Reimagining Learner Engagement Through Flipped Classrooms in the Post COVID-19 Era

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ABSTRACT

The post-COVID-19 era gave rise to the emergence of innovative teaching and learning strategies, which, among others, included flipped classrooms. This article sought to determine whether flipped classrooms are beneficial when online learning material is distributed prior the commencement of the class. Piaget's (1986) Constructivist Learning Theory underpinned this inquiry. Constructivism is an approach to education that holds that people actively generate their own knowledge and that reality is shaped by the learner's experiences. The interpretive paradigm and a qualitative approach were utilized to collect information through semi-structured interviews with twelve conveniently selected grade 10 teachers. Using a case study design, the researcher could investigate the phenomenon in detail. Findings, which ensued from thematically analysed data, indicated that learners benefit most from pre-class activities as they offer increased participation opportunities as learners engage in discussions in their native languages. Thus, discussions and modelling tasks during in-class activities are learner-centred, with the development of paraphrasing skills, which promote good essay writing skills with minimum plagiarism effects. The author, therefore, recommends that Teachers require ongoing professional development in applying flipped classrooms using advanced learner-centred technological pedagogies, which promote maximum participation in the learning environment.

KEYWORDS

Innovative strategies; flipped classrooms; online learning; scaffolded practices; learner-centred pedagogies.

INTRODUCTION

Language acquisition has advanced into a new stage using computers and the Internet (Chang & Hu, 2019; Foster & Stagl, 2018; Hiver et al., 2021; Pelas, 2017). The most important factors in fostering a supportive atmosphere for language acquisition are participation and involvement of students, particularly in English as a Second Language (ESL) classes (Bakar & Hashim, 2022). Meanwhile, teachers always complain about students' disengagement from their classes. When students are not interested, teachers can get depressed and lose their enthusiasm. Furthermore, inattentive students may make teaching and learning less effective (Nusrat & Islam, 2023). Since the turn of the twenty-first century, technology has been a major factor in helping students stay motivated and involved in language classes. Some studies highlighted the importance of using social networking sites for language practice, downloading mobile applications to learn vocabulary and grammar, and participating in online classes taught by instructors who live on the other side of the globe (Chang & Hung, 2019; Li & Li, 2022).

COVID-19 resulted in the emergence of innovative instructional practices, such as the spread of flipped classrooms (Cirit-Işıklıgil & Günay, 2022), student identity (Doğan, 2022), and teacher identity (Erdem-Coşgun & Savaş, 2023). To save the academic year, educators implemented trial-and-error pedagogies, ranging from sending voice notes through WhatsApp to using Teams, which was an advanced method for most educators due to their limited technological skills. In recent years, learner engagement in English Second Language (ESL) classrooms has become imperative, and one innovative approach gaining traction is the implementation of flipped classrooms. However, flipped classrooms are not a unique occurrence. Educators are adopting the flipped classroom paradigm to increase student involvement, teamwork, and active learning during in-class time, which involves using technology to offer courses outside of scheduled class times (Bergmann & Sams 2012). To be ready for active learning activities in class, students in the flipped classroom interact with learning resources, such as movies and other materials outside of the classroom (Abeysekera & Dawson 2015; Gough, DeJong & Grundmeyer 2017; Nichols, Burgh & Kennedy 2017). A flipped classroom is a mixed learning approach, where students access knowledge outside of the classroom using asynchronous resources (videos and articles from modules, other electronic data sources, photographs, and presentations) (Karabatak & Polat, 2019). In a flipped classroom, students watch multimedia videos before going to class, and participate in differentiated instruction where they "complete learning exercises during class, with the instructor acting as coach, mentor, or guide" (Kay et al., 2019).

A flipped learning strategy has the benefit of transforming class time into learning experiences where students participate in practical exercises, and ask questions about the material (Sakulprasertsri, 2017). Blended learning, which is a catchall term for using technology to supplement in-person instruction outside of the classroom, is linked to flipped classrooms (Chiang 2017). According to Richards and Rodgers (2014), the traditional ESl Classroom frequently employs a teacher-centred paradigm in which the instructor imparts knowledge

during class hours, leaving little opportunity for interactive and application-based activities. In contrast, the flipped classroom model flips this structure, allowing students to obtain course materials online ahead of time, and use in-person meetings for application- and collaboration-focused activities (Bakar & Hashim, 2022).

Studies by Bergmann and Sams (2012) highlight how flipped classes might improve ESL instruction. Outside of the classroom, when students work with the materials at their own speed, teachers can customize the material to meet each student's unique learning needs and accommodate a range of skill levels in the same class. This individualized method accommodates the different language proficiency levels of ESL students, promoting a more inclusive learning environment. Flipped classrooms also encourage critical thinking, and active learning (Mohammed, 2020). Students are encouraged to investigate, question, and apply concepts in a collaborative context as opposed to passively absorbing material (Geyber & Eybers, 2021). The transition from a passive to an active learning paradigm is consistent with current pedagogical theories that prioritize training that is focused on the needs of the learner (Brame, 2013). Through flipped classrooms, ESL students gain not only language proficiency but also the capacity to solve problems and communicate effectively.

One important factor boosting learner engagement in flipped classrooms is the incorporation of technology. Digital natives find dynamic and captivating content on online platforms, video courses, and interactive multimedia tools. Technology-enabled learning experiences can increase motivation and involvement, as stated by Bishop and Verleger (2013), making the ESL classroom more engaging. Even with all the potential advantages, learner accessibility and support mechanisms must be carefully considered when implementing flipped classes in ESL settings (Lundin et al., 2018). In addition to making sure that all students can access the necessary resources and technology students can access the necessary resources and technology. Educators also need to make sure that there is enough support available to help students manage the curriculum's online components. Continuous professional development is necessary for ESL teachers to successfully incorporate technology and pedagogy in a way that optimizes learner engagement (Aidoo et al., 2022).

One study gap the author of this report found is the paucity of studies on the use of flipped classrooms in secondary education, while learners, across all grades, have access to cell-phones. Even though the use of cell phones is forbidden in secondary schools, the fact is, learners carry and utilise them for other factors such as social entertainment, which might expose them to corrupt and risky behaviours by watching unmonitored videos. The author is of the opinion that use of cell phones in schools could be beneficial when used under strict supervision of teachers in age and grade appropriate levels. Thus, at home, cell phones can be utilised by learners through the assistance of other peers by discussing and interpreting the videos sent by the teacher in preparation for in-class activities. At school, learners can re-watch and refer to the videos to respond to the teachers' questions while scaffolding the learning material. This can lead to increased participation in class. However, some conservative teachers

and parents do recommend that learners use smartphones and the internet. The following questions guided this inquiry: -

- How do flipped classrooms facilitate learner engagement in the post COVID-19 era?
- What are the benefits of learner engagement in the flipped classrooms?

LITERATURE REVIEW

In recent years, numerous studies have been conducted on the effectiveness of flipped classrooms (Bakar & Hashim, 2022; Gerber & Eybers, 2021; Lo & Hew, 2017; Nusrat & Islam, 2023). Aidoo et al. (2022) posit that flipped classrooms have been associated with learners' motivation, and development of critical thinking skills, and collaborative learning. Also, flipped learning, according to Koroglu (2017), provoke learners' higher order thinking skills. Howie et al. (2017) state that "higher-order learning will be possible when adequate resources are available in the classroom that broaden the thinking of the learner and develop their grasp of the language and their ability to convey their thinking in writing." Rewatching videos and going over topics again is especially beneficial for students (Baig &Yadegaridehkordi, 2023; Bond, 2020; Lo & Hew, 2017; Lundin et al., 2018). Because flipped classrooms may accommodate a variety of learning styles and promote a more setting that prioritizes students as learners, they have emerged as a big potential for English Second Language (ESL) courses. This practice can be especially helpful in the context of ESL because it meets individual learning demands by letting students access language materials, grammar explanations, and vocabulary sessions at their own pace. Because of the flipped model's inherent flexibility, ESL students can take charge of their education, which encourages independence and self-directed learning (Lo & Hew, 2017).

Additionally, the flipped classroom style offers chances for students to participate actively in class. Teachers can address individual language issues and give students rapid feedback by utilizing class time for interactive activities, debates, and language practice exercises (Abeysekera & Dawson, 2015). This method is consistent with the communicative language teaching (CLT) method, which emphasizes meaningful contact as a means and an end in language acquisition (Celce-Murcia et al., 1995). However, the effective use of flipped classrooms in ESL environments requires careful consideration of elements like teacher preparation, student motivation, and technology accessibility (Hao and Lee, 2016). It is essential to guarantee that every student has equitable access to online resources in order to avoid making already-existing educational disparities worse. Furthermore, maintaining a positive and encouraging classroom environment is crucial to keeping students interested in and dedicated to the self-paced learning strategy (Mazur, 2009).

A study published by Aidoo et al. (2022) examined students' views of learning outcomes and analysed their experiences in flipped classrooms. Data were gathered through focus groups and surveys using a triangulation mixed case study research approach. The findings demonstrated that most students had favourable opinions of the flipped classroom in terms of expectations, satisfaction, usefulness, and efficacy. They also expressed a willingness to suggest

the course that was taught using this method. Positive learning outcomes from the flipped classroom also included motivation, accomplishment, critical thinking, and cooperative learning. However, because there weren't enough materials available to support their learning, pupils had some difficulties when they tried to learn in a flipped classroom.

Sakulprasertsri (2017) describes four flipped classroom pillars, as necessary for flipped learning to take place. According to Flipped Learning Network (2014), these comprise Intentional Content, Flexible Environment, Learning Culture, and Professional Educator. Flexible learning environments are those that introduce a variety of learning modalities—such as group work, individual study, research, performance, and project work—in the classroom that optimize students' learning potential. Participating in various learning contexts gives students the freedom to select when and where they learn, which can raise their degree of autonomy over time (Sakulprasertsri, 2017). The change from a teacher-centred to a student-centred approach since the turn of the twenty-first century is referred to as a shift in learning culture. In flipped classrooms, students get excellent instruction and a deeper dive into the subjects. Additionally, students actively participate in acquiring new information both within and outside of the classroom. They can pace and assess their own education. In the meanwhile, educators can stress the value of using classroom interactions to make sure students understand every lesson (Sakulprasertsri, 2017). Furthermore, both educators and learners could become more technologically savvy (Huang et al., 2023). Additionally, during the teaching and learning process, a flipped classroom promotes student participation and provides more opportunities for teacher-student engagement (Güler et al., 2023).

The term "intentional content" describes the responsibility of the instructor in selecting the subjects that must be taught explicitly as well as the right resources to support students' independent learning beyond the classroom. In order to make the most of class time, teachers select specific content. Depending on the students' grade level and subject matter, this content allows students to experience many instructional strategies, such as project-based learning, active learning, and inquiry-based learning, and peer instruction. In this sense, the need for qualified, experienced, and professional teachers is greater than ever. They must choose whether and when to switch from providing direct instruction to letting students study on their own. Additionally, they must choose how to facilitate student-teacher or student-student interaction. Additionally, to enhance their training and ensure that everyone understands the specific subject being taught in the flipped classroom, teachers often reflect on what they have taught and share it with others (Sakulprasertsri, 2017).

Applying the flipped learning paradigm to the right curriculum and age group may boost student satisfaction. This curriculum, which is more autonomous and thoughtfully given, can boost students' success or achievement by increasing their knowledge of the material. When implemented and prepared carefully, flipped classrooms are unquestionably a suitable learning paradigm to boost student engagement. Swemsen (2022) discovered that it can be challenging to attain student engagement in academic content due to the increasing usage of digital

technology in households and classrooms. This is due to the wide use of the mobile technologies everywhere across the globe. Sometimes, learners use their phones more than the lessons being taught in class.

Flipped classrooms, thus, take advantage of these gadgets since they are readily available and mostly occupy learners' lives. The idea is to take advantage of the platform that has caught learners by storm. Teachers now have a way to use the digital format with meaning and purpose when they implement flipped classrooms. Students can spend more of their classroom time engaged in active learning activities rather than listening to lectures that provide direct instruction by implementing the flipped learning paradigm. It has been demonstrated that the increased student involvement brought about by these active learning activities increases student success (Swemsen, 2022).

Flipped classrooms have also been used in other domains such as culinary arts program. To find out if kids perform better academically and are more involved in the digitally flipped classroom than they are in a traditional classroom, Holik (2019) carried out a study to gather information from a Community Technical Education culinary arts program. Two groups of twelve people each were created from the twenty-four participants in a postsecondary culinary arts program. A typical, teacher-centred class was presented to one group, while a flipped, student-centred session was given to the other. According to the results, over the course of the semester, students' grades in the flipped classroom consistently outperformed those in the traditional classroom, increasing by nearly 4%. These results imply that academic performance and student involvement both increased in flipped courses.

Theoretical literature

One promising approach to increasing learner engagement in ESL courses is the flipped classroom paradigm. To improve language acquisition and better prepare ESL students for communication difficulties in the real world, instructors can create a more dynamic and inclusive classroom by utilizing technology, personalizing instruction, and encouraging active learning. The flipped classroom concept is an example of creative and successful ESL pedagogy as the educational landscape changes. The fundamental idea behind the flipped learning approach is derived from Constructivist Learning Theory, which highlights the role that students have in their education by assisting them in becoming more engaged in the classroom and active learners. This study was guided by Piaget's (1986) Constructivism Learning Theory, which emphasizes the active role of students in creating their own understanding. According to this approach, learners build mental models, integrate new information into their schemas, and reflect on their experiences rather than passively absorbing information. This contact promotes deeper learning and comprehension.

Constructivism is 'an approach to learning that holds that people actively construct or make their own knowledge, and that reality is determined by the experiences of the learner' (Elliott et al., 2000, p. 256). Constructivists hold that each learner constructs their own meaning through experience, and that the relationship between new experiences and existing knowledge

shapes meaning. Constructivist Learning Theory, which emphasizes the role that students play in their education by helping them become more engaged in the classroom and be active learners, is where the basic notion of the flipped learning approach originates. A flipped learning approach has the benefit of converting class time into learning experiences where students ask questions and engage in collaborative, hands-on learning (Sakulprasertsri, 2017). Flipped classrooms are learner-centred, requiring students to take a more active part in their own education as opposed to the traditional teacher-centred model, which views students as empty vessels who passively absorb knowledge.

METHODOLOGICAL DESIGN

In this section, the author outlines the data collection procedures employed in this inquiry. Comprehending research methodology is essential to carrying out reliable and valid research. It encompasses a wide range of procedures and tenets that direct scientists in the gathering, processing, and interpretation of data (Kothari, 2004). However, by following a strict technique, researchers can guarantee the validity, reliability, and correctness of their findings (Cresswell, 2014).

Ryan (2018), cited in Pervin and Mokhtar (2022), postulate that since our cultures and life experiences differ, any empirical investigation, or interpretative approach, presume that knowledge and truth are subjective. According to Berryman (2019), an interpretive method is predicated on elements like language, shared awareness, and "social construction" as crucial components that interpretivists must consider in order to acquire data. In order to obtain answers to qualitative inquiries, interpretive researchers should focus on understanding the "how and why" factors that influence behaviour occurrence while designing their study topics. The goal of qualitative research, according to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), is to clarify the relevance of an event for those who were directly engaged. How people interpret their own experiences, or "how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences," is of interest to researchers collecting qualitative data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p.6).

Research design

Asenahabi (2018) contends that a strong design is necessary for doing research successfully. A research design is a method that an investigator decides to employ before beginning data collecting in order to achieve the purpose of the study properly (Kamal, 2019). The study plan specifies the kinds of analysis needed to produce the intended outcomes. It describes the kinds of information that are required, the methods that will be utilized to obtain the information, and the ways in which the information will be applied to the research questions. For this study, a case study methodology was selected in order to shed light on the mechanism by which a casual connection occurs and to provide a comprehensive understanding of how and why specific occurrences occur (Wabwoba & Ikoha, 2011).

Participant selection

Participants for this inquiry were 12 grade 10 English First Additional Language educators. Convenience sampling technique was used to sample educators from a rural setting to understand the possibility of learner engagement through flipped classrooms, which were widely used during the COVID- 19, as some of the alternative measures adopted by educators to save the academic year, to continue and engage learners in the learning environment.

Data collection procedures

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the participants in order to gather data. Because semi-structured interviews enable the researcher to go off course and delve deeper in pursuit of novel ideas based on the interviewee's responses, the researcher chose to employ them (Knott, et al., 2022). Typically, the researcher has a framework of the themes to be examined before beginning a semi-structured interview (Knott, et al. (2022). Interviews were collected for a period of 12 days, with each participant interviewed per day. Interviews, which were conducted for 40 minutes, with each participant, were audio-taped with the participants' consent.

Data analysis

Thematic analysis, which entails coding data and assigning categories to it, was used to analyse data. Busseto et al. (2020) describes coding as connecting the raw data with theoretical terms, thus, making raw data sortable. During this process, codes are then grouped together and summarised. The researcher then develops themes, which generate the findings of the study.

To ensure validity and reliability of the findings, a pilot study was conducted with 6 participants using semi-structured interviews. The results of the paper correlated with the findings of the pilot study. However, in qualitative studies, even if the same participants and instruments are utilised in both the pilot and the main study, findings will never exactly replicate each other. Due to unforeseen circumstances, participants might never behave in similar ways on both occasions.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The objectives of this study were to explore how flipped classrooms can improve leaner engagement in English Second Language classrooms in secondary schools, and to determine the way flipped classrooms facilitate learner engagement. Themes that emerged from the first objective are minimal gap between high ability and low ability students, and the development of paraphrasing skills. Themes that emerged from the latter include the pre-engagement with learning in the learners' home languages, and scaffolded instruction during in-class activities. Table 1 below is a summary of the objectives and themes that conveyed the results of this paper.

Table 1.

Objectives and Themes

Objective	Theme
To explore the benefits of learner engagement through flipped classrooms	• Minimal gap between high ability and low ability students • Development of paraphrasing skills
To determine how flipped classrooms facilitate learner engagement	• Pre-engagement with learning material in the learners' languages • Scaffolded instruction during in-class activities

Objective 1: To explore the benefits of learner engagement through flipped classrooms

Theme 1: Minimal gap between high ability and low ability learners

One of the major advantages of flipped classrooms is that they minimise the gap between high ability and low ability learners. Participants indicated that flipped classrooms allow the learners to interact with the learning material without interruptions from high ability students who dominate the classroom discussions. Furthermore, high ability learners threaten other learners when they always raise hands to respond to the teacher's questions. A participant responded, thus:-

> *The advantages of giving students reading material prior the class is that it encourages participation in the classroom. Learners ask questions on sections that presented them with difficulties. Furthermore, high ability students no longer dominate classes only. Also, low ability students participate in class because of their pre-exposure to the content to be learnt.* (Participant C)

Participant C's response above indicates that the opportunities offered by flipped classrooms benefits all types of learners because even the low ability learners participate in class because they can revisit the learning material several times, and, thus, note the areas of difficulty so they can also raise some concerns and seek clarity.

Some participants emphasized that the size of the class groups influences learners' performance. They articulated that in large groups, some learners do not get the opportunity to voice out their ideas. One of the participants had this to say:-

> *During flipped classrooms, all the learners prepare for class discussions, but some are discouraged when the teacher creates large groups. Smaller groups allow all learners to participate because they are not threatened by the fear of mistaking mistakes in front of many students.* (Participant I)

The participant's response above concurs with Nusrat and Islam (2023) who state that groups should not be too large, preferably groups of threes, so that all learners receive the opportunity to participate. Nusrat and Islam (2023) argue that groups should be arranged in mixed small cohorts, consisting of high ability and low ability learners to ensure that every learner participates. In this regard, active participation of all learners is ensured. Furthermore, assigning roles to every leaner is crucial. This minimises the opportunities of dominance of class discussions and activities by high ability learners. Learners of various cultural or academic backgrounds will formulate ideal groups, according to Nusrat and Islam (2023).

One participant indicated that sending the learning material to students without indicating the focus area for the next class can be a futile activity. Research has shown that teachers should also send activities, preferably in the form of worksheets (Geybers & Eybers, 2022), that can be completed by the learners when they are engaged in the pre-class activities. One of the participants had the following sentiment: -

> *It is important to indicate to the students the area of focus. Then they participate easily when they know the teacher's expectations. Sending videos to students without clarity does not facilitate learning. When the students know the focus area, they take an extra mile preparing for the following class.* (Participant J)

Participant J's response above exposed that the success of flipped classrooms depends on effective preparation by the teacher. This submits that instructors should select and send videos that will contribute to the effectiveness of the lesson. Therefore, instructor preparation time must be increased during the first transformation of flipping the classroom (Baig & Yadegaridehkordi, 2023).

Participants also indicated that when the learners know the types of activities that will be completed during in-class time, they are motivated to prepare thoroughly for those activities. One of the participants observed that :-

> *When you give the learners some activities to complete while they interact with the reading material sent through videos, they get good grades in class when the same activities are done in class. It becomes easier for them to perform in any class activity, be it discussions or written activities.* (Participant B)

The response above suggests that while the teacher selects relevant material to share with the learners, it is equally important to design activities that will guide the pre-class for effective learning. Completion of activities facilitate comprehension and ensure participation during in-class activities. However, flipped classrooms have not gone without criticism. Some studies have shown that flipped classrooms are time consuming on the part of the teacher.

Theme 2: Development of paraphrasing skills

Paraphrasing is an essential skill that enables learners to develop good writing skills. Studies have shown that many students struggle with paraphrasing skills. Reliance on online teaching has severe implications, which, among others, including the non-accessibility of proper monitoring devices, and irresponsibility on the part of instructors who fail to give proper

guidance to students regarding the handling of online material (Mbeshu-Mhlauli, 2023). Some participants indicated that some of the beneficial gains associated with flipped classrooms include the learners' ability to paraphrase texts. According to research, when learners receive learning material earlier, they have maximum opportunities to interact with it, and, thus, develop vocabulary that facilitates participation in class. Participant C's response below attests to this: -

> *Flipped classrooms help learners to have deeper understanding of the text because they can discuss the text with their peers. Their presentation skills increase when they have interacted with the learning material before the class*.

Flipped classrooms enable learners to demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of the learning material. Mastering the art of paraphrasing highlights one's deeper comprehension of source material. This also assists students to interpret other peoples' ideas, thus, leading to the production of own texts. This lessens the high rate of plagiarised texts and leads to good academic writing skills. Peer pressure is a contributing factor` to online learning difficulties, as many students neglect their student roles, and choose to plagiarize instead of focusing on their studies (Mbeshu-Mhlauli, 2023). Consequently, during online examinations, students exchange information they have copied and pasted from websites with their peers. Students that engage in such behaviour risk having lower-quality content knowledge, which impairs their ability to think creatively and write academically. Thus, flipped classrooms, if properly managed, provide strong platforms for learner participation and the development of good writing skills.

Some participants indicated that the ability to paraphrase facilitates vocabulary development as the learners find synonymous words to express themselves while they prepare for classroom presentations. One of the participants argued: -

Learners' vocabulary increases when they find new ways to express themselves. They use synonyms and their own sentences, which are different from the text. This shows their understanding of the text. (Participant F)

Acquisition of in-depth vocabulary maximises learners' participation in classroom activities. Additionally, this expands their vocabulary and improves their writing abilities. Furthermore, learners develop the art of scrambling sentences, which include beginning sentences with objects such that they become passive. In this way, learners improve the organisation of sentence, thus, gradually refining their writing skills.

Objective 2: To determine how flipped classrooms facilitate learner engagement

Theme 1: Pre-engagement with learning material in the learners' languages

Some of the participants specified that the distribution of learning material through videos and other media sources is beneficial to learners. Learners converge in groups and discuss the lessons sent to them. Participants indicated that during pre-class discussions, learners are free to utilise their home languages to facilitate comprehension.

> *Learners even discuss the activities among themselves. During their discussions, they are free to switch to any language they are comfortable with (Participant G)*

Some studies indicate that the utilisation of the learners' home languages (Lwanga-Lumu, 2020; Omidire, 2019) can be beneficial in contexts where the learning material seems inaccessible because of the language of instruction, which is a learning barrier to some learners. Thus, flipped classrooms offer opportunities to navigate the learning material in a language they are most comfortable with. This results in increased opportunities for participation in group discussions. Learners also complete the pre-class activities without much effort.

Some participants revealed that during in-class activities, learners participate actively since they know the teachers' expectations. This also reduces the teacher's authority as the only source of knowledge, and the marginalisation of learners as empty vessels to be filled by the teacher (Richards & Rodgers, 2017). One participant argued that: -

> *The teacher as an authority figure who possesses all knowledge no longer threatens students. (*Participant D)

Pre-engagement with learning material is a robust predictor of learner engagement in ESL classrooms. Students who attend flipped classrooms perform better academically, are more engaged with the content, have better comprehension, and are more confident and capable of critical thought (Mortaza-Mardiha et al., 2023). The teachers' responsibility is the selection of relevant online material, which will the focus area for a particular lesson. Learners, then, engage with the material utilising various strategies that will facilitate comprehension. This also boosts their self-esteem since they feel confident about themselves.

Theme 2: Scaffolded instruction during in-class activities

Some studies have shown that despite the benefits offered by online learning, there are some challenges experienced by both teachers and learners. Concerns about online learners, such as low learning engagement and poor instruction, have been highlighted by recent surveys and study findings (Doo et al., 2020). Thus, scaffolded instruction, during in-class activities, is a significant predictor of successful learning. Scaffolded instruction, in language learning environments, involves the use synonymous words, and antonyms to develop learners' vocabulary. One of the participants articulated that: -

> *After the flipped classrooms, there must be follow up activities which test the learners' understanding. Learners understand better when the teacher explains the lesson using synonyms or opposites of words.* (Participant G)

Participant G's claim above indicates that flipped classrooms, on their own, might not benefit learners when the teacher does not engage the learners through scaffolding activities. To improve online learning results and make learning more meaningful and engaging, learners need appropriate instructional support, such as timely and appropriate scaffolding that encourages them to build their own knowledge in the online learning environment (Oliver & Herrington, 2003). One of the participants echoed that: -

> *One of the advantages of flipped classrooms is that, in addition to the development of speaking skills, it also develops critical thinking skills. Also, learners' writing skills are*

improved when they first engage with the topic to be assessed, whether in a test or an assignment. (Participant I)

The participant's response above disclosed that during in-class activities, while the teacher interrogates learners and interact with the text, speaking skills are enhanced. Such activities facilitate comprehension of essay writing skills as learners paraphrase the learning material. In this regard, they learn to analyse texts critically, and select the most salient features in a text. The Best Colleges (2019) survey poll revealed that students just copy and paste information from websites without demonstrating any understanding while completing tasks related to online learning. With the realisation that online learning is expanding quickly, the "quality of instruction and academic support" for online courses in higher education was a concern for some students, according to the Best Colleges (2019) survey results. Thus, modelling activities provide guidelines for the completion of assignments.

To improve learning outcomes in online learning, Bonk (2009) contends that it is imperative to investigate the impacts of scaffolding as an instructional method. However, this kind of activity needs skilled teachers, with good questioning techniques ranging from low order to high order questions. Scaffolding, therefore, makes up for shortcomings like how students use the internet to complete projects. Flipped classrooms have the power to replace the lecture-method, which marginalises the learners and render them passive making them empty vessels that await to be filled by the teacher.

Limitations

A major limitation of this paper is the sample size, that was drawn from a rural community which experiences technologically related challenges, including internet connectivity. Also, some participants were technologically illiterate, and the utilisation of gadgets was limited to the less advanced technologies.

CONCLUSION

The objective of this paper was to gain insight into how learner engagement can be facilitated through flipped classrooms in the post COVID-19 era, which accelerated utilisation of new technologies in the learning environment. Semi-structured interviews, which were thematically analysed, indicated that flipped classrooms minimise the gap between high and low ability learners. They also contribute to the development of paraphrasing skills. Furthermore, flipped classrooms enable pre-engagement with learning material in the learners' languages; and promote scaffolded instruction during in-class activities.

Technology must be incorporated into the classroom to keep up with the ongoing evolution of student learning (Burgoyne & Eaton, 2018; Jukes et al., 2010). By using technology, educators can create an engaging and dynamic learning environment for their students during class by turning the typical lecture style classroom upside down and delivering lessons virtually outside of it (Ng, 2014; Pellas, 2017). In conclusion, flipped classrooms have the potential to create dynamic, student-centered learning environments by fostering learner involvement in

ESL classes. According to the literature, this method can help with interactive language practice, learner autonomy, and language learning. But, for implementation to be successful, issues with technological access must be resolved, and a positive classroom climate must be established. Among the many cutting-edge teaching strategies being investigated by educators, the flipped classroom model continues to be a vital asset to the ESL pedagogical toolbox.

The incorporation of mobile technologies in the teaching and learning environment caught the education landscape by storm in the COVID-19 era. Thus, involving learners in advanced technologies needs skilled and dedicated instructors, who can align the online material with the classroom requirements. Professional development for teachers, across all grades, should be an ongoing process as technology continually expands innovative instructional pedagogies. Teacher-training colleges should equip teacher trainees with the requisite skills to engage learners in flipped classrooms, which promote learner engagement. The curriculum should be revamped to include technology assisted learning as it provides the spark for learner engagement.

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