Focus on

THE FLIPPED CLASSROOM
FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE
TEACHING

1. What is it?

The flipped classroom concept
Flipped learning is a form of blended instruction that mixes ‘synchronous’ learning with ‘asynchronous’ independent study. Synchronous learning usually takes place in real time in a physical classroom, though it can also take place in a virtual classroom online. Learners interact with a teacher and classmates and receive instant feedback. Asynchronous learning is more independent. Content is usually accessed through some form of digital platform. Students can choose when they work, so whilst they can ask questions and share ideas with teachers and classmates, feedback may be delayed.

Independent study and group study
What makes flipped learning distinct from other forms of blended learning is the relationship between the independent study that students do alone and the work they do together. In a flipped learning model, independent study is used to input core ideas, concepts, or language prior to group study time. In group study time, students focus on practical tasks that enable them to develop a deeper understanding of their new knowledge and extend their skills. The traditional model of a classroom – where students receive input, then complete practice tasks for homework – is therefore ‘flipped’.

Video, text, and audio input
Video is commonly used as an input medium for self-study as it is accessible and allows students to stop and re-watch content as needed. Text and audio can also be used to develop content knowledge and ensure students are fully prepared for the synchronous class.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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www.oup.com/elt/expert
2. **What does it mean for the ELT classroom?**

**Changing the roles of teachers and students**
One of the key benefits of flipped learning is that it gives students more responsibility for their own learning. Outside the classroom, students are able to work at their own pace, whilst lessons become more student-centred. More importantly, it allows the teacher to dedicate more classroom time to practical, engaging, and interactive activities and projects.

**Increased language use**
Flipped learning means that appropriate amounts of time are given to introducing, clarifying, and practising new language. Language input is taught or revised during the pre-class learning stage, allowing more time for the students to practise interacting with the language in the classroom and to actively develop all of their language skills. Teachers are able to plan more effective lessons which meet the needs of their learners by focusing on additional language input, language revision, and language practice as required.

**Personalization and differentiation**
With more time spent producing language in class through speaking, writing, and project work, teachers have more opportunities to observe their students using the language and identify their strengths and weaknesses. This allows them to adapt the pace and content of their input accordingly, ensuring lessons are personalized and tasks are differentiated for each individual student.

**Autonomy and self-esteem**
In taking more responsibility for their own learning, students develop more effective independent study skills as they look for solutions and solve problems. This independence can lead to improved self-esteem and, in turn, higher levels of engagement.

3. **What are the challenges?**

**Motivation and self-regulation**
Students may need support adjusting to flipped learning since it requires high levels of motivation and self-regulation. They might also need time management tips to help them allocate enough time to work through the pre-class materials. However, since the teacher can never assume that all students will arrive for lessons fully ready for the language practice stage, a certain amount of reviewing and revision should be built into every lesson, allowing for further clarification and peer teaching. In time, students should see the benefits of being prepared for lessons.

**Mixed-ability students**
Some students may struggle to understand the input for the lesson without teacher or peer support. The teacher needs to be especially careful to ensure the materials they give are scaffolded well enough that all students gain the knowledge they need to complete the active tasks in the classroom.

**Teacher role**
Flipped learning requires teachers to change how they approach face-to-face classes. They need to provide practice activities for students that get them producing language in pairs or small groups, which can be challenging with large classes. Flipped learning requires teachers to take on more of an observational, supportive role and respond to individual students’ needs, so further training and support may be needed as they experiment with this new approach.

**Sourcing and designing materials**
There are currently relatively few professionally produced materials available which support the learning of English using a flipped model. Depending on what is available, teachers might need to acquire the skills and knowledge to source or produce high-quality, engaging materials for themselves. This can entail developing video creation and editing skills, redesigning existing materials, or spending time online to find ready-made materials that are suitable for their students. Many flipped learning courses are based on videos of lectures that have been put online, but these aren’t always the best examples of the model in practice. Rather than starting from scratch, teachers can look for videos that are appropriate for their learners and supplement them with engaging videos of their own as they build up a bank of resources over time.

**Monitoring student engagement**
Teachers need to be able to monitor students during the asynchronous preparation stage to gauge whether they can cope with the practice-orientated tasks in the classroom. To do this, teachers may need to allow extra time for accessing a learning management system (LMS) so they can stay up to date with student progress.

**Parental resistance**
Parents/carers may resist this change in approach and feel that teachers aren’t ‘doing their job’, especially if the change involves them taking on a more active role to ensure that their children are doing the preparation tasks. Clear messaging from schools about the approach and its benefits is therefore essential.
4. How can this be implemented?

Realistic expectations
Whilst careful planning will go some way to ensuring success, be aware that establishing a successful flipped classroom may take time. For the first few classes, you may have students turning up unprepared. If you respond by reverting back to the way you taught previously, then it’s unlikely that your classroom will flip. Keep persevering with the classes you planned until students adjust to the new way of learning and their new responsibilities. It takes time to create a new habit.

Getting support
Creating the flipped content for an entire course or even a strand (e.g., your grammar lessons only) is a huge undertaking and too much to do alone. It’s essential to get support from other teachers or from your school in order to spread out and share the work.

Bite-sized learning
When preparing the asynchronous input, think about it in terms of bite-sized chunks of learning. The optimum length for a video clip is around two and a half minutes. If you can’t cover what the students need to know in that time, then break down the input into shorter videos. Students are more likely to watch two short videos than one long video.

Design engaging tasks
Passively watching or reading content doesn’t provide an engaging learning experience, and it’s easy for students to tune out. So, once you have created your content – whether it’s text, audio, or video – be sure to design tasks to engage the students and guide them towards the learning outcomes. These could be comprehension-checking tasks or note-taking tasks, or you could establish forums to enable peer interaction around the content. Asking students to create something, like a role-play or short piece of writing, can be a great way for students to show what they have understood.

Tools and visuals
If you decide to create video content, make use of visuals to help convey meaning. It’s easy to stand in front of the camera and talk, but that doesn’t make for interesting or engaging viewing. It’s far more effective to combine visuals with your words, as you would with your whiteboard in the classroom. An easy way to do this is to use presentation software to build the visuals and then record a voiceover. Most standard presentation applications offer this functionality.

Your platform
You can get students to download the materials you produce from a virtual hard drive, or you could put them online. There are lots of useful free solutions, but they won’t provide much data about who watches the videos and how much of them they watch, so you may still be going into class without knowing who has prepared. Building your videos into an LMS will help you to monitor and understand how each student is using the content. You can also use it to build interactive materials that guide students’ understanding of the content and which give them feedback on what they are learning.

Your classroom
If your classroom has desks in rows, think about how you can rearrange the furniture so that the room is more conducive to group work. For instance, put tables into blocks to allow students to work in small groups. Make sure that you leave enough space to move between the tables to monitor the work students are doing and to give support when they need it.

Think about how and when you intervene in activities and provide correction and support. Be a good listener, make notes of any problems or new language your students need to do the activities more effectively, and set aside time to deal with these issues. If the problems are common to many students, then make that the subject of your next lesson.

Get parents/carers on board
Keep parents/carers informed about what you are doing and make them aware of the benefits it will have for their children. It’s a good idea to share the materials you are using with them and, if possible, provide guidance so they can support their children and know how to deal with any problems they may encounter.

5. Over to you
Flipping your classroom can be challenging, but the shift in responsibility can have a truly transformative impact on the students. In time, you’ll see the benefits of moving away from the front of the classroom, developing your understanding of your students’ individual strengths and weaknesses, and understanding how best to deal with them.
6. Further reading

The Flipped Learning Review
https://flr.flglobal.org

Flipped Learning Network
https://flippedlearning.org

Edutopia – Flipped Classroom
https://www.edutopia.org/topic/flipped-classroom

EdTech in ELT: Flipping the Classroom: Essential Steps for Success

Is Flipped Learning Really Worth the Trouble? Or, Flipped Learning and Learning Gains in the ESL/EFL Context

Is the Flipped Classroom Relevant to ELT?
https://www.eflmagazine.com/flipped-classroom-relevant-elt

Flipping my Writing Lessons
https://flippedlearning.org/academic_subject/english/flipping-my-writing-lessons

Social media groups for teachers interested in the flipped classroom
Flipped Classroom Teacher Support
https://www.facebook.com/groups/186544648623556
The Flipped Learning Network
https://www.facebook.com/groups/485599361454040

Hashtags to search or follow
#flipclass
#flipclasschat
#flippedlearning

Talking points

🔍 How could you develop the skills you need in order to create the flipped learning content?
🔍 How do you think your students would respond to this approach?
🔍 What challenges do you think you would face in implementing flipped learning with your students, and how could you deal with them?
🔍 What support would you need from your school?
🔍 How could you get other teachers involved?
🔍 How could you measure the impact of flipped learning on your students?

Acknowledgements
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