

Flipped Classrooms in Higher Education in Albania; What Do Students Think?

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Abstract

The use of Flipped Classroom in higher education has changed the dynamics of the auditoriums. It has reduced passive learning and enabled students to develop higher order thinking skills by practicing in class activities which lead to metacognition associated with deep learning. Though a relatively new teaching approach in higher education in Albania, it is widely embraced by educators and research demonstrates highly effective results. The objective of this paper is to highlight insights from 91 graduate students attending two universities in Albania who use Flipped Classrooms in two courses: Methodology of Teaching and Learning Languages and Methodology of Teaching and Critical Thinking. The questionnaire focuses in a mixed method study and the results propose that 77.7% of the students prefer Flipped Classrooms over traditional classes as they encourage interaction, inclusion, collaboration and tolerance. Students' reflection on the advantages of flipped classroom indicate that it allows them to express themselves freely and assists in building self-confidence. This innovative approach is also found to be a highly effective combination of autonomous learning and collaborative learning. In becoming English teachers, students consider Flipped Classrooms as an efficient inclusion strategy for future use. Some recommendations suggested by students for further improvement include the need for authentic videos, advanced technology, wider practice of such method at the university level, and additional trainings on how to apply Flipped Classrooms in the future.

Literature review

Flipped Classroom (FC) is grounded on the constructivist theory which gained momentum at the early 1990s. Social constructivism states that peer instruction is a necessary factor in scaffolding learning. Mazur (1996) was a pioneer of FC by introducing peer instruction as an effective teaching method in higher education which helped students learn from one another the knowledge that was hard to learn from the instructor and did not make meaning if learned autonomously. [5] describes FC as a form of blended learning; an emerging instructional strategy reversing a traditional lecture-based teaching model to improve the quality and efficiency of the teaching and learning process.

Research suggests that FC could be effective in many ways. The study of [4] based on 61 studies, suggests that FC methodology is more effective than other methodologies in terms of learning achievement, in secondary and higher education and it could be more beneficial in other constructs such as motivation, self-efficacy, cooperativeness and engagement among others. The study of [5] highlights that FC increases the level of motivation and pre-service teachers' active participation, as well as contributes to their future teaching practices. The same result is supported by the study of [7] who state that using FC has helped students feel more motivated and become more active learners while learning English as a Foreign Language. [9] also supports the idea that FC contributes to active learning especially when course convenors use a theoretical perspective to inform their flipped teaching strategy, integrate assessment into the design of their FC and flip the entire course. Interaction and active participation could be considered as the basis of FC. Bishop & Verleger (2013) define FC as interactive, group-based learning activities occurring inside the classroom and direct, computer- based individual instruction occurring outside the classroom (as cited by [9]). [3] also consider FC as an effective model of engaging students in active learning.

The study of [1] suggests that some of the students perceive FC as intended to support their learning process. While [2] claim that their students like the flexibility that FC gives to them, especially to the students who are involved either with a job or school activities.

Using FC might be of great importance for learners going through the Zone of Proximal Development. As [10] suggests enhancing collaboration among students of different levels might be extremely beneficial for the students as they learn by asking and answering questions, by giving explanations and finding solutions to the problems.

Research methodology

The aim of the study is to investigate the insights of the graduate students at two universities in Albania where FC is applied. The study is based on a mixed method approach. It consists of qualitative and quantitative data from a questionnaire, observations and discussions among students.

The study was conducted during the academic year 2021-2022 after applying FC for 15 weeks in two courses which were entirely flipped. The first course: Methodology of Teaching and Learning Languages is taught in English and students get 3 hours of lecture and 1 hour of seminar per week. This means that in total 60 classes of this course were observed and analyzed for this research. The second course: Methodology of Teaching and Critical Thinking is taught in Albanian and students get 4 classes of lecture per week and 2 classes of seminars. In total 90 classes of this second course were observed and analyzed. 91 graduate students completed the questionnaire at the end of the first term, before sitting exams and gave valuable feedback to the researcher.

Data analysis

A considerable number of students; 77,7% claim that they appreciate alternative methods of teaching over traditional lectures. This is a significant number considering that only in the last decade FC is becoming a popular teaching method in higher education in Albania. Evidence gathered by the students who participated in this research suggest that less than one third of the university professors use FC. On one aspect this could be considered progress in the Albanian context but taking into consideration the fact that the study was conducted with future teachers, who are supposed to learn and practice innovative teaching methods during their studies, we can suggest that more needs to be done by faculty members.

Part of the data in this research was gathered using a questionnaire which included both open ended and closed questions. The results are given in the table below.

Item	Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA
1	FC helps me be active in lectures and seminars	-	4.4	17.8	17.8	60
2	FC helps inclusion during the lectures	-	-	11.1	33.3	56,6
3	FC helps me become systematic	-	-	26.7	35.6	37.8
4	FC helps me better understand the information discussed during the lectures	-	2.2	15.6	33.3	48.9
5	FC helps me share my opinions freely	-	2.2	11.1	28.9	57.8
6	FC helps me learn more from other students	-	2.2	11.1	28.9	57.8
7	FC helps me understand different perspectives	-	-	11.1	24.4	48.9
8	FC helps me strengthen cooperation with other students	-	2.2	15.6	15.6	66.7
9	FC motivates me to study more	-	4.4	15.6	24.4	55.6

Table 1. The effect of Flipped Classroom on graduate students (in percentage).

When asked what do they consider as the main advantage of using FC, students gave different responses but many of them appreciate that FC helps them become active learners. As the traditional lectures focus on just transmitting new knowledge, FC makes students active and they scaffold their learning by strong cooperation with the professor but especially with peers. Another advantage is the opportunity to express their opinions freely. Students also appreciate that FC facilitates learning, promotes inclusion, motivates them and is adequate for students with different learning styles as well as different personality traits such as introverts and extroverts. One student wrote *“one of the biggest advantages of FC is that it helps students build their self-confidence and encourages autonomous learning. I come to the auditorium having many questions, but also knowing many things about the*

topic, and that gives me a sense of accomplishment". [6] describe FC as a method which heavily depends on students preparing outside of the class. Based on the observations and discussions with students there was a slight tendency for students to spend more time studying at home before joining the auditorium. This tendency might be due to other factors as well but several students declared that they found it very helpful watching the videos at their own pace before joining the auditorium and some of them affirm that they did not feel comfortable coming to the auditorium unprepared as they could not fully engage in the discussions without prior knowledge.

Data shows that the majority of the students consider FC as very useful for their future teaching career. They believe that this experience will help them provide student-centered classes and help with classroom management, students' inclusion, integrating technology, actively engaging students in the learning process, and teaching the 4 C-s of the 21st Century.

When discussing the challenges of using FC it is important to focus on the challenges of the university teachers. One of the most important elements of FC is using videos to demonstrate the new knowledge. Because this is a relatively new teaching method in our universities and because Albania is a developing country, the possibilities for university professors to produce authentic videos is limited. So, in order to provide the necessary videos for the students for the courses Methodology of Teaching and Learning Languages, and Methodology of Teaching and Critical Thinking, the professor decided to use videos and webinars from American English at State, interviews and webinars from philosophers and educators such as Noam Chomsky and Stephen Krashen, and also video demonstrations found on YouTube produced by national and international educators. Producing authentic videos and integrating the use of technology to a more significant amount were also suggested by the responses of the students who participated in the survey. Another suggestion was to encourage other university professors to use FC, to provide trainings or webinars to students to teach them how to use FC in their future career.

Conclusion

This research concludes that the majority of the graduate students prefer FC over traditional lectures. They acknowledge that this approach simplifies their learning, encourages active participation and inclusion and allows students to express themselves freely. In addition, it assists in preparing students for their future teaching careers by better understanding what a student-centered approach looks like. Students suggest that more university professors should apply this approach and there should be a greater focus on the integration of technology and creation of authentic videos to develop lectures.

Though data suggests that FC has many benefits for the students, more research is required to evaluate the effectiveness of using FC in higher education. Students' behavior and performance must be taken into consideration for further research.

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