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Developing a Flipped Learning model for Teaching EAP Students Struggling with Multi-Level Challenges in a College Context

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to understand students' experiences regarding the implementation of flipped learning (FL) as a modern blended learning technique in teaching English for academic purposes (EAP) in a community college context in Toronto. Based on students' views, blended learning theories, and several previous studies, the study also aims to develop a holistic contextualized flipped learning model that helps both students and teachers in the context of EAP to cope with the challenges of a multilevel EAP classroom. The study is guided by the epistemology and philosophy of the interpretive paradigm as an underpinning stance. Accordingly, the qualitative approach has been selected for determining the strategy and methods of sampling, and data collection and data analysis. Results revealed that students' views are compatible with the theoretical views in validating the utilization of flipped learning as a modern technique in the context of EAP. However, results revealed that the development of a holistic model includes a further component-online engagement as an extension component to the model. The study offers a set of recommendations and implications for EAP teachers and instructors within the area of ELT for classroom practice.

Key words: Blended Classroom, Flipped Classroom, E-Learning, Synchronous Learning, Asynchronous Learning

INTRODUCTION

Flipped learning (FL) has recently emerged as an innovative technique based on the instructional design methodology that emphasizes the adaptation of technology in fostering student-centered learning in English as a foreign or second language (EFL/ESL) environment. Student-centered learning is favored in English language teaching (ELT) which is due to its emphasis on learners' needs, motivation, and the power to find their voice and build confidence through classroom participation and engagement. Student-centered learning is also well known for its emphasis on the theory of constructivism, which advocates that through learning practices and collaboration, students construct knowledge for learning and understanding (Neumann, 2013; Lee and Brown, 2014). Nevertheless, the reality of ELT often poses certain challenges that may handicap the accomplishment of student-centered learning and learner outcomes. Among the most common challenges are learning anxiety, lack of engagement, and low self-confidence that can be realized in less proficient students, particularly when placed with high proficient students in a multilevel classroom.

In response to pedagogical challenges in EFL/EAP contexts, the ELT literature, along with empirical studies, has provided a variety of strategies, techniques, and tools that offer potential benefits leading to improving learning. Over the last years, flipped learning has emerged as a powerful effective strategy based on blended learning, where students individually watch online asynchronous lectures prior to class to be well prepared for engagement in classroom synchronous learning activities (Bergmann and Sams, 2012; Voss and Kosta, 2019). In a flipped classroom, lectures and materials are delivered to students online through a pre-class stage to be reviewed on their own and understand the meaning of the content. Flipped learning draws on the rationale that previous exposure to the course content targets students' understanding and remembering-the first levels of Bloomfield Taxonomy (Krathwohl, 2002). This, in turn, helps students come to class well prepared with and more confident in their abilities to engage in learning activities and class participation (Berrett, 2012; Bates and Galloway 2012; Bishop and Verleger, 2013; Viliet et al., 2015). The in-class stage, on the other hand, is supposed to target the advanced levels of Blooms' taxonomy- application, analyzation, evaluation, and creation.

Teaching EAP in Canada, where the study takes place, occurs in several different settings, such as intensive English language programs, pathway programs, and foundation programs. These programs offer courses that are designed to meet learners' language proficiency and academic skills.

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Students enrolling in these programs are mostly international students who bring considerable diversity in educational socio-cultural backgrounds that may be of value to the education system. Nevertheless, diversity in background knowledge may cause a variety of challenges and complications, and multi-level classroom is the most common challenge. This problem has repeatedly come up in the author's EAP classroom. In a multi-level classroom, there are some students who perform at a higher level; others perform at an average level, while others perform at a lower level. Even though a multi-level classroom has its own advantages, there are certain challenges that may negatively impact all stages of the curriculum, beginning from syllabus design, to the ongoing methodology, and ending up with the assessment and evaluation. Besides, these challenges are not free of negative impacts on students, the teacher, and the overall quality of learning and academic performance.

With regard to students, the top challenge of a multi-level classroom is the group conflict. Because of the various levels, it is regular that the most proficient students may feel as though they are wasting time with beginners while less skilled students may feel inadequate, and what they study is beyond their abilities. When the topic is taught, it may be too easy or too difficult according to students' level, and the result is that students may stop paying attention and lose interest because the work is either not stimulating or too challenging. This conflict may cause less proficient students to struggle to keep up with instructions. The worst thing is that the less proficient students may have a feeling of inadequacy, low self-esteem, and being behind. In addition, this problem is expected to impact our academic outcomes and the overall quality of learning and academic performance.

Teachers who face multi-level classroom challenges can be affected as well. They may be most often overwhelmed and exhausted, seeking for materials and activities while attempting to meet the needs of the multi-level students in the group. Part of struggling is due to their ongoing thinking of whether to satisfy the regulations of an institution and the outcomes of the course or to satisfy the needs and academic achievements of students.

With the growing number of studies that had been conducted to examine the role and effects of FL in a variety of subject areas, there is a notable lack of empirical evidence of how FL has actually contributed to coping with the challenges of EAP contexts, particularly the multilevel classroom challenges. Moreover, most empirical research has focused on investigating student and instructors' perceptions of FL through surveys that may not be sufficient methods in providing in-depth information. It is also worth mentioning that upon reviewing the literature in English language teaching (ELT) along with research studies, we can find out that there are a variety of strategies and techniques that have been created to support multilevel language classrooms. For example, Bell (2004) presented a very appealing book addressing the challenges of a multi-level class through pedagogical strategies and models. However, these models may provide solutions for teachers, but at the same time, they may be overwhelming and exhausting as they require planning, designing, and aligning a variety of activities to fix issues and challenges. Therefore, this study intends to fill in these gaps in our ELT area via collecting data from interviewing a group of students in an EAP undergraduate higher education context in Canada and reviewing the existing literature in FL in both education and learning in general and EFL/ESL learning in particular. This study also intends to list the current extensions to the FL model based on student participants' views.

It is the seriousness of this problem that has motivated the researcher to search through the literature to come up with more updating and less overwhelming optional strategies that help EFL teachers to cope with the multi-level classroom challenges. A flipped classroom is considered as an effective strategy that may be adopted to overcome multi-level EAP challenges.

This study is thought to contribute to knowledge through the process of constructing and developing the FL model based on a synthesis of theoretical views and students' views. It also intends to provide a set of implications and suggestions for EFL/ESL/ and EAP educators and teachers to take steps toward flipping their instruction. More specifically, the study aims to:

1. Provide an in-depth understanding of the role of flipped learning method in supporting student-centered learning dimensions in EAP classroom with the focus on motivation, engagement, and learner autonomy.
2. Explore the role of the FL method in coping with the challenges of the multilevel classroom, such as lack of engagement, lack of motivation, and low self-confidence.
3. Sketch a comprehensive framework or model that can be recommended to EFL/ESL/EAP teachers and instructors who are challenged with a multilevel classroom.

Based on the aims above, this study is guided by two main questions:

1. How does FL support the challenges of a multi-level classroom?
2. How do teachers develop a holistic and coherent FL model for supporting an EAP multi-level classroom based on theoretical perspectives and participants' views?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature in FL shows there are many studies that have been conducted in different subjects to address the concept of flipped learning in teaching and learning. The main focus of this study is on flipped learning as an update mode of technological pedagogy that supports facing the challenges of lack of engagement and motivation, and high level of anxiety in an EAP multilevel classroom.

The term 'flipped classroom' was initiated by Baker (2004) to be used as a unique approach that integrates instructional design and pedagogy. Later, Bergmann and Sams developed the idea of FL, pointing out that "what is done at school done at home, homework is done at home completed in class" (2012, p. 5). A further detailed definition of FL is provided by The Flipped Learning Network (2014) 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" (p.1).

Flipped learning is considered as an approach that represents a new paradigm shift from the traditional classroom learning to flipped classroom learning by changing the role and responsibilities of teachers and students (Sahin &Kurban, 2016; Overmyer, 2012; Loucky & ware, 2017). The flipped classroom approach encompasses four pillars of "F-L-I-P" (Flipped Learning Network, 2014, p. 1), as shown in Figure 1.

F "Flexible Environment" -- refers to creating a flexible environment for students in terms of spaces and time in which students choose where and when to learn.

L "Learning Culture"- refers to the replacement of the traditional approach of teacher-centered learning with the modern approach of student-centered learning.

I "Intentional Content"-Flipped learning educators and teachers must think about how education is used to improve students' understanding and fluency.

P "Professional Educators"- It refers to the importance of enhancing teachers' professional development to be more "reflective in their practice connect with each other to improve their instruction, accept constructive criticism, and tolerate controlled chaos in their classrooms" (ibid).

The flipped classroom approach involves engaging students in knowledge acquisition of a course material material prior to a class session, typically through assigned readings or lecture videos, leaving class time for the integration of knowledge through an application, analysis, or synthesis-based activities (Bergmann & Sams, 2012). In essence, students are introduced to course concepts prior to class sessions, allowing in-class time to offer students opportunities to work with the concepts while utilizing the support of peers and the instructor (Jessica et al., 2014). As such, in-class learning is shifted from traditional lecture delivery to class activities such as concept checks, discussions, debates, and activities involving application, analysis, problem-solving, experiments, or evaluation.

A critical analysis of flipped learning indicates that it draws on theories such as the cognitive load theory (CLT), self-determination theory (CDT), and student-centered learning (Hughes, 2018). The CLT, through the three types of cognitive load-Germain, intrinsic, and extraneous, explains how the process of learning takes place (Sweller, Ayres, & Kalyuga, in Hughes, 2018, p.27). They state that the brain processes information through audio and visual channels in the working memory and then transfers this information to the long memory. In the long-term memory, the new information is integrated with existing via schemas and is retained". According to SDT, Ryan, and Darcy (2000), learning takes place via the three elements-motivation, autonomy, and relatedness. According to the student-centered approach, learning takes place through elements of interaction, communication, and agency (Brown & Lee, 2014).

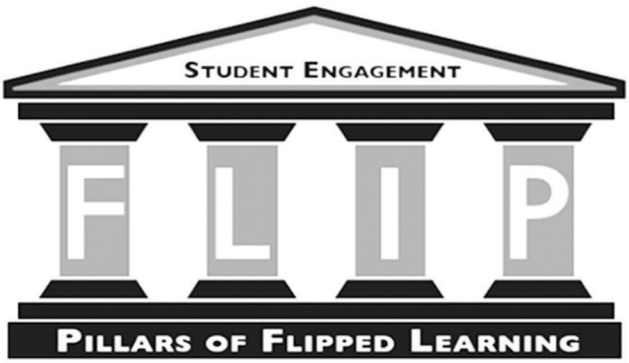

Figure 1. Pillars of Flipped learning (Adapted from Jessica, et al., 2014)

Flipped Learning and Technology

Bishop and Verleger (2013) state that FL is characterized by incorporating technology as a basic component. According to the existing literature and second language theory, technology has the potential of affecting teaching and learning (Murray & Blyth, 2011; Kukulska-Hulme, 2009; Thornton & Houser, 2005; White & Mills, 2014). Flipped learning uses technology in the form of video lectures as the sole source of input outside the classroom. According to viewing video lectures, the literature shows two types of studies. One type of study indicates students' interest in watching video lectures to improve their learning experience. Other studies, on the other hand, show that not all students are satisfied with watching video lectures (Costley, Hughes, & Lange in Hughes, 2018).

Flipping classrooms requires teachers need to prepare their materials online to be more accessible for students. Lectures are provided in videos that can be recorded by the teacher using a screencast tool or using educational videos from YouTube, TED-ED, and Khan Academy. However, posting lectures online requires teachers to have technological skills, especially while dealing with young students who are entirely professional in technology. Educators in this respect provided some tips and suggestions for the quality of videos. For example, Bergman and Sams (2014) recommend posting short and interactive videos, including pictures, animation, and exciting.

A Framework of Flipped Classroom Model from Theoretical Lenses

This study is guided by a flipped classroom model based on theoretical views, as depicted in Figure 2 called "A Flipped Learning Model: From Asynchronous to Synchronous Learning." It is a form of flipped learning that encompasses two phases Phase I (Pre-class Online learning) and Phase II (In-class Face-to-Face learning). Both Pre-class and In-class learning is supported by digital tasks and techniques. The FL model aims at creating engagement, participation, and reducing anxiety for low achievers.

Phase I: Pre Classroom Asynchronous Building Learning- Phase I is asynchronous as it delivers the lecture and materials to students to be watched and reviewed in their

own setting on their own time. This phase comprises successive stages (Voss & Koska, 2019; Sahin & Kurban, 2016). The first stage includes introducing the content and materials to students by recording and narrating screencast to view and review by themselves prior to the classroom. The second stage comprises working on skill-building activities through online sharing views, engagement, and feedback. Step three includes a quiz as a formative assessment, along with feedback. The Pre-class phase is a preliminary stage that aims at helping students target the first levels of Blooms' Taxonomy-remembering and understanding as in Figure 2.

Phase II: In-Class Synchronous Practice Learning- Phase II is a face-to-face setting where students sit in pairs or groups to work on activities and assignments relating to the topic that they have reviewed during the pre-class phase. In this phase, students will reflect on what they have learned, understood, and experienced. It is the stage where students are supposed to target the advanced levels of Blooms' taxonomy-evaluation, application, and syncretization, as in Figure 2.

Previous Studies on Flipped Learning

Within the area of ELT, there is a dearth of research published on investigating the potential of FL in facing the challenges of an EAP multilevel classroom that is in alignment with the research purpose. Nevertheless, there are numerous empirical studies that have been designed to investigate FL strategy and multilevel class separately. Even though the two strategies have been addressed independently, we can still benefit from research findings, especially those that are relating to examining the FL strategy in the student-centered approach. Based on the purpose of this research, the researcher will review several studies in general education, including EFL/EAP education, that addresses the FL strategy in student-centered learning, will be reviewed.

Generally, a number of previous studies have validated the potential of FL across a variety of learning domains (Gong et al. 2018; McLean & Attardi 2018; Yilmaz & Baydas 2017). Their argument draws on the belief that FL strategy offers students the opportunity of active learning through its unique structure that links between having prior knowledge in the pre-class and practicing knowledge during the in-class. Besides the structure, the incorporation of the two components, student-centered learning, and technology, can add to its validation. In supporting the student-centered learning, several studies (such as Millard, 2012; Baepler, Walker, & Driessen, 2014; Hung,2015; Zappe et al., 2009) reported that FL contributes to active learning through encouraging interaction, collaboration, motivation, and participation. Similarly, other studies (e.g., Day and Foley, 2006; Deslauriers and Wieman, 2011; Hung,2015; Zappe et al., 2009; Kim et al., 2014; Sams & Bergmann, 2013; Wilson, 2013) have reported the benefits of a flipped classroom in supporting students' achievement and involvement. For example, McCallum, Schultz, Sellke, and Spartz (2015), through an exploratory study, they examined the flipped classroom influence on students' performance and achievement. The findings of the study indicated that "student academic involvement was present through note-taking, viewing video lectures, active in-class learning, and collaboration" (p.42).

An interesting research thesis conducted by Marlowe (2012) examined the impact of FL on student achievement and stress levels. Findings of the study reported that those students, at the college level, who enrolled in an environmental system and societies course employing an FL displayed positive feelings towards learning than those students who had a traditional course. Students reported lower stress levels in an FL environment besides enjoying the associated benefits of being able to choose their own assignments and exploring concepts in more depth.

Within the area of EAP, Hughes (2018) conducted an experimental research study for the purpose of comparing the outcomes and satisfaction of students enrolled in An Advanced Presentation Course at the University of South Korea. Results revealed that "Students in the traditionally taught class achieved better objective assessment outcomes. Students in the flipped class achieved better competency-based assessment outcomes" (p.26). Another study was

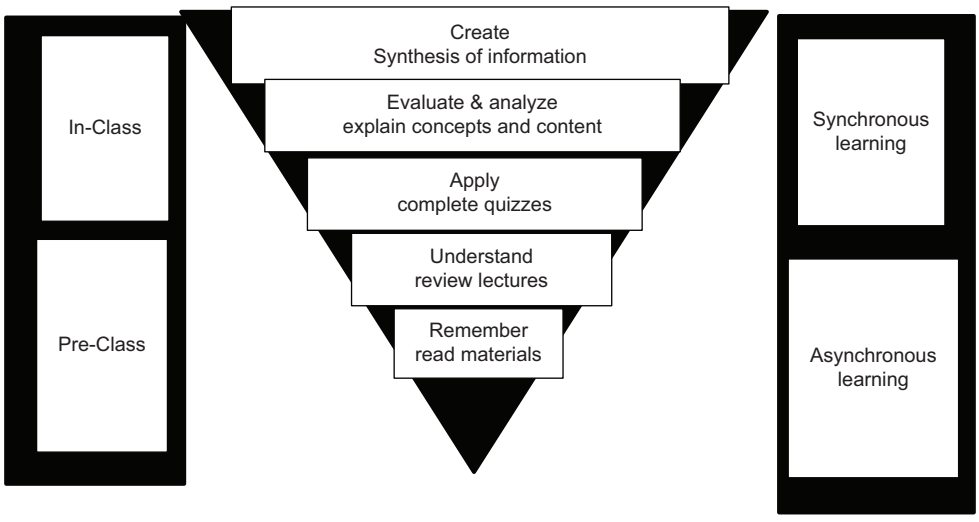

Figure 2. A Framework of Flipped Classroom Model from Theoretical Lenses

conducted by Shannon-Chastain and Fell-Kurban (2016) to investigate through a survey students' engagement with online resources. The study came up with higher satisfaction of students with the EAP flipped course in comparison to other traditional courses.

With regard to the context of higher education, Al-Samarraie, Shamsuddin, and Alzahrani (2019) have published a recent study based on reviewing previous literature to examine the utilization of FL in various disciplines. Findings of the study indicated that the utilization of flipped classrooms in various disciplines is mainly advocated to promote students' engagement, metacognition, attitude, performance, understanding, and achievement, as well as other learning outcomes" (P.1).

In the area of TESOL, there have been many studies conducted to provide information on FL (e.g., Basal, 2015; Aydın & Demirer, 2016; Moran, 2014; Han, 2015) though with a limited depth of evidence regarding the opportunities offered by FL in supporting student-centered learning dimensions or addressing classroom challenges. Lee and Wallace (2018) have conducted a mixed-method study to investigate the actual positive effects of FL strategy that was undertaken in four sections of the same College English 1 (E1) course over two consecutive semesters at a South Korean university. Findings, according to the final exam, indicated high statistical significance in the final exam scores of students in the flipped classroom. Also, surveys showed that most students in this study seemed to enjoy learning English in a flipped learning environment. Thaichay and Sitthitikul (2016) conducted an exploratory study to investigate the effects of flipped classroom instruction on language accuracy and an active learning environment through a research mixed method. The findings of the study showed a significant difference in students' language accuracy, in addition to their positive attitudes toward FL.

A more focused study in the ELT area has been conducted by Hsieh, Wu, and Marek (2016) to explore the benefits of the flipped classroom model to design an oral training course for learning a wide range of English idioms. Through mixed method research, findings revealed that "the theory-based flipped instruction using online written and oral interaction not only enhanced the participants' motivation, making them more active in using idioms in class but also significantly improved their idiomatic knowledge, indicating that the flipped learning was successful in achieving the instructional goals of the class" (p.1).

RESEARCH DESIGN

Data Collection

This qualitative research study draws on the epistemological considerations of the interpretivism paradigm (Dornyei, 2011; Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Merriam, 2002; Mason, 2002) that are "interactive and humanistic" (Creswell, 2003, P. 181). Accordingly, the source of data collection is semi-structured interviews with several student participants to gain a thick description of the studied topic (Kvale, 2006; Merriam, 2002; Lincoln & Denzin, 1994), which is one of the goals of this research. The selection of this method goes in line with the theoretical stance underpinning the research and the purpose of study that centers around "studying people's understanding of the meaning in their lived work" (Kvale, 1996, 105). More specifically, the study aims to understand and explore students' perceptions of the development and employment of a flipped classroom model in learning EAP courses.

Data Analysis

The purpose of data analysis in this qualitative research is to answer the two research questions. To analyze my data inductively, I relied on Miles and Huberman's model (1994), Miles, et al.,(2013), and Creswell (2007) that includes two main stages-data reduction and data display as displayed in Figure: 3. In the data reduction stage, the data were first transformed into written texts with the focus on meaningful segments and quotes. Then, the written texts and segments were categorized according to the main research questions into two categories. One category concerns the participants' views regarding the role of a flipped classroom in facing the challenges of the multilevel EAP context. The second category concerns the development of a flipped learning model based on students' views as well as theoretical views.

The third step was then coding the data. In this study, the process of coding begins with reviewing the transcribed data word by word and line by line within each particular answer of each interview. With regard to the question of how the data were analyzed, the answer is, to a small extent, inductively, and to some extent, deductively. Inductively, it means that the researcher adopted the technique of inductive coding based on the grounded theory by Strauss (1987), where themes can be created from the data on the basis of their relevance to the important question of research and its focus. (Creswell, 2007; Esterberg, 2002). The researcher's intention is to provide more detailed analysis and successful in terms of reliability a more detailed analysis, validity, and trustworthiness. Moreover, this approach matches the exploratory and interpretive goals of the entire research. In addition, the researcher relied on the deductive approach before and while coding the data, just for the purpose of

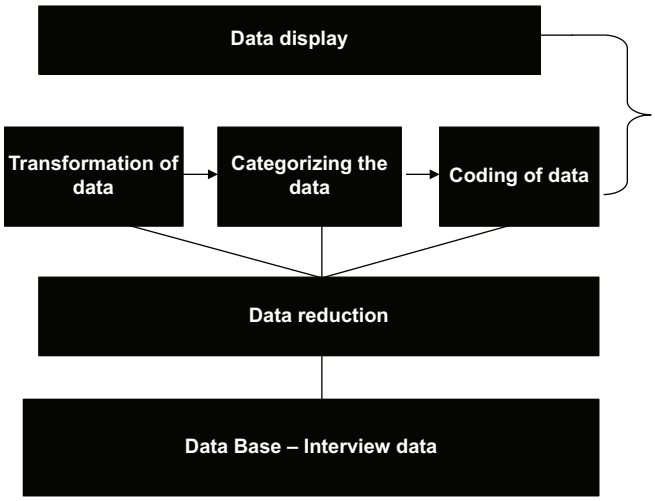

Figure 3. A Process of data analysis

categorizing data in terms of the two major questions of the study. While coding, I also operationalized the deductive approach for further categorization. This kind of categorization has been done in terms of the theoretical concepts derived from the literature review.

It is worth remarking that the data were coded manually because the researcher is more familiar with her data than the computer. Accordingly, I could easily recognize and pick up the key terms and concepts. I highlighted each meaningful segment using different colors according to the various categories of data.

Sample

This study used a purposeful convenience sampling consisting of 8 student participants. All students are international who enrolled in different EAP programs in various community colleges in Toronto. The students have been chosen from levels 6, 7, and 8. The sample has the potential to provide rich information for the research questions due to their live experiences in the studied phenomenon-flipped learning (Creswell, 2007). Practically, the selection had been made according to two considerations. The first consideration is due to their less language proficiency that is considered in this study as the factor that impacts the dynamism of student-centered learning. The second consideration is due to their youth age as they are categorized as young adults who have grown up with a wide array of digital tools. This means that they are open to innovations in digital education and are supposed to be familiar with the impacts of any innovation, such as the flipped learning in an EAP context.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings collected from students by the method of semi-structured interviews. Overall, the qualitative data analysis shows that student participants are in favor of using the FL method in EAP undergraduate courses, mainly writing, reading, and grammar courses. They consider it as an effective method to support their learning and engagement when placed in a multilevel classroom.

For the purpose of presenting more sensible and coherent data, the findings will be categorized in two sections and in terms of the two research questions composed for this study along with the findings and themes emerging from the data , and dissuasion of findings (see Figure 4).

How does FL Support the Challenges of a Multi-level Classroom?

To obtain data regarding the question above, the participants were asked two main questions as in the table below (see Table 1 for interview questions). In response to these questions, most of the participants reported that flipping classrooms support them in many ways, such as building understanding and memorizing, engagement, reducing anxiety, and creating motivation. Each of these findings is discussed separately with further elaboration supported by direct quotes from participants and theoretical views.

Finding One: Through Developing Understanding and Remembering

Six out of eight participants noted that viewing video/audio screencast lectures and delivering content on their own prior to class helps develop understanding and remembering skills. Two participants, however, said that they are not interested in the method of FL attributing that to their traditional learning style. One of them said, “I like the classroom in which the teacher explains the difficult concepts and topics,” whereas another one said, “I am not a visual learner…I don’t like to watch video lectures…I only like to take notes from the teacher”.

Students who supported an FL method justified their argument, saying that viewing lectures in advance provides them with the opportunity of viewing lectures more frequently and easily as they can stop the video and adjust the speed. Additionally, it helps them search through the Internet to discover more information about the topic. Four students referred to the idea of posting materials and its importance in supporting understanding and remembering. However, they referred to different factors to support their agreement, such as accessibility, availability, and authority to control the video and pace of time. The following is a sample of the students’ opinions of FL picked up from the data:

“When I watch the video lecture, I feel it is easy to understand…I also have the chance to watch the lectures multiple times to take notes …I think it is a good idea to have the teacher talks directly to me.”

“I think that posting the lecture and course content online before the class helps me understand more as I can easily review it as much as possible by myself. When I review the lecture by myself, I have the opportunity to identify the keywords and concepts. It is also a good opportunity for me to memorise them before the class.”

“Delivering the lecture and material online helps me access it anytime and anywhere…If we only depend on the in-class lecture, we will not get the chance to review it because we can’t catch up with the teacher every word and sentence if he speaks fast.”

“When I watch the lecture online, I can easily review it because I can adjust the speed and stop the video and repeat it over and over.”

Finding Two: Through Constructing Motivation and Student Engagement

When students were asked, “how does FL affect your engagement in classroom practice?” they provided a variety of views leading us to derive several key themes. Overall, all participants demonstrated their interest in flipping the second phase of the classroom to practicing activities and participating in group/pair discussions and presentations. Three participants confirmed that being familiar with the course content and materials in advance builds up the confidence of their abilities and skills. Thus, the key theme in this comment is ‘building up self-confidence’. Here are some illustrative excerpts on the key theme of self-confidence:

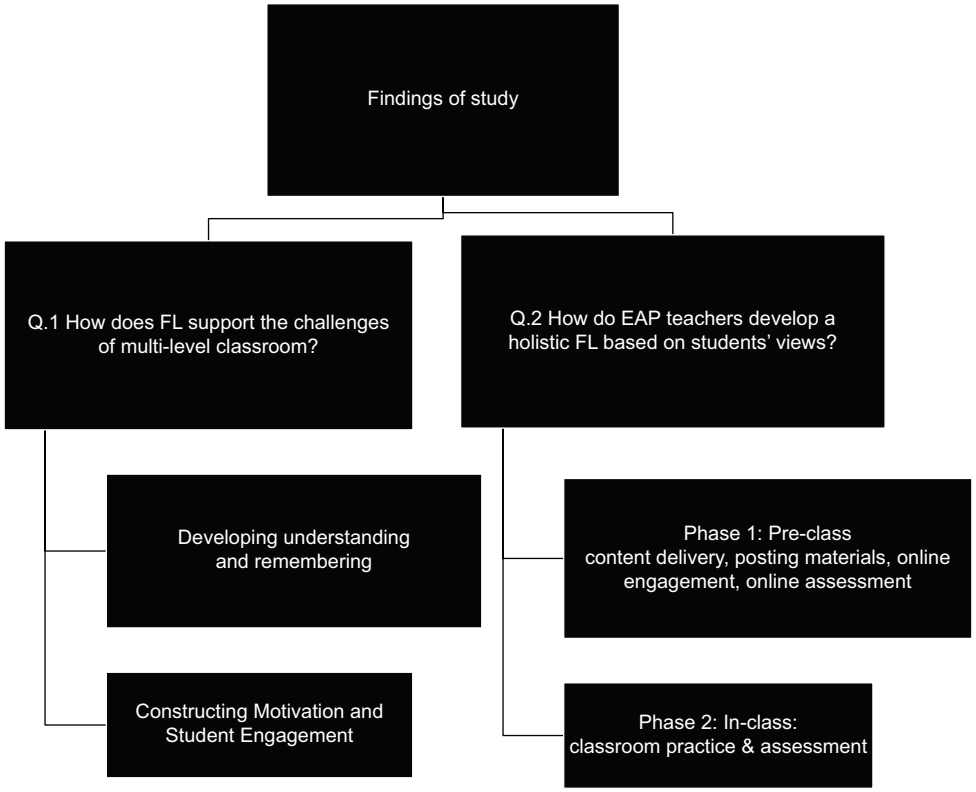

Figure 4. Findings of study

Table 1. An interview guide including questions

Q.1: How does FL support the challenges of multi-level classroom?	**Q.2: What are the best methods and techniques of developing a holistic contextualized flipped learning model?**
Do you face challenges in an EAP classroom? If yes, what kind of challenges?	In your opinion, what is the best way of flipping classroom?
Do you like learning English through a flipping classroom method? If yes or no, why?	Do you have any further suggestions for developing an effective flipped learning to be followed by your teachers?
How does FL affect your participation and engagement when you are placed in a multilevel classroom?	

"*Previous preparedness gives me more self -confidence when I engage in classroom work and discussion…I feel like I have something in my mind to talk about".*

A second theme that can be derived from the data is the 'application and practice.' Six students positively reported that the advantage of the flipping classroom into two phases gives them the chance to apply what they have learned in the pre-class time. They also reported that FL allows them to ask and answer questions relating to learned content.

"If I have previous information on the topic, I can apply it in the class though working on activities, doing presentations, asking and answering questions, and the like."

"In the EAP classroom, we need more practice to learn, but how can we practice if we don't have previous knowledge?"

"I am not interested in the traditional classroom where I just sit for a long time and listen to the teacher. I feel like I lose my attention, so I like to do practice in the classroom."

"When I come to class well prepared, I don't feel nervous…on the contrary, I feel like I am highly motivated to participate in classroom activities more."

Discussion of the First Category Findings

The most notable findings in this study according to the first research question "How does FL technique help EAP students cope with the challenges of the multilevel classroom?" was that (1) FL technique serves to develop student understanding and background knowledge prior to class, (2) FL technique creates a dynamic, engaging environment through practice, interaction, and participation in class. Each of these findings revealed several key themes and concepts that provide definite answers to the first research question. As an answer to the first question, the result reveals that the flipping classroom can be considered as a modern technique that helps cope with the challenges of a multilevel classroom, particularly the lack of engagement, motivation, and academic achievement. But one may ask how this technique can contribute to facing the challenges of a multilevel classroom? In order to provide a more sensible and clear discussion, the researcher will present a detailed discussion in the form of a question and answer. Besides the qualitative data themes, the discussion draws on theoretical views in the literature.

How does FL technique help cope with multilevel classroom challenges? The answer is through 'developing prior knowledge background and understanding.' Most of the student participants reported that by viewing and reviewing the content of the lecture and the associating materials at their own pace as many times as they wish prior to the class, they could get prepared for the lecture more thoroughly. This finding is consistent with Bloomfield's taxonomy that targets the first level of understanding and remembering (Krathwohl, 2002) and the FL literature that highlights the importance of preparedness before class via previous knowledge (Bergmann & Sams, 2012; Day & Foley, 2006; Hung, 2015; Sahin & Kurban, 2016). Having prior knowledge then is the driving force that enables students, particularly the less proficient students, to actively engage and participate in class. This finding is also in line with the theory of "Think-pair-share" by Lyman (1987), which indicates that learning passes through three stages. First, students need to think of a given question in order to be able to organize their thoughts and formulate ideas to be able to move to the second stage, which is sharing views with their pairs to share with them ideas and answers, which is the third step.

However, this finding raises an essential issue concerning the focus on designing and providing activities and tasks for classroom practice as it is emphasized by scholars (such as Nunan, 1994; Richards, 2007; Lee &Brown, 2014). The point of argument in this regard is that the focus on classroom dynamism and practice without prior knowledge may increase the burden on low achievable students and add to the challenges of a multilevel classroom. In other words, less proficient students can't engage in classroom practice if they don't have a background or foundation. In this regard, teachers need to seek other options to support student-centered learning instead of the sole focus on designing and providing activities and tasks.

How does developing knowledge background and understanding facilitate classroom engagement? The first answer to this question is that through 'building up self-confidence' or 'self-esteem'. Students believe that having background knowledge boosts their self-confidence and helps them, as one student said, "take the risk of participation in class and never feel shy when communicating with students of high language proficiency." This belief supports the theory of affective learning that take into consideration aspects of emotions, feelings, and attitude of the learner that play a positive or negative role in learning a foreign language (Brown, 2014). As Brown said, self-esteem is the heart of language learning, and that "no successful cognitive or effective activity can be carried out without some degree of self-esteem, self-confidence, knowledge of yourself, and self-efficacy" (144).

The second answer to the above question is that through 'reducing anxiety.' The term anxiety was raised by two students who claimed that they could not take part in class engagement due to the lack of knowledge and understanding. According to theories of second language acquisition, anxiety is considered as a big challenge to language achievement (Oxford, 1999; Gardner, 2010). Thus, the students in this study raised an important issue relating to the association of developing knowledge and constructing anxiety. From their perspectives, the higher level of knowledge leads to a low level of anxiety and vice versa. This implies that flipping the classroom can be employed as an important technique in reducing students' anxiety when engaging in classroom practice and applying their learned knowledge.

The third answer to the same question is through rising 'interest and motivation.' Almost all of the participants agreed that having prior content or background knowledge has an impact on their motivation and interest in learning. The result agrees with the literature on motivation theories (Dacy & Rayan, 2000; Dornyei, 2007), who valued the role of external motivation that comes through external factors. In this study, the FL technique is viewed as an external factor that facilitates the process of learning.

What Are The Best Methods And Techniques Of Developing A Holistic Contextualized Flipped Learning?

As for the second research question above, students were asked the question, "What do you suggest for developing a holistic flipped learning model that meets your needs and expectations? The students provided a variety of answers that can be categorized in terms of three key findings: structure, components, and procedures of delivery. Each of these categories is viewed as a key theme. Below is a presentation of each theme with a few illustrative excerpts picked up from the data.

Finding One: Flipped Classroom Structure

The six participants who valued the utilization of flipped classroom agreed that an effective holistic flipped classroom model is composed of two stages, pre-class and in-class. Their views are in line with the theory of flipped learning by Bergmann and Sams (2012) that categorizes FL in terms of these two stages. Phase I is concerned with delivering the content of the lecture and materials asynchronically, whereas Phase II is concerned with applying the learned content and knowledge in classroom practices synchronically. They all viewed stage I as an introductory or transitional stage that bridges them to the next stage. Furthermore, they all justified their answers based on the fact that flipping the classroom into two stages is a useful technique for a variety of reasons mentioned earlier in the first and second findings.

Finding Two: Flipped Classroom Components

The qualitative data revealed several themes relating to the components of each stage. In relation to stage I, the students stated that it should include (1) the objectives of the lesson or lecture, (2) the content of the topic, (3) materials, (4) online engagement, and (5) online assessment. With regard to the objectives of the lesson or lecture, three participants stated that they need to know about the learning objectives of the lecture in order to know what they are expecting to be able to do. One participant in this respect critically said, "We need to know what are the objectives of the lecture. Sometimes

we find out that we study things that we don't need, or we already studied them. Another student also critically said, "sometimes we are given worksheets that are not relating to the topic." With regard to the content of the lecture, all participants reported that delivering the content prior to class is very important. In this regard, one participant added a comment "If I know the content before I attend the class, I would be familiar with the topic, and this will help me ask and answer questions in class without shyness or embarrassment."

Finding Three: Procedures of Delivery

With respect to delivering materials online, almost all participants are satisfied with this idea. However, the result showed their interest in screencast audio lectures more than any type of material due to reasons such as improving understanding, engagement and motivation, attractiveness, and the ability to pause the video and take notes on their pace and time.

"screencasting lectures help me increase my understanding of the course content."

"If I watch screencast lectures, I will be more engaged in classroom activities."

"I think a screencast lecture is better than a traditional lecture…With a screencast lecture, I have the ability to pause the video to take notes at my own pace."

"Screencast lectures help saves class time. Instead of spending the class time on listening to the teacher, we spend it on practicing tasks and activities".

Discussion of the Second Category Findings

Among the most interesting findings is one of the online engagement added by the participants as a basic component to the first phase of the FL model. The participants in this study need to engage in online activities for the purpose of building a sense of community, along with applying what they have learned and improved their language skills. One student noted, "If we practice online, we will get the chance to know each other more than we practice in the class." Another student noted, "When I practice activities online with my peers, I feel more comfortable because I don't struggle with the language as I do in the class." Still, two participants raised a bit strange idea that unlike the class, online engagement provides them with the freedom of a partner choice. One participant supported this argument saying, "In the class, I don't choose my partner or the group I enjoy working with. Most of the time, the instructor puts me in a group or assign a partner whom I am interested in working with".

As for the question "What are the students' suggestions for developing a holistic, effective flipped learning model?", the qualitative data revealed a few suggestions that are almost compatible with those suggested by experts who are specialized in the theory of instructional design (Figure 5). Most of the participants suggested that developing a holistic flipped learning model requires taking into consideration three important aspects-structure, components, and engagement. However, there is one thing that is overemphasized in this study that is 'online engagement' in the first phase of the FL model for reasons that are mostly attributed to effective factors such as self-confidence, anxiety, freedom of choice, as well as building a sense of community. This finding implies that teachers need to take into account how to develop social networks among students if they are really looking for effective learning (Motteram & Sharma 2009). Building a social network serves as a constructive, effective technique that language teachers employ to develop a more solid and practical linguistic competence inside and outside the classroom context. Besides knowledge, the social network has the potential of providing communication and interactive learning environment, stimulating students with a variety of levels to take part in classroom discussions.

The finding of online engagement also implies that technology plays a crucial role in supporting students who are

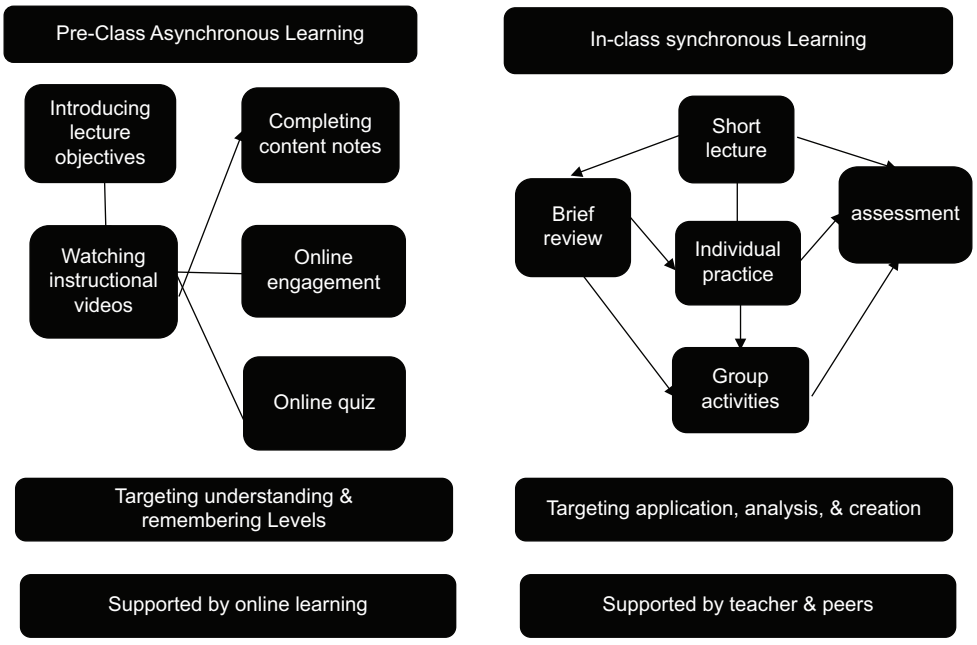

Figure 5. A flipped learning model based on theoretical & practical perspectives

struggling with language proficiency and oral communication. The participants selected for this study are less efficient in language competency, but they may be more proficient in the use of technology than students with high language proficiency. As Brown and Lee state that in language learning and teaching, technology has become "an integral rather than a supplementary" (2014, p. 237). This is due to the style of the young learners or "digital natives" (Prensky in Brown and Lee, 237) who consider technology as ubiquitous in their academic as well as social lives. Technology has a great potential to enhance the students' second language skills of communication and interaction synchronously and asynchronously (Jessica, et at., 2014). Technology is also important as it provides authentic materials and instructions that play an influential role in improving language learning (Richards, 2007).

Although there is a gap in the literature regarding how technology helps reduce anxiety for less proficient students, we can draw our conclusion on the argument that language learning is not restricted to the classroom setting. This implies that by means of technology high proficient students, as well as low proficient ones can still continue learning outside the classroom setting. Another justification is that students with low proficiency may struggle with the language, but don't struggle with technology. This implies that by means of technology, they may overcome language barriers and catch up with their highly proficient peers.

CONCLUSION

The primary goal of this study is to sketch a comprehensive framework or model that can be recommended to teachers and instructors in EFL/EAP classrooms. Besides, the study aims to understand the role of flipped learning method in supporting student-centered learning dimensions in EAP classroom, and explores its role in role in coping with the challenges of the multilevel classroom, such as lack of engagement, lack of motivation, and low self-confidence. Based on these aims, the study provides a model model of FL that draws on a mixture of theoretical and practical views regarding the implementation of FL as a modern digital technique to be utilized to confront the challenges of a multilevel EAP classroom and any contextual constraints. Overall, the analysis of data revealed that students' views go in line with the theoretical perspectives in validating FL. Students believe that flipping the classroom through delivering the lecture online along with the associating materials contribute to developing their background knowledge and understanding. This, in turn, serves as the driving force towards helping students, particularly the less linguistic proficient ones, to overcome issues of lack of engagement, motivation, and academic achievement. Results also revealed students' awareness of online engagement and interaction to be added as an extension component to the pre-class phase in addition to the in-class engagement. Furthermore, the data explored the role of technology in empowering low English proficiency students through the potential of reviewing and practicing prior to class.

Based on data analysis and discussion of findings, a number of suggestions and implications are offered to EAP teachers. First, teachers who are concerned about developing a deeper understanding and reducing the level of anxiety and frustration for students, particularly those with a lower level of English proficiency, are recommended to consider flipping the classroom. Second, teachers need to be aware of expanding engagement among students through both pre-class as well as in-class time. Teachers also need to be mindful of providing system management tools for online engagement such as social media, google docs, board discussion, and the like. Third, it is recommended that teachers need to update their technology and digital skills that are essential for effectively implementing the FL. This implies that teachers need orientation in designing online materials

Lastly, this study is a small scale study as it has a relatively small sample size that may account for the insignificance of data analysis and presenting meaningful results. Therefore, more studies on FL in EAP contexts are needed to examine a variety of issues relating to the mechanism of implementing FL in English academic settings.

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