learning has become E- learning and reading is done, nowadays, through Kindle. Even writing is assessed online and in the future pen and paper exams are likely to be replaced by online assessments. In this situation teaching using computers has become a fundamental requirement. However, traditional classroom method of giving lectures by teachers during classes and assigning writing tasks as homework is becoming boredom and monotonous in this age of technology. Hence, it is need of the hour to create innovative pedagogical models and one such innovation is the flipped classroom technique, which is becoming recently famous worldwide especially for teaching tertiary students owing to its varied benefits. The flipped classrooms provide students with tremendous learning opportunities inside and outside classrooms. This article defines flipped classroom technology and explores the varied benefits of flipping English classes for tertiary students.

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INTRODUCTION

With the advent of language lab and multimedia computing, most of the colleges teach communication skills using computer software programs. However, due to the availability of umpteen number of resources on net and the varied usage of computers, unlimited opportunities can be created for students, apart from using the software programmes, to enrich their language skills.Thanks to the smart phones, which have facilitated people to check their mails and respond, to download documents and to upload files. This never ending advancement of technology and the increasing level of students' interest on using computers and internet encouraged educators to create innovative teaching models that involve using computers and one such is the flipped classroom method. Flipping English classrooms will create favourable learning atmosphere for students. A flipped English class shares all the benefits of Computer Assisted Language Learning since it requires computers and internet in the teaching and learning process.

What is a flipped classroom?

A flipped classroom is a classroom in which the regular classroom instruction and homework elements are reversed. In

a flipped class, students receive the homework materials online to read, listen or watch, based on the next class' learning objectives. In the class, they participate in various interactive activities; based on the material they have received, to enhance their understanding further. Bergmann and Sams (2012) rightly assert that the flipped classroom model encompasses any use of using Internet technology to leverage the learning in a classroom, so that a teacher can spend more time interacting with students instead of lecturing. Flipped classrooms are also known as inverted classrooms. Maureen J Lage, Glenn J Platt and Michael Treglia (2000) emphasise that inverting the classrooms means that events that have traditionally taken place inside the classroom now take place outside the classroom and vice versa.

History of the flipped classroom

In 2007, science teachers Jonathan Bergman and Aaron Sams were planning on a strategy to provide lectures to their students who missed classes owing to various activities. They came out with a novel idea of teaching, in Woodland Park, Colorado, called the flipped classroom method, which has created a new perspective in education. Bergmann (2011) recalls: In the spring of 2007 Aaron was thumbing through a technology magazine and showed me an article about some software that would

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record a PowerPoint slide show including voice and any annotations, and then it converted the recording into a video file that could be easily distributed online. As we discussed the potential of such software we realized this might be a way for our students who missed class to not miss out on learning. Thus, we began to record our live lessons using screen capture software. We posted our lectures online so our students could access them. When we did this, YouTube was just getting started and the world of online video was just in its infancy. In all honesty, we recorded our lessons out of selfishness. We were spending inordinate amounts of time re-teaching lessons to students who missed class, and the recorded lectures became our first line of defence.

A few researches on flipped classrooms

There are many researches done on classroom flip to measure its effects. For instance, Jeremy F. Strayer (2007) studied the effects of the classroom flip on the learning environment: a comparison of learning activity in a traditional classroom and a flip classroom that used an intelligent tutoring system. The findings of this research showed that classroom flip students were less satisfied with how the structure of the classroom oriented them to the learning tasks in the course. However, the findings of Cara A. Marlowe (2012), who investigated on the effect of the flipped classroom on student achievement and stress, showed that the participants of the investigation reported lower stress levels in this type of classroom environment compared to other classes. While semester grades showed improvement, exam grades did not show significant improvement. Overall, students displayed positive feelings towards the treatment and enjoyed the associated benefits of being able to choose their own assignments and explore concepts they found interesting more in-depth. Lisa W. Johnson and Jeremy Runner (2012) studied the effect of the flipped classroom model on a secondary computer applications course: student and teacher perceptions, questions and student achievement. The findings indicated that no benefit to using the flipped classroom instruction in a secondary computer application. Gerald Robert Overmyer (2014) investigated on the flipped classroom model for college algebra: effects on student achievement.

The findings of this research show that there was not a statistically significant difference in the scores of student in the two groups; however students in the flipped sections did score slightly better than students in the traditional sections.

In the light of the above researches, the researcher has flipped the English classes for teaching the first year BBA students of Hindustan Institution of Technology and Science, Chennai.

Sample lesson plan for flipping English classes

Learning objective: Letter to the editor

Materials sent to the students through the group email created by the researcher: Article, PPT and Poster on Genetically Modified Foods.

Instruction given to the students: Go through the materials based on GM Foods carefully to participate in the next English class activities.

Duration to achieve the objective: One hour of English classes for two days.

The details of the two day's flipped English class activities are shown in the table 1.

Benefits of the flipped English classes

The following are some of the significant benefits of flipping English classrooms:

Develops Higher Order Thinking Skills

Developing higher order thinking skills at tertiary level is mandatory. Traditional language classroom practices do not seem to promote higher order thinking skills since they are either teacher-centred or content-based. In contrast, flipped English classes are learner-centred and so they play a vital role in developing higher order thinking skills.

Bloom's Taxonomy identifies different domains of learning, from the basic retention of facts to the application of knowledge which creates something new. Each domain has different levels; for example, figure 1 shows the revised version of Bloom's taxonomy for cognitive learning.

Table 1 Flipped English class activities

Day	Type of activity Group/individual	Skill focused	Name of the activity	Duration in minutes
Day 1	Group	Remembering	Forming lexical sets: List down twenty words related to GM foods.	10
	Group	Listening and remembering	Quiz on GM foods	20
	Group – one student from each group	Speaking	Just a minute speech on GM foods. Each group was given a different topic.	15
	Individual	Comprehension and Writing Thinking	Answer comprehension questions based on an unseen passage related to GM foods.	15
Day 2	Group	(Students think and share their points with their peers in the group. So collaborative learning happens)	Compare and contrast GM foods and organic foods	10
	Group	Speaking	Group discussion on the topic: GM foods should be banned.	20
	Group	Understanding (how to write a letter to the editor through collaborative learning)	Discuss the format, structure and language of writing a letter to the editor.	10
	Individual	Writing	Write a letter to the editor of a local newspaper sharing your views regarding GM foods.	20

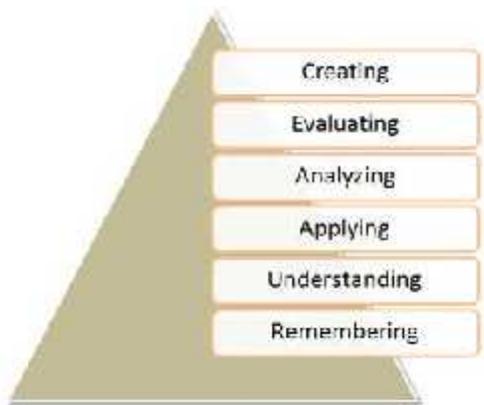


Figure 1 Lorin Anderson’s Revised Version of Bloom’s Taxonomy (2001)

The following table shows the flipped English classroom activities and the learning domains of Blooms Taxonomy achieved through the activities.

Table 2 Learning domains of Blooms Taxonomy and Flipped English classroom activities

Learning domains of Blooms Taxonomy	Flipped English Classroom Activities
Remembering	Participate in a quiz based on the topic GM Foods.
Understanding	Answer the comprehension questions based on the unseen passage on the topic GM Foods.
Applying	Compare and Contrast the GM Foods and inorganic foods,
Analysing	Analyse the various problems created by GM Foods
Evaluating	Suggest ideas to create awareness to people regarding GM Foods.
Creating	Write a letter to the editor sharing your views about GM Foods.

Applying Bloom’s revised taxonomy to a flipped classroom, students are doing the lower levels of cognitive work (remembering and understanding) outside of class, and focusing on the higher forms of cognitive work (applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating) in class, where they have the support of their peers and instructor (Brame, 2013).

Promotes collaborative learning

Flipped English classes promote collaborative learning. For instance in the flipped class suggested above, the teacher divides the class into groups for the quiz, just a minute and discussion. The teacher makes sure each group is heterogeneous in nature so that the members of the group discuss with each other and learn from their peers. Moreover, students who are skilled help their less competent friends in understanding and carrying out the task. According to Thakur (2015), “Flipped classrooms allow class time be used to master skills through collaborative projects and discussions. This encourages students to teach and learn concepts from each other with the guidance of their teachers.”

Promotes interaction

Unlike the traditional classroom practice, which involves teachers lecturing and students listening, flipped English classes are highly interactive in nature. Teachers of English can

plan and implement various speaking activities such as quiz, just a minute speech, discussion and debate using the flipped classroom method. Students get the ground knowledge about the topic of the next day’s class activity through the materials they receive. Since they know the topics to be discussed, debated, and quizzed, they interact actively during the class activities. Advocates of the flipped classroom claim that this practice promotes better student–teacher interaction. This is evident from the words of Bergmann and Sams (2012): when teachers aren’t standing in front of the classroom talking at students, they can circulate and talk with students.

Promotes outcome based education (OBE)

OBE is a process that enables the teachers to facilitate the students to acquire the necessary skills successfully and apply them effectively when needed. Flipped English classrooms facilitate the students to acquire English language skills with the guidance of teachers of English and hence it is outcome-based. In the sample lesson plan mentioned above, the expected outcome is to enable students to write a letter to the editor on the topic GM foods. After planning, designing and implementing the flipped class activities, the students wrote the letter to the editor on GM foods with the relevant content, clear structure and formal language. This activity is taken as a model process to write letters to the editor on any other topic. Thus, flipped English classes can facilitate outcome based education in a feasible manner.

Promotes learner autonomy

Flipped classrooms provide the students material necessary to learn a topic. Thus, students’ learning is self-paced as they have control over their learning. They can spend more time on difficult topics, until they understand the concepts, since they have the materials in hand. The materials can be in any form such as articles, PowerPoint slides, images, audio files or video lectures. The students can choose the type of material they are interested to learn. As a result, the students will become responsible for their own learning and become self-directed. Bakshi (2015) rightly asserts, “Instruction in the flipped classroom approach is self-paced since the video lecture is controlled by the students: they can pause, rewind and review the lecture in the home environment until they clearly grasp the concepts, knowledge and skills to be learned.”

Integrates LSRW Skills

Learning a language involves the development of the four language skills – Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. Flipped classroom method provides opportunities to students to involve in LSRW activities unlike the traditional classrooms, which prioritise the teaching and learning of the active skills – speaking and writing.

Integration of the four language skills, for holistic language development, is invariably one of the important criteria of English syllabus at tertiary level, be it the ESP or the general English course provided by various universities. However, students at tertiary level do not get opportunities to practice all the language skills owing to various reasons which include the infra structure of the classrooms, unavailability of technological resources, heterogeneous scenario, and time constraint. However, if English classes are flipped, students get exposed to

all four language skills and develop their language skills holistically.

A solution to heterogeneous and overcrowded classrooms

Today's classrooms at tertiary level are invariably heterogeneous in nature. Hence, a teacher has difficulty to make sure that her students, with varied abilities, have understood the topic taught and taken down the materials necessary to learn the topic. The teacher experiences same difficulty in an overcrowded classroom. In today's classrooms at tertiary level, the number of students ranges between sixty and ninety. It is impossible for a teacher to ensure whether all the students have understood the topic and have taken down the important points for further understanding. These issues can be addressed through flipped classes since the materials are sent to all the students through the group mail created by the teacher.

Promotes positive learner motivation and attitude

Flipping English classrooms promote positive learner motivation and attitude as the students receive the materials in advance and they schedule their study time. During the class activities, they use their ground knowledge to demonstrate active participation. They are neither stressed nor anxious but motivated to take part in group and individual activities. In the sample flipped English classes (Table 1), the students, after participating in the various activities based on the topic GM foods, demonstrated positive attitude towards the letter writing task since they had sufficient knowledge about the topic.

Limitations

Despite the above mentioned benefits, flipped English classrooms have certain limitations. They are,

- Barriers to internet access: Teachers and students need access to internet to prepare for the next day's class. If a student doesn't check his mail or go through the materials received due to lack of internet access, he/she cannot participate successfully in the next day's class.
- Time constraint: Teachers need sufficient time to flip English classes as it requires careful planning, selection of materials for the various learning objectives and implementation of various interactive activities.

CONCLUSION

Students at tertiary level are passionate about using mobiles phones, iPhones, iPads, laptops, and social networking sites for interacting with their friends and family. The conveniences of technology and the students' interest in using computers and internet have enabled teachers to implement flipped classroom method successfully. Flipped English classes are highly beneficial for tertiary students. They not only make the classes interactive and promote holistic language development but also reduce students' anxiety and stress, and motivate them to participate in various speaking and writing activities. In addition, they build knowledge, confidence and enhance their English language proficiency.

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