

Flipped Classroom as Effective Source of Learning for EFL Learners during COVID-19

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ABSTRACT

Key Words: English as a Foreign Language (EFL), Flipped Classrooms, Blended Learning, Students' Satisfaction.

Bangladesh, like almost all the countries of the whole world, is going through the dire affectedness as well as effects of the persisting COVID-19 pandemic. Although the Government has withdrawn lockdown from national life as a whole, the education sector of the country is still under strict shutdown prohibiting all sorts of onsite teaching-learning sessions, and permitting online classroom only. As such, currently, educational institutes of all levels of education are continuing their academic activities through virtual mode necessitating the teachers to hold class sessions on apps, like Zoom Meeting App, Google Classroom and Messenger, or uploading the recorded lessons on Facebook or YouTube. Accordingly, the present study attempts to bring into consideration the challenges that both the teachers and learners face while performing English language education via various types of online lessons, which, as this study basically intends to emphasize, can mostly be overcome through flipped classroom during the COVID-19 lockdown with special focus. The study was conducted on total 30 EFL learners (15 from Jagannath University and 15 from Cumilla University). The comparison between the traditional and the flipped classrooms on or before covid-19 pandemic along with the questionnaire survey among the target participants and its findings reveals that flipped classroom is highly positive in terms of students' satisfaction, comfort, safety and better utilization of this time etc. though its prevalent actualization appears below par, and it demonstrates some worth-noting shortcomings that require substantial reconsiderations.

INTRODUCTION

Up to the arrival and journey of 2021, according to UNESCO data, globally, more than 1.2 billion learners (68.0 per cent of the world's total enrolled learners) have been affected due to the education institute closure in more than 144 countries. Bangladesh is not spared from such a disaster. All levels of educational institutes in the country have been remaining absolutely shut as the undeniably direct and most immediate impact of the Covid-19 on the education sector. As a result, in-class learning opportunities have been suspended and more than 36.0 million students (including 17.0 million in the primary) are now out of the onsite classrooms. Experts say that Covid-19 has essentially caused suspension of the normal academic curriculum of around 40.0 million students all over the country (Uddin, 2020; Baura, 2020). Besides, the loss in schooling hours is not the only impact emerging from the Covid-19 crisis. On top of learning, schools are also a vital source of social protection, nutrition, health as well as psychosocial supports to children and young adults. Hence, in addition to the loss of direct learning scopes, closures of academic institutes have far-reaching impacts on social and economic issues such as school dropouts, digital divide, food insecurity and malnutrition, childcare, as well as disability services (Uddin, 2020).

The response to the COVID-19 pandemic in Bangladesh's education sector has been weak. Operating with limited economic resources and within budgetary frameworks, Bangladesh was tasked with fulfilling the educational needs of their citizens, while protecting public health. This has led to mixed results (Aker, 2020). In fact, at the start of this year, most universities in Bangladesh lacked basic learning management systems and digital infrastructure. So, when institutions were required to close because of COVID-19, educators could no longer teach. As Akter (2020) highlights, the country's University Grants Commission (UGC) rose to the challenge and introduced policies requiring all universities to go digital, to make teaching and learning activities accessible online—including admissions. Within four months, digitization was mainstreamed. An average of around 3,800 classes are held online daily with more than 220,000 students in attendance. Thus far, a total of around 203,200 classes have been conducted to more than 9.2 million attendees by 10,200 faculty members. With the commencement and continuation of virtual education in the country during the current COVID-19 pandemic situation, eLearning or distance learning has gained priority in the education sector. Accordingly, virtual media and/or social media, like Zoom, a video communication system, has gained huge popularity during these quarantine days. Facebook Messenger and YouTube channels have also been incorporated in the initiative. Despite using these as alternative emergency teaching means, none of them cover actual teaching or education purposes—rather these are suitable for business or official functions (Bhuiyan, 2020).

In consequence, the search for an eclectic approach that will serve the purpose in the most befitting manner goes on, as a result of which emerges the idea of realizing flipped classroom

during the COVID-19 situation across the world. Research explores that the combined model of online teaching with the flipped learning improves students' learning, attention, and evaluation of courses (Tang et al. 2020). As a matter of fact, we are passing a crucial time in the history of mankind, fighting against an invisible virus. This pandemic of Covid-19 has infected people and their activity all over the world. Education sector is highly affected. Undergraduate EFL learners are also not the exception. At such context digital education has become one of the most plausible and reliable platforms of teaching and learning. Accordingly, the integration of ICT in the academic arena has become obvious in the language learning process as well (Lea, 2004; Salehi & Salehi, 2012). ICT tools now infiltrate the academic atmosphere and reinforce the feat of the new millennium teaching and learning activities. In fact, in these 21 centuries, the application of ICTs can be viewed as an agent of change benefitting those countries that use it efficiently (Anderson et al., 2002). In Bangladesh mobile phone users are more than 162.920 million as per the report of BTRC (Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission). The number of total internet users is more than 101.18 million. 86% university students own smart phones. Surprisingly the number of private university students who own smart phones is more than public university students. Similarly, the trend of flipped classroom is in progress. Here lies the significance of this study as it has focused on the approach of two growing public university EFL learners in terms of exploring flipped classroom during Covid-19.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Bhuiyan and Mahmud (2015) while esteeming flipped classroom in the academic context of Bangladesh find it to be an innovative way of teaching to excel learning. Simultaneously they surmise that it is the latest invention and celebrated outcome of the experimental teaching and learning methods which have incessantly been tried out to reach more practicable results than the age-old black board-white board techniques. With the widespread prevalence of technology in the campus and outside the campus, flipping the classroom has proved to be bringing an appreciable change in the teaching practices, which is why many academicians of the country are practicing this. According to Chow (2015) and Naik (2015), flipped

learning is more likely to draw self-regulated or self-directed learning. As per Barr's study (as cited in Anderson and Burns, 1989:3), teachers are expected to fulfill a variety of roles. A teacher can be seen as a director of learning, a friend or counselor of pupils; a member of a group of professional workers; and a citizen participating in various community activities at local, state, national; and international levels. Similarly, Harmer (1991) viewed "the teacher" as an intrinsic motivator. In flipped classroom, teachers' role is to facilitate learning through some technology based materials such as teacher crafted videos that permit students to repeat and watch as much as they want (MC Bride, 2015).

OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this study is to gauge general applicability of flipped classroom at undergraduate level for learners during and after covid-19. Flipped classroom requires the students to watch an online lecture on the stipulated topic and appraise the course materials available in the vast world of online before they participate in the onsite blended learning session. If the students go through hard copies of texts or digital ones to receive and incorporate the information on the targeted topic with the lesson they obtain from the online lecture, the knowledge and idea they look for will get much more clarified to them. Simultaneously, virtual discussion and discourse on the subject of learning can also provide the learners with substantial foundation prior to their on-campus gathering. On top of these, the learners can also conduct individual or team research on the class topic for better understanding and improvement assimilation.

Subsequently, in a flipped classroom, the learners can practice the target skills either under the active guidance of the teachers or on their own. They can also take part in the other peer learning drills, like in-person performance, face-to-face conversation with their co-learners, debate sessions, presentations and role playing. They students can get their performance reviewed and evaluated by their peers or by the teachers.

These are just some prominent activities that the beneficiaries of the flipped classroom are to put to work before and during the learning sessions (Teach Thought Staff, 2020), but both the teachers and the learners can effectuate many more digitalized tasks that help comprehensive learning happen anywhere anytime.

During Covid-19 EFL undergraduate learners are participating in online classes. Teachers are uploading videos, materials through facebook or messenger, personal sites, group, whatsapp, chatbox, live. Few of them have personal You Tube channel. Some have professional networking sites. Conducting classes through institute's own server (BdREN, Zoom, Meeting App, Google Classroom are more in practice at public universities.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This entire study used a mixed method and case studies. The researcher chose to apply both quantitative and qualitative research methods in conducting the research on the efficacy of flipped classroom at the undergraduate level of Bangladesh so as to find a holistic understanding of the matter in all sorts of considerations during covid-19 . The research was carried out from April 2020 to December 2021 with the EFL students of Jagannath University of Bangladesh and Cumilla University, Cumilla. Jagannath University (JnU) is a state-funded public university located at 9-10,Chittaranjan Avenue in old town Shadarghat, [Dhaka](#), the capital of [Bangladesh](#). On the other hand The Comilla University is another public university located at Kotbari, Cumilla, Bangladesh. . Since both of the universities are public universities

in terms of meritorious students' participation, they are nearly equal. As noted earlier, the participants of this study were 30 university students taking a general English course. All the students were asked several questions on their preferences, experiences and future acceptance of flipped classroom.

Findings

From the students' responses regarding flipped classroom and regular classroom, it was found that 25 out of 30 students preferred flipped classroom because it was more comfortable and effective for them to learn English language course as foundation course through online after staying with parents. The rest 5 had mixed comments. It was also observed that students who are financially deprived failed to attend in flipped classroom.

Teachers' Response

Majority (66.66%) of the teachers responding the questionnaire opine that the introduction as well as the execution of the flipped classroom in the university needs to be renovated following the way it is implemented in the developed countries' educational scenario, whereas 43.44% of them expressed their complacency regarding whatever the system has in possession. Nevertheless, 100% of the teachers agreed that in the upcoming world there is less or no alternative to flipped classroom in the university.

Students Response:

Majority of the students prefer flipped classroom. They also opine that during covid-19 this experience of participating in online classes has provided them feedback to participate in online classes after post covid world what will help them to execute flipped classroom. They believe that after post covid world they will get input to attend in flipped classroom. The followings are few of our case studies

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Tamim Ruhul is a student of Department of Marketing. Batch -09 of Cumilla University. Tamim likes online English classes. Earlier he was afraid in Basic English class. Moreover as he stayed far away from campus he could not attend classes on time. He always dreamt to stay with parents but earlier he could not. But now he can participate and earn himself at his comfortable time. He prefers uploaded videos and materials on English course than Zoom class where most time he does not show his face to teachers. He feels shy to talk English if asked. Tamim prefers submitting written assignments through online and listening or reading English himself.

Shahin is a student of department of English, batch-09, Cumilla university. Shahin does not like online English classes. As he is student of Department of English, he misses English teachers, classmates, watching English dramas together. There are some hidden

questions in his mind what he could not ask during online class. He thinks that he will forget to ask once the session will be over. Shaheen is also missing his literature class, chaos, friends during covid-19. Moreover, As he is staying at village in his home there was interruption in internet connection. Due t one of his relatives death he could not attend classes properly. He feels that day by day he is becoming frustrated and his performance in English is decreasing. According to him for learning English as foreign language classroom teaching is more effective source than online and offline classes.

From our study we get few more drawbacks of flipped classroom but these drawbacks did not exceed the positive sides. These drawbacks are as follows:

- As per the report of teachers, there were students who did not submit assignments timely and neglect classes.
- Videos usually had a disadvantage in which learners could not ask the questions.
- The worst disadvantage of flipped classroom was ‘not doing their assignments’ which caused to make the students uncomfortable to participate in class and ended in disturbing group work. To prevent it, a special observation, checking program or an alert function was suggested.
- Flipped classroom was deemed to be less interesting to the teachers and students of less developed countries where utilizing digital sources successfully took procrastination.
- In line, regular class attendance became poor.
- Teachers’ role of motivating students remained poor in comparison with regular classes.
- There were limitations of video instructions too.
- Most of the teachers were not efficient in using flipped classroom. The idea of flipped classroom was unclear to some of them.
- Very few students (30%) could successfully ‘log in’ while others could not.

Advantages of Flipped Classroom

Students who can attend both online and offline classes regularly got the best input from flipped classroom. But during covid-19 there is overemphasis on online classes and less or no emphasis on offline classes. Many are waiting for universities to open. Efficacy of Flipped classroom is a dream to them.

Recommendations

The study offers quite a number of recommendations to put into consideration for making flipped classroom successful at Jagannath University and cumilla university, Bangladesh in true sense. Firstly, there should be more trained teachers and eager learners. Teachers should upload more videos and helpful materials on English courses. Public universities need to define a definite manpower to work for the monitoring and maintenance of flipped classroom materials. As for the students, to enjoy the multifaceted benefits of

flipped learning system, they must have computer and internet connectivity at their disposal. Further study for the large number of experimental participants in a variety of educational settings should be carried out. To implement them, technology-based professional training course should be preceded for a richer and more inclusive understanding of the applicability of flipped classroom in EFL for Jagannath University, Bangladesh.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion it can be said that flipped classroom has both negative and positive effects. However, as a pedagogical model and for consequences like covid-19 we can think of its extension and renovations. To fully adopt such type of teaching and learning system for English Language Teaching (ELT) at undergraduate level in Bangladesh, we need more research and attention.

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