

Promoting Active Lessons and Independent Work through Flipped Learning

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Abstract

In the arena of foreign languages, authorities affirm that the time of exposure is crucial to achieving a certain level of expertise. Since high-quality education and the face-to-face lessons are not sufficient to learn the target language, an approach as Flipped Learning surfaced to provide learners with the independent study time, often needed for better results. Therefore, this paper focuses on the experience of implementing the Class Preparation Session (The CPS hereafter) as a Flipped Learning strategy in an EFL university program in Colombia. The study looks at about 3,000 students a semester who have participated for almost three years. Participants were exposed to The CPS, and, as a result, increased their self-direction in language learning. When comparing the previous strategies with The CPS, in a sample of 430 participants, preliminary results showed that the students' independent work increased by 33%, under the same conditions of evaluation. Similarly, teachers state that classes are now more student-centered, promoting active learning. Besides, considering the large-scale coverage of participants, the academic team has created about 600 resources such as videos, online quizzes, audios, reading passages, and other scaffolded activities throughout the three-year implementation. In the session, attendees will be provided with examples of the institutional made materials, as well as the procedures that English level Coordinators and teachers follow to plan their classes. Finally, some key points, best practices, and successful strategies will be shared as to why Flipped Learning is an efficient approach to implement in higher educational language programs.

Keywords: *flipped learning; blended learning; active learning; Independent work; learner autonomy; student-centeredness.*

1. Introduction

The benefits of speaking a foreign language have been reported abundantly. For instance, [1] Bongwoon (2017) declares that acquiring a second language "cultivates your mind, fulfils your soul and develops your knowledge, competence, tolerance, understanding, and patience." He also states that much of the information available in the world is conveyed in English, which makes learning this language a necessity. Besides, it is well known that "communication" is a 21st-century skill, more valuable if it is in more than one language. Being aware of this importance, the educational community in Colombia promotes second language acquisition and high-level pedagogy in schools and university programs. For those reasons, this paper focuses on socializing the implementation of The CPS (Class Preparation Session) as a Flipped Learning Strategy, as a way to promote active learning and independent work in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) university program.

2. Context

The Department of Languages and Cultures from Universidad de La Sabana is the area in charge of offering foreign language courses to the university community. This paper is especially focused on the English as a Foreign Language Program, directed to undergraduate students. This program receives about 3.000 students a semester from different academic fields that need to reach a B2.1 level of English proficiency, according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. The Department also offers French, Portuguese, Italian and German for some students who have the requirement of a second foreign language to graduate or for the ones who take it as an elective course.

3. Problem Statement and Justification

The educational community has increasingly valued the importance of learning a foreign language. For a student to be able to develop a successful professional career and/or to progress with graduate studies, it has become necessary to be an independent user of English. Likewise, for a student to reach the university's demanded level of proficiency, between 600 – 800 hours are needed ([2]Desveaux, 2018; [3]The British Council, 2018). The EFL program at La Sabana aims to graduate



students with this level of proficiency, therefore it is designed to provide students with about 784 hours of exposure to the foreign language combining face-to-face classes and independent work. However, having students work on their own has always been a challenge for educators. That is why, The CPS as a Flipped Learning strategy surfaced to boost active lessons and to make independent work more meaningful to students.

4. Flipped Learning

The Flipped Learning Network (2015) defines Flipped Learning 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 concepts and engage creatively in the subject matter.” ([4] as cited in Jenkins et al., 2017).

The academic team in the EFL program at La Sabana moved some of the content explanations from the face-to-face classes to the students’ individual learning space in the Moodle platform; consequently, the time in class is devoted to practice the productive skills.

A case study on a Flipped classroom in an EFL content course, found out that through the implementation of this strategy, a group of 12 college students perceived the implementation as positive, they reported a more active participation in class and became more responsible before, during and after the lessons ([5] Sung, 2015). It is important to highlight, that [4] Jenkins et al (2017), also recommend Flipped Learning as part of the overarching pedagogical philosophies, rather than a mere technology implementation, which is a target in the EFL program at La Sabana.

5. Pedagogical Implementation

In the EFL program at La Sabana, students are requested to take 4 hours of face-to-face classes and to work for an estimated of an hour in the institutional Moodle platform. This technological activity is called The CPS (The Class Preparation Session), and it is where some of the content, that used to be taught in the group learning space, has moved to become part of the student individual learning space.

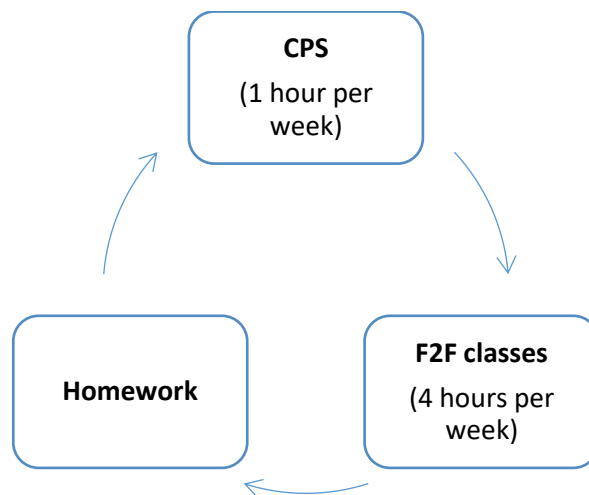


Figure 1. Students’ work cycle

Figure 1 above shows the cycle that students follow in this EFL program. To start, students work on The CPS, a week in advance, in the Moodle institutional platform. There, they must answer some questions of lower order thinking skills, according to Blooms’ Taxonomy. As a product of this CPS, students bring to class their notes, pictures, etc. based on the content studied in the platform. In class, students share their notes, solve doubts with their classmates and teacher, and use the higher order thinking skills, as applying the new knowledge and creating a product. The last stage of the cycle



showed in figure 1 is the consolidation of the content by doing regular homework. Chart 1 below is a model of the content studied before and during the class.

Level	Language Component	The CPS (Before Class) Lower order thinking skills	During Class Higher order thinking skills
Pre-intermediate	Grammar - Speaking	Students watch a video about the first conditional and answer some questions in the Moodle institutional platform to demonstrate the understanding of the topic Watch the video here	In groups, students socialize the use and structure of the first conditional; and provide some examples. Then, they must follow the regular steps of a language class: guided practice, free practice (Speaking).
Pre-intermediate	Writing	Students watch a video about the comparison and contrast composition. They must identify the parts of a given composition and tick only the correct topic sentences from a list given in Moodle. Watch the video here	Students share their notes, solve doubts and write the outline for a comparison and contrast composition.

Chart 1. Model of how the content is distributed

6. Preliminary Results

After almost three years of implementation, the program has found out some preliminary results. To start, the academic team has created about 600 institutional made resources, such as more than 60 videos, 350 Moodle questionnaires, and 200 workshops in word and PDF files, besides other activities performed in class. In addition, students have shared encouraging comments in the surveys applied so far. As a quantitative result, 100% of students affirmed to work on The CPS on a weekly basis. Likewise, when analyzing the data from the previous strategies against The CPS, preliminary results showed that the students' independent work improved by 33%, under the same evaluation settings. Moreover, teachers and coordinators state that they have observed positive changes in their classes, as having more time to practice the productive skills and students becoming more autonomous.

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