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Korean Preservice Teachers' Perspectives on Flipped Learning in the EFL Context

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Abstract

This study investigated preservice teachers' perspectives on flipped learning approaches in the EFL context in Korea. Fifteen preservice teachers agreed to participate in this study. Major data sources were focus group and interviews. These sources were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Then, the transcripts were interpreted and analyzed through thematic analysis to explore individuals' thoughts and opinions in depth. Findings revealed that the participants had positive thoughts and attitudes toward flipped learning. They thought that flipped learning increased their autonomy and self-regulation. The participants also addressed several benefits and shortcomings of flipped learning. Implications of research and pedagogy are discussed in the final section of this study.

Keywords: *Flipped Learning, Preservice Teachers, Teacher Education, Thematic Analysis*

Introduction

Flipped learning approaches are nowadays considered one of the most highly regarded instructional models in higher education. Recent advancement in technology has made the concept of flipped learning more significant for teachers and professionals in the educational context. Because ubiquitous software and teaching content are more accessible, teachers can use class time for activities, engagement, and interaction with students. Flipped learning (FL) is defined as an inverted classroom or upside-down classroom that maximizes learning through technology (Du, 2018; Hava, 2020; Loizou, 2022). FL is a new instructional method focusing on learner-centeredness. FL fosters individualized learning because learning occurs in any physical or virtual contexts (Lee, 2013). FL allows teachers and instructors to make their lessons more effective by

diminishing teacher-centered lecture time and providing more learning opportunities to learners at their own pace. Carhill-Poza (2019) maintained that FL is effective in focusing on socialization and interactions in the classroom setting and more opportunities for learning outside. In addition, a great amount of research shows high levels of achievement and progress in learning through FL (Ekmekci, 2017; Ngo & Yunus, 2021; O'Flaherty & Phillips, 2015; Sun et al., 2022; Yavuz & Ozdemir, 2019; Yi & Lim, 2020).

Flipped learning also enhances self-regulation. van Alten et al.'s (2020) quasi-experimental study measured the effects of self-regulated learning, learning outcomes, and satisfaction. One hundred fifteen eighth-grade Dutch students participated in the study. The findings showed a positive effect of FL in light of the participants' self-regulated learning. They favored the flipped learning environment by its nature, but some of them expressed that self-regulated instruction in FL should be carefully designed. As such, FL can be a powerful instructional approach by increasing learner autonomy. As an increasing demand for FL in language learning and teaching, this study examined EFL preservice teachers' perspectives on FL in the Korean university classroom context. Three research questions guided this study as follows:

RQ₁: What were the advantages of FL approaches in the learning process?

RQ₂: What were the disadvantages of FL approaches in the learning process?

RQ₃: How can FL approaches meet learner needs?

The Literature Review

The Definition and Characteristics of Flipped Learning

Flipped learning (FL) is a type of blended learning environment in which course content is delivered online to students (Burke & Fedorek, 2017). FL reverses the existing teaching format using instructional videos produced by teachers. Students watch the videos beforehand and participate in activities that the teacher offered during class (Sams & Bergmann, 2013).

The common characteristics of FL can be summarized as follows (Davies et al., 2013; Fulton, 2012). First, students who used to be passive learners in a lecture class become active agents of FL instruction. Second, the teacher's role is transferred to an assistant to help students learn. Third, the use of technology promotes instruction. Fourth, the time for classes and assignments change. Fifth, the teacher guides students individually or through activities based on their understandings. It is relevant to developing higher-order thinking and problem-solving skills. As discussed above, FL increases learners' initiatives, individualized education, and student autonomy according to their learning speed and abilities.

The Effectiveness of Flipped Learning

Several studies (Abu Safiyeh & Farrah, 2020; Enfield, 2013; Ceylaner & Karakuş, 2018; Chou et al., 2021; Hava, 2021; Loizou, 2022; Shahnama et al., 2021; Sirakaya & Özdemir, 2018; Su et al., 2022; Sun et al., 2022; Vitta & Al-Hoorie, 2020) discovered the effectiveness of FL. Enfield's (2013) study showed an increase in self-efficacy through FL. College students majoring in multimedia at the California State University shared their experiences of FL and focused on their learning. Ceylaner and Karakuş' (2018) study aimed to examine the effectiveness of FL on ninth graders' self-directed readiness toward language learning. The study identified the close

relationship between FL, students' self-directed readiness, and attitudes toward the language course. Sirakaya and Özdemir's (2018) study also examined the effects of an FL model on students' academic performance, motivation, and self-directed learning. Sixty-six Turkish college students participated in this study. Sirakaya and Özdemir (2018) conducted an experiment to see the effect of FL, and the findings showed there was a critical difference between groups regarding motivation, retention, and academic achievement. Hava's (2021) study investigated the effectiveness of FL on class participation and learning strategies. Turkish university students participated in this experimental study. Findings showed that FL is more effective than the traditional and typical teaching method regarding cognitive and affective participation and learning power. Su et al. (2022) studied the effect of the application of thinking tools on preservice teachers' argumentation skills in flipped learning. The results revealed that online text-based visual thinking tools helped preservice teachers better reflect their thinking processes.

Güvenç's (2018) action research study indicated many advantages of FL. First, FL improves student achievement (Hung, 2015; O'Flaherty & Phillips, 2015; Yang et al., 2018). Second, FL supports converting from passive participants to active learners in the process of learning. Third, it provides motivation and inspiration to practice and prepare for lessons. Fourth, FL enables teachers to have insight into learning styles and the difficulties students encounter. Lastly, students will take their responsibility for studying on their own and become autonomous in learning (Sams & Bergmann, 2013; Güvenç, 2018; Herreid & Schiler, 2013). Strayer's (2012) comparative research study also revealed students' positive attitudes towards FL as innovative and collaborative education. FL has the potential to reach various learner types at diverse cognitive levels (Strayer, 2012). A flipped learning environment also boosts critical thinking by efficiently using class time. Teachers can offer meaningful activities to practice and critical thinking skills to acquire content areas, leading to an increase in student achievement (Enfield, 2013; Murphree, 2014; Rowe et al., 2013). Güvenç (2018) noted that despite the benefits of FL, its possible challenges should be taken into consideration, such as students' resistance to new teaching modes and unpreparedness to the class. If instructional videos have low quality, students may easily get bored or lost in the instruction (Herreid & Schiler, 2013; Nederveld & Berge, 2015; Sams & Bergmann, 2013).

Hamdan et al.'s (2013) study suggested essential components of effective FL in language education: 1) professional educators, 2) learning culture, 3) intentional contents, and 4) flexible environments. First, teachers should try to develop their own expertise in FL and become professional educators. In the 21st century, teachers and practitioners are required to have a mindset that can keep abreast of the advancement of technology and tools; thus, they should be willing to receive training sessions of FL and collaborate with other colleagues for their professionalism. Second, we should accede changes in the learning culture. In other words, both teachers and students should be flexible in changing culture of learning and teaching. This adaptation will lead to individualized learning. Third, the sequence of pre-learning and classroom instruction is fundamental. FL requires two different modes such as online and face-to-face. Thus, it is important for teachers to consider purposeful content in advance and deliver it before classroom instruction and in the classroom context. Lastly, teachers try to be flexible in accommodating different environments, establishing systematic curriculum and instruction, and

setting appropriate educational objectives for evaluation in compliant environments.

In addition, FL supports self-regulated learning abilities (Çakıroğlu & Öztürk, 2020; Ceylaner & Karakuş, 2018; Rasheed et al., 2020; Robbins et al., 2020; Sirakaya & Özdemir, 2018; Zainuddin & Perera, 2018). Studies by Ceylaner and Karakuş (2018) and Sirakaya and Özdemir (2018) investigated the effect of FL on self-directed learning readiness and attitudes in Turkish educational contexts. Findings revealed that FL significantly influenced learners' attitudes and self-directed learning readiness. Zainuddin and Perera's (2018) qualitative case study examined the impact of FL on Malaysian college students' self-directed experiential learning. The study also showed that FL allowed learners to become self-directed in their language learning. Ngo and Yunus (2021) considered FL as a prospective educational and instructional method in the 21st century. Hence, it is necessary to understand how preservice teachers perceive FL in the learning context.

Strategies of Flipped Learning

Du (2018) suggests three major strategies of FL: 1) the alignment with English language disciplines, 2) the improvement of teachers' information literacy, and 3) the effective use of platform and communication tools. First, teachers should be able to select different teaching modes. When speaking skills are learned, it may be more suitable to implement the traditional teaching mode because teachers can offer instant feedback to students quickly. In contrast, reading and writing skills based on the written register can be taught through FL. In terms of a large number of students, the pedagogical and instructional mode should be converted with the consideration of learners' varied levels and aptitude, and teachers should apply individualized education to the instruction. Then, the unit content warm-up exercise can be placed in the online pre-class, and the knowledge content that requires practice can be put in the face-to-face class. Second, teachers should be qualified in light of information literacy. Teachers need to become the guide for their students to internalize the knowledge they acquire in the classroom. In this regard, they should develop information literacy for the FL application. Researchers show that qualified teachers equipped with information literacy can promote learning efficiency and autonomous learning. Students' thinking skills increase in a more natural learning environment (Li, 2014). Furthermore, teachers should be familiar with operating software, especially skillful use of up-to-date information technology, keeping pace with the current trend along with regular technology training and meeting students' expectations in a positive classroom environment. This leads to a decrease in anxiety of language use and an increase in the success of classroom teaching (Du, 2018). Third, adequate use of technology tools and platform is also a crucial factor in successful flipped learning. Technology tools can offer efficiency and convenience for language learning and teaching. Due to the advancement of technology, higher institutions have amplified network platforms for the implementation of FL. Teachers can upload and post related pre-class learning resources for students to study independently. College students are inclined to share their ideas by participating in virtual communication. They must apply the given content in concrete and thorough ways, practicing the intellectual skills that can help them process the information and incorporate it into their understanding of class concepts. Consequently, FL can utilize functions of communication tools to help students to be ready for both pre-class and in-class learning tasks, connecting online and classroom learning.

Methodology

Context and Participants

In this study, we conducted research at a medium-sized university in South Korea. Fifteen EFL preservice teachers (four males and eleven females) attending the Department of English Language Education participated in focus groups and interviews. The participants of this study included sophomores to juniors aged 21 to 28 in their programs. The class is entitled “Logic and Essay Writing of English Education,” which is a requirement for qualification as a Level 2 English language teacher. The main learning goals of this class were to recognize different types of English essays and to compose essays with a variety of sources as source-based writing.

Research Instruments

Focus Group Discussions

focus group discussions were employed in this study. Because of the nature of the exploratory study, focus group discussions were helpful in understanding preservice teachers’ dispositions and perceptions of how FL influenced their language learning. Data for this study were collected to obtain rich descriptions of the participants’ experiences and perceptions. Then, the focus group data were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Interviews

An interview was another research instrument for this study. The interview is a method for eliciting thoughts and perceptions of participants about a particular subject (Bolderston, 2012; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Fetterman, 2009). Interviews allow researchers to gather ideas, opinions, and thoughts by interviewees (Meho, 2006). Semi-structured interviews were used in this study for rich and in-depth data collection. The interview questions covered the preservice teachers’ perceptions of FL, such as its advantages and possible improvements.

Course Procedures of Flipped Learning

The FL structure contained two parts: 1) prior learning preparation from watching videos before the class and 2) face-to-face engagement and interactions between the instructor and students in the classroom. They discussed the major issues of each corresponding topic and asked questions about the lessons. Thus, they were required to preview the video lectures in advance and internalize the knowledge as they discussed the lecture topics and asked questions in the classroom. With the pre-offered online videos, the preservice teachers were supposed to watch and study them at their paces before face-to-face classes. In the physical face-to-face class, they had sufficient time to discuss the corresponding contents and concepts and ask questions to the instructor. The instructor also prepared key concepts and main ideas of the related content for active participation and question-and-answer periods. In particular, they were asked to write English essays as self-reflection notes about what they learned as a way to confirm their understanding of the material.

Data Collection and Analysis

Focus group and interview transcripts were collected and analyzed. The recorded discussions and interviews were transcribed verbatim. The questions included: “Did you learn basic principles of English academic writing from the video lecture?”; “How would you like the flipped learning approach?”; “What are the advantages of flipped learning?”; “What would be improvements in your flipped learning experience?” Interviewees explained their answers to these questions, and

further questions were asked based on their responses.

Then, thematic analysis was used in this study. Thematic analysis helps the researcher encounter, analyze, and integrate recurring trends or themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Furthermore, it is flexible for a wide range of analytic options and applicable to research questions that go beyond an individual's experience. The detailed analysis went through as follows: 1) acquainting with the data, 2) producing initial codes, 3) finding the topics, 4) studying the topics, 5) determining and defining the themes, and 6) writing. Frequently occurring themes were continuously clustered, classified, and compared to refine them. The interviewees were asked to verify that the data recorded in the findings corresponded to their original responses during a follow-up meeting.

Results

This study examined preservice teachers' perceptions of FL and their experiences with it through focus group discussions and interviews.

Advantages of FL

Promoting Self-directed Learning Abilities in Flipped Learning

Students who learn using FL can learn at their own pace and abilities. Participants discussed the advantages of FL, particularly the ability to develop self-directed learning abilities. Several excerpts from the interviews and focus group discussions are as follows:

Since I watched the online contents to prepare for face-to-face classes, I made a routine to watch them regularly. This made me more diligent and self-regulated (Preservice Teacher [PT] Choi, focus group discussion);

I had enough time and was ready to perform tasks before attending offline classes (PT Kim2, focus group discussion);

I often did not understand what the professor lectured about because I could not stop the class and asking the professor directly was burdensome. Because of that, many times I did not understand what the professor lectured about. In flipped learning, when watching video lectures, I watched the video while paying full attention to the course content, and I heard the parts I didn't understand while I was watching (PT Jung, interview).

FL is perceived as being most beneficial in terms of efficiency by preservice teachers. Using online video pre-classes and face-to-face classes with the instructor, several preservice teachers could grasp the contents thoroughly:

Flipped learning is more efficient for me because I can watch and learn the online contents as I am alert (PT Oh, focus group discussion);

I think the advantage of flipped learning classes is that students can take the class at their own pace. Flipped learning seems to be a really great strength because everyone has enough time to

listen to or understand the parts they do not understand differently. By watching the video lectures, I was able to participate more actively in the class (PT Lee, interview).

The online video lectures provided the students with an opportunity to prepare for discussions, question and answer, and participation in face-to-face lectures by first grasping the content of the lesson. Flipped classrooms with well-organized structures may encourage students to study at their own pace.

Affordances of Technological Materials for the Application of Knowledge

In the interviews and focus group discussions, positive aspects of online video lectures in FL consistently emerged. Participants indicated that they had worked through the given materials from the online lectures at their own pace to prepare for the face-to-face classes afterwards. They felt that the technological materials were a great resource for them to acquire information in FL.

Watching the video lectures also helped them understand the content discussed in the offline class (PT Choi, focus group discussion);

To be honest, it is difficult to watch the videos uploaded by the professor all the time. You feel like skipping them, but when it comes to preparing for the exam and checking attendance by watching the videos, there are many moments when I definitely feel obligated to take the time and watch them myself (PT Jeong, focus group discussion);

When I learn the theoretical part of the lesson, I ask the professor in the middle of the lesson about the part I didn't understand in the face-to-face class, or I go back to the part that I don't understand while listening to the video lecture of flipped learning. It's nice to be able to take some time to understand, like pausing the video and reading the textbook. So, I think the flip learning video lectures were very useful for me (PT Kim1, interview);

It was a systematic video lecture that started with the learning goals presented in the video lecture and what to learn, and it was impressive that the theory of writing was presented in a visual way to write an English essay (PT Kim3, interview);

The video lectures seem to be the best resource to understand the theory from the class. So, I listened to the video lectures diligently (PT Cha, interview).

Overall, preservice teachers remained devoted to their studies by watching videos or participating in live classes along with activities, discussions, and quiz in real time, while listening to various lectures. Online video lectures and associated materials helped them with self-directed learning to some extent. The preservice teachers recognized the benefits of FL as it can be done without time and space constraints.

Disadvantages of FL

The Necessity of Immediate Feedback

The essence of FL is to increase efficiency by providing time for discussion and question-and-answer sessions in face-to-face classes for self-directed learning and online learning without instructor supervision. Hence, there is no immediate feedback or interaction in online learning. The preservice teachers were disappointed at not receiving immediate feedback:

It is unfortunate that we cannot immediately ask the professor what we want to know about the class content, and that there is no sense of presence, such as immediate feedback from the professor or interaction with classmates (PT Choi, focus group discussion);

I think the disadvantage of flipped learning is that there is no immediate interaction with the professor (PT Park, interview).

Several preservice teachers expressed their grief about feedback issues. Therefore, it seems necessary to address the issue of how to provide useful feedback for effective learning.

Technical Issues during FL

Despite views on the merits of FL, participants expressed some opinions on disadvantages or improvements of FL. Relevant excerpts from the interviews are as follows:

Regarding the access problem, the school server often didn't run smoothly, and it was difficult to watch the video. At such times, I was frustrated and annoyed with this kind of class (PT Kim2, focus group discussion);

When we had live classes, there were a lot of buffering. Eventually, the class was disconnected. The professor texted us that the class was cancelled due to the power issue. At that time, I felt a little irritated (PT Park, interview).

These responses suggest that technology often disrupts the learning process. In other words, server instability caused problems with video lectures in terms of accessibility. In this case, a lack of regulation was present as students transitioned from an online lecture to an offline face-to-face class. They often felt awkward to communicate with others or ask questions to the instructor.

Discussion

FL improves self-directed learning skills, resulting in increasing learning impact (Anggoro & Khasanah, 2022; Ceylaner & Karakuş, 2018; Loizou, 2022; Sirakaya & Özdemir, 2018; Yi & Lim, 2020; Zainuddin & Perera, 2018). The flipped class structure with efficient use of online pre-class videos and offline class time contributed to the preservice teachers' comprehension of course content. This study uncovered how Korean college students found FL to be positive because they could self-study content online at their own pace. Participants indicated that they tried to go through the given materials from the online lectures at their own pace to prepare for face-to-face

classes afterwards. Then, face-to-face class time can efficiently be used for reviews, discussions, and problem-solving activities requiring collaboration and critical thinking skills. The participants also perceived the instructor as a facilitator and guide by asking questions comfortably. In effect, FL provides for learners with the opportunity to plan and review their own learning, encouraging them to assess themselves systematically. A systematic FL approach to instruction will be effective in increasing self-directed learning if the instructor organizes online contents and offline face-to-face instruction according to the characteristics of FL prior to learning. It is evident that students are motivated to engage with technological materials with convenience and full access. In particular, Muir and Geiger's (2015) study revealed that teachers' focused learning outcomes are closely connected to a success of FL approaches. With full access to relevant technological resources, consistent pedagogical approaches and classroom manner should be considered in flipped learning.

Providing feedback is a focal factor for a success of FL particularly for L2 learners (Alrowais, 2014; Luo et al., 2020). Research in the literature has shown that teacher feedback is important for evaluating students' learning. In this regard, learning should be facilitated through various communication media (email, memos, or text messages) so that learners receive feedback immediately during the online class. Instructors should be advised to adopt efficient e-feedback tools in teaching because this study showed the effectiveness of feedback in developing preservice teachers' knowledge and skills and improving their attitudes. In this regard, there should be more attention that should be paid to teaching training and workshops on using feedback strategies in flipped learning contexts, employing e-feedback tools, and utilizing them in course design (Alrowais, 2014).

To successfully use FL, McLaughlin et al. (2014) emphasized the provision of learning activities during offline face-to-face instruction to check individual learners' responses and understanding through questions, and pair-and-share activities. In addition, face-to-face instruction should include formative evaluations, such as individual presentations, group discussions, and quizzes. Several participants in this study also addressed checking their comprehension as helpful because they were able to reflect on how much they have learned in the FL context. Another participant stated the combination of online and offline instruction was useful since this made her alert to the lesson, leading to the retention of knowledge. To ensure effective learning, teachers must provide feedback to students regarding both online materials and classroom discussions and establish a flipped learning environment where pre-class learning sessions and face-to-face instruction are aligned.

It is essential that teachers systematically structure online lectures before delivering FL classes. Hava's (2021) study showed that video lectures before class are indeed a resource for students to better understand the lesson content. It should be noted that technology-integrated use should be mainly for pre-class content delivery with simplistic preparation. Some studies (Anggoro & Khasanah, 2022; Du, 2018; Rajabi et al., 2021) stressed the need to explore different English teaching and learning models and develop materials considering the time and students' interests and abilities. According to Loizou (2022), a well-structured flipped lesson with the upload and sharing of content accelerates effective implementation of language teaching (Pempek et al., 2009).

FL allows teachers and educators to continue learning no matter what situation occurs (e.g., a natural disaster or a national disaster). Therefore, it is of primary importance to develop and improve numerous FL models and methods that fit learners and that can also strengthen teaching skills, pedagogical implementation, as well as professional development.

Findings of this study offer guidelines of FL. First, teachers should consider challenges students may encounter in advance (Adnan, 2017) and set up systematic but approachable learning environments so that both teachers and students are flexible in facing issues and problems (Lee & Wallace, 2018). Monitoring learning progress may be essential in the entire process of FL (Wu et al., 2017). Teachers also need to help learners find and use effective online resources for learning and regulate their online learning (Anggoro & Khasanah, 2022). Teachers should provide opportunities for interactions and communication with peers (Hung, 2017). To make everything available, therefore, teachers play an important role by implementing well-aligned FL classes so that both teachers and students can take advantage of it.

Conclusion

This study is significant because it explores preservice teachers' experiences and perceptions of flipped learning, so that they can be effectively in the design and college courses. This study provided the pedagogical purpose and direction to be considered in designing FL and addressed the educational value and direction of FL. In this study, firstly, self-directed learning abilities of preservice teachers were improved in the FL context. This indicates that FL can be an effective instructional and pedagogic method as students actively engage in video pre-learning to prepare for face-to-face instruction. Secondly, even during online pre-learning, teachers must make an effort to provide feedback that is tailored to students' needs. Therefore, teachers should use a variety of interactive media to create an atmosphere in which students can ask the teacher for help even during online learning. Lastly, FL is more effective when online pre-class is paired with face-to-face instruction. FL can be maximized when conditions are in place for an efficient transition from online preparation courses to face-to-face instruction.

Some limitations should be noted for future research. One limitation is weak generalizability in this study. The sampling used in both focus group and interviews was convenience sampling. Furthermore, it is needed to examine EFL preservice teachers' perception of FL in a longer period of time. It was such a short time to explore the issue of FL during the pandemic. It would also be valuable to investigate this in the post-pandemic to see the effectiveness of FL.

Teachers and learners ought to be prepared to apply FL in their teaching and learning processes. By implementing an FL approach, students can learn independently and in a self-directed manner. It is hoped that this exploratory study may serve as a guide to researchers wishing to conduct studies about FL in education. In addition, researchers, educators, or teachers who are interested in innovative teaching may find this study useful in gathering information about FL. All in all, this study suggests that language teachers should focus on pedagogical design of FL that promotes pedagogical value and effectiveness in order to improve student learning and advance teacher education programs.

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No, there are no conflicting interests.

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