

“Flipping” the L2 Classroom: Peer Teaching With Student-Generated Materials

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Abstract

This study examines learner perspectives of student-generated materials (SGMs) in the second language classroom. In this research project, students took on the role of the teacher in a “flipped” learning approach. 22 students were given an open-ended survey asking them about the positive and/or negative aspects of creating materials and leading discussions, and what they learned about themselves after the experience. On the positive side, results showed that student engagement with the learning materials had increased, student leaders were able to understand how to deeply research their chosen topic in the L2, peers developed stronger relationships, and students could recognize areas to improve in their own language skills through observing others’ discussions. These successes led them to taking more responsibility for their learning and feeling more empowered. On the negative side, students reported that selecting topics and writing meaningful discussion questions was challenging due to the wide range of proficiency levels in the classroom. They also found it difficult to take notes and synthesize information from many groups. Overall, students found the experience beneficial to critically understanding their academic English level but also reported that they needed teacher guidance to help organize lessons and further build their skills.

Keywords: flipped learning, peer teaching, student-generated materials, authenticity

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Introduction

Second language acquisition (SLA) theories in the past focused heavily on grammar-translation and the writing of long vocabulary lists (Pangeran, 2025). This teaching approach, popular in the early to mid-1900s, was beneficial for improving reading comprehension skills but was largely ineffective in developing learners' communicative competence. The Direct Method, which emerged soon after, placed emphasis on oral communication in natural settings with linguistic accuracy. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), still practiced today, is the most popular teaching method, focusing on functional communication and authentic tasks in a variety of familiar and unfamiliar settings (see Ellis, 2021 for a brief history). As the concept of learner autonomy became more widespread in second language learning (Holec, 1981), SLA began to shift from CLT to more learner-centred teaching approaches. Task-based language teaching (Nunan, 2004), project-based Learning (Markham, 2011), and flipped learning classrooms (Baker, 2000; Bergmann & Sams, 2012) are all examples of current teaching methods which aim to promote learner development and encourage deeper learning through active exploration of real-life content. This study describes a flipped classroom approach in a freshman English course using student-generated materials (SGMs) to help students improve their communicative competence. Three aims guided this research:

1. To help learners increase talk time during lessons by encouraging them to prepare for lessons in advance and actively participate in discussions.
2. To promote learner autonomy by encouraging learners to take on leadership roles and assess learning strengths and areas to improve through critical self-reflection.
3. To understand student perspectives of challenges faced in the flipped classroom and benefits to their learning.

This model of learning provided a more interactive and reflective learning environment within the language classroom. To understand exactly how the flipped approach works, it is necessary to first give an overview of the approach and review other key terms. This will be followed by an explanation of the course structure and learner perceptions of the new approach.

Overview of the Flipped Learning Approach

Characteristics of a Flipped Learning Classroom

For this study, the researcher followed Shibukawa's (2024) three central characteristics of flipped teaching. The first characteristic aimed to reduce lecture time by encouraging students to prepare for each lesson in advance so they could use the 90 minutes of lesson time more effectively to discuss the content deeply. Preparation typically involved reading newspaper articles or other authentic L1 sources or watching videos. Students were asked to write notes and summarize the content to show deep understanding of the learning materials and then formulate their own personal opinions about the topic. The second characteristic involved maintaining the primary/primary relationship of applying knowledge gained from preparation to the lesson to the lesson discussions. That is, as preparation was a direct prerequisite to the following lesson's plan, if the student did not prepare for class, they would not be able to participate fully in the discussions. For the third characteristic, the preparation and lessons must be inseparable and aligned. Therefore, structural elements were included in lesson preparation such as vocabulary acquisition, note-taking to answer comprehension questions during class, and providing questions that facilitated deeper thinking. Assessment was conducted based on in-class activities and feedback given as a class as well as individually. In this way, while

preparing for class, students could envision their participation and feel more confident about joining in the discussions.

The Flipped Classroom and Learner Development

One of the main reasons for employing a flipped classroom was to help students reflect more deeply on their language abilities and become a more active participant in the learning process (as opposed to passively waiting for teacher instruction). Students in the freshman English course had different proficiency levels and reasons for wanting to improve their English, thus the flipped approach was considered as a suitable option to help learners self-reflect on their performance each week and set their own learning goals. Learner development was promoted in four ways:

1. *Self-pacing*: Learners were able to work at their own pace during lesson preparation. That is, they were free to read or watch the input materials as often as they wished and revisit difficult sections.
2. *Higher order thinking*: Critical thinking skills were encouraged especially through note taking. Writing notes and summaries helped students to deepen their understanding of the input materials and organize their thoughts by considering which information to keep or discard. Students were not given comprehension questions until the following class and thus had to understand the content fully to successfully answer questions.
3. *Engagement with learning materials*: Students actively engaged with lesson materials by selecting their own topics. Teacher-selected topics sometimes did not connect with student life which reduced engagement. Topic-selection gave students more ownership as there was personal interest in the content and it was more relevant to student life.
4. *Leadership skills and self-reflection*: Students reflected on skills through designing learning materials, leading discussions, managing the lesson time, helping to keep group discussions flow smoothly and reflecting on personal language strengths and areas to improve based on discussions they observed.

Student-Generated Materials in a Flipped Learning Classroom

A key strategy in the researcher's flipped classroom was handing over the control of the class to learners to further increase interaction through increased levels of collaboration and discussion. Each week, a group of students worked together collaboratively to create a lesson plan based on the structure of the lesson modelled in the first few classes of the semester. They were given one 90-minute lesson to decide on an academic topic, decide on roles, and split up tasks to prepare for teaching their lesson. Tasks included finding authentic L1 articles or videos that suited the language proficiency and interests of their peers, designing warm-up tasks (e.g., true/false quiz, personal questions, reorder information, or picture prompts), extracting difficult vocabulary from input materials to assist with comprehension, writing comprehension questions, followed by deeper questions to share viewpoints. All interaction was done in English during the class time and facilitated by the teacher. Discussions between the group about the lessons continued outside of the classroom via email or text message (in either the L1 or L2). The group leader and members communicated with the teacher in English through a Google document to share the materials and ask for advice. The key benefit of having students prepare, design, discuss, and use their own materials was lowering barriers during class discussions and increasing motivation as students were more supportive of their peers during student-led discussions (over teacher-produced content). A second benefit was that leaders could identify and reflect on their own strengths and areas to improve from observing other student discussions.

Research Context

The researcher has been using a flipped teaching approach for over a decade with 2nd to 4th year students in elective courses. Students in elective courses tend to be more motivated to participate in lessons as they have selected the course by themselves and are more mature and linguistically proficient than freshman students. Curricular changes over the past year at the researcher's university, however, have introduced a flipped teaching approach into mandatory freshman classes. As the proficiency level of first-year students is lower than those enrolled in elective classes, the researcher decided to use a smaller class for a pilot study to establish if the flipped classroom was effective with lower proficiency learners.

In Yan et al.'s (2024) study on the impact of flipped learning on the proficiency levels of mixed-level learners, they found that lower-proficiency level students' significantly improved listening and reading comprehension skills over their counterparts in more traditional classrooms where the teacher produced the learning materials (original content or from a textbook) and the students prepared for class as a secondary role. These results were also found in other studies (such as Ebron & Mabuan, 2021; Lee & Wallace, 2018). The rationale given for this is that the flipped approach, done correctly, offers scaffolding, clear instructional goals, more opportunities to collaborate and interact with peers, and more exposure to recast during preparation thereby enabling students to self-identify correct forms and supporting language acquisition. In this research, findings were similar. However, the researcher also noted that more proficient learners in this course saw additional improvements in writing and speaking skills (mainly note taking and verbal summaries) through consistent practice in each lesson. Improvements were not measured empirically in this study. Rather, the researcher asked students about their perceived improvements in self-reflective activities.

The number of students in typical freshman classes averaged between 25–30 students. The number of students enrolled in the researcher's pilot class totalled 25. One student was unable to continue the course and dropped out in the third week; thus, 24 students participated in the pilot study. This made it easy to separate the students into six groups of four for weekly group tasks and student-led discussions. If another student had quit the course, the researcher knew that a group of 3 students could still manage the work effectively with more guidance from the teacher, if required. Table 1 explains the structure of the course design:

Table 1

Flipped Learning Course Design

Lesson	Classroom Activity
1	Orientation. Explanation about the structure of discussion course and assessment methods
2–4	Teacher-led model discussions to help students understand and become accustomed to the structure of the lessons (preparation methods, discussion, and summary of thoughts) and focusing on specific discussion skills to be practiced and assessed.
5	Peer-collaboration for student-led discussions
6–11	Student-led discussions and reflection. <i>*In lesson 8 there is a mid-semester self-assessment to check progress and teacher overall comments about discussion skills observed and areas to improve as a class. Individual assessment reports explaining strengths and weaknesses were presented to students leading the discussions</i>
12–13	Teacher-led discussion and self-assessment of discussion skills
14	Observation and critical analysis of peer discussion to prepare for the final
15	Final discussion (audio and video recorded)

Assessment was broken down into four parts: lesson preparation (30%), class discussion and participation (30%), teacher evaluation of the final discussion (20%), and two self-assessments by students regarding their own efforts, not their language skill (20%).

Research Aims and Results

The three aims of this study were to use a flipped classroom to increase student talk time, to facilitate learner development through self-reflection, and to understand the challenges freshman student faced during the flipped approach and any perceived benefits. The next sections show the results followed by a discussion of key insights.

Increasing Student Talk Time

Student talk time in EFL teaching focuses on maximizing the amount of time a student uses to communicate in the L2 by shifting the focus away from teacher explanation. This makes the classroom more learner-focused and improves communicative competence, which was the overall objective of the freshman course. In past textbook-driven courses, which provided compartmentalized learning, students were typically asked to respond to warm-up and further discussion questions during lesson time without being required to prepare for the lesson in advance. There was little connection or transference of skills between classes, and assessment procedures for communication classes were usually a monologic presentation at the end of the course.

By moving comprehensible input (reading and watching videos) outside the classroom in the flipped approach however, the majority of class time was focused on communication, inquiry, and student observation which helped the teacher to offer real-time support. In practical terms, there was a carefully organized sequence of tasks. First, students began the lesson with a conversation warm-up activity or game related to the topic. The language used was informal so that students could enjoy sharing personal stories about their life. This was followed by a discussion of any new vocabulary learned while preparing for the lesson. Students were expected to *use* the vocabulary they encountered in the input materials or new vocabulary they learned on their own. The teacher then asked various comprehension questions about the homework input materials which the students needed to answer as a group using only the notes they had written for homework. Through problem-solving and co-construction of knowledge, students were able to piece together enough information to answer the questions correctly. All discussions were done mainly in English. Students' L1 was mostly used to clarify misunderstandings. Students were then asked to think more critically about the topic by sharing viewpoints. Deeper discussion questions were provided before the class, and students were expected to do research and formulate opinions to share with their group members. Students were expected to use academic language including transitional words and phrases and specific discussion skills in this part of the lesson (e. g., expanding on their viewpoints giving specific real-world examples, acknowledging others' opinions, and involving others in the discussion so that each student participated equally). They were free to use dictionaries or translators to help them express their ideas effectively. If a student did not prepare for the lesson, they were not able to contribute much to the discussions and became an observer. This describes the primary/primary relationship between preparation and lesson discussion referred to earlier Shibukawa's (2024). During comprehension checks and discussions, the teacher was easily able to note who was not speaking and who did not bring in notes. This made assessment simpler for the teacher. Each week, the teacher changed the groups, so students could speak with different classmates. Toward the end of the 90-minute class, students in each group had to

summarize what they had discussed and present it to the whole class. Students were asked to select different students each week so that every student had an opportunity to build confidence in public speaking. These tasks and strategies were successful in reducing teacher talk time and training students to be more active speakers rather than passive listeners.

Facilitating Learner Development

The second aim of the study was to help students take more responsibility for their learning. This was achieved in several ways.

Self-Reflection

In lesson 1, students discussed what they perceived to be strengths and weaknesses in their language learning and then reflect on what they wished to improve upon in the course. In lesson 8, students were asked to revisit their reflection to check if they were on track to achieving their goals. Students were also asked to reflect on their language skills (reading, writing notes, listening, speaking, and vocabulary) at the mid-point of the semester and reflect on what they needed to do to participate fully for the rest of the semester. In the last class of the semester, students completed a final reflection to think about what they had achieved and how they felt about their performance over the 15 weeks of lessons.

Time-Management

In the flipped approach, managing time to complete preparations was crucial to how well students performed during class. Input materials were limited to approximately 5 minutes for readings or videos. If students did not understand it the first time, they could work at their own pace and go through the input materials as often as needed. This helped to foster stronger time-management skills.

Increased Responsibility and Accountability

For student-led discussions, students assigned themselves specific roles to make the lesson go as smoothly as possible. They had to select a suitable topic and produce learning materials that would increase learner engagement and motivation to speak. During the lessons, leaders were able to observe their peers in discussion which gave them insights into their own level of performance. That is, through peer observation, students could understand new viewpoints that they had not discussed previously with other group leaders and understand various communication strategies used by other students. The leaders were also expected to help guide discussions and keep peers on track, so group members did not slip into the L1. This increased responsibility gave students a greater sense of accountability over their learning.

Motivation

As flipped learning is learner-centred, it is important for the students to maintain motivation throughout the duration of the course. Activities were thus designed to enhance both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation to match various student needs. Intrinsic motivation tasks were activities that helped students to feel an individual sense of achievement, such as topic selection based on interest and progress checks to assess growth. Extrinsic activities, focusing on grades or rewards, were done through self-assessment of effort as part of students' final grade as well

as the teacher giving positive feedback on homework preparation to encourage them to prepare fully for lessons.

Student Experiences With Flipped Learning

The final aim of this research was to understand students' perceptions of challenges and benefits of a flipped learning course (if any). 24 students were given an open-ended survey asking about the positive and negative aspects of creating materials and leading discussions, and what they learned about themselves after the experience. The positive and negative aspects, extracted directly from surveys, are presented as Table 2 in the students' own voices. Underlined text in the table illustrates the main challenges and benefits.

Table 2

Challenges and Benefits of Flipped Learning as Perceived by Students

Challenges	Benefits
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Trying to achieve consistency</u> with input from three group members is difficult. • <u>Managing the lesson time</u> is difficult. You have to listen, monitor groups, write notes, and stand at the front. • <u>It is important to read more on the topic</u> and get a lot of knowledge from various aspects as a leader so that you can answer questions deeply and deepen discussions. • <u>Writing notes on the whiteboard during synthesis is difficult</u> because you cannot write every word. You have to listen to the whole opinion and write key words. <u>I need to practice how to take notes in real time.</u> We can watch the video many times for homework. • <u>It is difficult to lead with limited English.</u> There are many times when I have to speak with no preparation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Choosing a fun topic and finding input videos</u> gave me many perspectives. We had to choose a video that many students could understand. • <u>I found that the process to make conclusion [during synthesis] is more fun</u> than hearing their conclusion. • It was challenging, but fun to lead discussions. <u>It surely broadened my perspective.</u> • I found that when discussions stray away from the point, <u>I could learn how to bring it in the right direction.</u> • Being a leader means doing many things, <u>but it is more effective than simply talking.</u> • <u>I want to study more about the topic by myself after hearing other perspectives.</u> I learned many new ideas I did not think about as a leader.

On the negative side (challenges), students reported five main points: (a) negotiating on topics and input materials with group members became difficult as everyone had to vote on several decisions about topics as well as watch and/or read all the choices of input materials; (b) time-management skills are crucial not only for preparation but especially when leading discussions; (c) without a deep knowledge of the topic, leaders are unable to help keep the discussion on track; (d) writing notes in real-time during summary reports is more difficult than when preparing for class as students are able to rewatch or reread parts that they did not understand; (e) students need to have a sufficient level of English to lead as they are not simply presenting a topic, but facilitating discussions.

There were six points on the positive side (benefits): (a) Students enjoyed selecting topics that suited their interests and watching interesting videos; (b) experiencing higher-cognitive levels of thinking by processing large amounts of information from various groups during

synthesis made students feel a greater sense of achievement rather than just picking up main points in one group to summarize; (c) Students were able to broaden perspectives and gain new viewpoints as they joined different groups throughout the lesson; (d) Understanding how to redirect discussions when they went off track was a useful skill that students found beneficial. They learned how to do it by asking probing questions in a Socratic inquiry style, or by politely interrupting the conversation and redirecting students to where they diverted from or offering a new perspective; (e) Students found multi-tasking a more enjoyable process than simply participating in the discussion. This involved monitoring groups, observing, writing notes, and helping to deepen the discussion; (f) Some of the leaders mentioned that they actually became more curious about the topic and wanted to read more after hearing a new perspective.

On the whole, both challenges and successes experienced helped the students feel more empowered about their learning. Many students found the experience interesting and different from what they were accustomed to in traditional classes. Although beneficial in many aspects, they also reported that without teacher guidance to help organize lessons and further build their skills, they would have struggled and lost motivation. This is an important point that teachers need to consider if they choose to use a flipped learning approach in their L2 classrooms. Two key insights which emerged from this study are presented below.

Key Insights From Using Student-Generated Materials in a Flipped Classroom

Understanding the Flipped Approach Fully

One of the key points is the importance of fully understanding the core principles of the flipped classroom approach before implementing it. Students need to prepare fully for classes with clear learning goals in mind or lessons will be ineffective. Teachers should not only think about the potential benefits but also prepare for challenges such as increased preparation and workload, developing fair assessment methods, and considering what to do if students do not embrace the approach. If teachers employ a flipped classroom just for the sake of it or because other teachers are doing it without understanding how to scaffold lessons and motivate students, both teachers and students may lose interest and fail to see the purpose of the lessons. Thus, to implement a successful flipped learning classroom, teachers should write clear learning goals and organize a plan of action. Starting with one or two classes as a pilot project can help teachers to build a more structured course later. Professional development through researching the approach in terms of underlying theory and practice and speaking with colleagues can help to further prepare teachers.

Reflection on Learning

Self-regulation is a crucial part of being a university student. Through the flipped approach, students can understand how to set goals, develop leadership skills, manage their time, overcome challenges, and reflect on how to improve their learning competencies. These skills will help students to become more independent learners. However, this requires the teacher to provide structured guidance and provide regular feedback to students. In order to help students achieve a higher level of learning, teachers themselves need to go through the process and reflect on their teaching. This can be done by improving planning skills, managing their time better, and understanding how to set clear, achievable goals for themselves.

Conclusion

Over the past decade, the researcher has found that the flipped learning classroom to be equally beneficial and challenging to both the teacher and students. Working with higher-proficiency learners is easier but watching lower-proficiency learners improve can be more rewarding. The researcher found that using a flipped approach with freshman students was more challenging than working with more mature students in elective classes as it required more structure in learning materials and effort from the teacher to sustain motivation.

It was difficult for many students to prepare for lessons if the content was unfamiliar to them. This required learning new vocabulary and rewatching videos several times to understand the content fully. If students found it exhausting to prepare, they lost motivation to participate in the lesson. Thus, it was important for the teacher to find content at an appropriate level which was also interesting to students. This is a time-consuming endeavour. The solution for the researcher was to use student-generated materials. Lesson plans created by students were used as models for the following year's students, as well as added immediate reusable resources for future lessons that were more in line with student interests.

Once the students began leading discussions, the entire class dynamics changed. Students were more engaged in their learning as they wanted to support their peers. For the teacher, the pressure of preparing content that may or may not have appealed to a younger generation was reduced. Helping discussion leaders to facilitate class activities meant that the researcher could spend more time observing student performance for individual assessment.

For teachers considering adopting a flipped classroom approach, it is advisable to consider if it is worth the considerable effort and initial time investment to develop the course. The flipped classroom is a valuable tool when implemented well but can be a nightmare if students reject it. Teachers should thus think carefully about their student population and the culture of the institution before making any decisions. If the goal of the university is to develop autonomous learners, and students are aware of this, there is a higher chance of success. If students prefer a traditional style of L2 learning, it might be better to embrace a more traditionally structured teaching framework such as prepare-practice-production (PPP) that guides students slowly to learning outcomes. In the end, teachers must choose the best approach that meets learning objectives, matches the teacher's style, and aligns with institutional goals rather than choosing the shiny, new educational tool that other educators claim as successful.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

The author declares that no AI or AI-assisted technologies have been used to generate, refine, or correct the content in the manuscript. The ideas, design, procedures, findings, analyses, and discussion are originally written and derived from careful and systematic conduct of the research.

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Appendix

Example of Student-Generated Materials Used in the Flipped Classroom

