TO WHAT EXTENT CAN FLIPPED LEARNING IMPROVE EFL LEARNERS’ SPEAKING AND WRITING SKILLS IN ONLINE EDUCATION?

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Abstract:

This paper reports on a qualitative study targeting the benefits of Flipped Learning in an online EFL education class composed of ten intermediate learners. The researcher made use of multiple sources of data including artifacts, semi-structured interviews, and observation. Students had to produce two major assignments in this class. The first one was a writing task in which they were asked to write a short opinion essay. The second one was a speaking task in which they were required to talk for three minutes about a topic of their choice. Both tasks were based on material covered in our online meetings. The findings showed that flipped learning had an overall significant effect on learners’ performance. The researcher also provided pedagogical insights for applying Flipped Learning and recommendations for further research.

Keywords: [Flipped Learning 1; Learner-centered Education 2; EFL 3; Speaking and Writing Skills 4; Performance 5]

Introduction:

Education technology has seen significant developments in recent years (Sean Bui, 2020) which paved the way for a smooth transition to online education, especially under the pandemic. Calls for a rigorous use of technology in education both in Morocco and around the world have emerged both as a necessity and as a potential in terms of the many opportunities that online education offers. Apparently, learning remotely is not only a passing fad but a need in the 21st Century education. Learners have been exposed to technological gadgets on a daily basis and it is high time educators and everyone involved in learning and teaching support learners put these personal gadgets to good use. To this end, several educators have adopted and suggested using the Flipped Learning (FL) approach which is a form of Blended Learning (Flipped Learning Network, 2014).

The core principle of FL is that learners have at their disposal presentations of lesson concepts, explanations, authentic language samples, and readings, usually, but not exclusively, in video formats which they study before going to class. In return, class time is used for feedback, language use, tasks, application, interaction and developing higher-order thinking skills. The bulk of research on FL in EFL/ESL settings suggests positive impact on learners’ performance, motivation, and perception (Bergmann & Sams, 2012). As an example of blended learning, FL has recently gained prominence due to emphasizing learner-centeredness, formative assessment, and motivation. In a flipped class, students are supported and guided to foster their critical thinking skills and evaluate their learning development. In turn, teachers occupy the role of a coach and mentor in this process. This allows teachers to bring more hands-on activities for students to practice skills, engage with content and collaborate with peers and receive valuable feedback on their development. This approach nurtures learners’ sense of autonomy and gives them more freedom to focus and spend time on items they deem more important (The Flipped Learning Network, 2013).

FL has recently conquered the field of education and has captured the interest of a great deal of professionals in a number of academic disciplines. It has gained more popularity in
disciplines such as Math, Medicine, and Health studies (Tadayonifar & Entezari, 2020). In the field of ELT, most studies targeted studying the impact of FL on EFL in general. Very limited research has been done on writing and speaking. It was not until 2014, when the Flipped Learning Network organized its first conference, that language practitioners started to experiment with FL in the English language classroom (Bauer-Ramazani et al., 2016).

For a successful FL experience, it is very important to apply active learning where educational efforts are on learners’ needs, rhythms, learning styles, and contexts (Ramirez, 2020). Therefore, a study to investigate FL benefits in teaching speaking and writing in a remote learning context is important. In this paper, the researcher reports on a 10-week online session in which parts of the course were flipped, mainly writing and speaking sections. The goal was to measure the extent to which FL mode can improve learners’ speaking and writing performance.

**Purpose of the study**

This paper aims at exploring the benefits of Flipped Learning in online classes. The researcher investigates the extent to which FL can help learners improve their linguistic performance, mainly that of speaking and writing abilities. Finally, participants are surveyed for their perceptions of online learning and using of the FL mode.

**Research Questions**

This qualitative study aims to answer the following questions.

1. To what extent can FL method improve learners’ writing and speaking skills?
2. What are the learners’ perceptions of the use of Flipped Learning approach?

**Significance of the study**

Remote learning is not a passing fad, but, considering the popularity of online education around the world, Morocco should invest in education technology and support teachers and educators to get training and conduct research in the field. Covid19 has revealed the shortcomings of some educational policies and practices in the country. Having the option for FL, Blended Learning, or total online learning experiences, is a necessity nowadays, and, considering the literature written thus far, it has good potential and will gain more ground in the coming years. The findings of this small-scale study on FL will provide insights not only for language courses, but also for other school subjects where particularly lecturing occupies significant amounts of class time. Furthermore, the fact that students are familiar with technological devices such as phones, tablets and laptops, applying and including FL in education is not far-fetched.

**Literature Review**

The new reality of both teacher and student profiles have evolved due to technological development which in turn led researchers to investigate new ways and approaches to learning and teaching. The 2021 student profile is significantly different from that of the 1990s. Thus, for the last several years, teaching practitioners have embarked on finding the right tools to effectively exploit class time, put technological gadgets to good use, and reach all learners. Flipped Learning came along and has won the popularity contest especially as a form of Blended Learning, and it is still being tested to learn more about its efficacy.

The appeal of FL in language classes is due to stressing learner centeredness, collaborative project-based and problem-based learning (Carhill-Poza, 2019). Carhill-Poza clarifies that FL has the potential to expand CLT practice by providing learners and teachers
with methods that facilitate engagement in social situations. In a different study, Arifani (2019) argues that the FL approach fosters EFL students’ collaboration. Having the assumption that FL emphasizes active and interactive learning settings, it has great potential to develop learners’ high-order thinking skills (Bergmann & Sams, 2012).

At the theoretical base of FL, Bloom’s taxonomy (2001) made a major component that supports its popularity among teaching practitioners. The revised version of Bloom’s Taxonomy (2001) is a framework which is meant to identify the impact of teaching and learning (Bergmann & Sams, 2014). In a traditional school setting where the teacher is the center, learners focus more on lower level skills – remembering and understanding – of Bloom’s Taxonomy (Koch, 2016). In a FL setting, learners have opportunities to develop and sharpen the higher-level skills through engaging tasks and projects (Bergmann & Sams, 2014). Applying and adapting the guidelines of this Taxonomy, students, at home, memorize information and perhaps check their comprehension, which is referred to as the lower order thinking skills. In class, students apply their knowledge, analyze, and evaluate, etc. The focus here is on higher order thinking skills (Flipped Learning Network, 2014). Therefore, the harder tasks are carried out in the presence of a teacher.

Flipped Learning: Definition and Background

On their website, the Flipped Learning Network defines FL as “a pedagogical approach in which direct instruction moves from the group learning space to the individual learning space, and the resulting group space is transformed into a dynamic, interactive learning environment where the educator guides students as they apply content and engage creatively in the subject matter” (Flipped Learning Network, 2014).

It is necessary to emphasize that FL is not the same as flipped classroom. Traditionally, flipped classroom refers to having students do some sections of the content at home. This, however, does not mean that the teacher is flipping the learning. They could be flipping the classroom but still continue with using the passive traditional learning and teaching approach inside the classroom. Learners are not put in engaging meaningful tasks (Ramirez, 2020). Taking a closer look at the definition above, we can see that FL brings a new concept to students and teachers’ roles. The teacher provides direct instruction and explanation through an appropriate venue (video, reading, audio, virtual resource, etc.) and students are in charge of accessing the material on their own (Ramirez, 2020).

Below are four pillars that the Flipped Learning Network (2014) developed along with their respective indicators under each pillar. The indicators constitute guidelines for educators to verify that student learning is also flipped, not just content. These pillars and indicators set the foundation for understanding and applying this learning and teaching model. Since FL is an approach, there is no specific method or formula to implement it. Each context and educational environment is unique and entails personalized understanding and decisions made by educators to obtain meaningful learning (Ramirez, 2020). In order to get the best of Flipped Learning, it is essential to incorporate the following pillars and guidelines (Flipped Learning Network, 2014):

Pillar 1 - Flexible environment

The physical conditions inside the classroom are exploited to accommodate diverse types of activities and tasks. Educators are required to make necessary arrangements so that students can decide where and when to learn. Additionally, teachers set flexible expectations when it comes to assessment and the pace learners follow.
The teacher provides spaces and time frames that allow learners to engage and reflect on their learning.

The teacher regularly monitors and observes learners to bring new adjustments as appropriate.

The teacher makes use of different ways for students to learn content and demonstrate mastery.

**Pillar 2 - Learning Culture**
Teachers play a role of a facilitator and coach in the flipped classroom. There is a deliberate shift of focus to more learner-centered practice. Here, learners are in charge of their learning and have opportunities to dive deeper into class activities, discussions, and construct new knowledge. They are also given opportunities for self-evaluation to build autonomy of their learning.

- The teacher creates opportunities for learners to engage in meaningful authentic activities in which the learner is the center.
- The teacher scaffolds activities and make them accessible to all students through differentiation and feedback.

**Pillar 3 - Intentional Content**
Flipped Learning educators spend significant amounts of time and energy searching for efficient ways in order to help learners build and develop conceptual understanding, as well as procedural fluency. In this model, teachers should decide on what they need to include in their teaching and what their learners should be doing outside class walls. Educators use Intentional Content to maximize classroom time to apply methods of learner-centered guidelines and work on more active learning strategies.

- The teacher sets priorities of learning concepts and material used in direct instruction for learners to access on their own.
- The teacher develops and/or curates appropriate content (typically videos) for learners.
- The teacher differentiates instruction to aid all learners in mastering the content.

**Pillar 4 - Professional educator**
In the FL approach, it is considered very critical to have professional educators. They continuously observe their learners, provide relevant feedback in the moment, and evaluate their work and progress. Furthermore, they are highly encouraged to reflect on their practices and connect with fellow teachers to improve their instruction, accept constructive feedback, and tolerate controlled disorder inside the classroom. Even though professional educators’ role is less visible in the learning process, they are a vital ingredient for a successful FL experience.

- The teacher is available to all learners for individual, small group, and class feedback.
- The teacher carries out regular formative assessment while in class via observation and recording data to inform future instruction.
- The teacher collaborates and reflects with other educators and takes responsibility for transforming his or her practice (Flipped Learning Network, 2014).

**Related Studies**
Recently, a number of studies have been conducted on the impact of FL on language skills. Soltanpour and Valizadeh (2017), Alias et al. (2017), Ping et al. (2019), and Altas and Mede (2020) investigated how flipping Writing courses impact learners’ writing skills. The
studies revealed a positive connection between FL and learners’ writing ability. Another group of researchers such as Wang and Wright (2018) and Yeşilçınar (2019) researched how FL impacts speaking in language classes.

Soltanpour and Valizadeh (2017) study aimed at investigating the impact of flipping on learners’ argumentative writing skills. The researchers implemented the experimental design, using a pre-test-treatment-posttest-delayed posttest design. To evaluate learners’ productions, they used writing rubrics. The total numbers of participants was 55 and were assigned to two groups. One followed a traditional approach and the other one used a flipped classroom model. The groups received 3 sessions of treatment each. The aim was to measure how significant the difference between the two groups in the overall quality of students’ writing ability. They found that the FL group outperformed the traditional group. Similarly, Alias et al. (2017) conducted a study in which they taught a module on Paragraph Writing using FL to Sudanese secondary school students. The aim was to investigate the impact of implementing FL on learners’ writing ability and motivation. The researchers recruited 28 student volunteers to conduct an exploratory-implementation study. The information from tests, focus group interviews and online interactions revealed that students’ proficiency and satisfaction improved. Ping et al. (2019) carried out a study in which they investigated EFL students’ attitudes and experience of learning writing using the FL model. Their data was acquired from semi-structured interviews of a sample of 18 students and revealed that most students had positive experiences following the FL mode. The researchers reported that participants had enough preparation time before class, deeper practice, more engagement and interaction, and received immediate feedback during class work.

In their article, The Impact of Flipped Classroom Approach on the Writing Achievement and Self-regulated Learning of Pre-service English Teachers, Altas and Mede (2020) investigated effects of flipped classroom on 55 pre-service English teachers’ writing skills. The authors of this research applied a quasi-experimental design and gathered data using pre- and post-tests. Two intact groups were chosen as control group (N=28) and experimental group (N=27). The control group followed a more conventional lecture-based teaching while the experimental group received instruction following the FL guidelines. In order to analyze the data, the researchers used a mixed ANOVA analysis. The research findings demonstrated that using the FL mode led to better writing achievement.

On the other hand, Yeşilçınar (2019) researched the effects of FL on learners’ oral proficiency. The researcher used a pre- and posttest quasi-experimental design to examine the impact of flipping her class on learners’ speaking skills. The participants were 22 non-English major voluntary academicians from different college departments. She used a number of research tools such as a speaking rubric, questionnaires, interviews, and observations. Her findings indicated that her learners developed their performance and confidence. In a similar study, Wang ad Wright (2018) implemented a mixed-methods empirical study to investigate the extent to which flipping class can affect learners’ speaking ability. Their 42 Chinese participants were from different backgrounds. After analyzing the results, they found out that the learners who were exposed to the FL model achieved better score (p < .01) than the traditional instruction group. The FL group also expressed positive reactions towards the language course.

A number of other studies were done on teaching grammar in a flipped class. Al-harbi and Alshumaimeri (2016), Lee and Wallace (2018), and Alnabi (2020) conducted studies to explore the impact of flipped learning on students’ grammar skills. The results were positive and showed that students’ understanding and average scores improved thanks to utilizing FL. Al-harbi and Alshumaimeri (2016) conducted a research study in which they applied the FL
strategy in teaching English grammar. The researchers used the experimental design to examine FL effects on middle school students’ performance and attitudes toward learning independently. The statistical analysis of the post-test results showed that adopting the FL approach played a positive role in enhancing students’ grammar mastery. Learners’ perceptions from the semi-structured interviews also showed that their perceptions of including the FL approach in learning led to positive reaction. Supporting what Al-harbi and Alshumaimeri (2016) concluded, Lee and Wallace (2018) conducted an action research study in a university in South Korea. They compared learners’ performance in a FL mode with that of CLT approach. Their data was gathered from 79 participants’ responses to three surveys, their achievement tasks, and the teacher’s observation of learners’ involvement in class work. The findings demonstrated that the learners in the FL mode achieved better scores in the final assignments than those who did not use in the flipped classroom. In terms of learner attitude, the surveys indicated that the majority of learners in this study had expressed positive feedback of the FL.

In a more recent study, Alnabi’s (2020) conducted a quasi-experimental study to research the impact of the FL on Omani EFL learners’ grammar and investigate their perceptions of the flipped classroom. The researcher studied an intact group of participants (n=28) who were registered in the foundation program in the Arab Open University in Oman. Seven videos on grammar lessons were developed and sent to the participants in advance. Several activities were created following task-based language teaching. The students met for 8 lessons over a span of 8 weeks. The data collection tools included a pre-test, post-test and semi-structured interview. The findings indicated that FL led to significant effects on learners’ comprehension and usage of English grammar. Students’ perceptions of the FL approach were generally positive.

In a more holistic outlook on teaching English language skills, Kung (2017) explored the effectiveness of FL model in a general English class in South Korea. The participants were 24 EFL college-level students from different departments. The students had to watch videos, complete a worksheet, and a quiz, as a form of summative assessment, in order to make sure that they had watched the video. This class was compared to a regular English class. The researcher used pre-and post-tests, learning logs, questionnaires, and interviews. His findings proved that the FL group made better progress. Similarly, Yang et al. (2018) studied how FL approach can impact students’ performance and satisfaction in comparison to a traditional class. Their findings proved that FL model performed better and showed more interest. Kvashnina and Martynko (2016) explored the impact of FL on ESL teaching. They concluded that regardless of challenges, the flipped classroom enhanced learners’ language proficiency, improved their motivation, and fostered their autonomous learning.

**Perceptions on Flipped Learning**

In terms of learner perception of FL, a number of researchers carried out studies to gauge learners’ attitudes of the FL model. Webb, Doman, and Pusey (2014), Sun (2017), and Andujar, Salaberri-Ramiro & Martinez (2020) studied students’ perceptions of the flipped classroom model.

Andujar, Salaberri-Ramiro and Martinez (2020) investigated the perceptions of 84 Spanish EFL learners following a FL approach in a middle school education. The researchers opted for a quantitative analysis in order to analyze the data collected from the two groups using questionnaires. The results yielded a positive perception of the flipped learning experience, particularly in terms of the overall satisfaction. Similarly, Sun (2017) followed a case-study method to explore the advantages of flipping a content-based language class in an EFL college-level setting in Taiwan. The data was collected from interviews and surveys of 30 undergraduate students. Regarding the participants’ perceptions toward the flipping strategy,
their reactions were generally positive. They reported that the FL mode allowed them to gain more confidence in giving presentations. Webb, Doman, and Pusey (2014) researched the flipped classroom model within college-level classes in order to learn more about student and instructor perspectives regarding the flipped classroom. They followed a mixed-method design to study the perspectives of 136 participants of high-intermediate proficiency in English as a foreign language. The researchers distributed questionnaires to learners and reflection journals for instructors. The study results showed that there was not a significant difference between flipped and non-flipped classrooms regarding students’ perspectives at the beginning of the semester. However, by the end of the semester, learners showed more positive attitudes towards flipped learning and they ultimately were comfortable using this approach.

In a review of FL, Låg and Sæle (2019) wrote a paper in a form of a meta-analysis. They retrieved resources from 8 different electronic reference databases to investigate the potential of FL. The findings showed a insignificant effect in favor of the flipped classroom. They continue arguing that an analysis by Cheng et al. (2018) is the only one that, as their own above, covers multiple disciplines. It included 55 different research studies and concluded a slightly significant improvement in favor of the FL approach.

It has been argued that implementing FL could encounter some challenges including the extra time that is required to set up the technological equipment, preparing and creating suitable language activities, finding appropriate resources online, and developing engaging tasks and project-based learning activities (Bauer-Ramzani et al., 2016). Others expressed that students may need more time to watch, read, or listen before class, which could be a challenge for some (Bergmann & Sams, 2012; Lee & Wallace, 2018). In such a situation where teachers provide long videos, it may cause a critical hindrance for learners of low-proficiency level. A different type of challenge might be caused by internet connection issues (Andujar et al., 2020).

To sum up, the literature review above establishes that FL has the potential for creating engaging, dynamic, learner-centered, and personalized learning. However, it was argued that FL can also be done poorly (Bergmann & Sams, 2014). The latter aspects of FL may not be obtained merely by moving classroom lecturing and explanation out of the group learning space. It should be stressed that teachers need to acquire and develop their practice so that they can successfully facilitate learning inside the classroom, and not just show the ability of effectively moving the lecturing to the virtual world (Flipped Learning Network, 2014).

It has been observed that although the flipped classroom model has greatly expanded to new educational settings worldwide, McNally et al., (2017) argued that there is a lack of empirical research on the effectiveness of flipped classrooms. In addition, the bulk of research on FL approach is outside the EFL context owing to its appropriateness in lecture-based academic courses such as Engineering, Health and Teacher Education (Tadayonifar & Entezari, 2020).

**Methodology**

This qualitative study reports on a 10-week online EFL intermediate class in which sections of the course were flipped. The researcher used a number of data collection tools, including semi-artifacts, semi-structured interviews, and observations. Students’ artifacts showed the extent to which participants developed their language skills. The observation’s aim was to account for learners’ engagement, progress, and attitudes. The semi-structured focus-group interviews were carried to gain deeper understanding of learners’ perceptions and to investigate their satisfaction with the FL experience.
Participants
The participants were enrolled in a private language center and their age ranged from 15 to 28 years old of which 50% were males and 50% females. They were from different walks of life including high school students, college students and researchers, and employees. Their goal was to obtain a good level of English language proficiency. The research followed a convenience sampling method since most learners were already familiar with the remote learning mode and the technological tools that were used such as Padlet, Google docs, Zoom, and WhatsApp.

Context and Procedure
This course lasted for 10 weeks with 3 hours of instruction per week. Each class meeting lasted for 1.5 hour. Course activities included recorded videos, readings, language practice, discussions, and presentations, among others. During class time, learners worked on practice activities, such as grammar, vocabulary, writing, and speaking tasks. Students did pre-class autonomous study through watching and reading the assigned material. The teacher, in this case a facilitator, also provided learners with online ready-made resources, such as those on YouTube links, Khan Academy, and Voice of America.

Flipped Learning Approach
FL as has been emphasized above as a model that stresses learner-centered education where tasks, projects, and on-going feedback are essential ingredients. Following the FL pillars and guidelines stated above, participants had material at their disposal. The researcher, also a teacher in this study, provided recorded videos, readings, and instructions to students to study and work on at home. During this course, students were asked to complete two major assignments:

a- A writing assignment: Learners were given a choice to write a short essay on one of the topics that were already covered during class readings and discussions. Learners had the freedom to work individually or in pairs via Google docs.

b- A speaking assignment: This task required students to record a video or audio of themselves talking about one of the book themes that were studied during the course. As the previous task, learners also had the choice to produce this project individually or in pairs. Their productions had to be from 2 to 3 minutes long using a recording tool of their choice.

Data collection
Artifacts — Students’ Productions
Adopting rubrics in language assessment, mainly with writing and speaking skills, has recently gained much popularity among language teaching practitioners (Cult of Pedagogy, 2015). Thus, two different single-point rubrics were adapted following a model by Jeniffer Gonzalez (2015) and reviewed by three fellow EFL teachers. These judges have more than 10 years of teaching experience and are familiar with the school curriculum. Single-point rubrics allow for giving learners ample feedback on a well-set chart. This chart is broken down into three main columns – I wonders, Standards, and I Likes (See Appendix A).

a. I wonders: Evidence of areas that may need growth. The teacher here includes and explains what a student could do to improve the quality of his or her work.

b. Standards: Ideals for This Presentation. On this column, learners have the information and criteria they need to successfully complete their assignments.
c. I likes: Evidence of meeting or exceeding ideals. On the third and last column, learners are given evidence showing the extent to which they successfully accomplished a given task.

Rubrics are used in sets of scoring guidelines that judges can use to provide consistency when assessing students’ work. They provide a specific scaling and weighing system crafted for specific tasks that students are required to complete with clear expectations. In the current study, learners, in advance, know what is expected of them in terms of language accuracy, fluency, presentation, and organization, etc. On the part of students, these rubrics are user-friendly and straightforward (Cult of Pedagogy, 2015). Such rubrics play an important role in helping learners notice a clear path for their development (Wolf and Stevens, 2007).

**Semi-structured Interview**

The purpose of conducting this interview was to investigate how satisfied learners were with the online learning experience and to gather more insight into participants’ perceptions of Flipped Learning. The interview lasted for 45 minutes during which the interviewer asked 15 different questions. The researcher developed an interview protocol with four main themes including a general opening, perceptions, evaluation, and suggestions (See Appendix B). Three fellow EFL teachers reviewed the interview questions for clarity and pertinence. The researcher adapted Dornyei’s (2007) coding stages: (1) transcribing, (2) coding, (3) growing ideas (4) interpreting the data and drawing conclusions.

**Observations**

The researcher observed participants’ interactions, productions, progress, and attitudes while working on course activities. The observer in this study is a participant following a guide with several categories which were developed to gain a good understanding of the participants’ interactions. This guide is broken down into five different themes, including attitudes, fluency, interaction, group dynamics, and course assignments (See Appendix C). Gill and Johnson (2002) argued that when doing observations, a researcher has a chance not only to observe but also to feel. It is also considered a tool that allows for gaining first-hand knowledge and being in and around the social setting (Zikmund et al., 2009). The researcher manually compared and labeled the data that was collected at different time intervals – beginning, middle and end of the course which lasted for ten weeks. The first observation was conducted on week one, the second one was on week six, and the last observation was administered on week ten.

**Results and Discussion**

**Artifacts – Students’ Productions**

Students’ spoken and written productions were analyzed and assessed using two single-point rubrics. The rubrics were on a scale of 20 points. The following results are laid out in a more comprehensive manner, i.e., the researcher provided a holistic evaluation of students’ progress using a single-point rubric.

After the assessment of learners’ productions using the single-point rubric, it was noted that the spoken assignment reflected the most progress. Eight out of ten learners earned a grade higher than 15 points. Their recorded audios and videos showed a remarkable development of their speaking ability. On the other hand, participants’ scores on the written task have not seen a significant progress. Only five out of ten were able to earn a passing grade [10/20] on the evaluating rubrics. The table below shows a breakdown of learners’ performance on both tasks.
Learners' performance on the written and spoken tasks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Speaking</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>9.75</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Learners scored significantly better on the speaking task. They scored better on average [15.2/20]. Three out of ten learners earned a grade equal to or higher than [16/20]. The value [1.8] of standard deviation shows that learners’ scores on the speaking task are not spread out, i.e., most scores are close to the mean [15.2]. In regards to the written productions, the mean is [10.5], which statistically reflects low improvement of learners’ writing ability. The standard deviation on this task is found to be low [1.5], which also shows that the distribution is not spread across the curve. This finding shows that a significant number of learners are lagging behind in terms of their writing skills.

Observation

The observation served not only to account for learners’ development, but also to watch, record, and feel their perceptions and attitudes while working and interacting in class activities. After studying and analyzing observation logs, the researcher noted a positive impact of FL on learners’ attitudes and language performance. On the performance level, the majority of learners developed their language proficiency. Their speaking and writing ability was enhanced when comparing observations from week one to week ten. Analyzing data from the different time intervals (beginning, middle and end), it was observed that most participants valued having time and support when they are engaged in oral activities, such as role plays, debates, and discussions. The second most prevailing behavior that was observed was learners’ engagement in group work. They were assigned different tasks in small groups, such as reading, language practice, and paragraph writing. Half the class appreciated working on writing tasks in small groups using Google docs. The chart below describes what learners valued in the FL model.

This graph shows elements learners valued most in FL
Students’ Perceptions

The collected data from the semi-structured interview showed that participants were generally satisfied and portrayed a positive turnout. Thematic analysis was followed in analyzing the interview data. After the coding process of the students’ feedback, four main themes emerged including advantages of FL, drawbacks, challenges, and suggestions (see the chart below).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Drawbacks</th>
<th>Challenges</th>
<th>Suggestions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>. more discussions</td>
<td>. internet connection issues</td>
<td>. staying focused during class work</td>
<td>. managing student participation well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>. positive connections with learners</td>
<td>. turn-taking problems</td>
<td>. doing the required tasks at home and in time</td>
<td>. gaming in class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>. learning from home</td>
<td>. limited human connections</td>
<td>. a fast pace of the course</td>
<td>. using other tools for more interaction with classmates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>. having enough material to learn from (videos and websites)</td>
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</table>

This chart represents participants’ views of FL

The data from learners’ satisfaction analysis indicated that FL had a positive impact on them. They commented that this model of learning and teaching enhanced their language skills mainly speaking and vocabulary. The interview consisted of 15 different items or questions. On items 2 and 3 of the interview, seven out of ten learners stated that having room for more discussions during class time and break-out rooms was their most valued factor. It was noticed that most learners (6/10) preferred working in small groups or break-out rooms. Eight out of ten interviewees stated that they had a positive experience. Student R mentioned that FL allowed her to study the material and prepare well at the comfort of her own house. Student M stressed the idea that FL allowed her to have more interaction with her classmates and that FL also improved communication with their teacher. On items 4 and 5, participants were asked to evaluate their progress on a scale of 1 to 5. Seven out of ten expressed positive contribution of FL mode to their English language proficiency development.

Overall, the results showed a positive impact of FL on learners’ language development and attitudes. Learners made a clear progress in their speaking ability [15.2/20]. However, on the writing task, there was not a significant turnout in learners’ productions. In both tools of data collection, participants demonstrated an important degree of satisfaction with the FL approach.

The first question aimed at investigating the benefits of FL in developing learners’ speaking skills. The study findings affirmed Wang et al. (2018) who investigated whether the flipped classroom could affect Chinese adult learners’ speaking ability. They conducted a mixed-method study and found that learners’ both speaking ability and attitude had improved significantly. The current research also confirmed Yesilcinar (2019) who ran a research study to explore the advantages of FL in terms of improving the participants’ oral skills. All learners were college volunteers from different departments. The researcher observed both a significant increase in participants’ oral proficiency and a positive collaboration among them. Similar
findings were reported in Lee and Wallace (2018) who reported higher average scores for students in the flipped classroom. The current research concluded similar results particularly on the speaking task in which learners earned high grades.

A different outcome was recorded on the written task. Participants did not manage to make a significant progress on the written assignment as shown in the table above. These findings were not in line with most previous studies including Soltanpour and Valizadeh (2017), Alias et al. (2017), and Altas and Mede (2020) who pointed out that flipping their classes led to important gains in learners’ writing ability. This could be attributed to the relatively short time – the term was 10 weeks long – that learners had in practicing writing during class. Another reason that could explain this result is the heterogeneity of the group since they were from different backgrounds with different proficiency levels.

The second question aimed at investigating learners’ attitudes towards the FL approach. The majority expressed that FL decreased feelings of anxiety and encouraged them to actively engage in class activities. The findings of this study demonstrated that learners were satisfied with the FL mode. As the chart above shows, FL had a significant impact on their learning and perceptions. This outcome confirmed previous studies that were discussed above in the literature review. Sun (2017) stated that FL played a critical role in improving learners’ motivation, expanding their exposure to language, enhancing their performance, and led to more satisfaction. In his turn, Andujar, Salaberri-Ramiro and Martinez (2020) argued that learners were found to be more engaged and benefited from the recorded material. They investigated the perceptions of 84 Spanish EFL learners following a FL approach in a middle school. They remarked that flipping their courses had a positive impact on their learners’ perceptions, motivation, and performance.

**Recommendations**

Considering the discussion above, online learning, and FL in particular, has many advantages and opportunities to exploit for the betterment of education. Therefore, the following recommendations are suggested for fellow teacher practitioners:

- Teachers are encouraged to bring in activities and tasks that target developing higher order thinking skills.
- It is important for learners to be involved in interaction-based and hands-on activities.
- Taking advantage of technology is encouraged. Learners enjoy being challenged when asked to use a phone to submit an assignment in a video or audio format.
- The material that learners work on inside class as well as that which they have to complete at home should be appealing and authentic.
- Writing tasks should be given more practice time in the classroom.
- Having learners work together has many benefits, both personal and academic.

Marshall and DeCapua (2013) explained that in a regular classroom, English language learners spend too much time and energy on lower levels of Blooms’ Taxonomy – understanding and remembering. In the FL model, the teacher moves these lower-level learning skills outside the group learning space to the learners’ comfort of their own living spaces. This will allow them to study at their own pace where they can pause, rewind recorded videos or review the material at any time they wish. During class work, learners and the teacher have ample time for developing higher-order thinking and learning skills – applying, analyzing, and creating.

Bergmann and Sams (2016) recommend FL educators to include various types of hands-on activities in class work. Having students work on projects and small tasks allows them to be
more engaged in their learning and help them gain deeper understanding and nurture their critical and creative skills. They continue arguing that FL also encourages the use of multimedia, such as movies, videos, and technological tools, which in turn give learners a sense of ownership of their learning and development.

Mcnally et al., (2017) came up with a list of four essential elements of flipping learning:
1. Prior exposure of students to content (e.g. recorded lectures, notes, videos)
2. An incentive for students to prepare for class (e.g. pre-class quizzes, online discussions, online activities)
3. A mechanism to measure students’ understanding and to ensure that students have viewed the content (e.g. graded pre-class quizzes)
4. In-class activities that focus on higher-level cognitive activities: active learning, collaborative and peer learning, and problem-solving.

On the other hand, there could be real challenges in applying the FL model. Some have expressed that students may need more time to watch, read, or listen before class, which could be a challenge for some (Bergmann & Sams, 2012; Lee & Wallace, 2018). In such a situation where teachers provide long videos, it may constitute a critical hindrance for learners of low-proficiency level, in particular. Since videos make up an essential component of FL, the Flipped Learning Radio stressed in one of their podcasts that videos have to be interactive and short. The host also argues that it is the teacher’s job to make and record the videos since they know how best to teach their lessons. It is no harm, the host comments, to include video material from other websites and platforms from time to time (Jon Bergmann, 2015). A different type of challenges might be caused by internet connection issues (Andujar et al., 2020). FL educators are asked to consider all these types of challenges when planning to flip their classes.

Limitations

The research study at hand revealed that FL had a positive and significant impact on learners’ speaking performance. However, on the written task, they were not able to make as much progress. This might be due to the span of the study. In order to gain a clear writing ability, learners may need more practice opportunities and guidance inside the classroom. A study that spans over a semester or a year is desirable to provide more insight into FL and its applications in learning and teaching. In this study, the ten learners were enrolled in an EFL intermediate class but they came from different educational backgrounds with diverse interests. A future study can recruit a bigger sample of participants with more homogeneity so that it yields deeper and consistent insights into the impact and potential of FL.

Conclusion

This paper was an attempt to investigate the benefits of FL in remote education. Flipping some parts of the course, generally, led to positive results in the current study. A successful FL experience requires flexible school structure and manageable student population. In addition, a great FL culture inside schools is also vital in order to yield positive results. As EFL teachers, it is essential that learners are given learner-centered education with activities that are action-based, authentic, collaborative, innovative, and inquiry based (Michael Gorman, 2012). The FL approach provides opportunities to create such a learner-centered classroom where deep and active learning happens (Bergmann & Sams, 2012). Adopting a clear FL model can create opportunities for learners to be autonomous learners and gain important learning skills. The existing literature suggests that FL has good potential for creating learning and teaching environments which prioritize project-based learning, on-going, constructive feedback,
engaging interactions, and tech-savvy learners. However, FL, as an approach, is in need of more systematic study that spans over longer periods of time to gain a deeper understanding of its potential and implications.

Acknowledgment
I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Abdellah Ghaicha, for his invaluable guidance and encouragement. I would also like to thank my colleague and friend Dr. Mohamed Yacoub for his continuous support and advice.

References
GORMAN, M. (2012, July 18). Flipping the classroom...a goldmine of research and resources keep you on your feet. http://21centuryedtech.wordpress.com/


Appendix A - Single Point Rubric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I wonders...</th>
<th>Standards</th>
<th>I likes...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Planning:</strong> Presentation was effectively organized and attention was given to the needs of the audience.</td>
<td><strong>8 points</strong></td>
<td>(Evidence of meeting or exceeding ideals)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Substance:</strong> Presentation showed a depth of understanding of important concepts and questions.</td>
<td><strong>8 points</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Delivery:</strong> Presentation effectively communicated to the audience.</td>
<td><strong>6 points</strong></td>
<td></td>
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Appendix B: Semi-structured Interview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1- How are your classes going?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2- How do you feel after taking this class?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3- Do you think online learning can be effective at helping you reach your goals?</td>
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<tr>
<td>4- How did you feel working with other students on the given tasks?</td>
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<tr>
<td>5- Did you have enough time to read and watch videos before class?</td>
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<tr>
<td>6- Did the videos and readings help you understand the material better?</td>
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<tr>
<td>7- How would you rate your speaking ability after this class?</td>
<td>[Rate from 1-5 points]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
8- How would you rate your writing ability after this class?  
   [Rate from 1-5 points]

9- What has been the most difficult aspect of taking this class?

10- What are 2/3 or strengths and 2/3 weaknesses of this online experience?

11- How has class changed your views of online learning?

12- What do you think makes the best online learning experience?

13- Do you consider retaking online classes?

14- Do you think remote learning has the potential for success in other school subjects?

15- What advice would you give us to improve online learning?

### Appendix C - Observation Guide

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavior observed</th>
<th>Week 1 [1-5 points]</th>
<th>Week 6 [1-5 points]</th>
<th>Week 10 [1-5 points]</th>
<th>Other comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Learner attitudes</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>[how relaxed are students? do they seem enjoying learning?]</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Fluency</strong></td>
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<td>[to what extent their speech is clear? do they produce long comprehensible utterances?]</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Interaction</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>[are learners engaged in class work?]</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Group work dynamics</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>[To what extent are learners engaged and enjoying working together?]</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Course assignments</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>[the quality of Ss spoken and written productions]</td>
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