

## *Implementing Flipped Classroom for Chinese Intellectual Property Lawyers*

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The IAFOR Conference on Educational Research & Innovation 2023  
Official Conference Proceedings

### **Abstract**

Flipped classroom is one of the alternative learning modalities beyond simply delivering lectures in the classroom and assigning homework for students at home. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Wusong Law School, a commercial educational institution for Chinese lawyers, initiates the flipped classroom where both distance e-learning prior to the class and online collaborative activities are integrated in the Intellectual Property Law Department. This paper assesses the best practices and challenges to Wusong Law School in the implementation of flipped classroom for Chinese intellectual property lawyers, which have been determined with the thematic approach. This research suggests that flipped classroom could promote student engagement, improve learning independence and self-control, and enhance student-teacher relationship. It also reveals that the students and teachers undertake the challenges of technical problems, time intensive preparation and procrastination. Law schools need to establish a sustainable flipped classroom model in consideration of the potential best practices and the worldwide spread of COVID-19, by reshaping the classroom in a collaborative, independent and customized way, providing technical supports, well-planned preparation and time management guidance for lawyers. This paper shall be significant and beneficial to law schools and law firms to assess current practices and gain insights into how to improve their education strategy to meet the needs of law students during the pandemic of COVID-19. For future researchers, it can be referred to as a foundation and basis for further studies about alternative learning modalities implemented by educational institutions of law.

Keywords: Flipped Classroom, Law School, Intellectual Property Lawyer

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

As a typical alternative learning modality, flipped classroom was brought into law schools in the context of the lockdown and quarantine caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Flipped classroom, as defined by Tucker (2012), is a teaching method that learning materials and instructions which used to occur in class are accessed at home in advance of class, while class sessions are used for working through problems, advancing concepts and engaging in collaborative learning. Halili and Zainuddin (2015) defined flipped classroom as an element of blended learning that integrates face-to-face learning through group discussion and distance learning by watching asynchronous lectures and online collaboration. It is clear that with this type of education strategy, students need to learn fundamental knowledge at home and then participate in active learning activities in the classroom with teachers.

Tucker (2012) indicated that flipped classroom helped educators maximize the scarcest learning resource, i.e., time. According to Fulton (2012), flipped classroom allowed the students to study at their own pace and it also allowed the teachers to customize their curriculum to meet individual needs of their students, which could strengthen the relationship between teachers and students. Moran and Young (2015) discovered that flipped classroom shaped education in ways that fit contemporary time. As a popular education strategy, it was able to increase student participation and engagement, and enhance the student-teacher bond. Clark (2015) illustrated that flipped classroom educational model directly increased student engagement, communication and collaboration. Kirvan et al. (2015), Kostaris et al. (2017), Smallhorn (2017) and Bond (2020) also noted student engagement as promoted by the flipped classroom model. Another study found that students taught with the strategy of flipped classroom improved their learning autonomy and paced as independent learners (Abeysekera & Dawson, 2015; Hermanns et al., 2015).

In the study by Hermanns et al. (2015), some educators were apprehensive about the flipped classroom because they were unfamiliar with the new technology used for video instructions. Chen (2016) conducted a qualitative investigation of the flipped classroom instructional pedagogy in a ninth-grade health education class and reported that the video lessons prepared by teachers might not be uploaded properly. According to Van Sickle (2015), Chen (2016), Johnson and Misterek (2017), some students did not watch the videos in advance of class for various reason. Recent studies also found it challenging for some teachers to deal with students who did not watch the video as their assignment prior to class or did not have internet access (Schmidt & Ralph, 2016; Van Sickle, 2015). Teachers also faced challenges in the flipped classroom, such as increased workload, lack of network connectivity and planning time constraints (Chen, 2016; D'addato & Miller, 2016; Unal & Unal, 2017). Johnson & Misterek (2017) indicated that the major challenge of flipped classroom was the time intensive preparation.

This paper shall be significant and beneficial to law schools and law firms to assess current practices and gain insights into how to improve their education strategy to meet the needs of law students during the pandemic of COVID-19. For future researchers, it can be referred to

as a foundation and basis for further studies about alternative learning modalities implemented by educational institutions of law. This qualitative study explores the best practices and challenges in implementing flipped classroom and provides evidence-based conclusions and recommendations for the sustainable development of flipped classroom in law school.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

In this study, one-on-one interview was used to collect qualitative data because it is a technique to improve understanding, help explain and explore the experiences, behaviors, and opinions of the research subjects. The researcher interviewed five key informants on which purposive sampling was applied for participant selection. Participants were selected on the basis that they met the study criteria, with the potential to impart pertinent and comprehensive data (Showkat & Parveen, 2017). Thematic analysis approach was applied to examine and identify the common themes of the research participants, involving the topics, ideas, patterns of meaning that appeared repeatedly (Caulfield, 2022).

## **3. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION**

The following themes of participants' sentiments related to the best practices and challenges in implementing flipped classroom are summarized by way of coding and categorizing the data collected from the key informants.

### **3.1 Best Practices in the Implementation of Flipped Classroom for Chinese IP Lawyers**

#### ***3.1.1 Promote Student Engagement***

As students participate in classroom activities to address legal issues through group discussion in a collaborative way, flipped classroom is a place for law students to develop problem-solving, communication, and collaboration abilities. As KI3 and KI5 mentioned:

*“My students are active in group discussion, and they have improved their risk awareness of intellectual property. They have better performance and make significant progress in problem-solving and communication.” (KI3)*

*“Through participating in the flipped classroom, our lawyers who studied at Wusong (Law School) have improved their abilities of communication and collaboration, which are transferable at work.” (KI5)*

Comparably, Clark (2015) indicated that flipped classroom directly increased student engagement, communication and collaboration. In order to implement flipped classroom more effectively, teachers should choose appropriate classroom activities in line with the video lectures and make proper use of class time with good planning (Lo et al., 2018).

### **3.1.2 Improve Learning Independence and Self-control**

It allows students to study at their own pace and take control of their own academics. Students could improve their learning attitude and become independent learners. As demonstrated in the following statements by KI1 and KI4:

*“I can study at my own pace at home... I can pause and rewind the videos until I have fully understood. I also have enough time to revise my learning materials over and over again. So it makes my study of IP law more focused.” (KI1)*

*“This alternative learning modality also improves student learning autonomy of the law students. They manage to get rid of the reliance on teachers and become independent learners.” (KI4)*

As explained by Smale-Jacobse et al. (2019), students can quickly get access to their learning resources at their own time and replay the videos until they have fully understood the concept studied. Therefore, it is essential for teachers to develop the flipped classroom with a view to enhancing the motivation of self-study and the independence of students.

### **3.1.3 Enhance Student-Teacher Relationship**

Compared with traditional classroom, flipped classroom enables teachers to teach more actively and individually. The curriculum is also customized for each group of the students. Having participated in group discussion and presentation with professional guidance, students develop closer relationships with their teachers. KI3 and KI5 best stated this practice:

*“... I join the student groups to listen to their arguments and encourage my students to share their viewpoints. I also work with students individually and even customized curriculum for certain students. By giving one-to-one instructions for all, I’ve been able to call the name of each student. We also have good relationship after class.” (KI3)*

*“... the young lawyers (students) also have good relationship with their teachers. They go out for dinner once a month and discuss the new IP cases.” (KI5)*

Fulton (2012) found it helpful to strengthen the student-teacher bond when teachers work with students more individually and provide with personalized learning activities. Many research studies on flipped classroom also emphasized the value of student-teacher relationship (Moran & Young, 2015; Hall & DuFrene, 2016; Gough et al., 2017). For fostering a strong relationship with students, teachers should play a role in facilitating the student-teacher interaction while meeting their academic needs.

## **3.2 Challenges in the Implementation of Flipped Classroom for Chinese IP Lawyers**

### **3.2.1 Technical Problems**

Both students and teachers ever experienced problems with the technical difficulties. In this study, the most common technical problems are related to the lack of network connectivity, website instability and unfamiliarity with ICT skills. As stated by K11 and K13:

*“... network is essential for each teacher and student. If the teacher doesn't have network connection, the whole teaching and learning process might come to an end. Sometimes we have the problem of poor communication with teachers and classmates due to the unstable network. Another challenge is the using of e-learning devices. I still remember I failed to download an e-learning mobile application because this APP is only compatible with Android system, but my iPhone is running in the IOS system.” (K11)*

*“... the biggest challenge is the technical difficulty. For example, no internet connection, poor communication due to unstable network, unable to upload videos properly, etc. These negatively influenced the quality of our classes.” (K13)*

Previous studies mentioned the same challenges in flipped classroom, such as lack of technical skills to manage recording, editing and uploading videos (Chen, 2016), and lack of internet (Chen, 2016; D'addato & Miller, 2016; Unal & Unal, 2017). For teachers, the lockdown caused by the pandemic of COVID-19 otherwise brought opportunities to improve their ICT and other professional skills, which would reshape education in ways that fit the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **3.2.2 Time Intensive Preparation**

Compared with traditional classroom, extra time is needed by teachers in flipped classroom because it requires massive preparation, such as recording, editing, uploading video lessons and devising proper in-class activities in line with the pre-session materials within a short period. This sentiment was evident in the following responses:

*“... the flipped classroom increases our workload. We need extra time to prepare the online videos and proper guidance for our students.” (K13)*

*“... some teachers complain about the increased workload and ask for a raise.” (K14)*

Previous studies reported this disadvantage of flipped classroom that teacher's planning and preparation time increased (Petrovici & Nemesu, 2015; Guy & Marquis, 2016; Hajhashemi et al., 2017). It was emphasized by Simonson (2017) that flipped classroom should be approached with careful planning to frontload preparation for students by the teachers.

### **3.2.3 Procrastination**

For a student in flipped classroom, the pre-session preparation is required as the foundation of the in-class activities, driven by the motivation and self-control. In this study, some participants raised concerns about productivity and time management. This problem was evident in KI2's response:

*“During the deadline's eve, I watch online lectures and read physical materials in a rush and stay up late until one or two... I have a little bit panic disorder and depression prior to the class... I also suffered from palpitation and insomnia before deadline.”*

KI3 echoed the same issue:

*“... there are several students not having enough time or interest to get well-prepared. They did their self-study in a rush at home and tend to 'ride on their teammates' coattails' in the oral presentation or group discussion.”*

Schmidt and Ralph (2016) noted the challenge in implementation of flipped classroom that some students did not watch the video as their homework for various reasons, which caused trouble to both teachers and students. In order to overcome the problem of procrastination, teachers should also guide students to manage their daily workload and become productive in their learning process.

## **4. CONCLUSIONON**

This paper has evaluated the best practices and challenges to Wusong Law School in the implementation of flipped classroom. The best practices to implement flipped classroom are categorized as promoting student engagement, improving learning independence and enhancing student-teacher relationship, which directly associate with the teaching and learning approach in a collaborative, independent and customized way. The challenges to Wusong Law School in implementing flipped classroom can be concluded as technical problems, time intensive preparation and procrastination.

To address the challenges in the implementation of flipped classroom for Chinese IP lawyers, it is recommended to provide technical supports for the lawyers and teachers. In addition, teachers should frontload well-preparation for lawyers with careful planning and provide time management guidance to enhance their productivity.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I am grateful to all my professors and classmates in University of the Cordilleras during the conduct of this research, especially my supervisors in research - Dr. Marcelino M. Agnawa Jr., Dr. Gemma Perey and our dean Dr. Ramir Austria. My thanks should also go to the key informants from Wusong Law School and Yingke Law Firm in Beijing, China.

## **APPENDIX A: KEY INFORMANTS' PROFILE**

### **Key Informant 1**

Position: Student

Designation: Top Student (Intellectual Property Lawyer in Yingke Law Firm)

### **Key Informant 2**

Position: Student

Designation: Poor Student (Intellectual Property Lawyer in Yingke Law Firm)

### **Key Informant 3**

Position: Teacher

Designation: Intellectual Property Law Teacher in Wusong Law School

### **Key Informant 4**

Position: Department Head

Designation: Intellectual Property Law Department of Wusong Law School

### **Key Informant 5**

Position: Employer of KI1 and KI2

Designation: Partner in Yingke Law Firm

## APPENDIX B: GENERATED THEMES

1. What best practices are being implemented in the flipped classroom at Wusong Law School for intellectual property lawyers?

Code	Theme
Communication and collaboration	Promote student engagement
Active in group discussion	
Fierce debate	
Meaningful participation	
Reshape the classes and become active	
Make full use of the class time	
Develop a positive attitude on case study	
Better performance and progress	
Deeper understanding	
Interesting learning process	
Flexible	
Study at students' own pace	
Improve student autonomy of law students	
Availability of online classes at home	
Revise learning materials over and over again	
Become independent learners	
Pause and rewind the videos until fully understand	
More focused	
Provide various learning tools for students	
Online lectures, MOOC, websites, journals	
Transferable at work	
Get rid of the reliance on teachers	
Conduct legal research at higher level	
Improve the ability to raise questions	
Need strong willpower	
Work with student individually	Enhance student-teacher relationship
Customize curriculum for certain students	
Provide personalized learning	
Proper guidance for students	
Deal with common and specific questions	
Meet students' learning needs	
Give one-to-one instructions	
Get closer emotionally	
Join the student groups to listen and share opinions	
Able to call the name of each student	
Strong relationship after graduation	



2. What are the challenges encountered in implementing flipped classroom at Wusong Law School for intellectual property lawyers?

Code	Theme
Unfamiliar with the e-learning devices	Technical problems
Unable to upload videos properly	
Lack of network connections	
Poor communication due to unstable network	
Learning software incompatible with the devices	
Need technical supports	
Unable to use proper online teaching tools	
Increase workload for teachers	Time Intensive preparation
Lack of student preparation	
Do not have enough time to get well-prepared	
Extra time is needed	
In a rush	
Stay up late	
Learning material unfit for the in-class activities	
Become exhausted	Procrastination
Students do not study at home before classes	
Poor time management	
Lack of interest and motivation	
Riding on teamate's coattails	
Distracted by social medias	
Unable to meet the deadline	
Panic disorder and depression prior to classes	
Palpitation and insomnia before deadline	
Absence	

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