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THE FLIPPED CLASSROOM AS AN ESSENTIAL PEDAGOGICAL STRATEGY IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASS, IN A COVID-19 ERA

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ABSTRACT
The effects of COVID-19 on education, especially in developing countries, have been monumental on the negative side. This is because the teaching-learning process has chiefly been through presential rather than virtual or out-of-class mode. The COVID-19 era has highlighted the necessity for the Flipped Classroom which is a hybrid or blended learning process also referred to as Inverse Learning. Flipped classroom provides learners the opportunity to access course material online through teacher-guided videos, presentations, learning management systems, evaluative questions and quizzes, articles, vodcasts, and other teaching tools, while presential classes are mainly for discussion, doing exercises and answering questions. English language, as a core and compulsory subject in Nigeria education system, would be better mastered by this inverse learning provided by the flipped classroom strategy and will also help in the management of large classes as it is often the case in the English language class.
Keywords: Flipped Classroom; Blended or Inverse Learning; COVID-19 Era; Presential and Virtual Class; English Language Class

Introduction
The COVID-19 pandemic has caused a ripple effect in all aspects of human life on a global scale. This era has brought about an awakening about doing things differently, not only for health, economic, educational and social survival, but to forestall the effect of similar occurrences in the near or distant future. The educational sector is one of the worst hit especially in developing nations where teaching has been solely by physical contact in many quarters, especially among people in the low social-economic stratum.Tadesse & Muluye (2020) and Mathivanan, Jayagopal, Ahmed, Manivannan, Kumar, Raja, Dharinya & Prasad (2021) aver that developing nations need to rethink educational strategies that will enable students learn adequately without much of a face-to-face contact; suggesting online and broadcast teaching and establishing virtual class infrastructures, even during post-coronavirus.

Conceptual Clarification
Flipped classroom, also referred to as inverted classroom, is a pedagogical strategy that should be very useful in ensuring effective teaching and learning of the English Language

in the COVID-19 Era. Scholars (Arnold-Garza, 2014; Bull-Fabrega, Sanovas, Ruiz-Munzon & Filho, 2019; and Hinojo, Lopez, Fuentes, Trujillo, & Pozo 2020) see the flipped classroom as a teaching method that introduces theoretical contents of learning materials outside the classroom, while class time is used to concretise knowledge acquired outside the class through questions asked by both the teacher and learners. It is a blended learning forum that is both presential and virtual, reported to positively influence learning outcomes like motivation and academic scores. According to Romero-Garcia, Buzon-Garcia, & Touron (2018) it is inverse learning that is interactive. The question and answer sessions lead to discussions that deepen understanding of course contents through clarifying of grey areas or those that learners find confusing. This is followed by learners engaging in assignments or hands-on exercises where their acquired theoretical knowledge is put into practice. Thus, there is a change in the roles of participants in the teaching-learning process with the teacher as the guide and counsellor and the student taking responsibility for learning with more class time dedicated to application of knowledge gained in pre-class time (Say & Yildirim, 2020).

In the flipped classroom learners from various locations connect to and view digital materials through devices with internet connection. Learners study materials that they access and when they get to the classroom there is in-depth discussion to ensure mastery of learning contents. Depending on the teacher, flipped learning may involve listening to podcasts, or reading articles and vodcasts. Discussions could be in groups among students or between the student(s) and the teacher. There would be opportunities for application of knowledge gained, through questions, exercises and homework. The different learning equipment used in a flipped classroom help to meet the different learning needs of the students (Sams, Bergmann, Daniels, Bennett, Marshall, & Arfstrom, 2014). Flipped learning materials could be pdfs, recorded sounds or websites. It should not be videos alone.

In order to maximise the benefits of flipped learning pedagogical strategy, it is essential that the concept itself is well construed. Banjunury (2014) points out that the flipped classroom is not just engaging learners with online videos only. It should not be an unsystematic work with learners. Corroborating this view, Fulford, & Paek (2017) maintain that flipped classroom is not about learners studying alone and spending nearly all the period for the course on computers, but that it should be structured in such a way that learners from different locations can interact in a virtual class while not compromising meaningful time for face-to-face interaction between learners and the instructor. They emphasise that if well implemented flipped classroom would save valuable class time for proper coverage of course contents.

The growth of importance of the English language has assumed global magnitude in recent decades. Functioning as a language of instruction (and a core subject that students should have credit pass in order to access academic advancement), politics and business, has made it attain the status of socio-economic influence. For these reasons, English language should be well taught in order for learners to communicate effectively. Some common methods of teaching English language in Nigeria according to Idialu (2020) include the talk-chalk-board and text methods, lecture method, with notes dictated and language rules explained and exercises from recommended texts worked upon. The teacher-dominated class, that is almost always presential, is inadequate in a COVID-19 era where social distancing makes physical contact difficult in some instances as a result of lock-downs. It is therefore necessary that a teaching strategy that will make learning with minimal physical contact is adopted; and the flipped classroom should come handy in this instance.

Challenges of a Flipped Classroom

Studies (He & Warschauer, 2016; Huang, Hew, & Lo 2018; and Karabulut, Jaramillo, & Hassall, 2018) reveal that in spite of the positive contributions of the flipped classroom to learning outcomes, it is not without its challenges. If slackly implemented and learners are not monitored to ensure that they do their assignments during out of class time they will not be prepared for contact sessions, causing a flop in the strategy. Again, it is of necessity that learners acquire equipment like smart phones, computers, tablets and so on, as well as possess internet facilities. Karabulut, Jaramillo, & Hassall (2018) emphasise the importance of ensuring that videos are carefully prepared in such a way that the learners can well understand, assimilate information and interact with the learning materials. They are emphatic about the fact that good quality videos are hard to come by and may not be easily developed especially for initial use because it takes a lot of time to create them. He & Warschauer (2016) state that there could be difficulty in achieving diversified teaching design models. They warn that teachers who adopt the flipped classroom strategy with the expectation that it reduces teachers' duties may end up getting disappointed because it actually increases them, as they prepare for both out-of and in-class activities.

Advantages of Flipped Learning in the English Language Class

The flipped classroom could be the way out in a COVID-19 era when learners and teachers do not have opportunities to meet as frequently as they should in a teaching-learning situation. The time spent by teachers and learners in engaging with the course contents outside the classroom creates the opportunity for better use of the time spent during face-to-face contact, as it enhances learning readiness on the part of learners. The

flipped classroom has been proved by some researchers such as Nwosisi & Walsh (2016) to improve academic indicators like attitude towards task completion and motivation. There is the indication that instructors and learners are better committed towards not just spelling out their objectives, but also achieving same. If well implemented, flipped classroom would help in managing large classes like the English language class that is usually large especially in public schools because it is a subject offered by all students.

In pointing out the strong points of the flipped classroom, Lopez, Pozo, & del Pino (2019) aver that the flipped classroom improves interactions between learners and facilitators and with the course contents. There are opportunities for feedback from learners. They emphasise that flipped classroom addresses the educational needs of individual learners such that apart from the degree of autonomy acquired during practice, encouraging individualised learning, the student also participates in learning activities with other learners, thus ensuring collaborative learning which also helps to build team spirit and social skills. There is more time for practical exercises in presential class time. There is also time for formative evaluation for teachers to identify knowledge gaps and map out strategies to correct them. Flipped classroom also helps to concretise students' knowledge as a lot of practice exercises and frequent feedbacks help knowledge retention and are contributors to the learning process, giving them ownership of what they have learned.

The flipped learning environment provides little or no extraneous contents that interfere with or interrupt learning, as the pre-arranged learning material do not include such diversions, thereby increasing the chance of learners concentrating more on learning materials with less distraction. Ozdamli & Asiksoy (2016) see flipped classroom as a teaching methodology that hybrids the presential learning with the digital one. This merger creates the opportunity for the inclusion of educational technology that makes possible the implementation of educational principles and easier management of large classes in a subject like English language. The use of technopedagogical resources will likely result in better motivation to learn, leading to more understanding of course contents, problem solving, maximising class time and improving learning outcomes and student/teacher and student/student interaction which can help to improve communication skills in an English language class (Huang, Hew, & Lo 2018).

Implementing the Flipped Learning Pedagogy of the English Language

For proper implementation of the flipped classroom, facilitators of learning need to take cognisance of the challenges that may arise and tailor learning activities such that learners can gain maximally from the use of this teaching methodology. The flipped learning should be implemented with care so that learning could be evaluated through quizzes and other forms of assessment that would ensure proper assimilation of knowledge. Mok (2014)

suggests that for the out-of-classroom aspect of flipped learning, blogposts could be created to allow learners to ponder on learning materials and share their opinions about what they have learned. Opportunities for interactive learning can be created through the provision of online discussion boards and interactive tutorials and frees up class time for more extended discussions.

Lopez, Pozo, & del Pino (2019) state that learners should be encouraged to engage in journaling, not only to help them record their spontaneous reactions but also to ask questions that will help them to access new information. Ensuring learners' feedback through interactive text will help them to complete reading assignments before in-class and evaluate their comprehension level of provided learning materials. According to Jensen, Holt, Sowards, Ogden, & West (2018), teachers should invest time in creating quality teaching material that can be reused at other times with slight modifications. This will save the teacher's time in producing course material during reuse.

Again, Zainuddin, Habiburrahim, Muluk & Keumala (2019) maintain that learners need to be given deadlines to help them know how early they should turn in assignments. To mitigate inequalities in learners' home lives in terms of acquisition of flip learning facilities, measures should also be put in place to ensure that learners do assignments during out-of-class lessons so that they would be prepared for contact sessions. Schools should work with parents, the government and charity organisations to ensure that learners do not lack equipment like smartphones, computers, or tablets needed for online teaching and learning. Zainuddin & Halili (2016) emphasise that teaching design models should be diversified to take care of individual learning differences and to improve upon design models from time to time.

It is pertinent that the roles of teachers and students should be well defined in the flipped learning classroom. Zainuddin & Halili (2016) and Hinojo, Lopez, Fuentes, Trujillo, & Pozo (2020) explained some roles of teachers and students that could be summarised as follows:

The Role of the Teacher in Flipped Classroom Learning

The teacher has some roles to play if the flipped classroom is to succeed. First the teacher should realise that he/she should function as a guide that will facilitate learning, rather than the sole repertoire of knowledge that dispenses same to learners. There is therefore the need to create learning condition that is anchored on questioning, so that students can actively interact with learning materials, answer provided questions and ask theirs and in the process also become knowledge contributors.

It is also the duty of the teacher to correct misunderstandings by clearing grey areas in the course content through interactive strategy. The teacher should create group interactive fora as well as individualise learning for each student by also creating opportunities for interacting with individual students outside the group. The use of suitable technological equipment will make this easily attainable. The teacher should set the rules of the virtual and presential classrooms and ensure that such rules are adhered to.

Moreno-Guerrero, Romero-Rodriguez, Lopez-Belmonte, & Alonso-Garcia (2020) emphasise that the teacher should think of creative ways to ensure that students' participation is adequate. As afore-stated, the teacher should create virtual class materials that are standard, including sharing videos as part of out-of-class activity. In all, whether out-of-class or in-class learning, the teacher should use pedagogical strategies that provide feedback so that levels of assimilation can be assessed and repeat presentations and explanations can be proffered where and when necessary.

According to Arnold-Garza (2014) videos should be of manageable lengths, probably each of the clips focusing on subtopics in a process known as chunking in a way that learners could access interconnected ideas in a non-passive way. Their interaction with learning material helps students increase their critical-thinking and problem-solving skills. Class time becomes a time to clarify material, additional learning objectives or practice with active learning, not just supplemental to lecture.

The Role of the Students in Flipped Classroom Learning

Apart from facilitators, students also have their part to play for flipped learning to be a success. Students should not be passive receivers of knowledge but should take learning responsibility through active participation that will promote and contribute to knowledge. Classroom rules – whether the out-of-class or presential, should be obeyed and all assignments done and submitted not later than set dates and time. Students could learn at their speed but should meet up with meeting times. They should ensure that provided lecture videos are watched before contact sessions and assignments done to ensure that they are not at sea during practical classes. It is also necessary that students interact with their teacher and friends. This will provide feedback that will enable them get needed help to comprehend course contents that are not clear. Students' participating in discussions helps to build team-working skills that will help their communication skills.

Learners should take notes while watching video presentations. They should prepare questions, about the parts that they do not understand. Flipped classroom provides opportunities for students to use their knowledge in class (virtual or presential) with the

guidance of the teacher, thereby enhancing learning preparedness on the part of the students.

To ensure successful implementation of the flipped classroom, Sams, Bergmann, Daniels, Bennett, Marshall & Arfstrom (2014) looked at the acronym FLIP:
F - means that the facilitator should ensure that there is flexibility in time and place of learning.
L – means learning culture which should change from the traditional teacher-centred approach to student-centred approach.
I – means intentional content; meaning that facilitators should intentionally tailor the course material and methodology towards meeting learning objectives.
P – means that the teacher should put a professional touch to his teaching. The flipped classroom educators observe students continuously, evaluate their studies, and use obtained feedbacks to feed learners back on how to improve on and apply knowledge gained.

In this paper, three groups of scholars who proffered ways that the flipped classroom could be delivered are considered. The first, Karanicolas & Snelling (2010), states that there are seven steps in the implementation of the flipped classroom. The first step is that the facilitator should determine the desired learning outcomes from the outset. The second step is to think of implementation strategy. The third step is to develop the pre-class learning activities. The fourth step is to develop the link and the class activities. The fifth step is to deliver the flipped class. The sixth step is to link to post class; and the last step is to evaluate the flipped classroom.

On the other hand, Marshall & Kostka (2020), discusses eight steps towards implementing the flipped learning class:
Step1: the facilitator should to the pre-work.
Step 2: the sign-in activity should be done.
Step 3: addresses whole group application while
Step 4: states that there should be break outs, meaning learners should be taught in groups.
Step 5: there should be share-outs of assignments and learning responsibilities.
Step 6: addresses preview discovery.
Step 7: there will be assignment instructions and
Step 8: is the reflection stage which deals with the evaluation of the whole process.

The third group of scholars to be considered here are Beres & Kis (2018). They divided the process of implementation of the flipped class into two phases which they titled as before-class activities and in-class activities. Before-class activities include providing online learning material, project task specification, evaluation and criteria/evaluation form.

In-class activities are formation of teams, motivation involvement instruction, project work/support projects, and evaluation of projects/individual.

From the aforementioned three forms of engaging in the flipped classroom, it can be deduced that there is not a set way of implementing the flipped classroom, but it depends on the teacher and the learning Institution. There could be an eclectic mix of points from the three groups presented here. Tse, Choi, & Tang (2019) agree that there is teaching effectiveness and subject satisfaction in the flipped classroom instruction as it strengthens learning.

Conclusion

The effects of COVID-19 on education serve as an eye-opener to the fact that teaching should not only be through physical contact. This is because the issue of social distancing made it impossible for frequent meetings. Flipped Classroom is a hybrid or blended learning process also referred to as Inverse Learning. Flipped classroom provides learners the opportunity to access course material online through teaching tools, while presential classes are mainly for discussion, doing exercises and answering questions. English language as a core and compulsory subject in Nigeria would be better mastered by this inverse learning provided by the flipped classroom strategy and will also help in the management of large classes as it is often the case in the English language class. The English Language teacher in the flipped classroom may integrate technologies as appropriate and available to facilitate effective teaching. The instructor should ensure that pre-class and in-class activities are well planned and implemented. The teacher could poll students through asking questions and collecting their responses for in-class discussions during contact sessions. From different studies investigated (Karanicolas & Snelling, 2010; Beres & Kis, 2018 and Marshall & Kostka, 2020) it was established that the method of application of the flipped classroom may not be a one-size-fits-all approach. It could be varied depending on the level of ingenuity of the teacher and the Institution's context. Students can be encouraged to make suggestions of how they think class instruction can be improved. In all, the flipped classroom should be organised in such a way that individual learning needs are taken care of through the eclectic mix strategies.

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