

# FLIPPED LEARNING PEDAGOGICAL METHOD TO TEACH DIDACTICS OF ENGLISH IN COVID TIMES

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## Abstract

Teachers of English trained at the National University of Education (UNAE) in Ecuador must develop the professional competencies that characterize a twenty-first century foreign language teacher during their career. For this purpose, they study the subject Didactics of English in their third term of the program. The authors of this paper teach this subject at UNAE. This semester, due to the COVID epidemiological crisis, the authors had to teach the subject in a blended learning mode, making use of flipped learning as a pedagogical method of choice. Flipped learning is also one of the Didactics of English most important learning contents. Thus, the use of flipped learning as a pedagogical method and as the mentioned subject's learning content is the **object of study** of this research and the **overall aim** is to propose a methodological framework for flipped learning to teach Didactics of English so that it contributes to the development of the students' professional competencies. **The framework is structured into three moments:** flipped classroom I- before the synchronous session (out of class); flipped classroom II- during the synchronous session (in class); and flipped classroom III- after the synchronous session (out of class). A qualitative **approach using intervention strategy** was used to accomplish the declared goal. The authors followed an action research process to elaborate and propose the framework. To reach the overall aim, the authors proposed a methodological framework to use flipped learning to teach the contents of the subject Didactics of English of this foreign language to the future teachers at UNAE.

Keywords: flipped learning, pedagogical method, didactics, professional competencies.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Teachers of English trained at the National University of Education (UNAE) in Ecuador must develop the professional competencies that characterize a twenty-first century foreign language teacher during their studies. For this purpose, they study the subject Didactics of English in the term of the English Language Teaching (ELT) program. The authors of this paper teach this subject at UNAE and the co-authors teach it in their schools.

This semester, due to the COVID epidemiological crisis, the authors had to teach the subject in a virtual learning mode, making use of flipped learning as pedagogical method of choice. In the Pedagogical model from this university, Pérez Gomez [1] includes as one of its pedagogical principles to promote the flipped classroom as a way to maximize the digital resources and social networks in the teaching learning process of the university. Thus, the use of flipped learning as a pedagogical method is the object of study of this research.

According to Crouch and Mazur, Deslauriers, Schelew and Wieman [2-3], flipping the classroom or "inverted teaching" emphasizes the idea that class time can be used to engage students in learning through active learning techniques, rather than through delivering lectures alone. Flipping the classroom is the process of replacing traditional lectures with more student-centred learning strategies, such as active learning, discussions, problem based learning and other forms of group work and peer instruction. Content delivery is moved outside of the classroom, for example through videos, or pre-class readings.

The flipped classroom is a pedagogical model in which the typical lecture and homework elements of a course are reversed. Short video lectures are viewed by the students at home before the class session, while in-class time is devoted to exercises, projects, or discussions. The video lecture is often seen as the key ingredient in the flipped approach, such lectures being either created by the instructor and posted online or selected from an online repository. While a pre-recorded lecture could be a podcast or another audio format, the ease with which video can be accessed and viewed today has made it so ubiquitous that the flipped model has come to be identified with it, EDUCAUSE [4].

The notion of a flipped classroom draws on such concepts as active learning, student engagement, hybrid course design, and course podcasting. The value of a flipped class is in the repurposing of class time into a workshop where students can inquire about lecture content, test their skills in applying knowledge, and interact with one another in hands-on activities. During class sessions, instructors function as coaches or advisors, encouraging students in individual inquiry and collaborative effort.

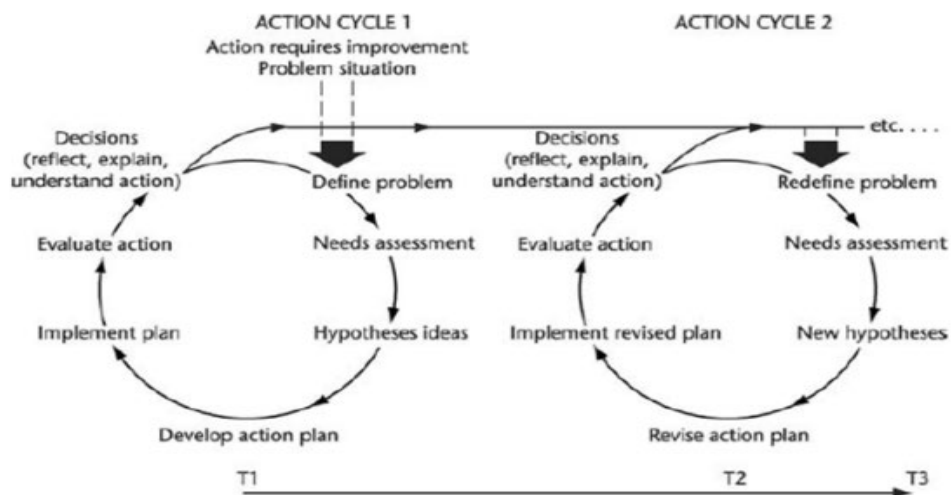
In essence, “flipping the classroom” means that students gain first exposure to new material outside of class, usually via reading or lecture videos. Then use class time to do the harder work of assimilating that knowledge, perhaps through problem-solving, discussion, or debates.

In terms of Bloom’s revised taxonomy, Anderson and Krathwohl [5], state that students are doing the lower levels of cognitive work (gaining knowledge and comprehension) outside of class, and focusing on the higher forms of cognitive work (application, analysis, synthesis, and/or evaluation) in class, where they have the support of their peers and instructor. This model contrasts from the traditional model in which “first exposure” occurs via lecture in class, with students assimilating knowledge through homework; thus, the term “flipped classroom.”

Using the Flipped Classroom to teach Didactics to the ELT program students at UNAE makes possible the statements of these authors as it can help trainees build strategies and ideas to use in their classroom by making a link between the way they are learning and the way they can teach later in their classes. As a part of the flip, students will be able to watch the videos or read the texts as homework as many times as they need in order to understand them before they go into the classroom. The overall aim of this paper is to propose a methodological framework for flipped learning to teach Didactics of English to third term ELT students at UNAE.

## 2 METHODOLOGY

A qualitative approach using intervention strategy was used to accomplish the declared goal. The authors followed an action research process to elaborate and propose the framework. Summarizing and innovating McKernan’s Action Research Model [6], results section (figure 1), the authors elaborated the methodological framework to be proposed.



McKernan’s Action Research Model (McKernan, 1996: 29)

Fig. 1 McKernan’s Action Research Model

In cycle I, the authors realized that the traditional methods they had used to teach didactics would not work in an online mode of instruction so they came up with the research question: How to teach the subject Didactics of English to the third term ELT students at UNAE online? And, then they developed the following action plan:

- 1 To assign videos and readings to be watched or read at home, as homework, and get ready before joining the synchronous class session.

- 2 To use the synchronous class time for content discussions, analysis, evaluation and the development of other high order critical thinking skills in collaborative learning such as pair and group work activities in breakout rooms.
- 3 To ask the students to plan lessons using the studied pedagogical method to conduct a demo lesson in the following synchronous session.

Based on the literature review about flipped learning, conducted for this research, the authors of this paper decided to develop a three-cycle action research process so as to implement, evaluate, and reflect on an action in each of the cycles. The cycles were defined in this way:

Cycle I was centered in the assignment of videos and readings as homework to be watched prior to synchronous sessions. This action was implemented and evaluated but while reflecting on it, it was noticed that not all the students came well prepared to the synchronous class sessions which proved that the action needed to be improved. Then it was planned to assign specific tasks for the students to complete before attending the synchronous sessions. This improved action was introduced in the second cycle together with the other actions originally planned for the cycle.

In cycle II, the first thing was to check by means of a quiz or any other quick assessment tool that the students had watched the video or read the previously assigned material; then based on the knowledge the students had gained, conduct in class (synchronous session) activities leading to the development of critical thinking by means of collaborative tasks in pairs or groups dived into breakout rooms. This action was evaluated and proved to be useful. However, it was still necessary that the students applied to the real language teaching situation what they had learned in class. The authors reflected on the need to ask the students to plan lessons using the studied teaching method to conduct a demo lesson in the following synchronous session.

In cycle III, the students first presented the lesson plans to the whole class in the synchronous session and their classmates and teacher asked questions about the lesson plans and gave feedback on how to improve them. Then the students conducted the demo lesson and this proved if they had met the objective to be able to apply the studied English language teaching method in a simulated language teaching situation or not. Their performance was also evaluated by teacher and students and feedback on classroom management was given to the presenters.

### **3 RESULTS**

To reach the overall aim, the authors applied research techniques such as interviews to five (5) teachers during the first and second cycles of the action research process in order to improve the framework and surveys to ninety-five (95) students at the end of the third cycle of the process to verify their level of satisfaction with it. The result of their application allowed the authors to propose a methodological framework to use flipped learning to teach the contents of the subject Didactics of English to the future ELT teachers.

The interviews conducted in the first cycle revealed that not all the students watched the videos or read the assigned readings at home before coming to class. The interviewed teachers believed that this was due to several objective and subjective factors.

Teachers 1, 3, and 5 commented, “the students are not motivated” when discussing why they said so, they claimed that “maybe the students have not realized the importance of the subject for their future profession”. Through those teachers’ comments the authors could infer that the content of the videos and readings use were not exactly the ones that the students needed so it was necessary to find new videos and reading texts.

Another factor was technology, not all the students had good internet access or computers to watch the videos.

Teachers 2 and 4 reported that some of their pupils lived in rural areas. These were some of their comments “I have some students who live in the countryside” “My students’ parents have a low income and cannot afford to buy a computer”. These claims made the authors think that some videos had to be changed by printed reading texts that could be sent to these students.

The interviews conducted in the second cycle showed that it was more useful to take the synchronous class time to develop interactive activities through collaborative learning that led to the development of high order thinking skills than to use that time to present the new contents. This was also expressed by the interviewed teachers when they stated the following ideas:

Teachers 1, 3, 4 and 5: “the breakout room activities do work”. Students really discuss in groups the best ways to use the teaching methods they are studying and apply them to plan their lessons”. These comments made the authors believe that it was worth taking the synchronous class time for collaborative group and pair work.

A survey was applied to the participants in the third cycle of the action research process. The aim was to verify the level of satisfaction of the students who participated in the aforementioned process when they taught the demo lessons using the method that they had learned with the proposed framework. This revealed the following results. Out of the 95 students involved in this action research process, 83 for an 87.3% of the participants reported to be **very satisfied** with the proposed framework, 7 for a 7.3 % were **satisfied** with the framework, and only 5, for a 5.2% **did not show satisfaction** with it. This shows the level of satisfaction with the framework.

As a result of the action research process conducted by the authors, the following methodological framework was elaborated. The methodological framework is structured into three moments: flipped classroom I- before the synchronous lesson session (out of class) when the students prepare to participate in the activity and the teacher records lecture, the students turn in, and watch videos any time before they come to class; flipped classroom II- during the synchronous lesson session (in class): the students join the synchronous zoom session ready to engage and participate applying key concepts with feedback in active learning activities; and flipped classroom III- after the synchronous lesson session (out of class). The students check their understanding and extend their learning planning a lesson using the studied didactic method to teach a demo lesson in the following synchronous lesson.

#### 4 CONCLUSIONS

To conclude, the framework proved to be useful for the required online mode of instruction during the Covid pandemic crisis. The students felt satisfied when they conducted the demo lessons that they had learned to plan using propped model and the teachers were happy to see that they had met the objectives of his didactics online classes.

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