Utilization of Flipped Classrooms for English Instruction during the COVID-19 Pandemic[1]

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Abstract

With the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, educational institutions worldwide adapted their teaching and learning techniques for various courses, including English. One of the adaptations includes a well-known model called Flipped Classroom (FC). FC often mixes two stages: pre-class that is online, and in-class that is face-to-face. Though the model was adopted during the pandemic, there were several model adaptations that emerged for entirely virtual use due to pandemic in-person instruction restrictions. These new models replaced the face-to-face session with an online synchronous session supported by several platforms. Several benefits and challenges were reported. Among others, the benefits included improving learning experiences and promoting active learning. This model claims to improve students' comprehension that leads to higher achievement and creates an online environment that encourages students to participate and be engaged during online classes actively. Concerning the challenges, poor-quality learning materials including videos could affect its success and the techniques could add to the workload that teachers already have. This paper presents the implications to English teachers with various technical skills and discusses the utilization of FC during the pandemic and it was limited to available and accessible online sources. Hence, it might not include all the studies on FC at the time of the pandemic.

Resumen

Con el estallido de la pandemia de COVID-19, las instituciones educativas de todo el mundo adaptaron sus técnicas de enseñanza y aprendizaje para varios cursos, incluido el inglés. Una de las adaptaciones incluye un modelo muy conocido llamado Flipped Classroom (FC). FC a menudo combina dos etapas: pre-clase que es en línea y en clase que es cara a cara. Aunque el modelo se adoptó durante la pandemia, surgieron varias adaptaciones del modelo para un uso completamente virtual debido a las restricciones de instrucción en persona durante la pandemia. Estos nuevos modelos sustituyeron la sesión presencial por una sesión síncrona online soportada por varias plataformas. Se informaron varios beneficios y desafíos. Entre otros, los beneficios incluían mejorar las experiencias de aprendizaje y promover el aprendizaje activo. Este modelo pretende mejorar la comprensión de los estudiantes que conduce a un mayor rendimiento y crea un entorno en línea que anima a los estudiantes a participar activamente durante las clases en línea. En cuanto a los desafíos, los materiales de aprendizaje de baja calidad, incluidos los videos, podrían afectar su éxito y las técnicas podrían aumentar la carga de trabajo que ya tienen los maestros. Este documento presenta las implicaciones para los profesores de inglés con diversas habilidades técnicas y analiza la utilización de FC durante la pandemia y se limitó a las fuentes en línea disponibles y accesibles. Por lo tanto, es posible que no incluya todos los estudios sobre FC en el momento de la pandemia.

Introduction

During COVID-19 pandemic, educational institutions worldwide adapted their teaching and learning techniques for various courses, including English. Online instruction became the new standard in English language teaching and educational institutions developed unique methods of delivering lessons. Numerous studies documented the difficulties faced by English teachers and students throughout the pandemic.

One significant issue during this period was the poor internet connections (Lestiyanawati, 2020; Naka, 2020; Rinekso & Muslim, 2020). While English as a foreign language (EFL) students benefited from synchronous online discussion, poor internet connections often disrupted the sessions (Rinekso & Muslim, 2020). Additionally, the teachers' lack of technological literacy hampered the delivery of lessons (Hermansyah & Haridah, 2021; Lestiyanawati, 2020). These obstacles created in a number of concerns, including a lack of student interest and comprehension (Anggoro & Rueangrong, 2021; Efriana, 2021). As a result, educational institutions began researching to determine how to resolve the issues. Flipped learning has been a popular method of English instruction since before and continuing during the pandemic, as can be seen by the growing number of recent studies adopting and adapting the concept. This article describes how the instruction model was implemented during the pandemic and what its impact was on English language instruction. Also, it offers practical implications for instructors of the English language.

General concept of flipped learning

The flipped classroom (FC) concept is not new. Because of the benefits it provides, its online pre-class and face-to-face in-class activities have been adopted at educational institutions all over the world. Because students acquire the subject matter prior to class, this methodology allows for more interaction and real-time feedback, resulting in higher accomplishment (Bergmann & Sams, 2012). In essence, FC promotes improved levels of critical thinking, communication, and cooperation (Strayer, 2012).

FC often mixes two stages, a pre-class which is online, and an in-class which is face-to-face. The first stage of flipped learning, pre-class, emphasizes independent learning, in which students manage their own studies. Before class, students are expected to acquire knowledge of the subject by reviewing learning resources in various media types such as online videos, podcasts, or text-formatted materials (Bergmann & Sams, 2012; Strayer, 2012). In the in-class stage, students are placed in a student-centered active learning environment where they participate in interactive lectures, problem-solving activities, laboratory experiments, role play, and collaborative design and creation (Gerstein, 2011; Strayer, 2012).

Flipped learning in English instruction

In English instruction before the pandemic, the FC was utilized in several contexts to improve various skills. Abdullah et al. (2019) conducted a study utilizing the model in an EFL classroom and reported its positive impact on students' English-speaking performance. The model can also be effective in improving students' writing skills (Abedi & Akbari, 2019). In addition to the productive skills, the FC can positively affect the instruction of other English skills, including listening (Ahmad, 2016), reading (Hasanudin & Fitrianingsih, 2018), vocabulary (Alnuhayt , 2018), and grammar (Al-Harbi & Alshumaimeri, 2016). In addition to language skills, the FC model was influential in developing students' willingness to communicate in English, which means that the method positively affects communicative competence (Mohammadi et al., 2019). Furthermore, Ayçiçek and Yanpar Yelken (2018) and Lee and Wallace (2018) found that the model improved students' classroom engagement in English classes, a significant obstacle in English language teaching (ELT). Lastly, the model also can enhance English learners' higher-order thinking skills (Alsowat, 2016).

Reasons for use of flipped learning in English instruction in the time of the pandemic

As a popular teaching strategy in EFL, it is not surprising to find that FC was used to solve problems in online EFL instruction during the pandemic. One main reason why the FC model was chosen by educators during the pandemic was because of its ability to improve learning outcomes in a variety of ways. One way is by improving students' achievement in English classes. Safiyeh and Farrah (2020), who conducted an experiment using FC during the pandemic, mentioned that it could enhance students' English language skills including reading, writing, listening, and speaking and areas, such as grammar and vocabulary. It also enhanced the interaction between instructors and students. Flipped learning approaches have been seen to boost online education, particularly the emphasis on benefiting from live synchronous meetings between instructors and students during live sessions (Tang et al., 2020). A more recent study used the FC model because it had a beneficial influence on the autonomy of students and their performance (Finnsson, 2021). These benefits justify the adoption or adaptation of FC in online English instruction.

FC was previously used with successful outcomes in an onsite general English course for a semester at a university (Anggoro & Khasanah, 2021). The model that was priorly shown to benefit the onsite course, was adapted for use in a fully online environment. One reason for the adaptation of the method is that a fully virtual class cannot replace face-to-face teaching. In her study, Radia (2021) adopted FC for this very this reason. This study, therefore, combines both online and onsite learning under a set of protocols.

Strategies to use flipped learning during the pandemic

During the pandemic, flipped learning was implemented in a variety of ways. There are two recurring themes: the combination of online and face-to-face interactions and a virtual environment. Radia (2021) implemented the FC's online and face-to-face components for English instruction. The study followed a set of guidelines recommended by their Ministry of Education to carry out the model and mixed face-to-face training with online instruction via e-learning platforms such as *Moodle*. As suggested in Radia's article, FC utilization occurred in three stages: pre-class learning, in-class learning, and post-class learning. Pre-class learning consisted of the teacher uploading an online recorded lecture to be viewed at home by learners to create a foundation of knowledge before the class session. In-class learning was dedicated to engaging learners in a thorough review and evaluation of newly learnt information by clarifying concepts and engaging

learners in deep learning. Post-classroom activities included assigning homework, project work, and research to pupils.

Apart from adopting the idea, several studies modified it and created entirely virtual strategies. Karalis and Raikou (2021) decided to adapt the traditional flipped learning model, which includes an online and face-to-face environment, to a fully virtual strategy. They explained as follows:

> *The instructors decided to turn all the face-to-face part of the course into online yet maintaining the basic pedagogical principles that are mentioned for the face-to-face part of the FC as well. Therefore, the part of synchronous education (which, in this case, was the official software available at the University of Patras, i.e., Zoom), would every time include the minimum lecturing possible or no lecturing at all, mostly to respond to queries, and the three hours of the online teaching would be used for activities in which the students would participate. In this part of the course, the techniques used were discussion on a specific matter, work in groups (using the breakout rooms function of Zoom), debate, brainstorming (mostly with the use of chat), voting (using Zoom's internal tools or software that allows a better visualization of the results, such as Mendimeter), and case studies.* (Karalis & Raikou, 2021, p.25)

From the explanation, it is inferred that although the environment was entirely virtual, the instructors included activities utilized in the traditional FC model. Students had an opportunity to independently learn the materials before class at their own pace and then joined a synchronous meeting comprised of interactive and engaging activities. The use of the *Zoom* platform was vital in applying the virtual model to deliver synchronous activities.

A similar application was described by Williams (2020), who mentioned that the flipped model was perfect for distance education during the pandemic. She outlined three steps to integrate the model: preparing materials for independent study, motivating students to prepare for online classes, and using class time to support and deepen student understanding. What is unique about her model is the second step, motivating students to prepare before class. This step neither exists in the traditional FC model, nor in several other adaptations. It includes reminding students to review materials before class, informing them that the session will begin with a brief quiz, instructing them to prepare a predetermined number of questions regarding the subject matter, and preparing some concrete examples to bring to class.

Another similar adaptation was found in a study by Khan and Abdou (2021), whose FC model is fully online and consists of two phases: online learning space and online classes. The online learning space utilized a learning management system or LMS. They mentioned that *Blackboard* and *Moodle* could be used, however they chose a *Gmail* group to communicate with students and a closed *Facebook* group to facilitate collaborative learning due to its availability and accessibility. In addition to the online learning space, students had online classes. Prior to each online meeting, the instructors sent materials to students for independent learning. Students were requested to ask questions related to the independent learning materials in the synchronous session.

Figure 1: Zoom online classroom (Khan and Abdou, 2020, p. 9)

Fidalgo et al. (2020) adapted the FC paradigm and coined the term HFC (Hybrid Flipped Classroom). In a HFC, the model's communication processes are synchronous with temporal coincidence and asynchronous where there is no temporal coincidence in activities such as email, forum, and others. As with other FC methods, the lesson in HFC is asynchronous primarily at home, but the assignment is synchronous in the classroom. This concept incorporates a novel function: the generation of data that allows instructors to determine the students' learning level throughout the home lesson. Thus, teachers can make judgments about the tactics and resources to utilize during classroom homework. The following figure explains how HFC is used.
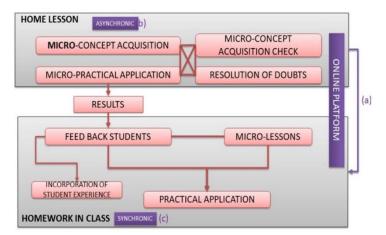
Figure 2: Hybrid FC (Fidalgo et al., 2020, p. 403)

Marshall (2017) and Marshall and Rodriguez-Buitrago (2017) created the Synchronous Online Flipped Learning Approach (SOFLA) to connect flipped learning principles with online education. The model enables interactive and dynamic interactions during class because students are required to complete independent learning before the lesson (Marshall & Kotska, 2020). As illustrated in Figure 4, the SOFLA model consists of eight phases. While Step 1, pre-work, is asynchronous, the others occur in a synchronous manner (Marshall, 2020, 19:28). In their paper, Marshall and Kostka (2020) explained the utilization of SOFLA with various online platforms, including *Zoom*, *Playposit*, *Kahoot*, and *Flipgrid*.

Synchronous Online Flipped Learning Approach	
Step	Learning Focus
1	Pre-Work
2	Sign-In Activity
3	Whole Group Application
4	Breakouts
5	Share-Out
6	Preview & Discovery
7	Assignment Instructions
8	Reflection

Figure 3: 8 steps of SOFLA (Marshal in Marshal & Kotska, 2020, p. 5)

Anggoro and Khasanah (2021) developed a model for online instruction called FCOI, or Flipped Classroom Online Instruction. Two virtual phases comprise the model: an asynchronous pre-online phase and a synchronous in-online phase. The instructor recorded and published brief lecture videos to an online platform accessible to all enrolled students to facilitate asynchronous learning. Additionally, a 10- to 15-question mini-quiz was created utilizing gamified internet quizzes such as *Kahoot* and *Quizizz* to assess students' understanding of the lecture video. The synchronous or real-time online education throughout the in-online class phase was mostly made up of practice and feedback sessions. It used a teleconferencing application called *Webex* to facilitate real-time oral exchanges between students and teachers during the synchronous session. *Pear Deck*, an online interactive slide system, was used in conjunction with *Webex* in the synchronous session. *Pear Deck* was also employed to engage students in online instruction. The following figure illustrates the implementation of the model.
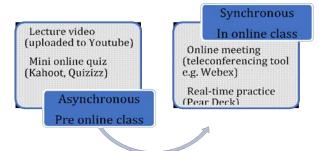
Figure 4: FC model for online instruction (Anggoro & Khasanah, 2021)

Benefits and challenges of flipped learning during the pandemic

The utilization of the flipped learning strategies employed in the time of the pandemic can benefit online English instruction. One benefit is related to learning experiences. Karalis and Raikou (2021) claimed that their FC adaptation improved students' learning experiences. According to Williams (2020), FC enables an environment where students become active participants; thus, it creates more opportunities for teachers to perform assessments to investigate students' understanding as well as to address issues encountered by them. Moreover, Anggoro & Khasanah (2021), reported that their fully virtual FC model significantly improved students' achievement in a reading and writing course. They reached that conclusion by comparing students' pre-test and post-test scores, which included evaluation of vocabulary, grammar, reading, and writing. Another benefit associated with FC active learning is that instead of being passive recipients of knowledge, students become active participants in their education when FC is used (Williams, 2020). This statement is congruous with that of Marshall and Rodriguez-Buitrago (2017), who found that their adaptation of FC created an engaging online English learning environment. Another study reported students' positive perceptions of the model and that they were engaged and active during the online classes (Anggoro & Khasanah, 2021). Moreover, FC is claimed to assist teachers in managing time more effectively, enhancing students' cooperation and participation, facilitating interactive activities among class members, and allowing students to think critically (Karalis & Raikou, 2021).

Despite the benefits, there were also several reported challenges. Radia (2021) discovered that the biggest challenge in her study was the uncertainty of students' comprehension of the online lessons. She also pointed out that the poor-quality videos shared to students might have affected their understanding. Marshall and Kotska (2020) highlighted that the utilization of the FC model results in more workload on the teachers since they have responsibilities to facilitate learning in two different settings, synchronous and asynchronous.

From the drawbacks, there are several important points to consider before adopting FC. First, the learning materials including videos be of good quality. Second, to ensure if students are learning, formative assessment should be regularly administered. For instance, when teaching vocabulary, the teacher can give an interactive quiz using an interactive response system such as *Kahoot*. Third, when doing FC, collaboration with another teacher is recommended since it could reduce the responsibilities and workload.

Implications for online English classes

This paper indicates that FC can be applied for online instruction, including English. Several strategies can be adopted or adapted by English instructors. Fundamentally, there are two essential tools to implementing FCs: a Learning Management System (LMS) such as *Google Classroom* and teleconferencing tools including *Zoom*. This section presents implications from the FC adaptations for use by English instructors. It suggests three levels of practical applications along with sample technology tools.

Level 1 – Primary

At this level, English instructors can follow the steps of the traditional FC model, which include pre-class and in-class. For the pre-online class, the instructor can assign prepared material for students to study. The material can be a textbook, module, video, among others. These materials can be self-developed or retrieved from online sources. The instructor needs to make sure that the materials are of good quality and every student has access to them. The utilization of a learning management system (LMS) is strongly suggested to share the teaching materials to students. The LMS can also be a platform for online communication and interaction. Assuming that students have studied the materials, the in-online class session can focus on helping students clarify their understanding and giving online practices. The practices

also act as a form of formative assessment so that the teacher will evaluate whether students have comprehended the materials or not and can address the encountered problems right away. The teachers can give more explanation on subject matters which students have not mastered. Also, there should be plenty of time for feedback and question-answer sessions. The following figure illustrates an example of the application of this level.
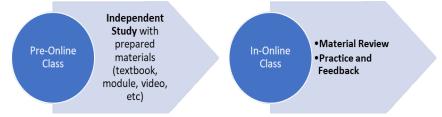

Figure 5: An application of the basic online FC model

Level 2 - Enhanced

Similar to Level 1, this level has pre and in-online class sessions. However, an additional element that an English instructor can add is a connecting activity. This activity connects the pre-online class to the in-online class. It can be as a mini-project or a mini-quiz. Before the in-class session, the students should complete a mini project related to the assigned materials in the pre-online class. For instance, if the topic is "expressing they are sorry," the teacher can assign students to make a short video using the expressions or creating a short conversation. Another technique is assigning the class a mini quiz. To make the quiz fun and engaging, the teacher can utilize interactive response systems (IRSs) like *Kahoot*, *Quizizz*, and *Socrative*. The following figure illustrates an example of the application of this level.
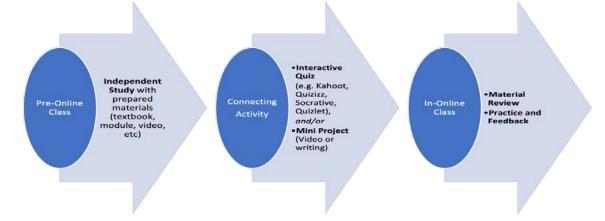

Figure 6: An application of an enhanced online FC model

Level 3 - Advanced

This level increases the utilization of more technology tools. In the pre-online class session, several online platforms can be integrated. The instructor can select one or more activities. One potential activity is an interactive video. The instructor can select any preferred platform such as *Playposit*, *Edpuzzle*, and *Wideo*. These sites enable teachers to develop interactive videos which require students to respond to several prompts while watching. This will increase students' attention to the content of the video. Another activity is interactive slides. *Pear Deck* and *Quizizz* are examples of platforms that can deliver asynchronous interactive slides. On *Pear Deck*, the teacher can insert the learning materials and practices in the slides. The students will have to do the exercises to complete the slides, and the instructor can check students' responses in real-time from home.

A connecting activity can follow the pre-online class session. Like the enhanced level, the teacher can develop a quiz using *Kahoot*, *Quizizz*, *Socrative*, or other IRS and assign it as an asynchronous activity. Before the in-class session, the instructor can check on which questions students do well or poorly.

In the in-class session, there are several activities that an instructor can use. For instance, a set of strategies in the SOFLA can be integrated here. In the model, seven synchronous activities include sign-in activity, whole group application, breakouts, share-out, preview & discovery, assignment instructions, and reflection (Marshall, 2020). The breakouts, for instance, allow students to work in groups during the class. It can be

a medium for discussion and collaboration. It also allows the instructor to assist students in small groups. Another way is by following the synchronous in online class session discussed by Anggoro and Khasanah, (2021). They utilize interactive slides using *Pear Deck* along with the teleconferencing tools. The slides give students opportunities to practice in real-time and participate actively. *Pear Deck* also offers various interactive slides that allow students to respond by typing short and long answers, drawing, selecting multiple choices, and others. The instructor can design tasks that can engage students during the online class. Moreover, the teacher can observe students' responses in real-time and give immediate feedback. The following figure illustrates an example of the application of this level.
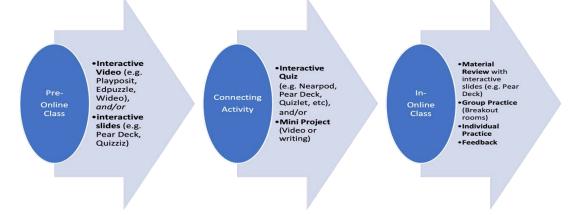

Figure 7: An application of advanced online FC model

Conclusion

It has been shown that FC can benefit English instruction. Nonetheless, in the time of the pandemic, the traditional FC model might have not been practical and ideal as classes were mostly online. Therefore, the adaptations of the model that can be utilized in an entirely virtual environment can be a solution to deliver quality instruction during an emergency situation that limits teaching to virtual classrooms. This paper sums up several adapted models that can enhance online English instruction, such as RFC, SOFLA, FCOI, and others. These models promote students' active learning during online classes and enable them to actively participate and be engaged. The models also positively affect students' learning experiences and improve their achievement. However, several applications of FC during the pandemic faced challenges such as uncertainty on students' comprehension, poor quality of materials, and the additional workload for teachers. In addition to discussing existing literature, this paper introduces several strategies that an instructor can follow when implementing FC. The strategies are derived from the previous models and categorized into three levels, primary, enhanced, and advanced. The levelling is expected to assist teachers with various technical skills. The strategies considered the challenges of previous FC applications and integrated activities that enable tracking of students' learning.

Though the paper discusses FC utilization during the pandemic, it is limited to only accessible sources and might not include all the studies on FC during the pandemic. Additionally, most accessible sources focus on students' perceptions and do not discuss impacts on their English skills. This opens opportunities for future research.

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