

Enhancing Cultural Awareness of EFL Learners Using a Flipped Classroom Model: The Perception of a Census

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Abstract.

Teaching English as a Foreign Language is always of need for leading-edge methods and approaches, strategies and the teaching style of teachers. Putting into operation any of those mentioned is not as easy as anyone would have thought because we have to guarantee its effectiveness as well as the willingness of the students in order to implement it in the English department. A new instructional model needs to find its way to be applied at university-level, the flipped classroom model. This study is meant to explore students' perceptions of using this strategy in teaching British and American civilizations course in the English Department at Barika University Center to ensure first-year learners' understanding of the target culture and awareness of cultural products, behaviours, and ideas. The study at hand is carried out through a descriptive method. The method of sampling in this study is the census since the whole population took part in this investigation. Forty (40) students were asked to answer a questionnaire that is related to both, the flipped strategy and cultural awareness. The results evinced a positive attitude towards using the flipped classroom in the culture and civilization module.

Keywords:

Flipped classroom; cultural awareness; perception.

Résumé.

Enseigner l'anglais en tant que langue étrangère a toujours besoin de s'appuyer sur les avancées de la didactique des langues étrangères. En effet, pour pouvoir aboutir à un enseignement efficace dans un contexte où l'anglais est langue étrangère, il faudra s'assurer de la participation active des étudiants. Ainsi, nous pensons que le modèle de la classe inversée devrait être mis en place au niveau universitaire. Cette étude vise à explorer les représentations qu'ont les étudiants du département d'anglais (Centre Universitaire de Barika) de la mise en place de ce modèle. Notre recherche se base sur l'hypothèse selon laquelle la mise en œuvre de ce modèle d'enseignement permettrait aux apprenants de première année de mieux appréhender la culture cible et de se conscientiser davantage des conceptions, des produits et des comportements culturels véhiculés par la langue anglaise. L'étude a été réalisée au moyen d'une méthode descriptive. Nous avons procédé par enquête à laquelle ont participé quarante (40) apprenants. Cette enquête par questionnaire dont les interrogations portent à la fois sur la stratégie inversée et sur la sensibilisation à la culture, a révélé, d'une manière générale, une attitude positive à l'égard du modèle de la classe inversée dans le module Culture et civilisation.

Mots-clés.

Classe inversée; sensibilisation culturelle; la perception.

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1 . Introduction

Syntax, phonetics and phonology are of great importance for learners in the EFL context; however, it is not enough when teaching a language in general and a foreign one in particular. Yet, culture is what the language expresses, embodies and symbolizes. The problem is not only related to comprehending the material but also to being motivated when it comes to learning the social habits and historical events of a given culture; moreover, culture embodies the social behaviour and norms of a particular group. In addition, as teachers, we should allot and devote some time discussing issues related to both cultures of the source and target languages. Consequently, the students will have the chance to become conscious of the objectives behind learning this material. Furthermore, they can spend more time reviewing recorded videos at home. Jonathan Bergmann and Aaron Sams¹ created the flipped classroom model in 2007, describing it: “which is traditionally done in class is now done at home, and that which is traditionally done as homework is now completed in class” (2012, p. 13). Teachers should plan their lessons then record a video course and put it online for the students to watch it before the class so that class time will be consumed in answering questions, doing activities and group discussions.

Though no studies, which aim at testing out the flipped classroom model in teaching the English culture’s course, have been found, we came across a number of studies that are pertinent in content and method (Bishop & Verleger, 2013; Blanton, 2013; Butt, 2014; Strayer, 2007; Toto & Nguyen, 2009; Thanasoulas, 2001; Chlopek, 2008; Phillips, 2001; Ekwelibe, 2015; Gurbanov, 2010; Long, 2018). Additionally, most of these studies used a questionnaire since the most important goal to reach was to state the students’ perceptions of the flipped classroom model. For that reason, we planned to

investigate whether students can be motivated towards using the flipped classroom model in teaching CCL class, mainly investigating EFL students' opinions in the English department of Barika University Center.

1.1.Literature Review

The curriculum of English as foreign language learning in the English department in Algeria includes teaching the British and American Civilizations, which is covered in a module named 'Culture and Civilization of Language' that presents the history of the English culture. The first-year students will be exposed to the building blocks of Britain and America focusing on the detailed chronological order of the events that happened in both countries. However, the traditional method often affects EFL students by making them feel bored easily due to listening to the lecture and assigned to write essays in this module. They need an advanced teaching method that may encourage students to improve their academic achievement.

On the one hand, culture is what the language manifests. It is considered a skill as claimed by Kramersch:

Culture in language learning is not an expendable fifth skill, tacked on, so to speak, to the teaching of speaking, listening, reading, and writing. It is always in the background, right from day one, ready to unsettle the good language learners when they expect it least, making evident the limitations of their hard-won communicative competence, challenging their ability to make sense of the world around them" (Kramersch, 1993, p. 1)

To explain, Kramersch¹³ has detected the role of the cultural information delivered to the students on their communicative competence; on the same side, Byram has criticized the flaw of the grammatical competence without the intercultural communicative competence. In fact, what has been forgotten is the fact that "knowledge of the grammatical system of a language

[grammatical competence] has to be complemented by understanding (sic) of culture-specific meanings” (Byram, Morgan et al., 1994, p. 4).

On the other hand, many EFL students are somehow incapable of understanding the British and American culture due to their rejection of other cultures. Therefore, it is not surprising to see the students get low academic achievements. Alkhaldeh’s study (2010) shed light on the difficulties that may cause this low achievement like classroom size, lack of teacher training, parental follow up (Cited in Alaraj, 2016, p. 489). Moreover, a part of Alaraj’s study (2016) exploring the difficulties that may hinder EFL learning showed the response of students saying: “Why such old ways of teaching still used! We feel very bored because of listening to the teacher... It is better to have some kind of discussion so that we feel interested” (2016, p. 488).

This study aims at inspecting students’ attitudes towards the use of the flipped classroom for a better understanding of the English culture and raising their cultural awareness to develop their cultural competence.

According to the theoretical part of this study, it is widely believed that using the flipped classroom could be beneficial for understanding key concepts related to culture. This model might be a very complex, powerful and motivational tool for integrating authentic English, culture and humour into English lessons.

If the teachers of English as a foreign language want to take advantage of using this model in their lessons, they should flip their EFL classrooms to get rid of the routine that leads students to get bored of culture and civilization of language course as well as other modules.

Thus, the fundamental research questions are:

- 1- How do the students perceive the flipped classroom in their EFL classroom?
- 2- What are the advantages/disadvantages of using it in English language teaching?
- 3- Does flipping the classroom contribute to fostering the students’ cultural awareness?

2. Method and Tools.

This study was carried out through a descriptive method including a questionnaire to inquire about the students' attitudes towards using the flipped classroom in the EFL classroom. We designed this questionnaire (Appendix A) that starts with information about the students' age and gender.

The Third question (3) asked about the students' opinions about having the lesson at home.

Questions four (4) to ten (10) were designed to know students' attitudes concerning the flipped classroom, and in what module the flipped classroom is likely to be used.

The participants who took part in this research were forty first-year students. The subjects presented the census in our case. The targeted subjects are eighteen (18) to twenty-six (26) years old studying at Barika University Center. They are taking courses in their field of study i.e. English as a Foreign language.

3. Results and Discussion

To explore the students' attitudes towards using the flipped classroom model; the results are shown below along with the discussion.

Of the study census, 40 students completed and returned the questionnaire. The population is composed of (36%) male and (64%) female.

Respondents were asked about their opinion concerning having the lesson at home and whether it helped them or not. Just over half (54%) confirmed that having the lesson at home helped them. While (36%) were confused about having the lesson or the exercises inside the classroom. Ten percent (10%) refused to receive the lesson outside the classroom.

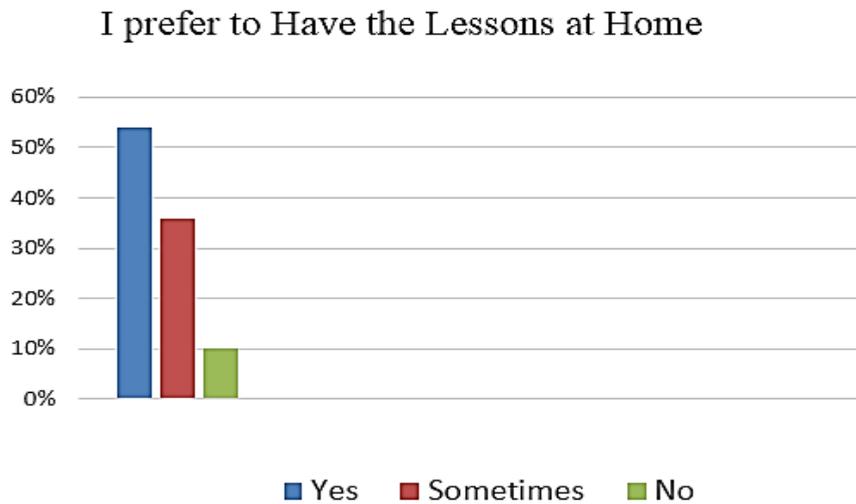


Figure (1): Students' response on having their lessons at home

After being introduced to the flipped classroom model along with culturally related terms such as cultural awareness, sensitivity, knowledge, competence, respondents were asked whether the flipped classroom fostered their cultural awareness (the results are shown in Figure (2)). Forty-five percent (45%) answered with yes; (26%) replied with sometimes, while (29%) said no.

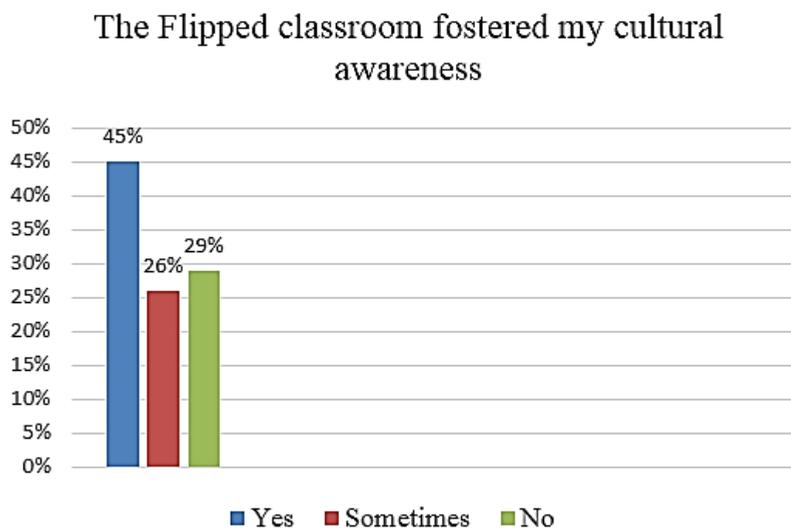


Figure (2): Students' perception of the role of the flipped classroom in fostering their cultural awareness

As for the item shown in Figure (3), 54% of respondents claimed that the flipped classroom helped them in fostering their cultural awareness, a small number of subjects disagreed (19%) while the others(27%) were in between.

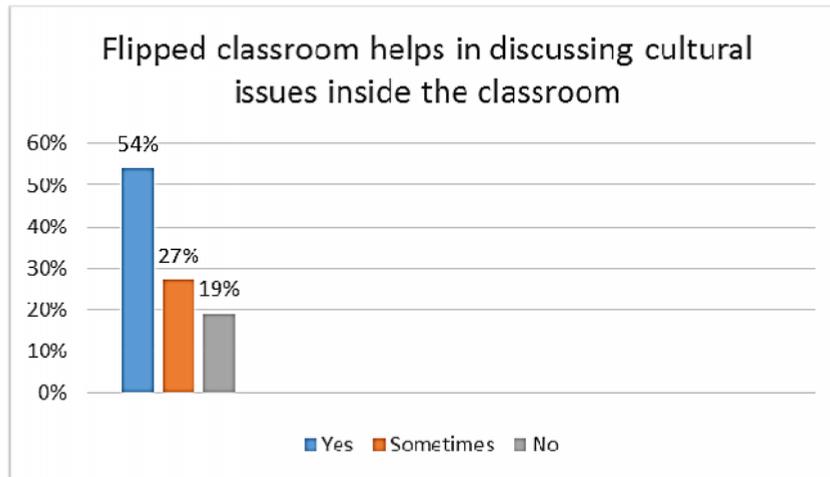


Figure (3): Students’ reaction to the advantage of the flipped classroom in discussing cultural issues

The data analysis shows that none of the participants refused to have a flipped classroom, while (27%) agreed that the flipped classroom must be used in the EFL classroom. The majority (73%) replied stating that the flipped classroom model must be used in the EFL classroom, but depending on the type of information delivered to the students. The results are shown below in the pie chart (Figure 4).

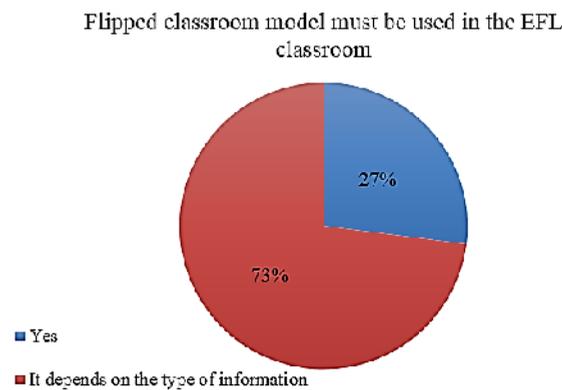


Figure (4): Students’ response to the must of applying the flipped classroom

Collecting data from the subjects (look at Figure 5) revealed that (74 %) agreed that the flipped classroom has helped them in saving time for promoting their cultural competence by discussing culture-related information. While the rest (26%) answered with “sometimes” but none of them refused to admit the aid of flipped classroom in saving time.

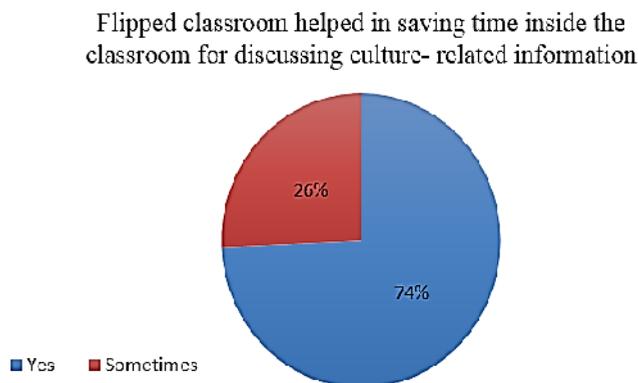


Figure (5): The flipped classroom’s role in devoting time for discussing culture-related information

Figure 6 shows the modules that the students wanted to flip (figure 6). Thirty-seven percent (37%) of the participants agreed on the application of the flipped classroom during the CCL courses. Both Written expression and grammar modules have the same percentage (18%). The same percentage (9 %) was collected from the students who claimed their desire of having the flipped classroom used in all modules, Oral Expression, and phonetics modules.

I would like to have a flipped classroom in ... course

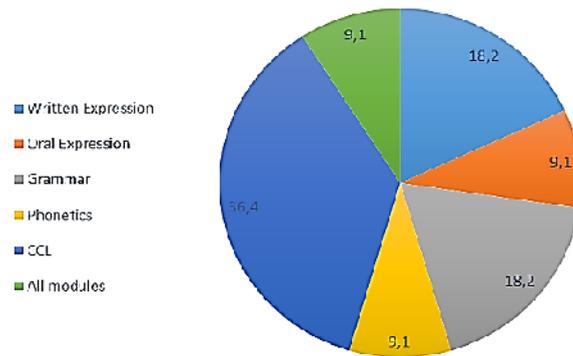


Figure (6): The courses where the students preferred to have a flipped classroom

Figure 7 evinces the fact that the flipped classroom helped the EFL learners improve their skills but at different levels (figure 7). A significant number of students (31%) stated that the flipped classroom helped them improve their writing skill, whereas most of the students (30%) agree on the fact that the flipped classroom helped in developing their speaking skill. Moreover, students’ listening skill was increased especially when watching the videos back home. As for the reading skill, only a few students claimed that the flipped classroom helped them when reading.

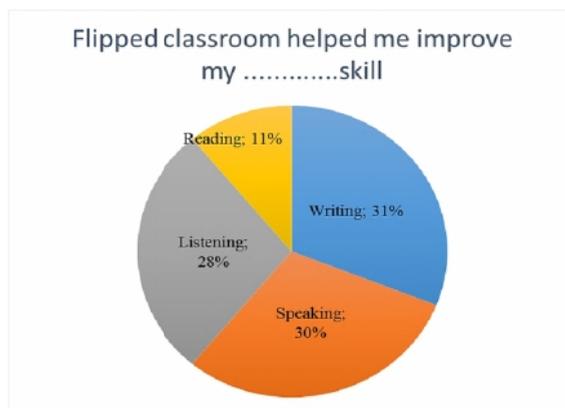


Figure (7): The effect of the flipped classroom on improving the four skills

The following pie chart (figure 8) clearly indicated that (63%) of the subjects reported a positive attitude towards the role of the flipped classroom in enhancing their vocabulary. Only (37%) of the participants disagreed on the same point.

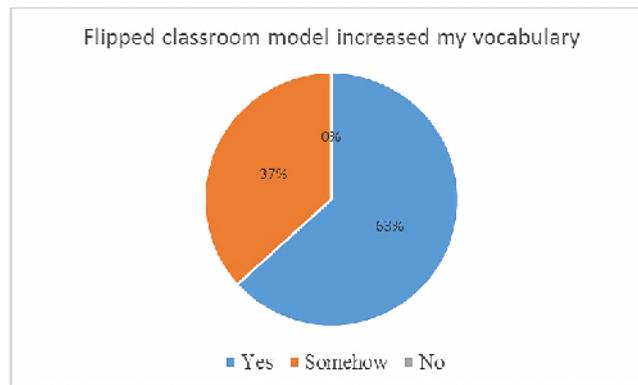


Figure (8): The role of the flipped classroom on increasing students' vocabulary

4. Conclusion

This study has found that there was a positive attitude shown by the first-year students at Barika University Center. In other words, most students are willing to have a change from a traditional classroom into a flipped one.

From the results explained, we can suggest that before applying the flipped classroom, teachers must take into consideration students' needs as well as the provided information.

When students watch the lesson at home, it should be simple in a way that students can understand, react, and be able to discuss some points when going to their class.

This study led to the following conclusions:

1- Using the flipped classroom model encourages EFL learners to use their time back home in learning and their time inside the classroom in developing their critical thinking.

2- The flipped classroom helps students enhance their cultural awareness and develops an understanding of culture-related subjects in a joyful environment.

3- Students find the flipped classroom model a turning point to a better way of learning English as a foreign language.

4- This study contributed in an attempt to adapt e-learning in higher education in general and the EFL classroom to be more specific.

5- Students find the flipped classroom model in the CCL module useful and relevant when it has some direct relation to the discussion of the course content.

6- The present research gave insights on students' perceptions and opinions on the use of the flipped classroom model in the EFL classroom. However, it is also imperative to redirect teachers' opinions, perceptions, experiences, failures and success while using a flipped classroom.

Based on the above-mentioned results, the researcher attempts to carry on this study and conduct an experimental study on the effect of the flipped classroom on EFL learners' cultural awareness, sensitivity, and competence.

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Appendix:Students' Questionnaire

Dear students,

This survey aims at gathering information on your perceptions on the flipped classroom. To make this survey helpful for the sake of educational research, please think carefully and then fill in the questionnaire, accurately reflecting your true opinions and feelings.

Do not mention your names please.

Please circle the appropriate answer or fill in the information where necessary:

- Your sex: a. Male b. Female

- Your age: _____

* In the following statements, tick the one that is right according to you.

Statements	Yes	Sometimes	No
-I prefer to have my lesson at home.			
- The Flipped classroom fostered my cultural awareness			
- The flipped classroom helps in discussing cultural issues inside the classroom.			
-The flipped classroom Must be used in the English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom.			
- The flipped classroom helped in saving time inside the classroom for discussing culture-related information.			
-The flipped classroom increased my vocabulary.			

-The flipped classroom is better used in... course.

a. Written Expression.

b. Oral Expression.

c. Grammar.

d. Phonetics.

e. CCL.

f All Modules.

g. Another:...

- Using the flipped classroom helped me develop my skill.

a. Reading.

b. Writing.

c. Listening.

d. Speaking