THE USEFULNESS OF A FLIPPED CLASSROOM METHOD IN TEACHING BUSINESS ENGLISH COURSES ONLINE

Katalin KISS[1]

ABSTRACT

With an outbreak of the global pandemic and transition to distance education academic staff have frequently experienced the passive role of students in their courses which were delivered through traditional teacher-focused educational methods. In multiple cases it has been observed that students participated in the classes without active engagement. In response to the challenges of distance learning academic staff had to reconsider their teaching methods and introduce more innovative, effective tools appropriate for online education to ensure proper student involvement and higher motivation. One of the methodologies proved successful in teaching Business English within the plethora of other university courses as well has been the flipped classroom learning method which is considered as one of the most exciting advancements in the modern teaching. The flipped classroom is essentially a model where lecture and homework elements are reversed. While the importance of the method lies in the idea that students have the possibility to study flexibly at their own pace, it may also enable teachers to efficiently enhance the whole education process and solve the problem of student passivity. This presentation is aimed to introduce the flipped classroom instructional model in details and to highlight how it can help Business English teachers make better use of classroom time spent online and create a maximum teacher-student interaction.

KEYWORDS

Distance learning**,** flipped classroom, motivation, teacher-student interaction, student engagement, personalized content

1. INTRODUCTION

Enhancing students' learning experiences and meeting their needs and expectations have always been the primary concerns of higher education institutions but have received even a greater emphasis over the last one and a half years when educational establishments in Hungary and all over the world were forced to shift to distance learning due to the global pandemic and had to face challenges of online education. Switching from traditional classroom and face to face learning to computer-based education, a virtual classroom made the learning experience entirely different for students. It was frequently observed by academic staff that students' resistance to change did not allow them to adapt completely to the online learning environment, and it took time for them to get accustomed to the methods of computer-based education. Passive listening and notes taking often occurring in a traditional classroom became no longer an option leading to an overall passivity displayed by many students during the classes delivered online. University instructors had to realize that teaching as telling is not viable and were forced to create new learning circumstances with involvement of creative and innovative methods trying to change the "traditional" mindset of students.

Before the global pandemic, classes delivered in the traditional form in the universities of Hungary consisted mainly of lectures and seminars being given to larger groups of students,

[1] Dr. Kiss Katalin, PhD, senior lecturer, Budapest Business School, College of International Management and Business, Department of International Business English kiss.katalin@uni-bge.hu

accompanied by tutorials and workshops, with some independent study. But with transition to online education university instructors had to reconsider these conventional teaching methods and introduce more effective tools appropriate for online education to ensure proper student involvement, higher motivation and to solve the problem of students' passive participation in classes. The best practices of teaching online by higher education establishments around the world have shown that the flipped classroom learning method has become used widely as one of the most effective models in the modern teaching especially during the prolonged period of pandemic. The flipped classroom is essentially an instructional model where lecture and homework elements are reversed. While the importance of the method lies in the idea that students have the possibility to study flexibly at their own pace, it may also enable teachers to efficiently enhance the whole education process and solve the problem of student passivity. This teaching technique typically uses some form of online instruction and is quite common in higher education academic settings.

The idea of teaching and learning online has not been unknown before the pandemic. Among the various models a blended learning active learning mode (also known as hybrid learning) has been used by multiple colleges and universities of the world as an alternative or supplement to traditional learning. It is based on the idea that the traditional classroom teaching is combined with online learning and independent study (Horn et al. [3]); or, as referred to by Bailey, Schneider and Ark [1], blended learning is an instruction method which moves part of the learning into an online environment and gives students more control over the pace, path, time, and place of learning. In a nutshell, it is a framework that has been designed to support learning using digital technologies in online, open and blended settings.

Another method which has been frequently integrated into a blended learning process but can be used independently in classrooms is a student- or peer-led learning approach also mentioned in the literature as a useful learning model according to which students themselves facilitate their learning, discuss materials, and solve problems with their peers in group activities (the method is also known as collaborative learning). This method is largely based on the idea of reversing the traditional information transfer model since collecting information and preparing from theory needs to be done before the class (Mazur [6]).

Both blended learning with an integrated peer -led approach and flipped classroom method are effective strategies that are worth considering for supporting active learning opportunities within and beyond the physical or live online classroom.

The aim of the present study is to show how the flipped classroom method can be used efficiently in teaching Business English courses in a fully online or blended learning settings, and why it may be seen as a valuable time spent with the teacher, synchronously in a live online session using computer-based technologies.

The next section will deal with the background to the flipped classroom method.

2. OVERVIEW OF THE THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

There is a considerable literature on the methodology of the flipped classroom, and the method itself is referred to by various names, for instance, the inverted classroom, blended teaching, autonomous learning and active learning. The concept, therefore, cannot be fully confined to one exhaustive definition – it is an educational framework which has developed parallel to recent advancements of information technology. The history of the flipped classroom method is brief in comparison to more traditional teaching methods.

The flipped classroom has its roots in the information technology revolution, with the emergence of social media platforms such as YouTube, Skype, Facebook and Instagram as well as

with the arrival of smartphone technologies and widespread access to broadband internet. It is, therefore, possible to claim that information technology was the necessary premise for the rise of the flipped classroom.

The flipped classroom concept was first used and practiced by Jonathan Bergmann and Aaron Sams in 2012. These two chemistry educators working at University of Northern Colorado realized that students need teachers' help more while they are doing their homework not while they are taught, and they started recording and posting lectures online to help students to catch up on lessons they missed. Bergmann and Sams defined flipped learning as an instructional model in which direct instruction is delivered through videos. The amount of whole-class instruction is minimised, and time and space are given to other student activities, such as problem-solving, discussion, project work, etc. Later, Bergman and Sams founded the *Flipped Learning Network* putting the students at the centre of the classroom and implemented instructional strategies with the aim of creating deep and lasting knowledge (Bergman and Sams [2]).

The flipped classroom theory got a boost with the emergence of free lecture sites such as Khan Academy founded by Salman Khan. In 2004 Salman Khan being the student of the MIT created video tutorials in mathematics which he uploaded on YouTube for his nephew. These videos became so popular among math students that they lead to the birth of Khan Academy in 2008.

Today Khan offers a library of over 3,000 videos that cover subjects ranging from math and finance to history and art. With videos which are 10 minutes long on average and specifically designed for learning via computer, Khan Academy provides a rich and engaging learning experience. Many instructors benefited and benefit day by day from the opportunity of using these videos while practicing the flipped model in their classes. The course videos are watched by students at home and other activities such as homework activities are done in classroom settings ensuring time for interactive tasks in the classroom.

As can be seen from this brief theoretical overview, the flipped classroom concept dates back only a few years ago but it has received a widespread support and recognition due to being successfully applied to various educational disciplines with the aim of increasing interaction and personalized contact time between students and teachers in the classroom setting. Thanks to flipped learning teachers can provide quality and rich learning experiences for students and flipping their class enables them to do so.

3. THE FLIPPED CLASSROOM AS AN INSTRUCTIONAL METHOD

The traditional classroom is defined as the way of instruction in which the teacher is discussing the lesson material with the students in class and the students are going over what they learned and doing homework related to the lesson afterwards. On the other hand, the flipped classroom, as the name suggests, reverses or flips classroom activities and homework assignments. In this case, the instruction is delivered online, students are asked to study the lessons on their own as they watch their teacher explain the material in a pre-recorded video lecture or a video related to the assigned topic or another medium. In the class the students will do the assignments and discuss them with the teacher afterwards. Defined simplistically it is "schoolwork done at home and homework at school" (retrieved from https://flippedlearning.org/definition-of-flipped-learning/). This way, class time may be spent efficiently with doing exercises, projects, discussions, debates, Q&As or other interactive activities that well illustrate the concept. Flipped classrooms can mean more time for students to

interact directly with the teacher. And it can also mean that classroom time is more active and engaging for students.

The concept of the flipped classroom is often associated with flipped learning leading to thinking that the two concepts are interchangeable. However, this is a misconception. These terms are not the same. Flipping a class can, but does not necessarily, lead to flipped learning. Flipped classroom refers to the manner of teaching a class while flipped learning aims to move away from the group learning setup usually found in the classroom (traditional or flipped), towards an individual-focused learning setup, which provides for a more dynamic and interactive learning environment (Yarbro et al. [9]). Many teachers may already flip their classes by having students read texts, learn materials and watch supplemental videos outside of class, but to engage in flipped learning, they must incorporate four pillars into their practice: (F.L.I.P).: Flexible Environment, Learning Culture, Intentional Content and Professional Educator (Lynch [4]).

Let us briefly review them one by one. The first pillar assumes that teachers must create a flexible environment in which students can choose when, where and how they learn. Within the framework of the second pillar, while shifting from a teacher-centered to a learner-centered approach, teachers set up a different learning culture where in-class time is dedicated to exploring topics in more depth, students become actively involved in the learning process, evaluate their own knowledge via receiving an immediate feedback from the teacher. The third is the so-called intentional content meaning that teachers decide what needs to be taught in class and what materials students should master on their own. This strategy can be useful to enhance a learner-centered environment to maximize classroom time to be spent with active learning. The fourth pillar is concerned with the reversed role of a teacher in the new learning environment, who serves as a professional educator and whose task is to continually observe, facilitate and encourage the learning process, provide feedback relevant in the moment and assess the work of the students. This reversed role of the teacher gains importance in the whole flipped learning environment as the teacher is not seen any longer as "the sole deliverer of knowledge, owner of power and the primary decision maker" (Manor, Bloch-Schulman, Flannery & Felten [5]). Learner-centered teachers and instructors share the decision-making power with students and involve students in making important decisions regarding the components of the learning process, i.e., the content of the course, the ways in which the course topics are learned, the ways in which students' learning is evaluated, etc. (Weimer [8]).

As is seen from the above, flipping the classroom can be a huge undertaking, which should be approached carefully and consciously. Yet, taking into consideration all the advantages of the method it can be claimed that such an innovative approach to learning opens new horizons in education and its widespread application worldwide points to the fact that more and more students and teachers are accepting flipped classroom as an alternative to traditional educational models.

4. A FLIPPED CLASSROOM SEQUENCE

A flipped classroom model has two key components: the video tutorials that students watch outside of class and the learning activities they do during the class. To make these components work, video tutorials must be introduced to the students and the students are assessed based on their understanding of the content resource (cited in the study carried out by the University of Waterloo, Canada, n.d., source available online). The study carried out by the University of Waterloo identified four steps in the sequence of a flipped classroom which are the following:

1. The instructor introduces the video tutorial related to the course topic. Video tutorials can be developed by the teacher or simply located. If the teacher decides to use the already available videos, the Khan Academy tutorials, TED Talks or YouTube videos all could be very useful for teaching a variety of courses and Business English as well. Prior instructions need to be provided for the students how to work effectively with the tutorials, e.g., simply watch them, take notes, prepare questions, etc. or else. It is important to draw students' attention that they would be able to participate in the class only if they are prepared in the topic.

2. In the second stage the instructor assesses the students' understanding of the video tutorial working with them in small groups. The instructor checks how well the students have understood the content in the video tutorial. At this stage, the instructor will provide explanation for the key concepts from the video, answer students' questions and involve them in the discussion to assess how to adjust the in-class learning activities for the later stage.

3. At the third stage students are engaged in in-class learning activities that foster deeper understanding of the topic, ensure collaboration and interactions between the students and the instructor. These activities may include a multiple-choice quiz, discussions, debates, Q&As, simulations, role plays, etc. In a virtual classroom the instructor's role is to guide the students as they encounter and solve problems.

4. The last stage is the productive phase in the learning process during which the students hold presentations on the topic, take part in debates or leverage the relevant content in some other creative way. The class closes with the mutual assessment of the presented materials and checking if the solid understanding of the topic is achieved.

As the stages above demonstrate, replacing the traditional teaching strategy, delivering a lecture on the online platform with more effective video tutorials that can be watched outside of class, can free up class time for the students and engage them in more productive and effective learning activities. Though flipping a classroom may require a particular amount of time to be invested by the teacher, this investment will be repaid later, as the teacher will be able to re-use video tutorials in their subsequent courses and, what is more important, it will lead to improved learning outcomes for students.

5. A FLIPPED CLASSROOM APPROACH IN PRACTICE. TEACHING A BUSINESS ENGLISH COURSE

To construct a flipped classroom model for teaching their subjects, teachers have to think over the structure of the class. The flipped classroom combines online and offline stages. Passive learning process combined with some active learning elements occurs on the online platform. Students can learn about the teaching schedule and content through the online and offline integrated teaching plan released by the teacher.

Before planning a flipped class, a teacher must consider the following points:

1. the aim of the class;

2. competencies the students will acquire in the end of the class;
3. learning achievements that will lead students to higher-level knowledge;
4. ways of assessing students' knowledge;
5. the need to break the course content into smaller chunks;
6. the prior knowledge of students and the degree of difficulty of the tasks to be delivered, e.g.,
   to check if student's background knowledge on the topic and the vocabulary are sufficient;
7. the availability of online resources and the possibility to integrate them in the learning process;
8. clear learning requirements and goals to be achieved;
9. measurable results of the learning process;
10. possibility to synthesise results achieved in online and offline stages;

5.1 Suggested Steps for Applying a Flipped Classroom Model in Teaching a Business English Course

The experiment lesson was held involving a group of 22 undergraduate students enrolled in the Business English course at Budapest Business School (FIMB). The students were informed by the teacher prior to the class that they would be studying the topic "Company Structure" provided as part of the course curriculum in a flipped classroom context. All the participants of the course voluntarily agreed to experience learning in a new learning environment. Below, there are key steps of flipped model as it was applied in teaching a Business English class.

Pre-class steps: a self-study online stage. Following the already described scenario of a flipped classroom model, i.e., 'which is traditionally done in class is now done at home, and that which is traditionally done as homework is now completed in class' (Bergman and Sams, [2]), in the first step, a teacher decides which activities will be flipped to efficiently implement the model. The following chart summarizes which activities can be flipped while teaching any language class including Business English courses as well.

Home	**Class**
• Podcasts • Videos • **Screen casts** • Reading • Quizzes to check learning • Other activities	• Tasks • Problem solving • Group based • Pair work • Presentations • Class discussion

Fig. 1 Design of teaching model based on flipped classroom
Source: https://www.teachertrainingvideos.com/

Before class, students must get familiar with the resources and instructional materials available on the online platform. The teacher uploads a worksheet created specifically for the topic 'Company Structure' and instructs the students which platform to use to access the online materials[2]. Students have to watch a video tutorial of approx. five minutes length the link of which is also shared with them on the worksheet along with the vocabulary tasks and listening comprehension questions prepared by the teacher based on the video. After watching the vid-

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[2] All educational content at BBS can be uploaded to two virtual learning platforms – CooSpace and Moodle.

eo, students can be asked to complete the pre-class learning plan through online independent learning, e.g., they check their understanding of the key terms based on a match-up task, (e.g., matching the terms with the definitions) and comprehension questions that appear as supplementary tasks on a worksheet. There is also an additional reading comprehension task related the topic to be done at this stage which is delivered from the coursebook compulsory to be used during the course. The reading task is meant to deepen the knowledge of the topic, and to enhance better understanding of the key concepts inferring their explanation from the context. The advantage of video tutorials compared to traditional lecture or seminar is that they provide accessibility to students who are not able to be present in classroom; students can watch video tutorials on their own computers or mobile devices at the time convenient for them to catch up on missed lessons from any location.

In-class steps: offline stage with group activities and role-plays. In-class steps are part of an offline teaching and learning stage which is reserved for interactions between the teacher and the students.[3] Class time is spent on activities related to the topic. Group activities focus more intensely on checking the understanding of the video lecture and tasks performed by the students; group-based learning includes small group discussion, problem solving (worksheet), role-play, case study and peer review on reading tasks. Thus, the active learning experience occurs in the classroom. The advantages of this stage are to promote the development of critical thinking, problem-solving skills and interpersonal skills.

Post-class steps: follow-up and evaluation. The post-class stage is aimed to provide students with opportunities to apply what they learned. Additional tasks that may be assigned include the following: students are asked to prepare presentation on the topic to be delivered in the next offline class. Students can be recommended to go deep into a company they are familiar with or research on and present on the company's structure, products and services, employees, customers/clients, competitors, financial information, etc. This could be one of the useful ways to consolidate their knowledge of the topic, improve their thinking ability and creativity. Besides, such a presentation task can be used to provide extra support as well as to challenge learners. Other follow-up activities include in-class debate or an assigned writing task (essay). Through the whole flipped class, the teacher serves as a facilitator who does not give direct instructions, but sets up the content, maps out homework, provides individualized instruction to students who have questions and need more support, explains problems, leads and guides teaching activities, observes the whole learning process and provides feedback. Synthesis of an online and offline stages consists of an evaluation process which focuses on the combination of teacher evaluation and group mutual evaluation to see to what extent the students achieved the goals set up at the beginning of the flipped class.

Following the lesson, students participating in a flipped classroom experiment were asked to express their general opinion about the new learning environment. Most students reported positively saying that self-pace learning and various interactive activities motivated them; whereas a few of them preferred more the conventional learning style, they were not ready to study in a new education setting, could not manage their time properly and complained on the increased time spent on computer screens. An experiment held in teaching a Business English flipped class at Budapest Business School suggests that blending technology and traditional methods can be an alternative for future Business English courses as it may provide an invaluable learning experience for students. Nevertheless, it must be taken into account that introduction of any new learning method by no means should happen overnight; it is necessary to test it before putting to use. Students should be provided with clear instructions how to

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[3] The offline stage in the last one and the half years was moved online and occurred on digital platforms Zoom and Microsoft Teams at BBS.

learn in a technology-based environment and how to manage their time properly spent with assigned tasks. Some of them must learn how to use technology in order feel comfortable in the new setting.

6. THE ADVANTAGES OF FLIPPED CLASSROOM APPROACH

Based on the above, it is possible to claim that the flipped classrooms can radically change educational methods and may have many advantages for teachers and students. But just like any education strategy and model, the flipped classroom comes with certain advantages and disadvantages. Let us first deal with some of the main advantages of the model highlighted by the study carried out by the University of Waterloo. These advantages are relevant for teaching Business English classes as well:

1. In a lecture, the attention of most students is likely to decrease after ten or fifteen minutes, thus flipping the class can provide a solution for student passivity, i.e., it can help keep students focused on learning throughout the whole class.
2. Students can control the time, pace and place of learning with the online materials. The ability to rewind and listen to the video lecture or explanation again can help students make more meaningful notes and overcome language fluency difficulties; students will take responsibility for their own learning and get support with the content from teachers in class.
3. Time spent in classroom is used more effectively in terms of both students and teachers, it gives rise to student-teacher and student-student collaboration and interaction.
4. The flipped classroom can effectively increase the students' performance, learning motivation, improves personalized learning, understanding capacity.
4. Teachers can get a clear idea of where students are having difficulties with the course materials or questions about the concepts they learned when they come to class already prepared. Teachers can then adjust what will be done in class depending on students' feedback. This idea is known as "just-in-time teaching".
5. Although the initial investment of time is necessary to create online materials and search appropriate video content, the materials can be reused by the teacher from year to year.
6. A flipped classroom method encourages students to think and study inside and outside the classroom.

7. THE DISADVANTAGES OF FLIPPED CLASSROOM MODEL

There are certain disadvantages of flipped classrooms as well since there always will be teachers and students who will resist changes. Besides, many argue that flipped board divides students digitally since the technology required are not accessible to many students and teachers. The students who are used to traditional model may face some problems in adapting to the new model and learning independently. For teachers to switch to the new teaching method may be difficult as well as many of them must learn how to handle technology properly. Let us see some of the further challenges of the method:

1. Teachers will have an increased workload; time and effort are required to rethink and prepare both pre-class and in-class activities.
2. If students come to class unprepared, it is difficult (or almost impossible) for a teacher to get them involved in class assignments.

3. The previous point leads us to student motivation. If the students are not enough motivated to study on their own, this method of teaching may allow less motivated students to get less done.
4. Without computer and internet access the application of flipped classrooms becomes complicated.
5. Finally, many teachers fear that a flipped classroom model may threaten the traditional classroom method.

The above disadvantages may be inhibiting for many students, therefore, before implementing the model, the teacher must always consider benefits and disadvantages of any of their teaching methods and a decision on which to apply in the classroom should also depend on socio-economic differences and capabilities of their students.

8. CONCLUSION

The flipped classroom model is a methodological alternative that is spreading around the world very fast especially with the transition of many higher education establishments to distance learning experienced during the last one and a half years of pandemic. As was shown in the study, though there could be certain difficulties in implementation of this instructional method, at least at the beginning, the flipped classroom seems to be a very efficient teaching method that may promote students' autonomy in learning, and which may allow teachers to serve as facilitators for students during the whole learning process and provide an effective help to move forward, if students have reached a dead end. This kind of interaction is less possible when students complete work in a traditional classroom setting. In the new age of digitalisation, when almost all the students use internet to follow social media sites, smart phones or tablets, they can be attracted by learning in a new environment supported by multimedia content in addition to valuable guidance of the teacher. Aimed to carry teaching outside the class, flipped classroom approach can offer a new possibility to increase students' willingness to learn how to become active participants in their learning process; it may give more time for teacher-student interactions and engaging activities that can be completed inside the classroom.

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