



Research Article

Evaluating Iraqi EFL Learners' Attitudes Toward Flipped Classrooms in Learning English for Specific Purpose

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Abstract:

Technology has completely changed our classroom environment in such a way that a flipped classroom, which is a very popular model, becomes feasible and subsequently students find it engaging at a large extent. This approach to student learning which is powered by technology is considered as a replacing of the self-paced student study i.e. the traditional way of teaching. The aim of this study was to investigate the extent to which the flipped classroom method would capture the interest and motivation of Iraqi learners of ESP. The participants were 50 undergraduate students enrolled in a compulsory course, “*Specialized Readings in English Language*,” at Southern Technical University, Iraq. The data collection instrument was a reliable questionnaire which had been previously tested and validated by Namaziandoost and Ziafar in their 2020 research measured EFL Learners' attitudes towards using language learning strategies. One, sample t, test served as the critical instrument to ascertain the significance of the collected data, which we used to examine the statistical significance of it. The study revealed that the students have negative attitudes to such a class and consequently chose the traditional teaching method with which they were already familiar. The outcome of the study was thoroughly examined and discussed, and the implications were also provided.

Keywords: Attitude, flipped classroom, English for Specific Purposes, traditional method, EFL Learners.

1. Introduction and Review of Related Literature

Technological advances have changed the way education is approached and have made the teachers and learners want to use innovative teaching methods. These new teaching methods and approaches are very important in the students' educational life as they train the students to adjust to the rapid changes of the modern world by developing their essential digital literacy and adaptability. The integration of technology into the learning process makes the flipped classroom method as the

trendy one that meets the demands of the student of today. It is a way that education remains relevant to their rapidly changing, modern lives (Bergmann & Sams, 2012).

Students cannot effectively learn by just passively listening, they have to take control of their learning. Davies et al., 2013; DeGrazia et al., 2012; Bergmann & Sams, 2012 assert that in order to achieve such an active role, the teacher needs to employ various means of strategies and methods. Several research studies show that the flipped classroom model represents a key element contributing to improving saving students' time due to having lectures (the so-called "least-learning unit") at home and opening up valuable time during school to provide opportunities for students to participate in hands-on, experiential educational opportunities such as projects, problem solving, and group work (Butt, 2014, Findlay, Thompson, & Mombourquette, 2014). Research shows that the flipped classroom represents the best method of learning for students in a post-secondary environment. Changing the old teaching methods and strategies in order for this to happen (Strayer 2012, Stone 2012, Bishop & Verleger 2013) requires an adjustment to how we teach today's students. Through the use of these changes, students will be actively engaged; students will be better prepared for class; and, more importantly, students will have the ability to apply their learning in real-world applications.

According to Hamdan et al. (2013), effective teaching is primarily motivational; it is a form of education that profoundly touches on a student's natural curiosity and desire to discover new knowledge and learn. In a flipped classroom, students have the ability to stop subjecting themselves to monotonous lecturing and instead devote their time to accomplishing a project and interacting with the material on an interactive basis. As a result, a dynamic environment will develop in which the student becomes the nucleus of his or her own learning. Merely recording and posting a lecture for students to view prior to class will not suffice. Wagner et al. (2013) assert that the flipped classroom will require much greater effort and planning from the teacher than simply posting a video. In order for the transition to happen successfully, we must have three key elements: quality instructional materials based on good pedagogy; lots of opportunities to engage in discussion; and sufficient support for students when they work individually or as a group (Elia & Hamaidi, 2018).

As technology advances, teachers continue to find creative ways to engage their students with both interesting and meaningful lessons. The flipped classroom has emerged as one of today's most powerful solutions for teachers who utilize technology for learning purposes in addition to traditional methods of teaching in higher education (Bergmann & Sams, 2012).

Research in this field consistently highlights the key advantages of the flipped classroom. Some of the most significant benefits include how students are able to choose when and how they learn, are motivated to learn, and develop social skills through interaction with peers. Students' social skills have been significantly improved as a result of implementing cooperative learning strategies which require students to work together in groups and learn to solve problems (Shakaa, 2016). One study's findings revealed that the students in the flipped-learning group received a greater benefit than those in the traditional model; they exhibited greater student self-efficacy and demonstrated a higher level of personalized learning, meeting their respective individual learning needs and styles. In addition, the model creates an engaging environment where students can exchange ideas and have fruitful discussions with both their peers and teachers (Eunice & Eyitayo, 2017; Harried & Schiller, 2013; Mason et al., 2013). The flipped model also allowed students to have

more control over the completion of their homework outside of the school hours. In fact, several studies confirm this and emphasize that in order for students to effectively use the technology in the classroom, teachers need to give them sufficient time and at the same time facilitate an easy way for those who cannot attend class to get information about the lessons they have missed (Tune et al., 2013; McLaughlin et al., 2013). This method is intended to enhance students critical thinking skills and increase their involvement both in class and individually. The learning outside class is enriched with various activities such as research, watching educational videos, preparing presentations, participating in discussions, reading, and self, reflection (Akçayır & Akçayır, 2018). As a result, students become responsible for their education and it is expected that they will actively take part in discussions, deeply read the materials, and come to the class duly prepared (Aşıksoy & Özdamlı, 2016).

Although the rise of flipped classrooms was largely driven by the COVID-19 pandemic, the shift to fully virtual or hybrid learning environments has not been without its challenges. Issues such as low engagement, limited interactivity, and a lack of effective assessment strategies have been reported (Li & Wang, 2023). In general, students have reported that their engagement was higher and that they achieved better learning outcomes. However, it is also important to acknowledge that the data revealed some inconsistencies in the final results. In particular, highly proficient students became more confident and participated actively, while students with lower skill levels, on the other hand, struggled with anxiety and disengagement (Li & Wang, 2023). Therefore, it is important to modify instructional strategies to meet diverse learner needs in flipped classrooms, especially in areas with different educational backgrounds (Akçayır & Akçayır, 2018).

While flipped classrooms have become widely recognized as an innovative and productive method to deliver instruction at many educational institutions across the globe, this study will specifically focus on making a contribution to the field of online teaching in Iraq through ESP courses; therefore, the purpose of this research will be to gather information about the experiences of students taking ESP courses (which are designed to help students learn and use content that will assist them in communicating in their respective fields of study) and how effective the use of flipped classrooms was in helping students accomplish that goal. By answering these questions, the researcher hopes to provide educators and administrators with useful information regarding how to implement and/or design an effective flipped classroom for their students. With this in mind, the current study aims to answer the following research question: Do Iraqi ESP learners have positive attitudes toward using flipped learning?

2. Methodology

2.1. Context and Participants

The current study was performed in the Department of Materials Management at Southern Technical University, Basra, during the first semester of the 2024-2025 academic year. The participants were 50 first-year undergraduate students (male and female) who were studying materials management. The subjects were within the age range of 18 to 22 years and were selected randomly selected from at least three different sections based on the alphabetical last name of each subject. The course book for the ESP course was *Specialized Readings in English Language*, and the

instruction was delivered through a videoconferencing tool. The researcher served as the course instructor during the study.

2.2. Instrumentation

The questionnaire previously developed and validated by Namaziandoost and Ziafar (2020) was used to assess learners' attitudes toward flipped classrooms. This questionnaire features ten main statements that serve as metrics for different aspects of the students' opinions. Students were asked to express their feelings about the accessibility, engagement, effectiveness, and a general positive impression of the flipped classroom. Response options were rated on a five, point Likert scale (from 1, Strongly Disagree, to 5, Strongly Agree). The questionnaire went through a careful validation process to ensure its quality. Its reliability was confirmed using the Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which came out to $\alpha = 0.89$, a score that shows the survey has a high level of internal consistency.

2.3. Procedure

The current study started in late September and lasted until mid-December for 12 weeks. Students were expected to join the class using university's virtual learning platform and each session lasted 60 minutes. The course book was *Specialized Readings in English Language* and flipped learning approach was integrated using a videoconferencing tool as well as the university platform.

The researcher who acted as the instructor introduced flipped classroom at the beginning of the semester and elaborated on the structure of the course. In the next step, students were provided with instructional materials, including reading assignments, and interactive exercises, pre-recorded lecture videos, which they were required to study before attending live online sessions. To ensure the accessibility and convenience for all students, the materials were distributed through multiple channels, including Telegram, WhatsApp, and Email.

During the online session whether on the university platform or videoconferencing, students were required to be engaged in different activities (e.g., problem-solving activities, discussions, and collaborative tasks) that were closely related to the course content. During the class, the instructor was very active in facilitating student learning by making concepts clear, leading discussions, and encouraging everyone to participate. In addition, students were given some out-of-class activities such as reflection.

At the end of the study (week 12), students were asked to complete the questionnaire developed by Namaziandost et al. (2020) to assess their attitudes toward the flipped classroom model. The questionnaire was administered online, ensuring anonymity to encourage honest responses. The collected data were then analyzed quantitatively using descriptive and inferential statistics. A one-sample t-test in SPSS was used to determine whether significance of students' perception toward flipped learning in their ESP course.

3. Results

To answer the research question, the frequency and mean score for each statement was calculated. The obtained results are indicated in Table 1.

Table 1.*Descriptive analysis of Leaners' Attitude toward Flipped Classroom Questionnaire*

Statements	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean
Q1: The flipped classroom underpins learners in turning out to be self-coordinated students.	28	13	7	2	0	1.66
Q2: The flipped classroom permits learners to approach the talks whenever no problem at all.	26	16	3	3	2	1.78
Q3: The flipped classroom gives learners more chances to speak with one another.	39	7	4	0	0	1.30
Q4: The flipped classroom encourages learners to pose inquiries and find quick focused on solutions to troublesome ideas.	37	10	3	0	0	1.32
Q5: The flipped classroom decreases the measure of disappointing sessions.	27	21	2	0	0	1.50
Q6: The flipped classroom	30	19	0	0	1	1.46

classroom permits learners possess more energy for family, companions, play, and extra-curricular exercises.						
Q7: Learners would prescribe the flipped classroom to their companions.	19	24	3	3	1	1.86
Q8: The flipped classroom has improved learners' learning of English.	42	5	3	0	0	1.22
Q9: Learners would prefer to watch an exercise video than a conventional instructor lead exercise.	43	5	1	1	0	1.20
Q10: Instructors are accessible for progressively one-on-one communication with learners in a flipped classroom.	35	12	3	0	0	1.36

As can be seen in Table 1, respondents did not perceive the flipped classroom model as effective as traditional instruction (Q8: $M = 1.22$ vs Q9: $M = 1.20$). The majority of participants thought the model was not able to foster self-coordination (Q1: $M = 1.66$), facilitate easy access to lectures (Q2: $M = 1.78$), and encourage speaking opportunities (Q3: $M = 1.30$). They felt the flipped classroom mode was not conducive to inquiry and problem-solving (Q4: $M = 1.32$), nor did it reduce frustration (Q5: $M = 1.50$). The model was also felt not to afford extra time for their engagements in private life (Q6: $M = 1.46$) and participants were not sure whether to recommend it to others (Q7: $M = 1.86$). Most students strongly disagreed with the assumption that a flipped classroom improves student access to instructors for one-on-one support (Q10: $M = 1.36$). Therefore, the overall results indicated

a negative attitude toward flipped classroom. One-sample t-test analysis can shed light on whether these negative attitudes attained statistical significance. Table 2 shows the results.

Table 2.
One-sample T-test Results

Test Value = 30						
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean	95% Confidence Interval of	
				Difference	Lower	Upper
Learners' attitude	-53.003	49	.000	-15.34000	-15.9216	-14.7584

As can be seen, the mean score of the questionnaire ($M = 14.66$) significantly differed from the neutral test value of 30, with a t-value of -53.003 ($df = 49$), and a p-value of < 0.001 . The data showed a mean difference of $-\$15.34$ (95% CI: $-\$15.92$ to $-\$14.76$). This consistently negative result means that participants' responses were significantly below the neutral point, indicating a strong overall dislike of the flipped classroom model.

4. Discussion

This study aimed to discover what Iraqi ESP (English for Specific Purposes) learners think about using the flipped learning approach in Iraq. Flipped learning is an instructional method that reverses the traditional model: students view lecture materials (like videos) outside of class and then use the valuable class time for active learning, collaboration, and discussion (Akçayır & Akçayır, 2018). The reason why this is considered an effective method is that it enhances student performance, raises engagement levels, energizes motivation, and results in improved learning outcomes (Aşıksoy & Özdamlı, 2016; Retnaningsih et al., 2022; Ying & Ayub, 2022). However, the results of this particular study contrary to much prior research: for Iraqi ESP learners, the flipped classroom model did not generate a positive response. This finding stands in sharp contrast to the many other studies that have hailed flipped classrooms as highly effective teaching strategies (Jebur et al., 2023; Qader & Yalcin Arsalan, 2019; Dehham et al., 2022). Therefore, these results call into question the widespread assumption that flipped learning works equally well everywhere, especially when applied to Iraqi ESP learners.

The negative effect of flipped classroom on students' attitude may be related also to some factors. Firstly, it can be observed that students did not find flipped classroom model helpful in improving their English and they belied that this method of teaching did not provide them with more chances of speaking the language in class. In a traditional learning environment, students often rely on direct instruction from their teachers, which they may feel provides clearer guidance and structure (Khayat et al., 2021). It can be then inferred that Iraqi students studying at higher level of education prefer more direct instruction. While learners' independence and motivation are requirements of flipped classrooms concept, learners in the current study did not hold such perception about their ESP course. The other reason could be the nature of the content and the corresponding learners'

needs. ESP learners may be working toward learning English for purposes of a certain field, and often this means specialized instruction that a flipped model cannot always adequately provide. It is possible that the learners felt the flipped classroom model fell short in fulfilling their specific needs for practical context-rich English learning. Other possibilities are that the learners thought that the flipped classrooms process focused on just content review and peer interactions and with less direct response according to their fields of interest. With fewer chances to interact with the instructors directly under the flipped approach, such classrooms left some students feeling less directed, at least in a setting where, quite reasonably, many learners appreciate personalized direct contact with their teachers regarding specific learning problems.

It is also important to mention that Iraq is a poor country that has been affected by a history of “neglect and war” (UNICEF, 2004). According to Coutts et al. (2020), the economic growth has been negating even before the pandemic financial recession hit. Therefore, the poverty and geographic spread of Iraq have made e-learning much more challenging. Indeed, e-learning has faced many unique challenges in Arab and developing countries, including language barriers for software use. Electricity supply is intermittent in some areas, affecting all forms of e-learning provision. Therefore, in comparison to other Arab countries, launching e-learning systems in Iraq came at a late stage (Ameen et.al, 2017). Therefore, this situation can be another factor affecting Iraqi learners' reluctance to online mode of learning in ESL flipped classes.

Considering the obtained results, it is important to acknowledge some limitations of the study. These limitations include the limited sample although adequate for the statistical analysis. The number of participants may not fully represent the larger population of Iraqi ESP learners. A larger, more diverse subjects of the study, such students from different educational backgrounds and fields of study, could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the generalizability of these findings. Moreover, the obtained data from the current study embraced self-reported data from a questionnaire, which is thus prone to experimentally induced biases, such as social desirability, or misunderstanding of the questions. Future research could employ a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews or focus groups, to gain a deeper understanding of the learners' attitudes and experiences with flipped learning. Another limitation is the duration and context of the flipped learning implementation. This means that the obtained results might be affected by a short-term or poorly implemented version of the flipped classroom, while a longer, more well-established experience with the model might reveal different findings. Consequently, some implications and future studies are suggested.

The findings of this study provided educators of ESP contexts useful information so that they can ensure if their learners are prepared to take on the challenge of self-guided learning. Clear guidance, support that is always available, and chances to talk with the teacher could help remove the difficulties that learners in flipped learning face, especially those who are not used to studying independently. Moreover, making the flipped learning materials more detailed and directly related to the students' specific field of study (ESP) might be the crucial factor that not only helps in attracting their attention but also increases their motivation to a great extent. The next study should determine the ways that make the flipped classroom model easily understandable and comfortable for different types of learners. Besides that, research needs to find out the ways in which technology can be a real help to the learning process rather than becoming a source of dissatisfaction or a hindrance.

Furthermore, the next research should investigate the issues that make students resist the flipped model. By identifying obstacles such as lack of technology, cultural learning preferences, and previous negative experiences, we will be able to adjust and develop the flipped learning method to different educational systems.

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