Flipped Learning in an A1 Level Foreign Language Classroom. Does it Work?

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Abstract
Blended learning methods have much developed these last years and more particularly Flipped classrooms where the typical elements of a lecture are reversed. Indeed, many educators implemented this approach to teach different subjects including languages. The aim of this current study is to examine the impact of flipped learning implemented with novice learners of French as a Foreign language. This study is undertaken in an A1.1 French elective university course involving 230 beginner students taking online classes. We assessed the results for each topic (9 different topics) through a quiz presented to the students at the end of each lecture. The students that did not have a home preparatory activity scored on average 57% for the quizzes given at the end of the lecture. The flipped learning students scored on average 65% for the same quizzes given at the end of the lecture. In addition, the flipped learning students were assessed through a different quiz at the beginning of the lecture about their preparatory activity and scored on average 57%. Besides, all students answered an anonymous survey about their commitment and feedback regarding the flipped classroom experience. The results show that 93% of the students that responded to the survey have solved the flipped activities before coming to the lecture. 98% of these students agreed that flipped learning helped them to participate and interact during the lecture. On another hand, 92% of the students that did not experienced flipped learning agreed that they would have preferred having a preparatory activity.

Keywords: Beginner students; Blended and online learning; French language; Learners feedback; Students commitment.

1. Introduction
During these last decades, many active learning approaches have been developed. They all aim to enable students to better apply knowledge. Flipped learning (FL) is one of the approaches that has a great popularity. It has become increasingly widespread. As mentioned by Turana & Akdag-Cimenb (2020), the FL “is one of the many active learning approaches that emerged as a result of a quest for a method that serves the changing needs of the new age and has been readily welcomed by instructors and researchers” (591). It is practiced with learners from different levels and in different fields even in Foreign languages classes. This method has been introduced in my French as a Foreign language university elective course. In this paper, the first results of an in progress study are presented. First of all, the Flipped learning method is defined and presented. Second, the experimentation conducted is detailed and finally the results of the experimentation are presented and discussed.
2. What is a flipped learning?

Flipped learning is an active learning approach «in which the conventional notion of classroom-based learning is inverted: students are introduced to the learning material before class with classroom time then being used to deepen understanding through discussion with peers and problem-solving activities facilitated by teachers» (Advance HE).

This concept shifted since it first appeared in the late 1990. Nizet et al., (2016) summarize the evolution of this concept in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Definitions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Mazur</td>
<td>Peer instruction</td>
<td>Students work in groups outside the classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Lage, Platt &amp; Treglia</td>
<td>Inverted classroom</td>
<td>Approach implementing a teaching strategy that touches a wide range of learning styles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Khan</td>
<td>Flipping classroom</td>
<td>Students watch video conferences at home and solve their homework in class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Nizet &amp; Meyer</td>
<td>Flipped classroom</td>
<td>A hybrid-type pedagogical sequence in which the teacher makes use of digital technologies to make knowledge accessible to students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013, 2014</td>
<td>FLN</td>
<td>Flipped learning</td>
<td>Pedagogical approach : learning environment moves from group to individual</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In order to clarify this approach, the creators of the Flipped learning network (FLN) (2014) present this formal definition of flipping learning: It is «a pedagogical approach which direct instruction moves from the group learning space to the individual learning space, and the resulting group space is transformed into a dynamic, interactive learning environment where the educator guides students as they apply concepts and engage creatively in the subject matter”.

They however warn that «flipping a class can, but does not necessarily, lead to Flipped Learning” (FLN, 2014). To implement a flipped learning, four pillars must be incorporated to the teacher practice:

- **Flexible environment**: “Flipped Learning allows a variety of learning modes” (physical arrangement of the learning space can be done). Instructors should be flexible with learners and let them choose when and where they want to learn.

- **Learning culture**: Flipped Learning model “deliberately shifts instruction to a learner-centered approach, where in-class time is dedicated to exploring topics in greater depth and creating rich learning opportunities”. As a consequence, learners are more active in the learning process.

- **Intentional content**: Instructors need to determine “what they need to teach and what materials students should explore on their own”.

- **Professional educators**: They have to be more present for the learners. Their role is more important and much more demanding.

3. Review of the literature

To better understand the flipped learning methodology impact, a review of two key literature areas is conducted. Some studies on flipped learning in higher education are presented as well as studies on flipped learning in language classes.
3.1 Flipped learning in Higher education

The flipped learning method is used in higher education through a wide range of disciplines, in both graduate and under-graduate levels. Turan & Akdag-Cimenb (2020) mention that in the literature review they conducted, flipped classroom is implemented in different domains such as statistics, engineering and teacher education.

Besides, O'Flaherty & Phillips (2015) in a literature review of FL in higher education note that most of the studies indicate that FL “enhanced class preparation, increased classroom interactivity and improved academic performance” (93). They also observe that “there were a number of qualitative comments that the flipped model enhanced the learning experience and promoted student empowerment, development and engagement.” (89). They also reveal that according to some studies “the flipped model promoted more independent learners, increased group collaboration and greater innovation with learning” (89). As a consequence, “students who are better communicators and have better interpersonal and problem solving skills” (89). The authors also observe that « studies focusing on student perceptions of the flipped class were generally positive with a significant minority having some negative views. This suggests that the flipped classroom may not be applicable to all subjects » (94). They also notice that one of the problems for instructors who flip the learning is mainly “a lack of pedagogical understanding of how to effectively translate the flipped classroom concept into practice” (94).

3.2. Flipped learning in language classes

Flipping learning is used in language classes as well. This approach allows learners to focus more on practicing as class time is fully dedicated to that. Many studies have shown the positive impact of FL on language classes. Turan & Akdag-Cimen (2020), for instance, note that “the flipped classroom model is considered to be beneficial in foreign language teaching as it promotes two key points to success: student-centered learning and autonomy” (592). Basal (2015) observes that this method allows the learners to learn at their own rhythm. As a result, he notes that the students are more engaged in the class. Besides, according to Evseeva & Solozhenko (2015), the flipped learning leads to «an increase of students’ motivation and interest for studying foreign languages. Furthermore, it has a positive impact on students’ self-discipline and self-directedness due to the fact that students take on responsibility for their own learning”.

Basically, this learning environment, “where students can use their new learning with access to immediate instructor and classmate feedback enables students to correct misunderstandings, organize new learning, and formulate their own ideas/perceptions enabling easier future access to new learning” (Mehring, 2018).

Most of the studies point the effectiveness of this pedagogical approach in language classes.

3.3. Research questions

Flipped learning seems to be an efficient learning method that allows students to fully benefit of the class time order to practice and improve their skills. What about implementing this method with beginners:

- Q1: Is flipped learning efficient with A1.1 level Foreign language learners?
- Q 2: How do the beginner learners deal with the flipped learning?
4. Experimentation, procedure and data collection

I experimented the flipped learning in an A1 Level Foreign language course during one semester. This course is a university elective course where students learn French 3 hours a week for 16 weeks. 230 students were registered in 5 different sections. The courses are offered online because of the Covid-19 pandemic. The students taking this course have different L1 background but English language is used by all. They are in different academic levels (freshman, sophomore, junior, senior) but are supposed to be all beginners in French.

The first decision I had to take was what to flip. I decided to flip the grammar and vocabulary outside the class in order to allow the students to focus on practicing and communicating during the class time. My purpose was to help students using what they learned and give them feedback.

The second decision to make was how to flip. I had, here, to pay attention to 2 matters. First of all, I should decide which type of activities will be presented in flipping. Many articles presented in the literature review focused on the resources used in flipped classes. «These resources included; pre-recorded lectures in the form of podcasts/ vodcasts, screencasts, annotated notes and captured videos [...] prereadings, automated tutoring systems and study guides interactive videos”. (O'Flaherty & Phillips, 2015, 87).

Which one of these resources could be used with beginner learners?

Second, I had to decide how long these activities should take. As Mehring (2018) noticed, one of flipped learning challenges is the increased workload. He observed that «students are surprised by the amount of preparation that needs to be done before class; therefore, a gradual implementation of the system should be taken into consideration” (4).

For all these reasons, I presented to the students a preparatory activity (PA) that is not too long and should not take much time to be prepared. I made sure to provide students with monolingual and bilingual dictionaries links to help them in the process. The tasks presented were easy and the instructions clear (pictograms were added sometimes to help them understand). I varied these PA tasks (observing sentences, listening to songs, matching pictures and words, watching short and easy videos, …). Technology wasn’t systematically used in the PA (Mehery, 2018)

I made sure to post the PA on students Blackboard at least 48 hours before the session in order to give to the students enough time to prepare them.

The experimentation has been made on 2 levels: First, the students’ performance has been evaluated and second the students’ feedback was consulted.

4.1. Evaluating students’ performance

All the students that had to prepare a PA took 2 quizzes. A first one (QZ1) at the beginning of the session and a second one (QZ 2) at the end. Each PA, was presented to 4 sections out of 5. Each time a different section is designed as a control group (CG) (Cf. Table 2). I decided not to keep the same section as a CG for 2 reasons. First, I had to follow the same course syllabus with all the students and cover the same material as they all will take the same final exam. I presumed that the content covered will be less in one section if only this section follows traditional learning during the full semester. Second, I wanted to give the students the opportunity to compare (sessions with and without flipped learning). I think that comparing these 2 approaches will allow them to have a better idea on the specificities of FL.
The CG takes only one quiz (QZ 2) at the end of the session.  

**Table 2: Different control groups (CG)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Section 1</th>
<th>Section 2</th>
<th>Section 3</th>
<th>Section 4</th>
<th>Section 5</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AP2</td>
<td>CG</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AP3</td>
<td>CG</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>AP4</td>
<td>CG</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>AP5</td>
<td>CG</td>
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<tr>
<td>AP6</td>
<td>CG</td>
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<tr>
<td>AP7</td>
<td>CG</td>
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<tr>
<td>AP8</td>
<td>CG</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AP9</td>
<td>CG</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

The quizzes are Multiple Choice Questions. The quiz 1 is fully inspired from the PA (quite same words, sentences) and the Quiz 2 is more “elaborated”. For all the quizzes, students have 20 seconds per question to answer.

4.2. Survey

At a second level of this experimentation, in order to survey the students, I asked them some questions. Two questions were asked to the students that prepared a PA, one at the beginning (Q1: *Did you prepare the AP?*) and another at the end of each session (Q2: *Did the AP helped you following the session?*).

I asked the CG a different question: (Q3: *Would have preferred having a PA?*).

At the end of the semester, another survey will be presented to the students in order to survey the students’ general feedback, asking them to compare their both experiences (with and without PA).

5. Results and discussion

As mentioned previously, this study is still in progress. The results I am exposing here were collected during 7 weeks (at the mid-semester). Ten PA have been presented to the students so far. I am keeping collecting data during the second part of the semester. The first PA has not been evaluated and incorporated to this study as I wanted to make sure that the students are comfortable with FL.

5.1. Students’ performance

We note that overall quizzes’ scores are better in Qz 2 for the Flipped learning group (FL). The average is 57% for Qz 1 and moves to 65% for Qz 2 (Figure 1).
The comparison of Qz 2 results for the Flipped learning groups (FL) and the control group that did not follow a flipped learning (NFL) presents a higher score average for FL group (65 % FL group // 55 % NFL group) (Figure 2).

The average score of NFL group is slightly lower than the average score of Qz 1 FL group (57 %).

These results suggest that flipped learning seems to be efficient with beginner learners. Students that prepare for the lessons are better equipped to practice during the sessions. However, the scores are not really high. In order to explain these averages, I will have to:

- Increase the time given to students to answer (20 seconds may not be enough to some students, they may need some more time),
- Go through all the quizzes reports and check if all the students took the quiz entirely (some students may have joined the quiz in the middle, some others may not have completed it).

Besides, I noted that the students’ participation rate is low. Only 66 % of the registered students took the Qz 2, 68 % took the Qz 1 and 69 % of the CG took the Qz2 (Figure 3).

Few students faced some technical issues while taking the quizzes but this cannot explain this quite low participation rate. How can we explain this? Is it due to the online process? Indeed,
we noted that some students are connected to the session but were “absent”. Do we need to make these quizzes grades as part of the final grade?

![AVERAGE / PARTICIPATION](image)

*Figure 3: Students’ participation rates*

### 5.2 Survey

An average of 93 % of the FL students that answered “yes” to the Q1 said they prepared the PA (Figure 4). 98 % said that the PA helped them to practice during the session (Figure 5).

On another hand, 92 % of the students that did not take a flipped learning session said they would have preferred having a PA (Figure 6). Students seem to prefer having a PA. Comparing the two experiences made them aware of the PA advantages. Why did they prefer having a PA? What was better? They will have to answer to these questions at the end of the semester and point what are the benefits of FL for them.

However, the average rate of students answering the questions is not high: 62 % of the students registered to the course answered to Q1, 65 % answered to Q2 and only 59 % answered to Q3.

![Did you prepare the PA?](image)

*Figure 4: Students’ answers to Q1.*
6. Conclusion

The very first results of an in progress study are presented in this work. To the first question “Is flipped learning efficient with beginners (A1.1 level)?”, we can answer, yes as the average of students results in QZ 2 is better than the average grades QZ 2 CG (65 % versus 55 %). Preparing for the sessions, being able to discover the topic before attending the session, working on it as long as needed have benefit to the students. However, both of these averages are not really high. In order to explain this all the exams reports should be carefully checked (maybe some students did not answer to all the questions). In order to make sure this is not a matter of comprehension, the time for answering question should be extended (maybe 20 seconds per question are not enough).

Besides, the rate of students’ participation is around 70 %. Why is this not high? Is this linked to the online process? A comparison of students’ participation in other courses may help to answer.

Data collection is still in progress and some study parameters would be changed. The students’ final survey may also help to have more answers.
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