

Flipped Classroom as an Instructional Medium to Teach English at Tertiary Level in India

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Abstract

The teachers who handle large classes face problems in catering to the needs of the students who have different learning abilities. The traditional classroom method arguably does not offer a solution to this problem, and as a result, slow learners among the students become disengaged and demotivated. Introducing flipped teaching method will be effective in dealing with the diversity of the learners as well as the disproportionate class strength. This paper attempts to highlight the advantage of the flipped classroom over the traditional classroom, and explains the ways to implement flipped classroom especially in English language classes.

Keywords- *Flipped Classroom, Inverted Classroom, Traditional Classroom, Direct Instruction*

Introduction

A major challenge faced by the teachers today, particularly with large classrooms like the foundation course classes in India, is addressing the individual differences of learners and imparting the lessons effectively to every student in the class. The traditional methods and approaches seem to offer no clear guidelines for making learning and teaching effective in handling individual differences as well as in reaching out to every student. Montaigne, a French writer, highlighted this issue in the essay 'On the education of children' five centuries ago: "When, according to common practice, a teacher undertakes to school several minds of very different structure and capacity with the same lessons and the same measure of guidance, it is no wonder that, among a whole multitude of children, he scarcely finds two or three who derive any proper profit from their teaching" (Montaigne). The present day teachers face the same difficulties as mentioned by Montaigne; though they are careful in choosing activities, there will always be some learners who find them easy or too difficult, as a result of this they become either unsatisfied or bored. One solution for this issue probably is delivering the lessons to students in short parcels prior to the class. Flipped classroom or flipped learning comes to the rescue of teachers who face the problem of addressing larger classes with diverse learners. It helps the disengaged, demotivated and passive learners to actively participate in the classroom activities, and caters to the needs of students with different abilities.

The flipped classroom/flipped learning uses audio and video and text materials prepared in advance and delivered to the students prior to classroom teaching. It uses mainly devices like smart phones, tablet PCs and laptop computers to disseminate the learning materials. Flipped Classroom has wide applicability in imparting lessons to the technologically-driven generation of learners. It is often called an inverted classroom as it is a pedagogical model in which "direct instruction is done through video, or some other learning object that students can use individually prior to coming to class. This time shift then allows the teacher to use class time for work that is either better done as a large group, or that requires individualized teacher attention" (Sams). Ramsey Musallam describes flipped learning 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" (Sams). Cockrum defines flipped classroom as "Using technology to deliver asynchronous direct instruction with the intention of freeing up class time for student-centred learning" (Cockrum). One of the main aims of the flipped classroom is to "provide a free, world-class education for anyone, anywhere" (Khan). It restores "the excitement—the active participation in learning and the natural high that went with it—that conventional curricula sometimes seemed to bludgeon into submission" (Khan).

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Many theoreticians and practitioners of teaching and learning claim to be the originators of the idea of flipping the class. The phrase, “Flip Your Class” used in the popular 2010-TED talk titled “Let’s Use Video to Reinvent Education” by Salman Khan, the founder of Khan Academy, made many in the field of education think that term ‘flipped classroom’ was coined by Salman Khan. The other people who were considered to be the founders of the idea include Jon Bergmann and Aaron Sams, who wrote the book *Flip Your Classroom: Reach Every Student in Every Class Every Day*. According to Cockrum, the term flipped or flipping was first found in the research papers of Wesley Baker in 2000 which focussed on learning management system (LMS). Subsequently the term was also used by Mike Tenneson and Bob Mc Glasson, and Jeremy Strayer in their work in 2005 and 2007 respectively (Cockrum). Around the same time, Bergmann and Sams were creating videos for their chemistry students in Woodland Park, Colorado. When they noticed that they had frequent student absences in their school because of their location as it was in a rural area, the two started to create videos which they called Vodcasting to reach the students outside the classroom. In the next few years their innovative work became popular and it was not until 2010 the term Flipped Classroom became associated with Bergmann and Sam (Cockrum). Bergmann and Sams believed that the most valuable possessions teachers have is the time spent each day with students and it is essential for the teachers to make use of the class time to maximize learning. For them, “Talking at each day is not the best use of class time! Students need teachers most when they are stuck on a difficult concept or problem that, in a traditional classroom, often happens at home, when the teacher is unavailable. The best use of class time incorporates enriching learning activities and relevant experiences” (Sams).

Flipped Classroom is arguably more-learner-centred as compared to the traditional classroom. The traditional classroom is apparently centred on teachers where the presentation given by the teacher is the main source of learning for the students. The way traditional teaching works is at times described as ‘jug and mug’ - the way knowledge being transferred from one person to the another and is often considered as the teacher spending the maximum class time using the board to explain things with sporadic questions to or from the students and they will be made to do some exercises to test their understanding of what is taught. Throughout the teaching process, the teacher has control of the subjects matter, makes decisions about what work has to be done and gives directions to learners. In this kind of classroom, the teacher presumably talks more and is the most active person in the classroom. In this system, the role of students is to listen and concentrate and perhaps take notes. Considering the short attention span of students, this method is generally thought of as ineffective. There are theorists who felt that “ten to eighteen minutes was about the limit of students’ attention spans.” (Khan). Teachers are often thought of as knowers and deliverers of knowledge, and it was held that teachers’ explanations in the classroom always resulted in learning. If the learning does not

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take place it is considered that “it is because the teacher has done his job badly or the student is lazy or incompetent” (Scrivener). Contrary to this, when the teacher leaves the stage and becomes a facilitator of learning, instead of being a presenter of content, the classroom becomes a centre for learning where the students are the focus of the classroom. A flipped classroom provides a suitable alternative to the traditional classroom, in which classrooms becomes a place for activities discussions and clarifications.

The flipped classroom changes the role of the teachers, as they do not stand in front of the room giving information and being the centre of attention, instead they spend the time helping the students, and working with individuals who are struggling and have the opportunity to guide them and clear up their misconceptions (Jonathan Bergmann & Aaron Sams). The content is made available to the students when they are ready for it, and it is not necessary for them to access it from their home, they can access it from anywhere, in the class or outside the class. Flipped Classroom can help in retaining the attention of the students in the classroom as they are made to engage in some learning activity, whereas it is not so in traditional classroom as they get distracted easily. Joan Middenlorf and Alan Kalish, professors from Indiana University, published an article in the year of 1996 about the ebbs and flows of students’ concentration during a class hour, where there was no technological innovations such as texting and tweeting, which usually distracts the attention of the students. They stated that “students needed a three-to-five-minute period of settling down, which would be followed by ten to eighteen minutes of optimal focus” (Khan). In a traditional classroom, the teacher sets the pace of the class and goes ahead with the teaching based on the material that is to be delivered during the classroom time whether the students understand the content or not. Due to this, the slow learners get further behind, and sometimes they are punished for being slower. In the flipped classroom model the slower students are not penalised, instead, ample opportunities are given to them to relearn and remediate (Jonathan Bergmann & Aaron Sams). An educationist presents the advantages of flipped classroom thus: “Flipped learning, at its core, is individualized learning. There are many methods, variations, and types of student-centred learning-differentiated instruction, problem/project-based learning, inquiry-based study, and many others. When combined with the flipped learning concept, these strategies become practical to implement. Flipped learning is fundamentally learner-centric” (Cockrum). According to Moran & Young, “Flipped Classroom is really about being student-centred and flexible with the options you have once you’ve freed up this class time” (quoted in Cockrum)

Flipped Classroom and English language teaching

The teachers of English language usually complain that it is expected from them to complete everything in the prescribed book, which also confines the quantity of time they can spend on activities based language activities. One of the advantages of flipping the English class is that it

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provides the opportunity to make students learn some contents of a lesson out of the classroom and go online. In this way the teacher can spend most of the valuable time with the students and engage them in a meaningful interaction in the target language. This method is essential in ELT because it maximizes the talk time of students in English during class hours.

By flipping the English classroom the teacher can reach students with different learning styles. For instance, the students who are visual learners, required to see the words that they are learning both as pictures and in written form and those who are auditory learners, prefer to listen to the language. Students who have kinaesthetic intelligence, have to interact with the language by doing physical activities; and those who are analytic would need to see rules and examples. In this way flipped classroom reaches all sorts of students.

By making a video of a lesson with text images, audio, and interactions, the teacher can reach more students effectively. The prime advantage is the fact that students can play, pause, and repeat the lesson a number of times, which is not obviously possible in a classroom. This also paves the way to complete the syllabus materials and increases learner autonomy (Puppo).

According to Russell it is not necessary to flip all the English classes, nonetheless the method could be used for certain lessons or some part of the syllabus. For instance, almost all English teachers have to teach grammar, explain different writing genres and construction of paragraphs very often in the classroom. Hence, materials related to this could be made online so as to enable the teacher to spend more time in the class helping the learners. (Stannard)

In the article "Is the Flipped Classroom relevant to ELT?" Stannard explains by giving an example of teaching the construction of paragraphs using flipped method.

Let's imagine that we are looking at the construction of paragraphs. We could make a video/screen cast that explains to students how a paragraph is normally made up. It might include an explanation of what a subject sentence is and how it should be supported by the rest of the paragraph. Perhaps there is also a simple quiz that the students have to do to check understanding after they watch the video. In class, the students are given a series of paragraphs where the sentences have all been mixed up. The students work in groups and order the sentences, making sure the topic sentence is at the start of the paragraph. They then have a second exercise where they have been provided with a topic sentence but are asked to write the rest of the paragraph in groups. (Stannard)

Flipped classroom becomes handy for those English teachers who think of doing lots of imaginative things during the class time to motivate the students and encourage them to work on tasks in groups and pairs, especially for the group activities such as discussions, debates, presentations,

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group planning etc. The students could be made to watch video about a topic prescribed in the syllabus and thereby encouraging a group of students to discuss or debate and another group to give a presentation on the topic (Stannard). According to Tara Arntsen adopting the flipped classroom approach in teaching English “maximizes the amount of time students speak English in class and minimizes of teacher talk time” (Arntsen).

The students who pursue degree courses in India learn English language as a subject which comprises literature, language skills and grammar for a period of two years. Most of them grow up with the digital technology and they make use of gadgets regularly. To borrow the term used by Marc Prensky students who belong to this generation can be called ‘digital natives’, while their teachers, who find it difficult to understand those gadgets, may fall into the category of ‘digital immigrants’ (Scrivener). To address the requirements of the digital natives, it becomes essential to employ flipped classroom, as it promotes the use of technology in English classrooms.

Flipped classroom becomes handy when the English teachers deal with different kinds of students with different abilities in a classroom with the strength between 50 and 70. Here the Flipped method, if properly presented, enables the teacher to reach out to each and every student in the classroom. As the flipped classroom integrates technology in itself, it would be one of the motivating factors to keep the students engaged actively inside and outside the classroom. It is evident that most of the students use smartphones with reasonable internet speed, hence, the teachers should think of making use of those gadgets.

In order to implement the Flipped method for the teacher needs to prepare themselves for creating their digital content. One of the major steps involved here is creating videos on the language and other items to be taught. It is not necessary to make videos for all lessons; videos made by other teachers which are available online could be also made use of. The videos should be made available to the students prior to the classroom discussion. The teacher may adopt many ways to make it convenient for the students to watch the videos: YouTube channel could be created to upload the videos, as they become accessible from anywhere; videos could also be shared to smartphone via suitable mobile applications; those who do not have internet connection at home or have mobile device without internet package; videos could be shared using offline methods like Bluetooth. Arrangement could also be made to make the students watching the video in the smart classroom, if the institution provides the facility, so that no one is left out from watching it. If the situation necessitates, the students could also be allowed to watch the videos in the classroom before initiating the discussion. The videos made by the teacher should not be of monotonous lectures, instead they should be interactive with pictorial representations of the lessons along with subtitles, voice over, meaning of difficult words and explanation of stanzas. As the saying goes ‘a picture is worth thousand

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words', pictorial representation of prose, poetry and grammar has a visual impact on the viewers, hence, the teacher should make a careful selection of pictures along with the text of the lesson to create impression on the students. While recording his/her own voice for the video the teacher should ascertain that words were pronounced correctly and clearly, so that the students could learn the correct pronunciation of words. The duration of the video should be from five to seven minutes, as the present day students belong to YouTube generation, and "they want things in bite-sized pieces" (Jonathan Bergmann & Aaron Sams).

To conclude, this paper suggests that in comparison with the traditional classroom, flipped classroom would be an effective way to reach students with different abilities in a large classroom. Though the teachers may have problems in the initial stage in implementing the flipped classroom, once they are acquainted with it, they may find that even disoriented and disengaged students would actively involve themselves in classroom activities. Especially, adopting flipped classroom in the English language classroom at tertiary level will help the students in enriching the knowledge of literature and in improving the language skills as this approach makes proper use of technology.

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