

Personalized Learning in English Flipped Classrooms: Exploring ESL Learners' Decision-Making Styles in Academic Reading

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ABSTRACT

This concept paper attempts to explore how Personalized Learning opportunities within a Flipped Classroom model can be enhanced by understanding the decision-making styles of English as a Second Language students during academic reading activities. Flipped classrooms - where initial content exposure occurs outside of class via recorded lectures and readings have potential to facilitate more tailored, self-paced instruction. However, limited research has examined students' use of decision-making skills in reading academic materials during asynchronous learning, especially in developing English literacy skills essential for academic success. Utilizing a qualitative case study approach, this study attempts to investigate how ESL undergraduate students who are advanced English readers, make decisions while engaging with reading materials during asynchronous learning for flipped classrooms, including factors influencing choices of texts and materials, and their decision-making styles as proposed by Janis & Mann (1977). Triangulated data from semi-structured interviews and class observation in this study could provide rich insights into ESL students' in-class engagement and decision-making priorities. Exploring connections between ESL learners' approaches to self-regulated learning through decision-making skills in academic reading and how they experience flipped classroom instructions have practical implications for designing pre-work class that cultivates autonomy and stronger personalized outcomes. The study provides opportunities to derive key design principles and guidelines for flipped English classroom materials in a way that responds sensitively and systematically to the unique decision-making needs of ESL learners in higher education contexts.

Keywords: Personalized Learning (PL), Flipped Classroom (FC) approach, Decision-making styles, Academic reading, English as Second Language (ESL) learners

INTRODUCTION

Globalization is affecting today's society in many ways. One of the obvious aspects in education is the internalization of Higher Education, where English language is proven to be a dominant language: English as the Global Lingua Franca (EGLF) (Köylü, & Tracy-Ventura, 2022; Smokotin et al., 2014). Ngo and Tran (2023, September 2nd) in their article, 'Beyond English: Other options for HE internalization' asserted that many Asian countries have now implement policies to enhance English. This is apparent that

English has also contributed to the internalization of higher education (HE) in Asia. As higher education institutions (HEI) implement policies to enhance English, tertiary ESL students may need to adapt to English-medium instructions. This transition demands self-regulated learning skills, as a tool to cope with the challenges to learn English as a second language (Oxford, 1990) that helps language learners learn how to learn (Benson, 2001) in a non-native language environment.

While classroom education imparts foundational knowledge, reading skills provide the vehicle to expand one's

understanding of topics far beyond any formal curriculum (Kaur et al., 2022). Reading, therefore, becomes the most liberating and horizon-expanding skill to overcome such limitations. However, even since decades ago, reading is already commonly perceived as an outdated activity as reported by Pivec (1998). He noted a decline in young adults' interest in reading due to their fascination with television and the Internet. Bashir & Mattoo (2012) also reported that reading habits among students is deteriorating globally. Sharma et al. (2017) asserted that among of the reasons for students to fail to complete required readings is due to the struggle to comprehend complex texts. This as a result, according to them, demotivated the students and gave up on reading the materials. A study conducted by Gorzycki et al. (2019) claimed that students consistently expressed the importance of reading, yet their failure to complete reading assignments suggested otherwise. The qualitative analysis in the same study suggested that students do not experience academic reading as a venue for scholarly engagement, as the students perceive that academic reading is too voluminous and irrelevant to class outcomes. This issue is worldwide. Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) launched a program called Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). The assessment which has started in 2000, is a triennial survey of 15-year-old students, assesses the extent to which these students have acquired important knowledge and skills essential for full participation in social and economic life. PISA focuses on three domains which are mathematics, science and reading. PISA 2022 results which was recently published (OECD 2023), has shocked many academics due to the decline in these three aspects (as shown in Figure 1).

Thus, the ability to read written language opens up immense opportunities for self-regulated learning and personal development. This language skill unlocks massive opportunities for self-regulated learning and personal growth (Zulkifli et al, 2021).

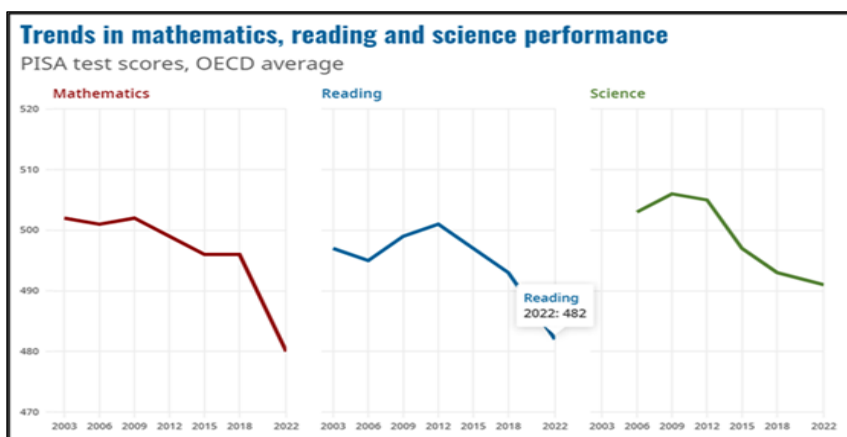


Figure 1: PISA Test Scores, OECD Average (OECD 2023)

To better cultivate self-regulated learning characters among ESL learners, they should be well-trained in activating their utmost self-regulation potentials. This can be done by promoting more favorable personalized teaching and learning activities where learners' independence in language learning, is simultaneously elevated (Wijaya et al., 2022). Within this context especially in the shift of education system after the Covid-19 pandemic, together with the advancement of technology, the Flipped Classroom (FC) approach, an approach that emphasized on personalized learning (PL) learning activities (Cevikbas & Kaiser, 2022) has garnered increased popularity in the new education landscape. Personalized learning is highly self-regulated (Basham et al., 2016).; aims to craft students' learning experience according to their needs, goals, and skills, through technology and dynamic learning environments (Shemshack & Spector, 2021). This approach to a certain extent, helps instructors to understand students' expectations, strengths, limitations, and current level of knowledge before the FC real-time class sessions. Also, there are more opportunities for instructors to maximize class hours allocated for personalized deep learning activities during the flipped classroom sessions (Cevikbas & Argün, 2017; Bergmann & Sams, 2012). Because Personalized Learning recognizes individual uniqueness, it enables them to progress towards their particular learning objectives at their own pace. However, academics claimed that the practical implementation of PL is still a big challenge to them (Louhab et al., 2018; Schmid et al, 2022). Personalized instruction is said to be time consuming if students are found to be unprepared (Sota, 2016), and challenging if conducted with poor digital technology (Kakosimos, 2015). In

order for students to experience meaningful personalized learning in flipped classes, they have to exhibit motivation, readiness, as well as continuously showing interest in learning (De Oliveira Fassbinder et al, 2015). This illustrates that students have to be actively involved in class to ensure that they can fully benefit the flipped class sessions. McCormick et al. (2012) emphasized that students' active class participation can be achieved by focusing on their decisions that regulates metacognition while they prepare for classes.

Academics who focus on the preparatory stage of Flipped Classroom model where students' self-regulated learning takes place, provides an opportunity for the students to become conscious of their decisions in reading academic materials (Ismail & Hashem, 2022). This is part of their metacognitive awareness throughout the personalized learning process. Despite the potential benefits of both approaches for ESL students and instructors, studies on the combination of both Flipped Classroom and Personalized Learning approaches is still limited (Chen & Su, 2022). While the majority of existing studies focus on examining the pedagogical effectiveness, little is known about how students prepare for in-class learning activities in flipped classroom setting (Othman & Rahman, 2023; Akçayır & Akçayır, 2018) which includes ESL learners' engagement in reading for academic purposes. Hence, there is a need for this study to be conducted in order to fill in the voids in the current body of knowledge. This proposed study attempts to investigate how ESL undergraduate students who are advanced English readers, make decisions while engaging with reading materials during asynchronous learning for flipped classrooms. With their advanced language mastery and vocabulary, set them in a strong position to engage in English texts deeply, allowing study of decision-making styles in academic reading unencumbered by basic reading comprehension barriers.

Objectives of the Study

The present study aims

1. to characterize ESL undergraduate students' decision-making styles during academic reading for flipped classrooms.
2. to investigate how the ESL undergraduate students' decision- making styles during academic reading facilitate personalized learning in flipped classrooms.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Personalized Learning Through the Flipped Classroom Model

The concept of flipped classroom was first introduced in 2007 by two high school chemistry teachers from Woodland Park High School, Jonathan Bergmann and Aaron Sams. Both Bergmann and Sams recorded live lessons and broadcasted them online for their students who have missed those lessons (Bergmann & Sams, 2014). The flipped classroom's slogan is much like the concept itself: Turning learning on its head (Noonoo, 2012). Bristol (2014) explained that the primary objective of this educational approach is to give students a foundation in the subject before the course begins. Flipped classroom method provides opportunities for learners to access the parts of the course, they will study appropriate for individual learning and to also perform problem-solving activities (Bishop & Verleger, 2013). In a flipped classroom, prior to attending a class, students receive direct instructions from different sources like recorded materials or handouts. They have to read and understand the content before the class begins. During class, students devote the session to practicing and apply new concepts they have learned with the support of the instructor and classmates. In short, flipped classroom shifts the teaching and learning process from the group to the individual learners (Flipped Learning Network, 2014). Less time is spent for group lectures because students have already engaged with the knowledge they need before attending class. As a result, the group learning space is transformed into a dynamic, interactive learning environment where the class instructor guides individual students as they apply concepts and creatively engage in the subject matter.

Sahin and Kurban (2016) in their book entitled 'The Flipping Approach to Higher Education: Designing Universities for Today's Education' highlighted that the Flipped Classroom model overcomes a significant weakness found in a traditional language classroom. Traditionally after lecture, while students are working in

their own, they are expected to use the new knowledge in higher cognitive activities that involves the need of applying, analyzing, and evaluating. When the students are expected to cognitively function at their highest-level, they have poor access for supports from the instructor and classmates. Herein lies the weakness of the traditional approach. In a flipped classroom, knowledge transfer takes place before class through assigned reading materials and supplementary materials explored by the students. These are, according Bloom's Revised Taxonomy, are the Lower Order Thinking Skills (LOTS) tasks that are generally involve watching, remembering and understanding the new knowledge learned (Sahin and Kurban, 2016). Their learning is more flexible and personalized. Hence in real-time class sessions, students can concentrate more on the Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) proposed in the Bloom's Revised Taxonomy (Bloom et al., 1971) assisted by the instructor as shown in Figure 1. Figure 1 illustrates the aspects of traditional and flipped classroom mapped against Blooms' Revised taxonomy (Bloom et al., 1971) and Bergmann & Sams (2014) definition of Flipped classroom adapted from Sahin and Kurban (2016).

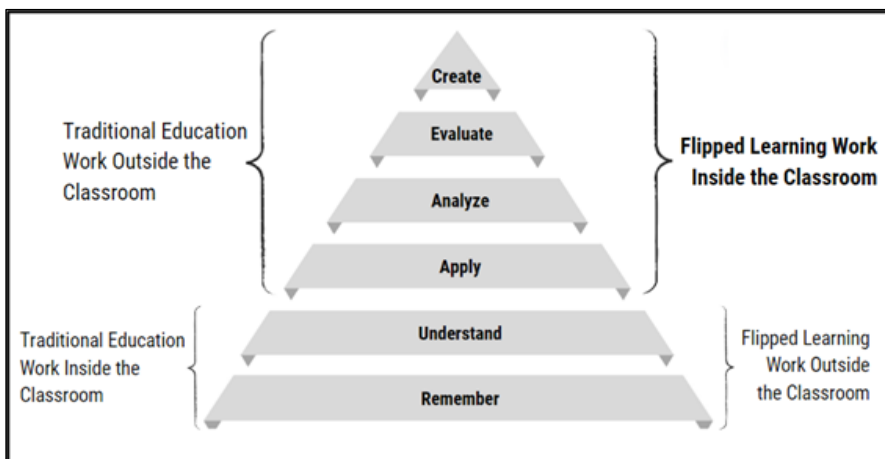


Figure 1: Aspects of Traditional and Flipped Classroom mapped against Blooms' Revised Taxonomy (Bloom et al, 1971) and Bergmann & Sams (2014) definition of Flipped Classroom adapted from Sahin & Kurban, (2016).

The Flipped Classroom approach offers numerous benefits for students and has positive influence on their academic achievements, emotional and social growth (Rahman et al., 2020). Synergizing Personalized Learning in FC approach, optimizes students' engagement, satisfaction and understanding within their learning goals. Offering PL in Flipped Classroom approach allows students to have more control of their own learning. Walkington & Bernacki (2020) observed that Personalized Learning is not a learning theory by itself, but PL is a principal approach to leverage existing learning theories that when combine with academic's practical experiences and students' input, can modify aspects of a learning environment to suit students' need. They further added, among the learning theories that have been used to undergird and motivate personalized learning intervention are Mastery Learning (Bloom, 1968), Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1992, 2002), Interest Theory (Hidi & Renninger, 2006), Situated Cognition Theory (Lave & Wenger, 1992). A related Personalized Learning definition by Bray & McClaskey (2014) explains "In a personalized learning environment, learners actively participate in their learning. They have a voice in what they are learning based on how they learn best. Learners have a choice in how they demonstrate what they know and provide evidence of their learning. In a learner centred environment, learners own and co-design their learning. The teacher is their guide on their personal journey" (p. 14). This definition shares many key points of Flipped Classroom approach (Bergman & Sam,2014); to explicitly position students in a role of ownership, prioritizing decisions and control over their own learning.

The Conflict Theory of Decision-Making

Janis and Mann (1977) Conflict Theory of Decision-making proposed that the dependence on a particular coping pattern or decision-making style is determined by the presence of absence of pre-existing conditions. According to Mann et al. (1997), there are three antecedent conditions that lead to four basic decision-making styles. In relation to this study, the antecedent conditions Janis and Mann (1977) have proposed, mirror the

condition of asynchronous learning phase in a Flipped Classroom approach. Through the Flipped Classroom instruction, students are aware of the reading activities they need to do before attend the real-time class session. Within the time frame given for asynchronous learning, they should spend time for independent learning through academic reading activities.

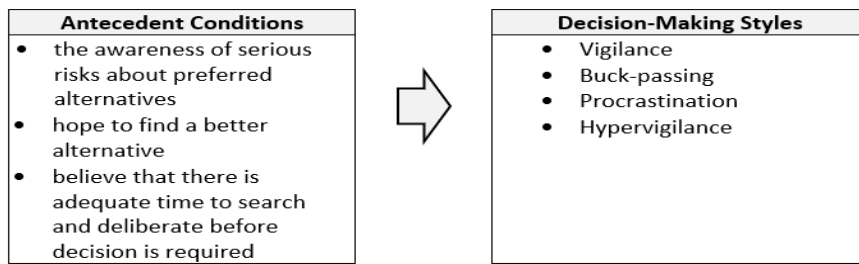


Figure 2: The Conflict Theory of Decision-Making

These conditions experienced, lead to what they call as Vigilance, Hypervigilance, Buck-passing and Procrastination as illustrated in Figure 2. Students who are categorised as Vigilance, are those who evaluate the situation and make decision based on evaluation of alternatives and is perceived as a rational decision-making style. Students who are the Hypervigilance, practice hurried approach to decision-making to remove the discomfort of the situation while engaging in reading academic materials. The Buck passing includes passing the responsibility of decision making to other students, hence avoiding responsibility. Lastly, the Procrastination students are usually those who postpone making decisions until a later time this can be attributed to irrational fears and self-criticism of one’s ability to complete a task (Ellis & Knaus, 1979). It is worth noting that decision-making styles may have influence on the students’ personalized learning in flipped classrooms, which then leads to their academic achievements (Cevikbas & Kaiser, 2022).

CONTRIBUTIONS

This study offers an original contribution by addressing a significant gap in understanding how ESL undergraduate students leverage preparatory reading materials for flipped English literacy classrooms. While existing research has examined the pedagogical effectiveness of Flipped Classroom models and benefits of Personalized Learning, limited focus has been given to ESL learners’ asynchronous learning experience that either optimize or inhibit a personalized, self-directed experience. This qualitative case study approach aims to profile how advanced readers among ESL undergraduate students approach information and material selections, reading strategies, and support during academic readings prior to FC real-class time, might reveal rich insights on the decision-making phenomena underlying personalized outcomes. Practically, findings gathered from semi-structured interviews and class observation can help academics to design and differentiate English academic reading materials for flipped ESL courses that respond to the revealed decision-making styles. The findings from this study could also assist English curriculum designers to develop modules and guidelines of Personalized Flipped Classroom that is tailored to the characteristics of ESL learners decision-making styles and their demographic profiles as second language learners. In addition, more modules on Personalized Learning and Flipped Classroom can be developed to respond to the current aim of the new educational landscape aligned to OECD Learning Framework 2030 (OECD 2019) which is to exercise Learner Agency. Learner Agency implies ‘a sense of responsibility to participate in the world and, in so doing, to influence people, events and circumstances for the better.’ (p.4). It is mentioned that one of the factors to enable learner agency is through Personalized Learning environment that supports and motivates individual student to nurture passions, make connections between different educational experiences and opportunities, and are able to design their own learning projects and processes in collaboration with others.

CONCLUSION

This exploratory inquiry into ESL students’ decision-making styles in academic readings during asynchronous learning for flipped classrooms, generate rich insights into how personalized learning opportunities can be enhanced through targeted support. Within this context, a brief review of literature regarding the decision-

making styles, personalized Learning, and Flipped Classroom approach has been discussed. It is hoped that the findings bridge the gaps in the existing literature as this synergy of Flipped Classroom approach, Personalized Learning and Decision-making Styles is an area that requires further investigation by future academics. Future research could consider a more diverse samples which includes ESL learners of different English proficiency levels, different cultural backgrounds, and different educational contexts to support the proposed study.

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