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ABSTRACT

During the last few years flipped classrooms have aimed to provide more authentic forms of student engagement in which learners have greater opportunity to utilise classroom time more effectively. This chapter reports on a preliminary study conducted in a private higher education institution in Oman involving 16 students enrolled in Level 3 of the English GFP (General Foundation program). It investigated the effect of the flipped model on the engagement of EFL (English as Foreign Language) learners in writing skills, focusing specifically on their cognitive, behavioural, emotional, and agentic levels of engagement. Students' self-report questionnaires and focus group interviews were used in a mixed methods approach. The results revealed that students' overall level of behavioural and emotional engagement was closely related to their cognitive engagement and agency. The chapter calls for more research on the flipped classroom in relation to writing skills as well as the need to identify strategies to help with the extra non-classroom activities required of them.

Keywords: Engagement, Blended Learning, CALL, Involvement, Academic Writing, EFL, General Foundation Program, Oman

INTRODUCTION

'Flipping the classroom', an instructional model in which homework and input material are completed by students before the class rather than after it, has been widely implemented for several years in the STEM field (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) both at secondary and tertiary level (Yarboo, Arfstrom, McKnight, & McKnight, 2014). According to this reversal of the tradition order, more in-class time as a result can be devoted to discussions, projects and other forms of meaningful interaction. Researchers including Baepler, Walker and Driessen (2014), Davies, Dean and Ball (2013), Mason, Shuman and Cook (2013), Moravec, Williams, Aguitar-Roca and O'Dowd (2010), and Schlingensiepen (2014), to name but a few, have reported a range of positive results arising from studies in which a flipped instructional approach has been developed in this disciplinary context. Among many other benefits, it is believed that flipped instruction enhances students' academic engagement and motivation (Moravec et al., 2010), both important factors that play a significant role in students' general academic progress (Baron & Corbin, 2012).

On the other hand, research in flipped EFL instruction is still in its infancy. The research studies that have been conducted in this field to date have been limited both in scope and methodological rigor. For this reason, the EFL literature base, for instance, lacks research that outlines the classroom design principles underpinning this approach and how this instructional model could be implemented, particularly in terms of teaching various language skills. Moreover, although few studies have explored the perceptions

of EFL students of this instructional model, the existing studies often lack empirical rigor, transparency and depth and this may undervalue their findings and recommendations. Furthermore, research studies which have examined the way flipped instruction influences students' engagement in various English language skills such as academic writing are extremely limited, if they exist at all. In addressing these concerns and elisions, this chapter reports on the results of a preliminary study conducted at a higher education institution in Oman which aimed to investigate the effects of flipped instruction on the various dimensions of foundation students' engagement in an EFL academic writing course.

BACKGROUND

Lack of student engagement in the EFL classroom has been a concern of a number of academic studies (Kuh, Hu, & Vesper, 1997; Sheard, Carbone, & Hurst, 2010). Several authors including Al Mahrooqi (2012) and Al Seyabi and Tuzlukova (2014) have argued that academic writing constitutes a major challenge to many EFL students in Oman and it is often perceived as a source of disengagement. Engagement is conceptualized here as a multidimensional construct which involves four primary areas, namely, emotional, behavioural, cognitive, and agentic aspects (Reeve & Tseng, 2011; Skinner & Belmont, 1993). According to Skinner and Belmont (1993) engaged students are both behaviourally involved and emotionally positive. Consequently, they invest 'intense' and 'concentrated effort' while completing learning tasks and are 'enthusiastic,' 'optimistic,' 'curious,' and 'interested' in the learning process. In addition, these students utilize 'deep thinking skills' which reflects a high level of cognitive engagement. Reeve, Jang, Carrell, Jeon and Barch (2004) used agentic engagement theory to describe the degree to which students with this profile deliberately and constructively contribute to their own learning over time.

The four engagement dimensions are highly significant indicators of student success. According to Krause (2005) engagement guarantees learning since engaged students 'persevere,' 'persist,' and 'show interest'— all of which are crucial for 'deep learning' to take place. Tross, Harper, Osherr, and Kneidinger (2000) pointed out that students' grades are also affected by their engagement levels, which ultimately impacts on their academic progress. Furthermore, Finn and Zimmer (2012) claimed that students who are academically engaged are more satisfied with their educational experience and succeed in transferring abilities they develop in-class to the workplace unlike their disengaged counterparts. This opinion has been advanced by other researchers like Pike, Kuh, and Gonyea (2003) and Trowler (2010) who believe that the intellectual and cognitive capacities and competence of engaged students develop considerably by comparison to disengaged students.

The discussion of the value of engagement in students' academic achievement and the unfavourable results of academic disengagement leads to the conclusion that enhancing students' engagement is indispensable to improving overall academic performance. There are several factors that influence students' involvement in academic studies and which should be carefully considered in any attempt to enhance students' engagement. These include personal factors such as gender (Diprete & Buchmann, 2013), race and ethnicity (Sbrocco, 2009), as well as personal traits like intrinsic motivation to learn (Crick, 2012). However, there are other equally important

factors that relate in particular to the classroom environment and which either enhance or impede students' engagement in that context. Classroom-related factors include the quantity and quality of teacher-student interactions and rapport (Linvill, 2014; Parsons & Taylor, 2011) as well as classroom dynamics. Markwell (2007) and Reeve, Jang, Carrell, Jeon and Barch (2004), for example, have argued that learners' engagement increases in technology-rich educational environments in which the technology can be used to support learners' autonomy, engage them in problem-based learning tasks, and encourage them to utilize higher-order critical thinking skills in a creative manner. Therefore, since other factors that affect engagement like gender, ethnicity, and intrinsic motivation are fixed and cannot be changed, educators who aim to boost their students' engagement need to focus on improving the design of the learning environment and the pedagogical tasks and activities they use. Over the last five years flipped instructional approaches have been advanced as one such approach that has the potential to enhance learner engagement and involvement in academic studies.

AN OVERVIEW OF FLIPPED TEACHING

Jonathan Bergman and Aaron Sams, two American chemistry school teachers, first utilized the concept of flipped teaching to refer to any instructional design which reverses the order of classroom activities in the sense that what students normally do at home is completed in class and vice versa (Bergmann & Sams, 2012). Abeysekera and Dawson (2015) and Strayer (2012) offered a more comprehensive conceptualization of flipped instruction focusing on technology integration and the types of tasks required. According to them, flipped instruction:

- transmits course content to students before class through various technologies;
- involves students in different learning tasks prior to class;
- engages students in enriching, active and social activities inside class;
- and regularly and systematically integrates technology in pre and in-class learning activities.

In this study, flipped instruction is conceived of as a type of blended learning (Graham & Dziuban, 2008), which integrates online and off-line instruction and employs available technologies to involve students in various complementary learning activities, both prior to and during traditional classroom instruction (Diaz & Brown, 2010). The different learning tasks students perform in a flipped class are grounded in the psychological foundations of blended systems inspired by cognitivist, constructivist, and behaviourist learning theories.

The psychological assumptions of flipped instruction

Three main learning theories have influenced blended instruction in general and flipped instruction in particular: cognitive, constructivist, and behaviourist theories. First, according to cognitivists, human agency is valuable in the learning process (Bandura, 1999). Learning results from the agentic role a learner plays in this process as s/he both reacts and acts upon different events in his/her immediate context. Moreover, social cognitivists consider learning to be a socially-situated event which is affected by the learners' individual characteristics such as age and gender (Bloomer & Hodkinson, 2000; Niles, 1995). Constructivists also stress the social aspect of learning and consider it a social and collaborative act in which knowledge is constructed through conversation

and interaction (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). Similarly, behaviourism has affected approaches to blended instruction as a result of the acknowledged importance of regular practice, training and routine (Higgins & Johns, 1984).

Implications for pedagogy

As a consequence flipped instruction has developed as a learner-centred approach which promotes cooperative and active learning utilising digital technologies. Smelser (2002) argued that such learning environments cater for individual students' learning styles and addresses their personal needs through the type of technology and learning tasks used. According to Cottrell and Robison (2003) learning in blended systems like a flipped classroom is self-paced and enables learners to access learning materials at their own convenience based on an 'anywhere, anytime' approach. Added to that, flipped instruction provides ample opportunity for learners to collaborate before and/or in class in order to increase their engagement, and to improve comprehension and retention (Perkins, 2006; Roberts & Plakhotnik, 2009; Stacey, 1999). Learners in a flipped classroom also engage in different kinds of exchanges with their teacher and/or peers and contribute to each other's understanding. Most importantly, flipped learning environments may 'free up' class time enabling students to engage in interactive and intellectually challenging learning tasks which require higher order thinking skills and problem-based learning rather than rote learning techniques.

Potential and limitations

As indicated above, several studies have emphasized that the flipped instructional model has positive effects on the teaching and learning process. First, Velegol, Zappe, and Mahoney (2015) argued that this classroom design enables instructors to cover large content areas and at the same time to ensure learning takes place in an interactive and engaging manner which enhances understanding. Second, Baepler et al. (2014) and Schlingensiepen (2014) claimed that flipped instruction improves learning outcomes and reduces failure rates. Other researchers including Mok (2014) and Moravec et al. (2010) emphasized that flipped instruction is engaging and motivating for learners. Along similar lines, Kurtz, Tsimerman, and Steiner-Lavi (2014) pointed out that this instructional model helps to ameliorate learners' interest, alleviate classroom boredom, and boost learners' overall confidence.

On the other hand, the approach is not without a number of pedagogical challenges and limitations. Many researchers in fact have doubted the success of flipped instruction in technology-poor and pedagogically conservative educational contexts where more research is needed. For instance, Missildine, Fountain, Summers and Gosselin (2013) cautioned against the implementation of this instructional approach in contexts where learners do not have equal access to technology as this could be counterproductive. Moreover, conservative educational cultures may find embracing this innovative instructional approach extremely challenging. In fact, Hamdan, McKnight, McKnight and Arfstrom (2013) argued that an adjustment in both learning and teaching cultures would be needed in order to benefit from flipped instruction. On the one hand, learners have to have significant 'buy-in' to this approach in order to accept that they have may have to do more work both outside and inside class (Strayer, 2012). As a consequence, instructors may have undergo extra training in the design and

implementation of flipped pedagogy (Kim, Kim, Khera, & Getman, 2014) in order to avoid reproducing the traditional classroom which is overly focused on content and remains teacher-centred.

The implementation of flipped instruction in EFL classes

A review of the literature above has shown that research in flipped English language instruction has been quite limited to date. Moreover, the topics discussed have been confined to the investigation of the learners' overall perceptions of this instructional model and its impact on students' effort and participation. One such study was carried out by Hung (2015) and involved 75 students taking a Communicative English Language Course in a university in Taiwan. The study adopted a quasi-experimental design utilizing three different flipped teaching formats and aimed to explore the learners' academic performance, attitudes to learning, and levels of course participation. Findings indicated that flipped instruction influenced students' learning outcomes, their learning attitudes, as well as participation levels positively.

Another experimental study was conducted in a Chinese higher education institute by Wong and Chu (2014) and examined the perceptions of 68 students enrolled in a flipped English Speaking Proficiency Course. The study confirmed that this instructional model proved to be more effective than the conventional approaches to teaching and that learners' engagement and overall confidence was relatively higher in the flipped class. Engin and Donanci (2014) focused on how flipped teaching infuenced students' enthusisam and interest in an Academic Writing Course in a university in United Arab Emirates. Although less structured than those mentioned above, its results aligned with the findings of previous research in the sense that it showed that more opportunities for effective learning were made possible in the flipped writing class. Finally, Han (2015) reported the results of a project that was designed to investigate whether flipped English language instruction is possible and whether it promotes the autonomy of the English language learner. The research findings showed that flipped English language instruction resulted in positive learning outcomes and in the development of learner autonomy.

Despite the positive outcomes of research on flipped instruction as shown above, it is evident that there are several weaknesses in most of the studies conducted thus far. For instance, the sustainability of the results obtained in Hung's (2015) study is not guaranteed beyond the seven week time period which was the overall duration of the project. Furthermore, although improvement in students' engagement in the flipped class constituted a major finding in Wong and Chu's (2014) research, the authors did not provide a deep analysis of the way the approach influenced the various dimensions of student engagement or an explantion of the way these engagement levels were measured. The researchers limited their analysis to the description of the learners' observed behavior which may not actually reflect how engaged the students were. Likewise, the lack of a clear structure and empirical data collection and analysis in Engin and Donanci (2014) and Han's (2015) studies reduces the overall effectiveness and usefulness of their findings to the target audience.

Given the limitations of the extant research studies identified above, the study described below aimed to address some of the issues and to fill the gap that exists in the EFL literatue base with regard to the application of flipped instruction in the EFL field

in Oman. In particular, it focused on how flipped instruction impacts on students' engagement, described in terms of behavioral, cognitive, emotional, and agentic factors, in relation to the particular skill of academic writing.

METHODOLOGY

The preliminary study reported on here adopted a mixed-methods approach and involved 16 participants (12% males and 88% females) whose ages ranged from 18 to 23 years old. All were full-time students enrolled in Level 3 of the English General Foundation Program (EGFP) at a university in Oman. 6% of the participants were non-Omani, while 94% were Omani citizens. The EGFP is a three-level compulsory program which all students who score below 60% in the English language Placement Test and fail to score 5.5 in IELTS must take in order to hone their language skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing, vocabulary, and grammar) and basic study skills before they begin any undergraduate university courses. Purposeful convenience sampling was used to recruit the participants in the study which lasted for three weeks in duration.

The study participants were instructed using the flipped approach in the Academic Writing Course, a five-hour weekly class that introduced students to basic academic writing concepts and developed their abilities to write a variety of essay genres such as compare and contrast, cause and effect, and an evaluative essay. During the study, 'flipping' consisted mainly of introducing course content, specifically the theoretical aspect of academic writing such as the layout of particular essay genres, to the participants through YouTube videos, engaging them in reading activities to introduce them to unfamiliar topics, and involving them in discussions on a collaborative web-based application (https://padlet.com/) to share ideas about different topics prior to class. Inside the writing class, the participants engaged in collaborative tasks in pairs and groups which aimed to engage them in higher order thinking skills such as analysis of different texts, construction of parts of a text, and the creation of different text types for a variety of purposes.

The study utilized multiple data collection methods. First, upon the completion of the course all the participants completed a self-report questionnaire which assessed the participants' engagement levels in the flipped academic writing classes. The questionnaire consisted of 3 main parts and a total of 43 questions. The first part measured the participants' cognitive (18 items), behavioural (7 items), agentic (5 items), and emotional (7 items) engagement in the flipped classes. The second section (6 items), however, aimed to explore the participants' perceptions about the most significant gain obtained from being instructed using the flipped methodology focusing on the pre-class activities. The questionnaire also included demographic questions which collected information about the participants' gender, age, nationality, mode of study, and employment status. As no one scale measuring all the four dimensions of student engagement has been developed, the instrument was a compilation of several previously used tools.

Three validated instruments which demonstrated acceptable levels of internal consistency were utilized to develop the student engagement questionnaire. First, the cognitive engagement items were adopted from Greene's (2015) Cognitive Engagement Scale. This particular scale was originally developed by Greene and Miller who used it to measure the cognitive engagement levels of students. The second scale was the

Perceived Behavioural and Emotional Questionnaire designed by Miserandino's (1996). The items included in the scale measured students' levels of behavioral as well as emotional engagement. The final instrument was originally developed by Reeve and Tseng's (2011) for the purpose of measuring students' agency. Another subscale was also included to explore the participants' perceptions of the biggest gain in the flipped class. The four engagement subscales demonstrated a .758 internal consistency, while the internal consistency level of the whole instrument was .82. Along with the self-report, the study also used a focus group interview to assess the students' four aspects of engagement as well as their perceptions of the instructional model.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The student engagement self-report questionnaire measured students' levels of engagement in the flipped writing class. The survey was divided into five subscales focusing on 1) the cognitive, 2) behavioural, 3) agentic, and 4) emotional aspects of engagement in addition to the perceptions of the participants about what they gained most during the flipped class. The cognitive subscale specifically measured students' self-regulation and deep strategy use, while the behavioural subscale measured their involvement, persistence versus avoidance, and participation levels. The items were measured on a six-point Likert scale where 1 was negative (strongly disagree) and 6 was positive (strongly agree). Nine items were worded in the reverse direction in order to provide variety in the instrument where a score of 6 was negative and 1 was positive.

Due to the study's limited sample population, it was not possible to perform any inferential statistics and the analysis was limited to descriptive statistics followed by a discussion of the findings. The descriptive statistics showed that the student engagement questionnaire item means and standard deviations ranged from 2.88 to 5.37 and .84 to 1.86 respectively. A close observation of the sample means and standard deviations showed that most items were within 1 standard deviation of the mean and thus it could be concluded that the scale used was sensitive to the students' varying opinions of their engagement levels in the flipped writing class.

The main question of interest in the preliminary study was how students' four engagement dimensions were influenced by the flipped teaching approach. The mean of the four engagement dimensions' subscales i.e., cognitive, behavioural, emotional, and agentic subscales was 4.29 suggesting that the students believed that they were engaged in the flipped writing class. However, it is also important to consider the variation between the means of the four subscales in the survey instrument in order to understand how each engagement dimension was affected by the flipped approach to teaching. Table 1 shows the means and standard deviations for each of the subscales of the student engagement questionnaire. A comparison of each of the subscales' means indicated that, in general, the means of emotional and behavioural engagement subscales (means= 5.08 and 4.58 respectively) were higher compared with the means of the cognitive and agentic engagement subscales (means=3.85 and 3.66 respectively). Thus, the results indicated that the majority of students agreed that they were both emotionally and behaviourally engaged in the flipped academic writing class while they slightly disagreed that they were engaged at the cognitive and agentic levels.

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation

	Valid	Missing		
Cognitive Engagement	16	0	3.85	.82
Behavioral Engagement	16	0	4.58	.63
Agentic Engagement	16	0	3.66	1.43
Emotional Engagement	16	0	5.08	.97

Table 1: Means and standard deviations of the 5 subscales of the student engagement questionnaire

The way flipped teaching impacts on students' engagement levels was the fundamental question in the study. However, it was equally important to consider the variations in the means within each subscale, particularly the cognitive and behavioural engagement subscales as shown in Table 2. It shows that at the cognitive engagement level, the mean of the items assessing students' 'deep strategy use' in the flipped writing class is higher than the mean of the 'self-regulation' items (4.04 versus 3.71). Similarly, the mean of the items assessing the students' levels of 'perseverance versus avoidance' in the behavioural engagement dimension was the highest (mean=4.81) compared with involvement (mean=4.60) and participation (mean=4.29). This means that the flipped approach to teaching did not impact all dimensions of engagement in the same manner and that there was variation in the way flipping affected the different components of each dimension.

Subscale		Mean
Cognitive Engagement	Self-regulation	3.71
	Deep strategy use	4.04
Behavioural Engagement	Involvement	4.60
	Persistence versus Avoidance	4.81
	Participation	4.29

Table 2: Variations in the means within cognitive and behavioural engagement subscales

Another important question in the study related to students' perceptions of what they gained the most in the flipped writing class. Table 3 includes the mean and standard deviation of the subscale. The mean (=4.63) shows that most of the students thought that there was a gain obtained in the flipped class and the standard deviation demonstrates a general agreement in the students' opinions about the items in this subscale. What is important to note here is that the means of items 47 and 48 (=5.19) show that the majority thought that they were behaviourally engaged in the flipped writing class, thus confirming the previous observations. Moreover, the means show that flipped instruction helped them both to 'develop new skills' (item 47) and to 'persevere when they did not understand' (item 48) quite a lot. At another level, this approach also helped them develop an interest in the writing module (mean=4.88).

	N	Mean	Std.

	Valid	Missing		Deviation
Biggest gain from the flipped writing class	16	0	4.63	.80

Table 3: Mean and standard deviation of students' perceptions of the biggest gain from the flipped writing class

To summarise, a careful analysis of the quantitative data in this preliminary study showed that generally speaking the engagement level of students in the flipped academic writing class was high, although this is not a claim that students' high level of engagement was caused by the implementation of the flipped instructional approach. Added to that, a close analysis of the four aspects of engagement showed that there was variation in the way each dimension of engagement was influenced in the flipped class. The results demonstrate that most students were behaviourally and emotionally engaged in the sense that they persevered and persisted when they were faced with difficulties in completing the assigned tasks prior to class and were both comfortable and satisfied completing those tasks.

On the other hand, the analysis revealed that the students were not quite engaged at the cognitive and agentic levels especially when it came to planning to complete the assigned tasks before class, using the virtual classroom platform to ask questions about the tasks completed and materials reviewed before class, and giving opinions and offering suggestions in order to improve the tasks to be completed before class. These findings could be attributed to the conservative nature and the study habits in the educational context in which the study was set, which authors like Lane-Kelso (2014) and Nguyena, Terlouw, and Pilot (2006) argued should be transformed if flipping is to be successful.

In order to gain further insights into the impact of flipping on students' engagement as well as students' perceptions of this teaching approach, qualitative data were collected through a focus group interview which involved 14 participants (2 males and 12 females) and lasted for about 35 minutes. The participants were asked 9 questions which focused on the same four dimensions of engagement as identified above. The data collected was first transcribed and then coded keeping in mind the afore-mentioned themes. However, the thematic analysis also included other alternative themes which were relevant to the main focus of the study.

The qualitative analysis confirmed most of the findings from the quantitative data analysis, but there were some points of divergence that are worthy of further elaboration. Overall, at the cognitive and agentic level, the students were not as engaged in the flipped class as they were behaviourally and emotionally. First, at the cognitive level, students reported partial engagement in the academic writing class. As far as self-regulation is concerned, it seemed that planning and finding time to complete the assigned tasks outside class was not possible for some of the students. When they were asked about the way they managed to review and do the assigned tasks outside class one of the participants complained that out-of-class time should be allotted for non-study-related activities. The female participant reported, "I didn't have time to do anything because I don't work outside class. I just don't work outside class because …

like I am sitting in class 2 hours work then when we go outside class it's our free time to do other things not do work every single time. We have to do other things".

On the other hand, some participants confirmed using deep strategies to deal with the materials to be reviewed and tasks to be completed outside class such as note-taking and summarizing which aligned well with the findings of the quantitative data analysis above (Table 2). Some of the participants also claimed that they consulted other resources on the Internet to improve their understanding of the concepts and ideas introduced to them in the flipped writing class. When asked about how flipping, specifically completing the learning tasks outside class influenced their learning experience, some participants reported that it improved their information retention skills because they tried to relate new information to what preceded it and to put what they learned outside class into practice inside class. One participant for instance stated that the model essays which were shared with her prior to class helped her to learn new linking words which she will continue to use even after the course ends. She explained "because I always review everything [the teacher] give[s] us … now when I do anything or write anything or write my journal when I want to write if I have any mistake I will remember the picture I will remember [the teacher's] voice I will remember a slide".

Second, the qualitative data analysis showed that most of the interviewed participants were behaviourally engaged in the flipped class thus confirming the quantitative data analysis. First, most of the participants said that they persevered to understand the information shared with them and did not give up when faced with difficulties. Most of them explained that they sought the assistance of a friend and/or a family member to comprehend the materials and to complete the learning tasks. In line with this, collaboration and cooperation were considered recurrent ideas in the interview and seemed to be essential in this discussion. One of the participants stated, "I go to my friends and they help me and teach me something I didn't answer" when asked about how they dealt with difficult concepts and information. Another explained that her family members helped her with ideas which she translated from Arabic to English and posted on PADLET. One of the participants stated that she depended more on the Internet whenever she faced difficulties as she believed that it gave her all the information she needed, thus demonstrating her level of involvement in the writing class.

Similarly, the analysis demonstrates that the participants are emotionally engaged in the flipped class. One of the questions required the participants to report what they felt when completing the learning tasks outside class. The majority replied that they felt 'comfortable', 'happy', and 'good'. Yet, the reasons they provided to explain these feelings were slightly different. While many of the participants reported that they felt happy because they completed all the tasks assigned to them by the teacher, one of them explained her feeling of comfort in relation to the gain that she obtained from doing the tasks. She said "Comfortable. That I understood what's in class now reviewing the information stays inside so now I'm comfortable not stressed out [or] sad". Fourth, unlike the findings from the quantitative analysis which showed that students' agency level in the flipped writing class was low, the focus group interview data analysis proved that students in fact formed an opinion about the learning materials and tasks they completed although they did not openly express it in class. For instance, the majority found proof-reading the essays and contributing with ideas to PADLET interesting. Yet, similar to the findings from the self-report questionnaire analysis none of the participants

suggested ways to improve the learning materials and tasks. The fact that students did not openly express their opinion could be attributed to the difficulty of being critical (Fook & Askeland, 2007) as well as the absence of a culture of criticism in the educational context of Oman where criticality is in fact viewed negatively if not considered offensive.

To summarise, the quantitative and qualitative data analysis showed that overall students were not equally engaged in the flipped academic writing class. In addition, there was variation in students' engagement levels when discussing the four engagement dimensions, which were not influenced by this instructional approach in the same way. The students were to a less extent agentically and cognitively engaged in the flipped class, even though at the cognitive level they tended to use deep rather than surface learning strategies which is advisable in higher education in general and specifically in English language learning.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Findings from the preliminary study highlighted several issues which will have direct implications on the design of future research. These issues were mainly procedural in nature. First and foremost, the sample size of the study was problematic since the data collected was too limited and therefore it was not possible to perform several quantitative data analysis procedures such as exploring the difference in engagement levels between various groups. Another major limitation was the duration of the study which was three weeks. Findings from previous research showed that it is highly recommended to adopt this instructional approach over a reasonable time period to allow students ample time to adapt to it. This would help them to form a better opinion about this teaching approach and consequently to provide more reliable answers. The third limitation concerned the data collection instruments, namely, the self-report questionnaire and interview protocol. A number of participants were challenged by the level of questions' difficulty which necessitated the translation of the instruments from English to Arabic in addition to the simplification and paraphrasing of some of the difficult questions in the main study. Some of the questions were also deleted and others added to collect more relevant data. Finally, the focus group interview procedures adopted in the study also caused some issues like lost data, as three participants refused to contribute to the discussion although their consent was obtained beforehand. It also led to dominance by some participants in the discussion. Few measures were taken to avoid such cultural problems in this study, but a planned future study will aim to reduce challenges such as these.

Despite its limitations, this study aimed to contribute to current discussions about the implementation of flipped instruction in language learning classrooms where little research has been carried out to date. This is why there is an increasing need for further studies to explore other areas like the possible implementation of this instructional approach in EFL courses and its impact on students enrolled in such courses. Equally important are comparative studies that explore how students in different educational contexts within the same country and in different countries respond to this instructional approach in various EFL courses.

CONCLUSION

Findings from the preliminary study presented in this chapter shed some light on one important aspect of the utilization of the flipped approach to teaching, namely, its impact on students' engagement in an EFL writing class. It revealed that the flipped instructional approach influences the students' engagement in the EFL academic writing class although not in a predictable manner. Most importantly, the study showed that students' emotional and behavioural engagement levels were quite high in the flipped writing class and that although the students' self-regulation abilities were low, they were to a certain extent cognitively engaged as they utilized several deep learning strategies to cope with the demands of this teaching approach. By contrast, the impact on the students' agency level was lower. Arising from the research it is clear that further studies which specifically investigate the theoretical foundations and design principles of flipped EFL courses are needed if this instructional approach is to be recognized as a rigorous language teaching methodology in the future.

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