FLIPPED LEARNING IN ELT: EXPERIENCES FROM OMAN

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ABSTRACT

Background and Purpose: Recently, flipped learning has become prevalent as a teaching and learning approach in international educational settings. A commonly cited advantage is to do self-study at home and to spend valuable classroom time on meaningful interactive learning activities. After the start of Covid-19 pandemic, the sudden transition to online teaching required many institutions to adopt a flipped learning approach. The current study was conducted at one of such institutions, namely Dhofar University in Oman. The aim of this paper is to identify the challenges met by both teachers and students using flipped learning during this transition as well as the solutions they developed to cope with them.

Methodology: This study implemented a mixed methods design for which the data were collected from two questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. One questionnaire was for teachers with 14 responses while the other was for students and could obtain responses from 68 students from the target population. From the list of teacher respondents, 10 were interviewed for deeper discussion of flipped learning context. The Questionnaires results were statistically calculated and descriptively analysed, whereas the interviews were thematically scrutinized.

Findings: The researchers found several major challenges including increased workload, lack of training, resistance to change, lacking IT skills, technical issues, non-completion of homework tasks and non-participation in live sessions. Teachers' resilience in the face of these challenges was

noteworthy; especially in the form of peer support groups. The suggestions made by the teaching faculty for solutions are reported and discussed in the relevant sections of the article with reference to various research studies from different contexts.

Contributions: Despite the small scale and the specific context of the study, the results and discussion provide useful food for thought to educational practitioners and decision makers in wider international contexts when it comes to flipped learning challenges and coping mechanisms.

Keywords: Flipped learning, ELT, challenges, solutions, higher education.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Flipped learning or flipped classroom is a new and popular approach to teaching and learning. The concept of the flipped classroom is implemented in many different disciplines and educational institutions around the world (Hao, 2016). The introductory activities usually done in the traditional classroom become homework, and the practice activities that are normally assigned as homework are completed in the classroom (Bergmann & Sams, 2012). In the flipped classroom, the teacher assists students instead of only delivering information while the students become more responsible for their learning and have more control on their learning pace (Lai & Hwang, 2016). Classroom time is not dedicated to knowledge transmission or simply lecturing. Therefore, the teacher can involve students in interactive learning activities like group discussions, solving problems and peer-learning.

The Foundation Programme at Dhofar University (DU) has adopted the flipped learning approach during the COVID-19 pandemic and applied it to the online English classes to benefit from its commonly cited advantages such as increased learner autonomy and improved classroom interaction. However, there were some challenges that the students and the teachers faced in adopting this new learning approach. In order to address these issues, teachers and students also started developing their own solutions. The researchers are all based in this university and were part of this transition process. There was a pressing need to record and analyse the day-to-day experiences of the teaching faculty and the students which ignited the current study. The rest of the paper presents a literature review section with relevant theories and research studies followed by methodology, results, discussion and conclusion sections.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Although the term 'flipped learning' is widely used interchangeably with several other terms, this term emphasises the learning aspect and is, therefore, more preferable (Lockwood, 2014). Bergmann, Overmeyer, and Wilie (2013) reject the minimalist definition of flipped learning which describes it as simply watching online videos. It is preferable to redirect the focus on the learning and the learner rather than the teacher. Moreover, Bergman and Sams (2012) claim that there is a variety among teachers' implementation of flipped learning and there is not just one way to flip a classroom. According to Bishop and Verleger (2013) the flipped learning approach has two main components. The first is the instructional videos that are viewed prior to the classroom session. The second part is the group interaction activities that take place in the classroom.

The advantages of flipped learning have been described at length by educators to promote its use among teachers and institutions. Kostka and Marshall (2017) mention that learners need to be exposed to the target language sufficiently. In this approach, learners spend their own time to complete class preparations activities, and classroom activities are reconceptualised to provide for this required target language exposure. Therefore, class time can be dedicated precisely to communicative pair work and group work encouraging learners to practise language use (Hockly, 2017), which is considered a challenge for students to achieve outside their classrooms. Meanwhile, there are other exercises related to grammar, listening and extensive reading that can be done as homework (Hockly & Dudeney, 2017).

As highlighted in literature, flipped learning facilitates a lot of educational utilities which can be organized into three categories; personalization, active learning and engagement and attitude. According to Bergman and Sams (2012), personalization of the classroom based on student's needs is a main advantage of flipped learning where teachers and students can personalize the learning process. Addressing individual learning difficulties and supporting individual learners are some personalization techniques that teachers can perform whereas students can be offered the option to select the learning materials as well as the pace of study. In bigger classes, it is probable to find students with learning difficulties which may become a challenge to address in the traditional classroom. Bergmann and Sams (2012) state that flipped learning approach allows the teacher to provide students with difficulties with individual support while other students are busy in their pair and group discussions.

Moreover, flipped learning allows self-pacing. In this approach, students manage their learning time outside of the classroom. They may search for extra materials online to provide better understanding of a grammar or vocabulary topic, and can view a video or listen to an

audio multiple times. As a result, "they are better prepared and feel more inclined to ask questions, solve problems and interact with their peers" (King, 2016, p. 90). This also provides an equal opportunity for 'slower' learners who are usually left behind in a mixed ability class. As for the advantage of active learning, students can do self-study, leaving the class time for higher-order skills such as analyzing, evaluating and creating (Kostka & Marshall, 2017). Moreover, these higher-order skills require more interaction to do the tasks while being exposed to the language that can help them to produce it and to receive useful feedback from their peers and teachers (Kostka & Marshall, 2017). Another advantage is learners' ownership of learning giving them a level of control on their learning process (Mercer & Dörnyei, 2020). To obtain all these benefits, there is a need for a more professional and flexible teacher who creates meaningful opportunities for all students to interact, decides the most suitable content for students to do as homework, and facilitates appropriate classroom interaction through pair and group work and monitors students' understanding.

However, flipped learning has its own challenges and is not entirely unproblematic. The challenges can be student-related, faculty-related, and operational (Betihavas et al., 2016). As for the ones related to students, students may resist the new approach and prefer the traditional classroom initially (Snyder, Paska, & Besozzi, 2014; Wang, 2016). DeSantis et al. (2015) report that learners showed lower satisfaction compared to the traditional classroom as a kind of resistance to the instructional change. Chen (2016) confirms this point and explains that many students feel alienated as they are not used to learning at home before they go to the classroom. Meanwhile, some students find the instructional videos long and boring, (Clark, 2015; Schultz et al., 2014) and they think that the pre-class activities are time consuming (Snyder et al., 2014). A final limitation is that students cannot ask questions and have instant interaction through the instructional videos unlike in the classroom where this happens regularly.

As for teachers' challenges, educators need to develop a level of familiarity of the flipped classroom and what it requires. Finding suitable videos or preparing their own instructional videos is considered a significant increase in workload (Chen, 2016). Furthermore, teachers are to guide learners to develop self-study skills that allow them to set objectives and organize their time. As a remedy to this problem, an active communication channel should be established between learners and teachers to receive help and support (Voss & Kostas, 2019).

In addition, learner and teacher expectations form a significant challenge in the flipped learning approach. Kostka and Marshall (2017) posit that adjusting to flipped learning may

pose a challenge for students who are accustomed to a teacher-centered learning classroom. Students' anxiety can result in resistance to adjust themselves to the flipped model, especially in the beginning, because, here, they have to work more independently. Thus, there is a need to explain the rationale and to listen to learners' concerns and doubts. Hockly (2017) suggests trying out first with a limited number of flipped sessions and receiving students' feedback to involve them in the decision to go forward. Meanwhile, the flipped model may cause conflict for some teachers with their perception of their job's requirements and anxiety because of workload. Hence, they need support and training.

Another category of challenges is operational such as the non-completion of assigned work. The communicative work in the classroom depends on the completion of assigned tasks while the lack of completion will affect the rest of the process (Webb & Doman, 2016). Voss and Kostka (2019) state that some teachers think that students who haven't completed assignments may be isolated at the back till they finish their homework. However, such a measure may further undermine learners' motivation. Others think it is advisable to explain everything again for the benefit of all students but this is also counterproductive as students may think it is unnecessary to do the pre-session tasks (Hockley, 2017).

Finally, technology requirements also pose a challenge for both learners and teachers engaging in flipped learning. Not all learners have access to devices like laptops and tablets with good internet connection to do the homework (pre-class tasks). Moreover, some students do not have the needed computer skills and they may require training first. Teachers who are involved in preparing the instructional videos and other learning materials may need to possess a certain level of skills in IT as well (Kvashnina & Martynko, 2016). All this requires time and institutional support.

3.0 RESEARCH DESIGN

For the purpose of this study, a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods were used. There were two main reasons for this choice of methodology. First, when qualitative and quantitative methods are used together in a study, it might reveal better responses to the research problems than using a single method on its own (Creswell, 2012). Advantages of both methods can be exploited fully in a mixed methods study. Second, a mix of methods provides triangulation which Mackey and Gass (2005) define as "the use of multiple, independent methods of obtaining data in a single investigation in order to arrive at the same research findings" (p. 181). Triangulation, in return, provides a higher level of validity and reliability in the findings of the study and reduces any possible researcher bias in the interpretation.

The convergent parallel design (Creswell, 2012) was used in this study to answer the set questions for this research. The data were collected from qualitative and quantitative sources simultaneously giving equal importance to both types of data. The results were compared and contrasted to achieve triangulation. All the research stages contributed to find answers to the study 2 questions:

1. What are the challenges that teachers and students face during online English flipped classrooms in the English Unit of the Foundation Programme?
2. What are the solutions that teachers adopt to counter the identified challenges?

3.1 Data Collection Procedures

In order to collect data a questionnaire and an interview guide were adopted. The questionnaire had two versions; one for the students and another one for the teachers. The questions were prepared by one of the researchers based on her experience as a teacher working in the same context and the initial literature review. Both questionnaires were distributed via email to the students and teachers in the English Language Unit. Altogether, there were 14 teachers and 68 students who responded to the questionnaires. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers to have a deep understanding of the challenges and solutions related to flipped learning approach in the particular context. The interview questions were written by one of the researchers based on the preliminary literature review and professional experience. Finally, the researchers' own experiences of using flipped learning approaches were included, mainly in the interpretation and discussion of the results.

3.2 Data Analysis Tools

In order to analyze the data from the questionnaires, the descriptive statistics were used. The data were entered on Microsoft Excel and tested for percentages. This gave an indication of what percentage of the participants answered the options in each question.

The interview responses were recorded as notes for analysis. Thematic analysis was conducted to categorize the responses. The initial list mainly consisted of challenges and solutions that one of the researchers observed during their online teaching sessions. Emerging themes from the interviews were added to the initial list prepared from the questions. The observations of one of the researchers were also included in the interpretation of the analysis; mainly in the results section.

3.3 Context and Participants

Dhofar University (DU) is the biggest private university in the south of Oman. Students can study in different programmes after they finish their secondary schools. Entrance depends on secondary school graduation grades as well as placement test scores in English, Maths and IT. According to their results, students can either join their majors directly or to one of the three levels in the Foundation Programme to prepare for their majors.

In terms of demographic distribution, there were 1000 students in the English Language Programme: 80% were in Level 1, 10% in Level 2 and 10% in Level 3. 65% were female whereas 35% were male. Only 1% to 2 % of students passed directly to the majors. 80% joined level one and 20% were placed in level 2 or 3 where they studied Cambridge series.

At DU, each level takes about three months. Besides their regular in-class teaching, students can access revision classes which are introduced to all students on campus and online in the evening. These courses are offered for free through the FP Muraje'a Centre (Revision Centre).

During conducting this research, there were 57 teachers at the English Language Unit in the foundation programme, from different nationalities: 13 Indians, 6 Pakistanis, 7 Americans, 1 Canadian, 2 Turkish and 27 Arabs (14 Omanis, 8 Jordanians, 2 Iraqis, 1 Moroccan and 2 Egyptians). In terms of gender, there were 20 male and 37 female teachers. All were qualified at Master's Degree level with 4 PhD graduates. Those teachers were offered various workshops by Cambridge University Press and by the university's Center for Teaching and Learning according to their needs.

There were two groups of participants in this study. The first group consisted of the English Language teachers in the English Language Unit. These teachers were invited by email to complete an online questionnaire. Those who completed the questionnaire were also asked to participate in a short semi-structured interview. There were 14 completions for the questionnaire and 10 completions for the interviews from the teachers' group. The second group consisted of students in the Foundation Programme. An email invitation was sent to the students to participate in the online questionnaire. There were 68 students who completed the questionnaire.

In terms of sampling, convenience sampling was used for this study and all were included from the target group (i.e. teachers and students at the English Language Unit) who were available and agreed to participate in this study.

4.0 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Teachers' Questionnaire Results

4.1.1 Teachers' Attitudes Towards Flipped Learning

As for their attitudes towards flipped learning, there were mixed responses to the items in the teachers' questionnaire. While 64.3% said it could be used in the normal classes, 57% believed it didn't help weak students. Less than half (42.9 %) believed it was better than the traditional learning approaches and 28.6% believed its challenges were more than benefits. Moreover, 35.7% of teachers didn't think that students got the expected benefits. Moreover, 71.4% of teachers stated that they sometimes achieved all the class objectives, while 21.4% assured that they always achieved them and only 7% of them never achieved all the objectives.

One of the aims of this study was to identify advantages and challenges related to flipped learning. Teachers' perceived advantages and challenges of flipped learning are displayed in Figure 1. When teachers were asked about what challenges they faced during flipped classrooms, the majority stated homework completion as the most frequent challenge (92.9%) followed by technical issues (85.7%), then the lack of IT skills (57.1%) and finally expectations from teachers to do the work (50%). In terms of advantages, the most frequently mentioned advantage was learner autonomy (92%), followed by personalized/self-paced learning (71.1%), focus on higher-order skills (50%), increasing interaction (42.9%), personal choice of materials (28.6%) and providing individual support (28.6%).
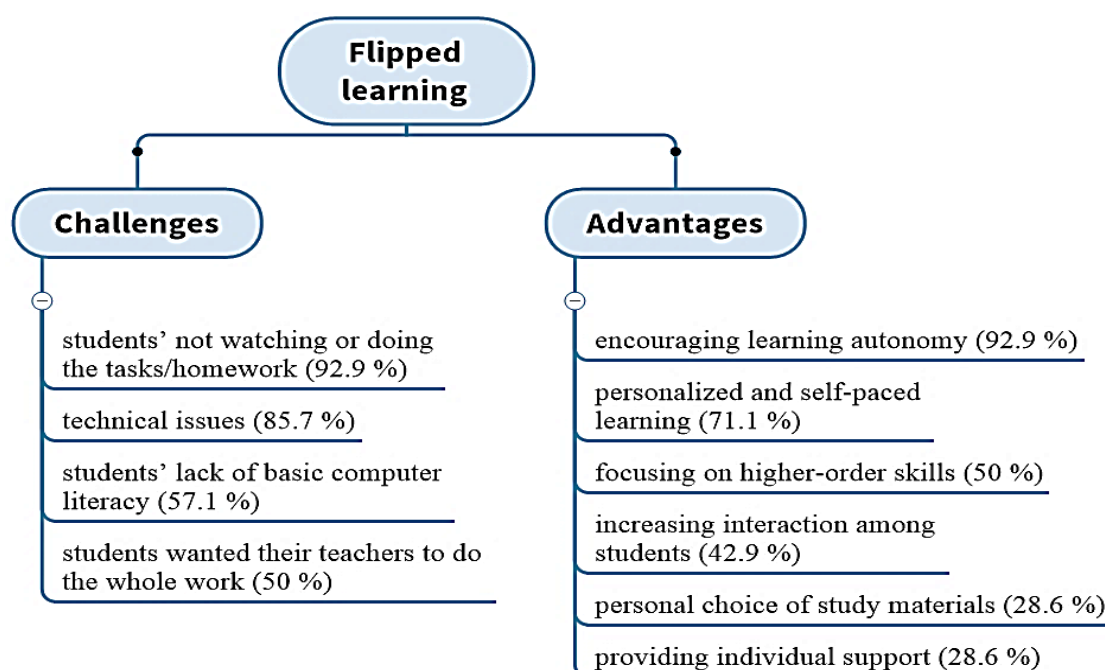

Figure 1: Perceived advantages and challenges of flipped learning

4.1.2 Teachers' Roles in Flipped Learning

When asked about teachers' roles in flipped learning, participants mentioned creating interaction opportunities as the most frequent role. Scaffolding learning, providing feedback, adjusting the curriculum and preparing supplementary materials were the other items in the questionnaire. Details of teachers' roles in the questionnaire can be found in Figure 2.

With regards to training for flipped learning approach, only 21% of the teachers stated they received training from their institution. 50% got help from their colleagues while the majority (78.6%) read articles and attended online workshops to learn more about the flipped learning approach.
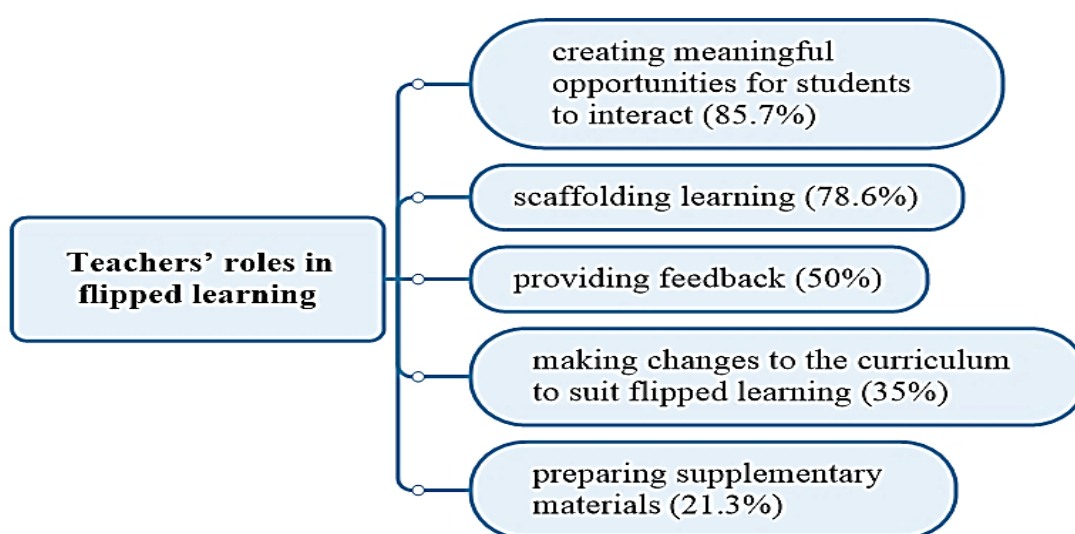

Figure 2: Teachers' roles in flipped learning

4.1.3 Teaching Tools and Strategies for Flipped Learning

Respondents also mentioned using a variety of tools for teaching using the flipped learning approach. All of them used pre-recorded instructional videos which they prepared individually or in groups. The other methods employed in teaching were live classes (85.7%), breakout rooms (71.4%) and polling (50%).

Regarding the way the instructors reacted to students who attended classes without doing homework the day before,78.6% of them tried to involve these students by grouping them with the ones who did homework. However, 21.4% stated that they repeated what was in the recorded videos to make sure that those students never missed anything.

There were also questions related to the solutions adopted by the faculty to address the challenges they encountered. These were grouped as motivational strategies for online sessions and motivational strategies for homework completion. As for their techniques in increasing

students' interest and involvement during the online flipped classrooms, praise was the most frequently used method (71%), then using various online tools (64.3%), and using questions or the gradebook (50%). These are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1: Motivational strategies for online sessions

Strategy	Percentage
praising good participation	71 %
use of online tools (games, Kahoot!, annotation and screen share for students, etc.)	64.3%
using simple questions and marks/gradebook	50 %

On the other hand, strategies to increase homework completion included sending reminder messages on WhatsApp (71%), using gradebook (71%), specifying the videos daily (57%) and general reminders of the importance of homework (7.1%) (see Table 2).

Table 2: Motivational strategies for homework completion

Strategy	Percentage
sending daily WhatsApp messages	71 %
using marks/gradebook	71 %
specifying videos and tasks daily	57 %
reminder of the importance of tasks	7.1 %

4.2 Teachers' Interviews

In the interview with the ten FP teachers, the researchers focused on the main challenges related to institution, teaching and students. All participants complained about the demanding workload as they had to prepare 6 to 10 videos daily as stated by a teacher in the following words: "I feel overwhelmed with so many videos I have to prepare daily as I can't find videos that suit my students". Another teacher commented "My whole time was dedicated to just preparing and uploading videos as it is not easy to find ready videos that suit our students' level". As a solution to the challenging workload, some teachers divided the workload and formed teams to prepare the instructional videos.

Another issue was the role of the teachers in the flipped learning approach. Several teachers stated that they were unsure about how they could apply the new pedagogy during the online classes at the beginning. Despite the general feeling of loss at the start, there was some indication of strong resilience. Some suggested training workshops as a solution and even took the lead and volunteered to train other teachers on good practices for flipped learning.

Moreover, all the interviewees mentioned students' reluctance to do the pre-class homework and to participate in the class discussions. For this point, they suggested different solutions like using the marks/gradebook as an incentive (5 teachers). 3 teachers suggested motivating the weak ones by giving simple questions to answer and to show their participation on the screen to feel proud and interested. One teacher suggested using diaries to be the class routine to make sure that students really watched the instructional videos. Another teacher suggested using gamification of the learning process to motivate students (e.g., using Kahoot! and other educational tools).

In the questionnaire and interview data, it can be clearly seen that the teachers and students in the Foundation programme at DU faced different kinds of challenges while using flipped learning in the online classes and developed various methods to deal with these issues (Table 3).

Table 3: Summary of challenges faced by participants and solutions

Challenges	Solutions/Proposed Solutions
Lack of training	- forming peer support groups - sharing best practices with colleagues
Teachers' increased workload	- dividing duties among team members - setting tasks that are automatically graded - setting realistic objectives
Resistance to change (Teachers and Students)	- clearly communicating the benefits of flipped learning - encouraging learner autonomy (e.g., choosing materials)
Technical issues	- using IT Hotline for Moodle problems - using alternative tools (e.g., Zoom) as a backup
Non-completion of homework	- preparing shorter videos in simple language - choosing videos and tasks daily - using grades - encouraging queries by email or WhatsApp
Students' lack of IT skills	- support by IT teachers - recording videos in both Arabic and English
Students' non-participation in live sessions	- using simple learning logs via screen share: 1- I watched…….. 2- I learnt……….. 3- I didn't understand………. - grouping students for production tasks for peer support - asking students questions individually - encouraging weaker students through simple questions and praise - using screen share to monitor completion of tasks - using games (e.g., Kahoot!) to keep them interested - asking students about their preference (materials-tasks)

4.3 Students' Questionnaire Results

68 learner participants responded to the online questionnaire from level 2 and level 3 students.

4.3.1 Flipped Learning: Students' Attitudes and Perceptions

Students' perceptions of flipped learning were mixed. About three quarters (73%) of the respondents stated that flipped learning improved their language. However, the majority of respondents (70%) still preferred the traditional classroom to the flipped classroom.

As for the challenges they faced in flipped learning in online classes, students reported the number and length of the videos, technical issues, difficulty understanding the videos and feeling shy to participate in their questionnaire responses (see figure 3). In addition, 69.6% of students stated that they had the required technical skills for flipped learning whereas 30.4% stated otherwise.
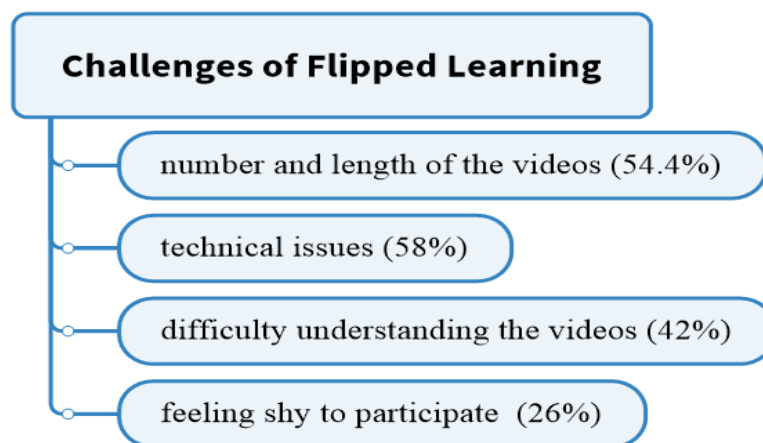

Challenges of Flipped Learning

- number and length of the videos (54.4%)
- technical issues (58%)
- difficulty understanding the videos (42%)
- feeling shy to participate (26%)

Figure 3: Students' perceptions of flipped learning challenges

4.3.2 Students' Perceptions of The Teachers' Roles

The students' perceptions of the teachers' roles in flipped learning focussed on three major areas including preparing and selecting videos to watch, motivating students during live sessions and evaluation and feedback (Table 4). Moreover, 60.2% thought that their teachers accepted mistakes and corrected them nicely, 50% thought that their teachers welcomed their questions they sent on WhatApp and were keen on all students' participation 17.6% of students stated that their teacher asked and answered the questions himself/herself while 2 students (1.26%) of the respondents stated that their teacher blamed those who did not watch videos.

Table 4: Teachers' roles in flipped learning

Role	Percentage
preparing and selecting videos to watch	87 %
motivating students during live sessions	41%
evaluation and providing feedback	30.8%

4.3.3 Preparation for Live Sessions

In order to prepare for the live session, students also completed a variety of tasks. These included viewing the recorded videos and doing assignment, writing down questions to discuss during the live class, sending queries to their teachers from WhatsApp, and watching other online videos for a better understanding. Only five students admitted that they never did any homework or preparation (see Figure 4).
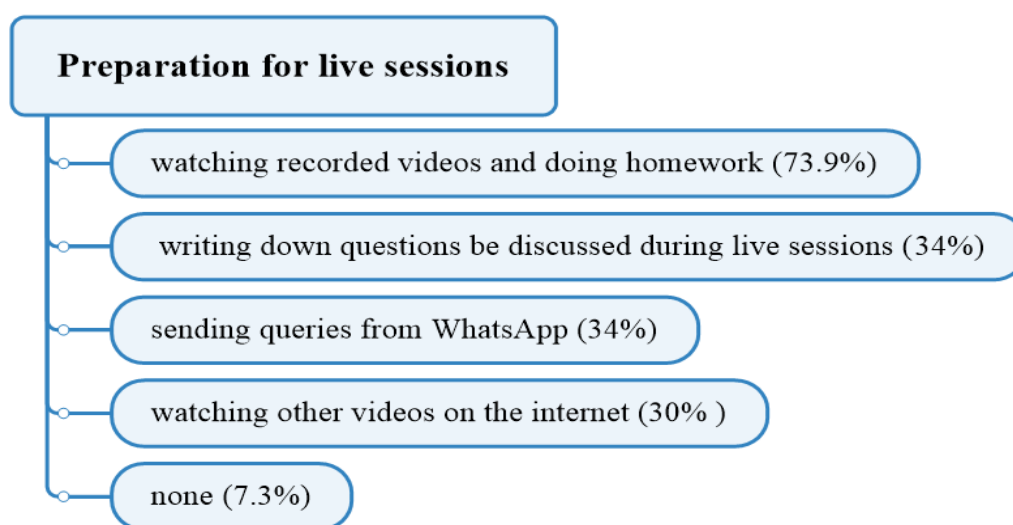

Figure 4: Students' preparation activities for live sessions

4.3.4 Homework Completion

69.6% of students did the tasks themselves, 26.1% did the homework with the help of a family member. Regarding how they reacted when they faced difficulties doing their homework, students used various strategies such as discussing with classmates on WhatsApp, leaving it to the teacher to explain, watching videos again, watching other videos and ignoring the task (Table 5).

Table 5: Students' strategies to deal with difficult homework

Role	Percentage
discussing with classmates on WhatsApp	57.3%
leaving it to the teacher to explain	54.4%
watching videos repeatedly	50%
watching other online videos	41%
ignoring the task	1.26%

Non completion of homework resulted in different outcomes as some tried to participate in any way they could (69.1%), others felt lost (33.8%) embarrassed (22%), or not worried because the teacher would explain it again, or did not participate at all (14.7%).

4.3.5 Participation in Live Sessions

Participation in the live sessions among students showed some variation in the questionnaire responses. About half of the students (51.4%) stated that they sometimes participated and 7.5% only when the teacher called their names.

During the live sessions there were a wide array of activities that students participated in such as group work, pair work, writing in the chat box, individual participation, oral participation, and matching exercises (see Figure 5).
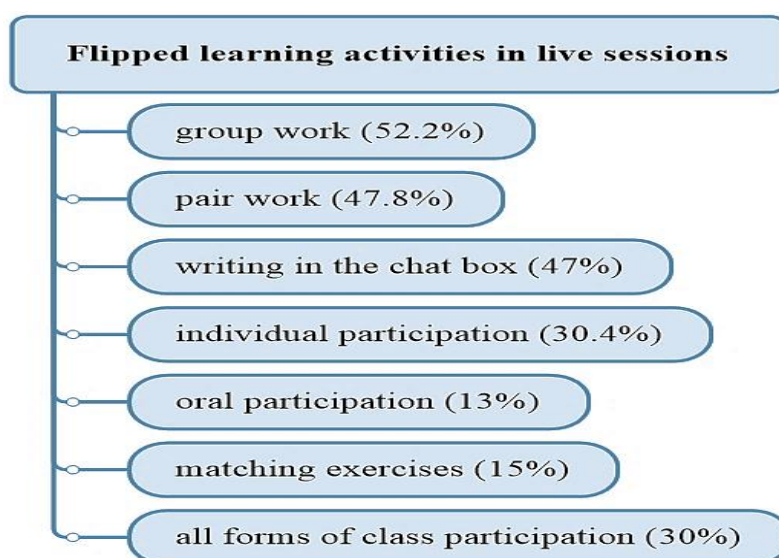
Flipped learning activities in live sessions

- group work (52.2%)
- pair work (47.8%)
- writing in the chat box (47%)
- individual participation (30.4%)
- oral participation (13%)
- matching exercises (15%)
- all forms of class participation (30%)

Figure 5: Flipped learning activities during live sessions

4.4 Discussion

The study aimed at exploring the challenges faced by both teachers and students while using flipped learning pedagogy in the online English classes at DU along with suggesting possible solutions to these challenges for better practices.

One of the challenges was the new teaching and learning approach itself and what roles teachers and students would have. Teachers were instructed by the management to use flipped learning for better learning outcomes in the online classes. It was their first time teaching online besides using a new approach that they had never experienced before. Without detailed training and previous experience, they had to depend on each other for success. Lacking required IT skills was also an issue for many. The suggested solutions were supporting fellow teachers with workshops, peer visits and help from the IT teachers. This result agrees with the findings of Shi-Chun, Ze-Tian, and Yi (2014) who claimed that there should be mutual cooperation in a new teaching situation like this. Brewer and Movahedazarhouligh (2018) suggested that instructors should be provided with support through peer reflection. Moreover, Betihavas et al. (2016) suggested the faculty challenges can be reduced by enriching their knowledge about the pedagogy of flipped classrooms. These actually indicate the importance of training and continuous support.

Moreover, most teachers' anxiety levels were increased due to the confusion about their roles as teachers in the flipped classroom. There were several elements including redesigning the course, preparing materials and assessing using online tools. In this case, teachers had to face the challenge of recording 6 to 8 videos daily. Teachers experienced stress because of the increasing workload. Besides, they were not able to achieve all the objectives they put for each class. The solution was to divide and share the workload among teachers and to prepare shorter videos. The use of brief and effective instructional videos is suggested by Bergmann and Sams (2012) as well. In some cases, 3 to 5 minutes can be enough as claimed by Bridgeman (2013). The most important idea is to make the videos short, and easy for the learners to re-watch (Rosenberg, 2013).

As for teachers' roles, being one of the challenges, it was clarified through the new experience that the role should be to prepare the instructional videos and provide the students with proper materials besides having a communication channel with the students to receive their doubts and to be a facilitator and a scaffolder in the class. All these challenges were met by workshops, training, peer reviews and sharing workload. That also helped in dealing with the challenge of teachers' resistance because of their stress.

Moreover, one of the most considerable challenges was students' resistance as they didn't use to depending mainly on themselves as Betihavas et al. (2016) stated that students resist the new model and like the traditional class where they depend mainly on their teachers and that as stated by Kostka and Marshall (2017) as well. Most students came from a similar educational background where the traditional way of classes was the most used one and most of them lacked the proper IT skills besides the internet poor connection in remote areas, all these helped in their resistance to the new models which was shown in their reluctance to do their homework and take part in the class discussion. Moreover, those students needed to be more self-motivated to do their duties from watching videos, looking for other videos for better understanding, sending their queries to their teachers and participating in pair and group work in the live class as "the goal of flipping a classroom is to remove attention from the teacher and place it on the learners" as stated by Bergman and Sams (2012, p. 100). Students were under stress because of the new approach requirements that request them to be active not passive learners. They used to look at their teachers as the main trusted source of information. To meet this challenge, students were assisted by teaching them some IT skills, sending them instructional videos in Arabic to show them the importance of the new approach and what their roles should be besides having a communication tool (i.e., WhatsApp) with their own teachers to answer their questions, which agrees with Voss and Kostas (2019) who stated that students should have ways to ask and receive help through a sort of a communication channel with teachers. In this study, besides their lack of IT skills, which was solved by the help of IT teachers, they found the videos too many and too long. That challenge was met by short simple videos prepared by their teachers followed by some tasks (H5Ps) to do.

Some students were positively triggered to study by their fear of losing marks; something that worked well according to with Long, Logan, and Waugh (2016) who used quizzes in their study to motivate students to watch the videos and to check understanding as well. After students were taught some IT skills, teachers showed them how to search for other information themselves as a way of promoting students' learning autonomy besides asking them about the kind of materials they prefer. That again is in accordance with Long et al. (2016) when, in their study about their perception and preference of the videos introduced to them, they found that it is better to ask students about the material they prefer and the kind of videos which should cover the target content in a concise manner.

Moreover, the weak learners were encouraged by giving them simple tasks to do and by praising their contribution to increase their motivation. Furthermore, to motivate learners more, teachers used games like Kahoot! to make them more willing to participate in the live

classes which is in line with Huang, Hew, and Lo (2018), when they refer to the positive role of gamification in enhancing students' engagement as shown in their completion of pre-class and post class activities. Teachers praised good practices and let students share their contribution on the screen to feel prouder and more interested as that was better according to the students' cultural background and to help the shy ones who were afraid to make mistakes while using English. To make sure that students really do the pre-class tasks, diaries were used where they used very simple sentences stating what they watched, what they understood and what they could not.

Students may sometimes ask the assignments to be done in the class with their instructors. Hockey (2017) advises against teachers explaining the pre-session tasks when students don't do their homework because this violates the basics of flipped learning approach. For this problem, the use of group work to do assignments was encouraged in Cabi (2018). The study findings confirm this solution. The teachers used pair and group work, grouping the weaker or unprepared students with stronger and better prepared ones in the breakout rooms.

5.0 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, flipped learning approach is a newly adopted teaching and learning method in the context of the present study. It is a major change from the traditional language classroom which is usually centered on the teacher to a more interactive learning environment where students depend more on themselves and each other. Flipped learning helps them to become more autonomous through some preparation tasks at home and thus utilizing class time for interaction and problem solving. In the present study, there were challenges described by teachers and students including more workload, lack of training, insufficient IT skills, technical problems, homework completion and participation issues and a general resistance to change. The solutions developed by teachers include mainly peer-support groups where they divided the work and provided individual support to members of the group. With sufficient institutional support flipped learning can continue to deliver the positive promises that it offers.

The current study was conducted in a private university's foundation programme in Oman. The scale of the study should be expanded with comparable contexts from Oman and other countries in the region in order to become more generalisable. Moreover, comparisons between private and public universities may generate useful data regarding the similarities and differences of public and private sectors in the implementation of flipped learning. Despite these limitations, the results may prove to be useful and relatable by the practitioners and

management in the implementation of flipped learning as a new approach in teaching English language.

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