Flipped Learning: Does It Work?
by Evelyn Doman

The flipped classroom has become a buzzword in educational circles in the 21st century. As an inverse way of teaching and learning, the flipped classroom addresses the 4 Cs of learning—critical thinking, communication, cooperation, and creativity—as students work with technology to preview material at home prior to coming to class. Then, in class, they engage in higher order thinking skills, such as synthesizing, analyzing, and evaluating material through hands-on projects, group work, problem-solving, discussions, debates, or any multitude of student-centered activities (Doman & Webb, 2017; Kostka & Brinks Lockwood, 2014).

Five years ago, an online search for information about the flipped classroom yielded only "how to" guides and descriptions of how students seemed to respond to the new pedagogical method simply from teachers' observations. Few, if any, empirical studies on the effects of the flipped approach existed, especially in the field of second language learning. However, slowly but surely, the number of experimental studies about the flipped classroom is beginning to grow, but this field is still sparse when it comes to the language classroom. There is a drastic need to fill the gap in the research.

Currently, there are three assumptions about flipped learning that tend to dominate the research arena within first or second language acquisition:

1. Students enjoy flipped learning more than traditional learning (Doman & Webb, 2017; Kostka & Brinks Lockwood, 2014).
2. Students perform better in flipped classrooms versus traditional classrooms (Kang, 2015; Obari & Lambacher, 2015).
3. Students become more autonomous when exposed to flipped learning (Han, 2015).

For 4 years, former colleagues and I have tested each of these assumptions through empirical studies of our own as well as through investigations of similar studies by other researchers. Our results do suggest that all three assumptions may be true, although there is a clear need for additional, more longitudinal studies on much larger scales. For teachers wishing to implement a flipped model, it is important to ensure the assumptions remain true. This article provides some simple suggestions for doing so.

Assumption 1: Students Enjoy Flipped Learning More

There have been numerous investigations into students' satisfaction with the flipped approach to learning. Kostka and Brinks Lockwood (2015) reported that students in the 2014–15 academic year shared positive comments about the flipped method, saying it was a productive way of learning. These sentiments were echoed by Doman and Webb (2017) in their studies of Macau students' exposure to the flipped classroom in which students reported that the flipped classroom allowed them more time in class to fully evaluate and synthesize the information that was necessary for the class assessments and that flipped classrooms were in fact more enjoyable because they allowed for more interaction with the teacher as well as among classmates.

How to Ensure This Assumption Remains True

If we want our students to enjoy the flipped classroom experience, there are several points to keep in mind.

Encourage collaboration and communication: First, teachers should encourage a collaborative, student-centered classroom. By holding classroom discussions and debates, assigning group projects, having students complete tasks with partners, and getting students out of their seats to engage in kinesthetic activities, students will enjoy the flipped classroom more than if they are busy doing worksheets or paper-based quizzes alone. Have students communicate with each other to get information they need to complete assignments.

Choose videos wisely: Keep the video lectures short (under 10 minutes each) so that students do not feel overwhelmed. Videos over 10 minutes are likely to lose students' attention and interest. Also, not connecting the classroom activities and exercises with the videos assigned for homework is another sure way for students to lose interest in the flipped classroom. The connection between the work in class and out of class needs to be apparent.

Use smart assessments: If assessments are composed only of one or two high-stakes examinations, students are likely not to enjoy the class. Instead, use several formative assessments to evaluate student performance as well as to make informed decisions about teaching.

Assumption 2: Students Perform Better in Flipped Classrooms

Supporters of the flipped approach tend to refer to literature that shows that this method does in fact lead to increases in student achievement. In a case study with students at a university in Japan, Obari and Lambacher (2015) found that students in a flipped classroom performed better on the Test for English for International Communication (TOEIC) exam than students in the control class (484 vs. 474 points) and that they improved 24% on an oral proficiency interview. Kang (2015) also found that students showed significant changes in vocabulary and grammar knowledge after being exposed to flipped lessons.

How to Ensure This Assumption Remains True

Ensure students do their homework: Make sure that students do the homework (i.e., watch videos at home before coming to class) so that they are better prepared for class. Give students short, low-stakes or no-stakes quizzes at the beginning of class to quickly determine who did the homework and who did not. By having the in-class activities reflect the concepts that were taught at home through the videos or readings, students will soon realize how important it is to do the homework so they don't not fall behind in class.

Review, review, review: Frequently review all new concepts for students to achieve mastery. Encourage students to go back to previously viewed videos and classroom materials. Make sure that each new concept taps into students' prior knowledge and is relevant to their lives. For

example, if you notice that many students are interested in sports, create warm-up activities, quizzes, and games and activities around the theme of sports at least several times throughout the semester. Avoid themes that have no connection at all to students' lives; students are likely to forget what they have learned if there is no relevance to them.

Focus on higher order thinking: For the in-class activities, focus on the higher order thinking skills of Bloom's Taxonomy. Instead of having students regurgitate the knowledge they gained in the videos, have them analyze, synthesize, and evaluate the knowledge or even create something with what they learned. Activities such producing a group video, doing a role-play, holding a mock trial, or creating a newspaper article will engage students with the new concepts and allow them to practice and improve their language skills at the same time. In addition to helping students perform better in class, these types of activities will help students to remember the materials longer.

Assumption 3: Students Become More Autonomous When Exposed to Flipped Learning

Because students bear the responsibility of attaining new knowledge at home through the assigned videos, screencasts, or readings instead of relying on the teacher to tell them everything they should know during class time, the flipped approach requires students to become more autonomous. Han (2015) found in her investigation of advanced ESL students on the East Coast of the United States that students voluntarily went above the demands of the class assignments by submitting more Google Voice recordings than were required and searched for sources and tools on their own for a final class project. Han's findings led to the assumption that students had become more autonomous in their learning and were thus more likely to continue to study English even after completing the course, since they had taken more responsibility for their own learning.

How to Ensure This Assumption Remains True

Remind students of the flipped classroom benefits: The nature of the flipped classroom allows students more control over their own learning. Through the video lectures that are assigned as homework, students can learn at their own pace. Remind students that they can watch the videos as often as they like, rewinding or pausing whenever necessary. Let them know they can write down questions about content on which they need clarification later.

Promote active learning: Teachers can promote autonomy in the flipped classroom by making students participants in their own learning processes through active learning. Through collaborative projects and discussions, students teach and learn from each other while the teacher is available to assist and answer any questions with students individually. A wide variety of activities that address the multiple intelligences should be used, allowing students to show that they understand a concept by performing assignments through a range of different learning styles—for example, role-plays for kinesthetic learners, presentations for linguistic learners, and songs and dances for musical learners.

Conclusions

Although there is a growing amount of scientific inquiry into the flipped classroom, more research is necessary to tell us exactly how well flipped language classrooms work. Until researchers are able to provide more hard data on the benefits of the flipped approach, many teachers will remain skeptical. Whether our findings are positive, neutral, or negative, we must accumulate more data about the flipped classroom to determine if this strategy is just a passing whim or a revolutionary departure in education.

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