

Flipping the English grammar classroom: A pedagogical experiment for undergraduate students

Marta Pacheco Franco

Universidad de Málaga

Grammar is a key component of any language teaching curriculum, whether it ascribes to structural or to communicative approaches (Ur 2012). Although the attention devoted to grammar has decreased in the latter models –mainly because other components have gained relevance–, students continue to dread grammar lessons. These are infamous for being long and boring, since they typically consist of a lecture from the teacher and are followed by some drill-type activity (Larsen-Freeman 2001). Despite the myriad of pedagogical innovations today, this continues to be the state of affairs in grammar teaching, more so at university level. Indeed, the role of the lecture in undergraduate teaching seems to be irreplaceable, or almost so (Reidsema et al. 2017). The flipped classroom is an educational model that is gaining ground today by challenging the basis of this type of presentation (Kvashnina and Martynko 2016). It provides students with a blended learning experience that affects both the medium and the temporality of teaching, since flipped classrooms often present a combination of asynchronous online learning and synchronous face-to-face lessons (Reidsema et al. 2017). However, the model is best characterised by the way the contents are presented and practiced. Whereas lecturing is the central activity in a traditional classroom and practice is assigned as homework, a flipped classroom does exactly the opposite (Bergmann and Sams 2012). In moving the “information-transmission teaching out of [the grammar] class” (Abeysekera and Dawson 2014: 4), the flipped model enables students to become active and independent in their learning process (Bergmann and Sams 2012: 16). If applied to the grammar lesson, a flipped classroom has the potential of involving students in the contents they are learning and of making this learning more significant (Abeysekera and Dawson 2014).

This is indeed the proposal that was implemented in an undergraduate English course as part of a pedagogical experiment. The present paper thus aims to analyse the benefits that flipping the classroom may have entailed in the grammar lesson as well as its shortcomings. The results of the experiment have been gathered through direct observation and through surveying students, and the students’ learning processes have been monitored by performing level tests –before and after the experiment– and by bearing continuous assessment –in the form of written essays– into consideration. The conclusions, though tentative, suggest that students are more motivated to tackle grammar contents in the flipped classroom than they were in a traditional lecture, and that they deemed materials to be more accessible for each individual student than other synchronous presentations. The quantitative data regarding the improvement –or lack thereof– of the students’ grammatical skills is not yet available, but it will shed some light on the overall success of the experiment.

Keywords: English as a second language, ESL, flipped classroom, grammar, pedagogical experiment.

References

- Abeysekera, Lakmal & Phillip Dawson. 2014. “Motivation and cognitive load in the flipped classroom: definition, rationale and a call for research.” *Higher Education Research & Development* 34:1, 1–14.
- Bergmann, Jonathan. & Aaron Sams. 2012. *Flip your classroom: Reach every student in every class every day*. Washington DC: International Society for Technology in Education.

- Kvashnina, Olga. S. & Ekaterina A. Martynko. 2016. Analyzing the potential of flipped classroom in ESL teaching. *International Journal of Emerging Technologies in Learning (IJET)*, 11:3, 71–73.
- Larsen-Freeman, Diane. 2001. Grammar. In R. Carter & D. Nunan (Eds.), *The Cambridge guide to teaching English to speakers of other languages* (pp. 34–41). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Reidsema, Carl., Lydia Kavanagh, Roger Hadgraft & Neville Smith. 2014. *The Flipped Classroom: Practice and Practices in Higher Education*. Singapore: Springer.
- Ur, Penny. 2012. *A Course in English Language Teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.