

# **Flipping the Language Classroom: Challenges of Design and Implementation in UK HE Settings**

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## **Abstract**

This qualitative study investigates the perceptions of UK-based Higher Education (HE) language practitioners and students arising from their experience of approaches to the flipped classroom in Institution-Wide Language Programmes (IWLPs). The study was conducted in response to the challenges facing language practitioners in a rapidly changing sector and contextualises their use of the flipped classroom model against the backdrop of marketisation and reform in UK HE. Responding to a knowledge gap about flipped classroom implementations in languages which was evident in the literature, the study investigates how language practitioners reflect on the principles and decisions that underpin their approach to the flipped classroom, including their experience of its implementation and that of students. Six interviews with practitioners were conducted across a number of UK universities to address the research questions, supported by data collected from a student focus group.

The thematic analysis identified three main challenges to the design and implementation of a flipped classroom approach: a basic requirement for learner autonomy; difficulties in negotiating roles between practitioners and students; and a wider lack of institutional support for these pedagogic initiatives. The study makes three recommendations for future implementations: first, that practitioners explore pedagogic connections, both disciplinary and institutional, when planning their flipped classroom approach; second, that practitioners consider carefully the impact of the discourse that surrounds the flipped classroom, particularly in their discussions with students; and third, that there should be greater awareness of the need to avoid

dichotomous thinking when formulating the characteristics of learning that takes place inside and outside the classroom space.

An important point of context to the findings is that the flipped classrooms examined in this study were all partial implementations, both in the sense that the approach was used in specific teaching sessions and in the sense that it was limited to particular aspects of the discipline.

## Impact Statement

Experimentation with the flipped classroom is widely reported in a growing body of pedagogic literature. It is typically presented as a simple “model” involving the inversion of a normative teaching and learning process. Lower levels of learning take place before class, with students studying rudimentary knowledge independently, in order to allow higher and more creative levels of learning to be pursued in class. This shift is associated with a change in the role of the teacher and an increased use of technology to support independent study. Understood in these terms, the flipped classroom is often presented as a solution to a range of problems and, more widely, as an embodiment of constructivist ideals in education. However, the depth and quality of research and evaluation on which these assumptions rest is questionable. An obvious limitation is the relatively small number of qualitative studies that are contextualised in the specifics of an institutional and disciplinary context.

This research addresses this limitation by examining the implementation of flipped classrooms in UK Higher Education (HE) and in the disciplinary context of language teaching on Institution-Wide Language Programmes (IWLPs). The strengths of this approach are that it compares and contrasts practitioner and student perceptions of the flipped classroom; establishes connections between these perceptions and the wider context of changes unfolding in the UK HE sector; and critically evaluates the challenges of design and implementation in terms of how the flipped classroom is conceptualised and understood. It is the first study to adopt this approach. A key finding is that by strictly aligning the distinction between pre-class and in-class learning with the lower and higher levels of Bloom’s taxonomy,

practitioners limited the opportunities for socialisation and creativity when students worked autonomously and that this stemmed from viewing the flipped classroom as a model rather than as an approach. A second major finding was that how practitioner inducted students into their approach, in particular the discourse they used, had the potential to make it more difficult for students to engage productively because of how the language resonated in the wider environment. A third finding was that practitioners generally missed opportunities to explore the pedagogic connections the flipped classroom shared with approaches in their discipline, potentially restricting the impact of their design and implementation.

Implementing the practical recommendations of this research has the potential for impact in three areas. First, exploring the connections between the flipped classroom and language pedagogy could help IWLP practitioners navigate the challenges of cuts to contact hours in ways that make teaching and learning more effective. Second, understanding how student perceptions of pedagogic experimentation are shaped by environmental factors could help HE practitioners improve student engagement with innovations in the teaching and learning environment. Third, reflecting on the limitations of conceiving of the flipped classroom as a model and questioning the simplistic terms in which it is often presented could aid a wider educational audience to benefit from the creative opportunities the approach presents. The study will also serve as a reference point for future research in these and related areas.

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## **Declaration**

I, Abir Mahmoud Elsayed Ahmed, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

44,820 words.

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I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Susan Taylor, for her invaluable advice and guidance throughout this study. I am also grateful for the support of my family whilst I was completing this work.

## **Reflective Statement**

In this statement I reflect on my research journey, which began in 2016 and is culminating in this thesis. I summarise the most important things I have learned whilst working towards my Doctorate in Education (EdD) and highlight the connections between the different modules that I undertook during the course. I discuss both how I have developed my thinking and understanding across the various modules and how the learning and experience I gained on the course have informed and enhanced my professional practice. I begin by providing a summary of my professional context and approach to my practice prior to joining the EdD course. This will enable me to demonstrate the developments in my thinking in a clearly thought out and linear way.

After I obtained a master's degree in translation, I worked for several years as a legal and technical translator. In 2005 I completed a course on teaching languages to non-native speakers and subsequently embarked on a teaching journey in HE. I began by teaching Arabic to non-native speakers at various levels in a post-1992 institution. My role was initially limited to teaching and assessment but it later developed to include administrative and leadership responsibilities. Although varied and demanding, those responsibilities lacked the intellectual stimulation I had hoped for. I came to realise the importance of taking the initiative to develop my professional skills and knowledge in new directions and outside of my routine work.

Now, looking back at my position, I realise that the staff development opportunities that were available in a teaching-focused institution were limited. The support provided for practitioners to further develop their research skills

and enhance their teaching practice was severely lacking. To counter this, I made sustained efforts to develop my skills and ensure my practice was informed by research. For example, I actively pursued opportunities outside of my teaching-focused cycle, developed pedagogic bids for small projects, and attended workshops, conferences and other activities both inside and outside of my institution.

Attending conferences, engaging in constructive discussions and exploring research studies relevant to my subject area all stimulated my interest in conducting my own research. My developing awareness of the limitations of other researchers' work allowed me to appreciate the benefits and importance of conducting my own independent research rather than relying on the studies of others. Furthermore, my appreciation of the value of conducting independent research was not limited to simply improving my teaching practice. I started to further appreciate how it would also benefit my role in a wider complex professional context which requires a much more well-rounded skillset.

In preparation for my research journey, I needed to construct my research skills and knowledge on a solid basis. In 2015, I began a one-year postgraduate diploma in social science research methods with the Institute of Education. The four 30-credit mandatory modules, which were delivered by intensive workshops, were as follows: developing research questions; methods of investigation; designing a research study; and developing a research proposal. Looking back at those four modules and their assignments, I can appreciate how the sequence in which those modules were introduced

and built on each other coherently helped me to develop my research skills and progress through a well-structured research journey.

The Developing Research Questions module focused on the development and evaluation of workable research questions, which is the most 'challenging' process in research according to White (2017). The module improved my ability to conduct literature reviews and appreciate their wider purpose beyond simply providing a summary of related research studies or being an exercise in identifying knowledge gaps. I came to realise the relevance of literature reviews in identifying and refining a research question and I better understood the position of my research in relation to an existing body of knowledge. As part of the assessment for this module, I wrote a reflective statement on my improved understanding. I focused my research question on student perception of what I understood at the time as the Flipped Classroom "model", which would later become the focus of my research as the course progressed.

The Methods of Investigation module introduced me to different research designs, methods and strategies, as well as the principles on which these should be considered in terms of the research question. The module involved a research placement, for which I participated in the 'Flipped Learning in Praxis' research project. This provided me with a better understanding of how to design my research project and equipped me with the skills required for the next module, which I focused on designing a small-scale research study. The experience of learning to code data was particularly important at this point and helped me to develop a more rigorous approach to analysis.

For the Designing a Research Study module, I designed a small-scale qualitative study on the student perspective of the Flipped Classroom. In undertaking this study, I gained first-hand practical experience in how to plan, stage and design a research study. Furthermore, I learnt how to manage the process and gained confidence in decision-making for different developmental stages of the research project. Personally, I found drawing on the new skills that I had acquired a challenging task. However, it was essential to check my ability to operationalise my research question and draw on the understanding, principles and knowledge which I had learned in the previous two modules.

The constant support and constructive feedback received from my supervisor throughout the course played a major role in guiding my learning journey. The guidance I received whilst developing my first research study helped me both to develop skills and made me aware of my limitations. For example, I realised the need to develop a more critical voice when evaluating other studies and to approach my reading with greater scrutiny. Out of the four PGDip assessments, I found this module's assessment to be the most challenging but at the same time the most beneficial for my learning.

The fourth module, Developing a Research Proposal, aimed to equip students with the skills required to produce a research proposal. By the end of the module, I was able to complete a successful 4000-word research proposal for the module assignment. I later built on this and developed a more detailed proposal for my Institution-Focused Study (IFS) application, which dealt with Arabic students' perceptions of the Flipped Classroom in my previous workplace. I could draw on my learning from the other three modules to build

my proposal. Consequently, as I wrote my proposal, I was able to clearly see the progressive sequence according to which the PGDip modules were structured and how my learning had correspondingly progressed.

Although I was still working on developing a more critical and evaluative tone, I developed the skills needed to conduct a literature review, including considering current studies and arguments, and the knowledge gaps in the subject area, as well as establishing links to the current body of knowledge. I was also able to outline clear research aims and questions to further guide my study. Furthermore, I was better able to describe and justify my research methodology and also discuss the possible ethical considerations of my research in detail. I became aware of the importance of investing time in developing my research proposal in order to be able to complete the ethical form properly. This might seem to be stating the obvious but it demonstrates how I was still learning to operationalise my understanding of fundamental research processes at that point.

Completing the PGDip successfully with an 'A' grade in all four modules motivated me to develop further my postgraduate research skills and pursue a Doctorate in Education (EdD). The flexible structure of the EdD, the accommodating schedule and blended delivery mode of the course, allowed students to study whilst in full-time employment. In the second year of the EdD, I successfully completed the Foundation of Professionalism module. This allowed me to reflect on and question my perception of my professional identity and role as a language practitioner in the current HE context. It was an important exercise prior to moving to the IFS, an interim stage of research that



links and facilitates transition from the taught modules to the independent thesis. The IFS extended over a two-year period, during which I was able to build on the research skills I acquired in the PGDip and put them into practice. I designed and managed an independent sizable research study that focused on my own professional context and workplace. I built on the small-scale study which I had completed for the Designing a Research Study module, as I continued to be interested in the Flipped Classroom approach, and understanding it as an approach rather than a model, and decided to investigate the topic further to develop deeper insight.

The IFS study investigated in greater depth the perception of the Flipped Classroom learning experience of Arabic language students in my previous institution. This was a key stage in the development of my thinking because it allowed me to review my practice from a researcher's perspective and to examine different theories and principles in terms of their relationship to my practice. By the end of the study, I had presented two conference papers on the use of the Flipped Classroom in the Arabic language teaching provision of a UK-based IWLP (Ahmed, 2017a and 2017b).

My development throughout the IFS aided my transition to the more demanding and challenging thesis stage and gave me first-hand experience in how to communicate and work productively with my supervisor. It has also increased my awareness of the complexity of managing a relatively large-scale study. Whilst working on the early stages of my thesis I continued to disseminate my earlier work. This included two staff development workshops (Ahmed, 2018b and 2019a), one for senior academics at the Association of

University Language Communities (AULC), and presented a third conference paper at King's College London (Ahmed, 2019b).

For the thesis, I chose to continue exploring the Flipped Classroom approach and building on the knowledge I had gained from my previous research during the PGDip and IFS stages. Immersing myself in the topic helped me to explore further my interest in investigating online learning and blended learning approaches. I developed the study's design and methodology to investigate how a group of six UK HE language practitioners conceptualised their experimentation with the Flipped Classroom. More specifically, the design was developed to capture their experiences of implementation, the challenges they faced and the impact of these challenges on their practice and autonomy. The study also examined how a group of six undergraduate language students perceived the Flipped Classroom's effectiveness as a pedagogic approach and the aspects of their learning they understood it to support. By identifying differences and commonalities in the participants' responses, I developed a deeper understanding of the main challenges associated with the approach of the practitioners to the Flipped Classroom, namely its design and implementation.

The thesis stage was not straightforward as I went through many personal and work-related challenges. My work circumstances changed and I was struggling with various demands including changing my job, moving to another country and then dealing with the impact of COVID-19 on my work situation. It has been a struggle to manage my time as the demands of my new job were further added to by the constraints and anxiety resulting from the pandemic. Finding the time needed to reflect and critically refine my thinking

in the final stages of my thesis has been a test of resilience. The support, flexibility and understanding that I have received from my family, my personal tutor and supervisor have been key factors in enabling me to complete this work.

An important element in my intellectual development during this period was getting to grips with the confusions I sensed in how the Flipped Classroom was understood and presented in the literature and coming to an understanding of these confusions could help me clarify my own thinking about the data I had collected and analysed. The critical moment was in changing my understanding of the Flipped Classroom as a model – an externally imposed and idealised form with some theoretical underpinnings – to the Flipped Classroom as an approach. By approach, I mean a broader restructuring of learning that challenged the relationship of distinct stages of learning to particular spaces as part of a reappraisal of learning culture that was also linked to a complex range of environmental factors.

Completing my Doctorate in Education course in spite of all of its associated challenges has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my life. The learning, confidence, experiences and skills I have acquired have exceeded my expectations from this course. I look forward to starting on my post-doctoral research and developing my knowledge further in the areas of interest which I developed throughout this journey.

# CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Introduction

In this chapter I provide some initial context to my investigation of the use of the flipped classroom by language practitioners in UK Higher Education (HE). I also explain the broad characteristics of the research problem I identified and how I became aware of it and introduce the aims of my research and the specific questions I sought to address. First, I orient the reader to my professional setting as a language practitioner employed on an Institution-Wide Language Programme (IWLP), linking my interest in the use of technology and approaches to blended learning to earlier research investigating my students' perceptions of the flipped classroom. Second, I review the rapid changes that have taken place in the UK HE sector, the complexities of its recent past and their implications for language teaching. Specifically, I consider the impact of the current reform agenda for teaching and learning practices, focusing on how educational technology has been perceived as a solution to the challenges this presents to those working in the sector. Third, I present the overall aims of my investigation and introduce the research questions that have guided this study, which is qualitative in its methodological orientation. To maintain terminological consistency, I refer to the flipped classroom as an approach rather than as a model throughout my thesis: this preference, and the distinction between narrow and broad conceptualisations of the flipped classroom, is discussed in greater detail in the literature review

## 1.2 Origins of the Problem

I have been working as a language practitioner for several years in various UK HE settings, with the primary focus of my work being the oversight of the Arabic language modules of an Institution-Wide Language Programme (IWLP) offered at a London-based post-92 Higher Education Institution (HEI). Whilst administrative and academic arrangements vary between institutions, an IWLP typically provides credited language teaching to students enrolled on undergraduate or postgraduate degree programmes in the form of elective modules offered across an institution. The programme on which I was employed at the time of this research taught a range of eight European and non-European languages at five levels of language proficiency to some 1250 students. These modules are distinct from undergraduate language degree teaching but are validated with reference to the UK HE Subject Benchmark Statement for Languages, Cultures and Societies (Quality Assurance Agency, 2019) and mapped to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (Council of Europe, 2021).

My role on this programme, a Senior Lecturer responsibility, was to lead and coordinate the delivery of five Arabic modules, taught by a team of five lecturers to some 225 students. As an important part of my self-directed professional development, I investigated educational technologies and how to incorporate them in my teaching. I also developed a specific interest in a blended learning approach and integrated it with my language teaching. Blüch *et al.* (2007) identify blended learning as a pedagogic approach that combines both face-to-face and on-line teaching. The use of a blended approach helped me to design and deliver my courses in a more flexible manner, which was

important generally in maintaining high levels of student engagement and student satisfaction, both of which were objectively demonstrated through module feedback and Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) statistics.

Integrating blended learning has also helped in supporting students with learning disabilities, such as dyslexia and partial visual impairment. These students benefited from having permanent online access to the learning materials provided in video and audio formats. An important aspect of the development of this online provision was that it recognised the students were not language specialists in a disciplinary sense and were not necessarily aware of how to study a language effectively. In the case of Arabic, there are a range of additional challenges not commonly found in the learning of European languages. From the point of view of the language, these include the fact that Arabic is diglossic, meaning that there exist functionally differentiated varieties of the language; that it is structurally dissimilar to European syntax and morphology; and that it requires the learning of a new script and new systems of sounds (Albirini, 2016). From the point of view of the learner, heritage learners wanting to improve their existing knowledge of the language for religious and cultural reasons are a significant but not exclusive presence in the classroom. This, in turn, meant that learning activities had to be thought through to account for a wide range of exposure and experience of language among students.

Student feedback to the approach I have taken evidenced a high level of satisfaction with the learning experience and reflected the potential of educational technology when used and integrated effectively, namely with clear pedagogic goals in mind. My teaching experience on the IWLP Arabic

modules, which was extensively documented and reflected upon as part of my application to become a Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy, encouraged me to explore more innovative ways to use technology when I was confronted with specific challenges from the broader institutional context, specifically those resulting from budget cuts in my workplace.

Budgetary cuts and savings have become a significant and regular feature of language provisions in UK HE (Feigenbaum and Iqani, 2015). When cuts were made in my own institution, I was often struck by the fact that savings made by reducing the time available for teaching languages were almost always implemented without reference to the pedagogic consequences or impact on learning outcomes. For example, it is generally recognised that reductions in class contact hours significantly compromise the time available for class activities, instant feedback and collaborative learning (Gokhale, 1995). In my case, class contact time was reduced by a third, from 66 to 44 hours per module and one has to remember that, in the case of non-European languages, a third of *ab initio* teaching time is typically spent teaching the script. It was partly in response to these pressures that I began to explore teaching approaches that not only integrated technology but also focused on the most effective use of class time. It was this possibility of making better use of the time available in class by restructuring learning outside conventional teaching spaces that led me to introduce the flipped classroom to my teaching.

My Institution-Focused Study (IFS) (Ahmed, 2018a), which formed an earlier part of my submission in fulfilment of the UCL EdD requirements, examined the perceptions of Arabic students of the flipped classroom in one of the advanced Arabic modules I had taught for several years. The study also

investigated the perceived advantages and/or disadvantages of the flipped classroom approach and its impact on student collaboration and engagement. I conducted the study in my workplace and disseminated the findings at two conferences in London and Leeds (Ahmed, 2017a and 2017b). This allowed me to identify and engage in professional discussions with colleagues from various HE institutions who had also implemented the flipped classroom to enhance their teaching and student experience.

Reduction in class contact time invariably raises questions about value for money, a key question for students and other stakeholders against the backdrop of the marketisation of Higher Education, the dimensions of which are discussed in greater detail later in this chapter. The findings of my IFS highlighted the influence of student consumer attitudes as a response to their experience of the flipped classroom (Ahmed, 2018a). These findings suggested the need for further investigation of how and to what extent decisions about flipped classroom implementation are pedagogically motivated and/or influenced by a perceived need to ensure student satisfaction by providing particular forms of learning. Professional discussions with colleagues highlighted the challenges many experienced in flipping their language classes, focusing on the attitudes of students to the perceived value of their educational “product”. These challenges underlined the point that current HE consumer demands have influenced the teacher-student relationship and the teaching and learning process. More specifically, there is a perception that students expect the teacher to “entertain” them in class, provide more time and support, avoid negative feedback and modify their



teaching techniques and practices in such a way that requires less effort from the students and fits in with their demands (Fairchild *et al.*, 2007, p. 1).

Professional discussions also revealed that many colleagues in my disciplinary arena felt threatened by the impact of student attitudes and the associated changes unfolding across the UK HE sector, in particular as they related to their understanding of their role, sense of professional autonomy and academic standards generally. There was, I observed, a lack of clarity in the conversations taking place among language professionals about their understanding of the flipped classroom, which became apparent from initial conversations with peers. All of these factors motivated me to investigate what I and other language practitioners in HE understood by the flipped classroom and how we implemented it within the complex and shifting context of UK HE. In short, when HE language practitioners talked about the flipped classroom and its implementation, it was not at all clear to me that they were talking about the same thing. Nor was it clear how these initiatives, by which I mean how language practitioners develop, implement and reflect on their experiments with the flipped classroom, connected to the wider context of the changes unfolding in UK Higher Education.

### **1.3 UK Higher Education – A Changing Context**

There is a general consensus in the research literature that the current HE landscape in the UK is characterized by a dramatic sense of uncertainty and fundamental change. Words such as “complex”, “unpredictable” and “chaotic” are just some of the most typical adjectives used to sum up the present situation (Bauman, 2005). This underlying sense of disturbance is unsurprising

given the nature and scale of the economic and political changes the sector has witnessed over the last thirty or so years; it is generally accepted that the structural changes implemented by government have had radical consequences for the culture, ethos and values of the sector. In a relatively short space of time, UK HE has experienced a profound change to its status and its *raison d'être*. No longer is it a free service provided by the state, established in the wake of the World War II to promote equality among different social classes. In its place, there has emerged a 'neoliberal' system of market competition in which only the fittest institutions survive (Gewirtz and Cribb, 2013). This approach, and the assumptions on which it is based, have particular implications for educational activities, such as non-degree language provisions, that are not viewed as "core" or "essential". But the picture is more nuanced than languages simply being viewed as a pedagogic expense. In the discussion that follows, I discuss the changes to HE in some detail and link these developments to the consequences and opportunities for non-degree language programmes.

### ***1.3.1 Higher Education as a Commodity***

In recognizing the changes that have taken place in UK HE, it is important to consider a) what the changes mean; b) how they have been received; and c), their consequences, both intended and otherwise. For the discussion that follows, a 'neoliberal' educational system is to be understood as one that has been reconfigured by the practices of corporate enterprise and the standards of the private sector to promote institutional competition as part of a drive towards 'marketisation' (De Wit, 2011). From this perspective, Higher

Education is perceived to be no different to any other market: energy, transport, media or health. It is important to remember that in all these cases, the underlying principle, namely to drive standards through competition, is, at heart, a political choice as much as it is an economic or social theory.

Needless to say, the 'commodification' or 'marketisation' of the UK HE sector, introduced by the government in 1998 on the basis that its aim was to improve the quality of HE teaching and learning, has been controversial (Altbach and Knight, 2007). Whilst ostensibly driven by objectives such as establishing 'a competitive edge' and strengthening the UK's position in the global economic market, the result has polarized opinion. Positive responses to the change in focus need to be judged against the view that the core message of education, unlike that of the commercial sector, is to 'carry the moral fabric of society' (Gibbs, 2001, p. 89).

Furthermore, if, by adopting a market model, the traditional notion of UK HE has shifted from being that of a 'public responsibility' to a 'commodity' (Sarker *et al.*, 2010), it is important to recognize that this has had consequences for organisational behaviour. For example, the shift to a market orientation has increased competition among HE institutions resulting in a competitive 'market-like' environment, as they compete for students and rankings in league tables (Temple *et al.*, 2014). However, the underlying premise that competition among institutions raises standards neglects the fact that policy changes often have unintended and undesirable consequences regardless of the ethical principles involved.

At the present time, there is inadequate and insufficient evidence that a 'neoliberal' ideology has been successful in developing UK HE or enhancing

its quality (The Guardian, 2016). In addition to the ethical ambiguities, UK HE marketisation has also created a backdrop of economic and political uncertainty, most notably in the acceptance that institutions will be allowed to fail. But, above all, it has opened up new areas of challenge for UK HE educators (Brown and Oplatka, 2006), and it is to the educational consequences of the political backdrop, particularly in the humanities, and more specifically languages, that I now turn.

### ***1.3.2 Restructuring Higher Education and the Reform Agenda***

The move to ‘adjust’ the university system began in the early 1980s with a redistribution of funds which privileged engineering and science at the expense of the humanities and social sciences. The reorganization of disciplines in terms of their perceived economic benefits brought with it a range of challenges for those disciplines receiving reduced funding (Gibbs, 2012). The financial effects have been felt at several levels; for example, in terms of the total funding awarded to particular HE institutions, as well as direct cuts to contact hours in specific disciplines, and cuts in the wider resource environment that underpins teaching and learning (*ibid.*). From this perspective, language teaching of any description is often perceived, somewhat paradoxically, to be a valued-added option (for example, business degree with language option) and an expensive soft skill (for example, intercultural understanding or socio-cultural context acquired through study of “classical” texts in the original language).

A second development, the emergence of the National Skills Agenda (NSA) in 2001, added a further utilitarian dimension to the sector context, placing demands on UK HE institutions to enhance and develop certain aspects of HE learning and teaching (Fallows and Steven, 2000; Appleby and Bathmaker, 2006). In essence, the NSA has stressed the development of teaching practices and research in such a way that supports the UK economy and social cohesion (Gewirtz and Cribb, 2013). Within this view, the purpose of curriculum design is to enhance UK graduates' skills including 'employability skills', 'personal competencies' and 'graduate communicative competence' (Bloggs, 1998). Beside introducing a focus on the quality of curriculum design and developing assessment and feedback, the 2001 National Skills Agenda also focused on the importance of other aspects of the UK HE mission, including the student experience, student satisfaction and student retention (Gibbs, 2012). From this perspective, language competence, in particular its cross-cultural consequences, is understood to be attractive to employers and, by extension, to institutions promoting their courses to students keen to enter the world of work.

The overall effect of reforms such as those discussed above has been to force institutions and educators to juggle different and potentially conflicting pressures and demands to survive in a competitive environment. They have also put the onus on institutions to find solutions to the conflicts in their roles and to deal with the consequences of the accountabilities to which they are now subject. It is possible to sum up these pressures through the metaphor of an equation that is difficult, if not impossible, to balance. On the one side, institutions face reduction in funding and reduction in teaching time; and, on

the other, they must improve the quality of teaching and curriculum design, and raise the skill level of their cohorts, achieve an acceptable level of student satisfaction and meet increasing consumer expectations about what a university qualification will do for their students (Gibbs, 2012).

The consequence for language teaching of any description is, with typical class sizes of 15-25, that it is seen as intensive, hands-on and expensive. Whilst many language degrees have closed, IWLPs, which can be run at scale as part of a value-added approach to employability, have remained generally stable in terms of student numbers. But the pedagogic consequences of reducing contact time, the switch to non-traditional modes of delivery, how these changes are managed and the implications for quality, are generally not considered at a strategic institutional or disciplinary level. Rather, it is left to individual practitioners and languages to modify, innovate or manage learning outcomes, teaching quality, institutional imperatives and student expectations as they judge best.

### ***1.3.3 The Student Consumer***

An important consequence of marketisation is the rise of consumer attitudes amongst students, a phenomenon I have previously investigated in the consequence of my use of the flipped classroom (Ahmed, 2018a). The UK HE tuition fee regime, first introduced in 1998, is arguably the most visible and tangible manifestation of the view that Higher Education is a product, one with a specific cash value. It has also had significant consequences for the sector's culture and the wider understanding of its role in society. Perhaps most

importantly, tuition fees have changed the relationship and the nature of the interactions between students and universities. Not only has the role of students as key stakeholders become explicitly articulated, it has brought with it a greater focus on the needs and demands of students, who, arguably, demonstrate an increasing sense of entitlement and expectation.

Tuition fees have created a context in which the consumer metaphor is made real. If HE courses are 'products', then students become 'the principal customers of universities' (Bunce *et al.*, 2017, p. 1). It is important to stress that this is not just the poetic extension of a commercial metaphor: with the payment of tuition fees through student loans, the concept of the student as consumer has been reinforced in a very practical way by the passing of the Consumer Rights Act in 2015 (*ibid.*). Moreover, student acquisition of a consumer identity has been accompanied by greater focus on the responsibility of institutions to engage with students and listen to their feedback; for example, through the National Student Survey (NSS). In effect, the UK government has made the student's own evaluation of their learning experience paramount. As a consequence, student satisfaction and retention rates have become important indicators in determining an institution's ranking in the league tables and improving student satisfaction by enhancing the learning experience became a priority for the UK HE national agenda in 2004 (Douglas *et al.*, 2015). A renewed focus on the curriculum – understood as the design of the educational product – is but one area of activity where institutions have come under considerable pressure to reform. In the case of languages, this focus on the curriculum has brought little clarity on how to develop the languages "product" but its effects are often felt in how practitioners talk about

their discipline and construct it in relation to institutional discourse. For example, the merits of learning a language are often repurposed as part of an institutional discourse about employability or graduate skills, but the study of language as a form of intellectual enquiry is less foregrounded.

#### ***1.3.4 The Politics of the Curriculum***

The distinction between enquiry and skills is typically reflected in the politics of the university curriculum. Approached in terms of a consumer-provider relationship of students to universities, the pure acquisition of academic subject knowledge is now often viewed as insufficient to equip graduates for the challenges of the competitive 'knowledge-based' UK market (Fallows and Steven, 2000). Despite the general importance of acquiring academic knowledge, students' ability to retain that knowledge and to apply it in authentic situations is now what really matters (Scager, 2016). In more sophisticated terms, Ashwin and McVitty (2015, p. 351) note that 'experiencing an in-depth encounter with disciplinary knowledge is not merely a process of acquisition but a process of identity formation and transformation—a 'becoming' not a 'having' is accurate'. It should be noted that this process of transformation is focused on students acquiring professional identities in a narrow sense; the curriculum is not necessarily an opportunity, for example, to explore what it means to be human in a moral sense.

In line with this transformational paradigm, and in order to contribute to the UK's economic growth, many universities have had to redesign their academic curriculum to take account of changes in the HE context and market



demand. This sense of adaptation for social need is reflected in the definition of the curriculum given by Ashwin and McVitty (2015, p. 349). They describe the move from 'the body of knowledge that constitutes an academic discipline or area of professional practice' and towards 'the creation of a structured course of study which tacitly articulates what knowledge is the most important'. Ashin and McVitty (*ibid.*) also note the importance of incorporating in the curriculum 'the ways that students might be expected to encounter [this knowledge]' and how they come 'to understand through their encounters with knowledge'.

This wider perspective, one that brings in awareness of the context in which knowledge is used and valued, is reflected more instrumentally in the comments of Fallows and Steven (2000, p. 75). They argue that academic curricula should be designed and geared to prepare students to become lifelong learners with essential employability skills and capabilities including: 'the retrieval and handling of information; communication and presentation; planning and problem solving; and social development and interaction'.

Understood in terms of the consumer metaphor, it is worth noting that this level of tension between the instrumental acquisition of knowledge, the acquisition of a professional identity and the cultural values associated with a body of knowledge is what makes the HE product unusual. For example, Peach (2010) notes that building an academic curriculum involves negotiating structures of knowledge, making judgments about their value and reflecting on the meanings and purposes of higher education. And while some scholars support the view that education is not limited to just acquiring knowledge,

others argue that a curriculum based on graduates' 'instrumental requirements' and market needs is limiting (Gewirtz and Cribb, 2013).

One of the ways in which these tensions manifest themselves in the teaching of languages in UK Higher Education is the shifting balance of contextualization of language learning towards specific skills (for example, listening) and levels of communicative or intercultural competence (for example, CEFRL descriptors) and away from indicators of "deeper" knowledge (the socio-historic context of a country or region, in-depth reading of particular works, especially literature) and cultural methodology. This is a distinction which also aligns with the separation of language teaching in UK HE into degree programmes for specialist linguists and institutional-wide language programmes for students from other subject areas. In the case of the latter, language learning is often seen, at most, as the development of an additional facet of an existing knowledge identity rooted in experience outside languages. But this is a perspective that does not always acknowledge the pedagogic consequences of language learning for non-specialists. At the same time, the role that language classes play in allowing for the core identity of students from other disciplines to be rehearsed, experimented with and performed is also rarely acknowledged. Rather, what happens in a language module is perceived as a "bolt-on" skill, to be evaluated in terms of linguistic mastery for specific purposes.

## **1.4 Developments in Learning and Teaching**

If the changes to UK HE have had an impact on how a subject is viewed and what constitutes “useful” knowledge, it is important also to acknowledge the developments to learning and teaching over the same period. For my purposes, the impact of the reform agenda on learning and teaching is most usefully approached through the concept of student engagement: the idea that HE generally, and its practitioners more specifically, are accountable for actively involving students in purposeful educational activity and the creation of their own learning experience. Although this is a well-established educational principle, with roots in the constructivist approach to learning, student engagement has been repositioned in recent years at the forefront of the UK HE national agenda (Ashwin and McVitty, 2015). This shift in emphasis is not just about pedagogic values, however; its use as a yardstick for measuring effectiveness, in an environment of economic constraints, also politicizes educational culture. Earlier in this chapter, for example, I noted that my use of an online approach had been judged effective solely by invoking student feedback, a reference point that reflects the importance of the student voice. The political dimension of this involvement is that it is often judged to override other forms of evaluation and measurement.

By this, I mean that it is not necessarily the case that student feedback is always included as one of several perspectives. For example, with students declared to be ‘at the heart of the system’ (Thompson and Bekhradnia, 2011), the concept of student engagement has come to serve as a dominant point of reference for ‘the purposes of various stakeholders across learning and teaching, institutional management, and national policy contexts’ (Ashwin and

McVitty, 2015, p. 314). In broad terms, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) has defined student engagement as ‘all about involving and empowering students in the process of shaping the student learning experience’ (Dunne and Owen, 2013, p. 60). More specifically, it has come to be considered as a ‘*defining* characteristic of high-quality teaching and learning in higher education’ (Ashwin and McVitty, 2015, my italics). An institution which does not engage its students, or cannot demonstrate this, is thus failing both in terms of the demands of the market and in terms of its educational mission. But what is not clear, which is why I am setting these issues out in some detail in this opening chapter, is what student engagement means for the teaching of a subject (for example, languages); for the institutional context in which the subject is taught (for example, IWLP); for the changing resources (specifically contact hours and digital platforms) available to a practitioner; and for the professional judgement of an educator designing or redesigning their teaching.

#### ***1.4.1 Student Engagement – From Policy to Practice in a Disciplinary Context***

It will be clear from the initial reference points cited in the introductory paragraphs above that, at a policy level, student engagement is not clearly defined in educational terms. From a learning and teaching perspective, student engagement is a complex and multifaceted concept that has multiple and overlapping dimensions of meaning (Fredricks *et al.*, 2004). However, for the purpose of this study, I am interested primarily in the concept of student engagement within the parameters of ‘disciplinary and professional

knowledge'. At this level, accountability for student engagement rests primarily with practitioners, albeit within an institutional context.

According to Ashwin and McVitty (2015, p. 356) the concept of student engagement at this level forms 'the basis on which students develop understanding, on which curricula are formed, and on which higher education communities are developed'. Approached in these terms, student engagement is widely understood to be forms of active participation in meaningful educational activities and practices and the concept has been largely defined along those lines (Christenson *et al.*, 2012). This leaves open the question of who decides what is meaningful and how it is measured and set against these questions there are also subtleties in the ways individual researchers refine the term (*ibid.*). However, for the purposes of relating these ideas to language teaching, it is relatively straightforward to establish a connection between the concepts of active participation and meaningful collaboration and historical developments in language pedagogy.

In very broad terms, language teaching methodologies can be organised and grouped into three categories. The first of these is known as the grammar-translation method, which was common in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and is associated with the teaching of ancient languages. It sees language taught as a set of grammatical rules which students memorize and use systematically with an expected high level of accuracy to translate sentences 'into and out of the foreign language' (Richards and Rodgers, 2014, p. 6). The second approach is the audiolingual method, which is also known as the Army Intensive Method (AIM). It was developed in the mid-1940s and shifted the focus of the second language classroom from learning grammatical

structures to emphasise speaking accuracy. Under this approach, second language acquisition became a 'process of habit formation' achieved through controlled listening practice, structured repetition and memorisation of dialogues and statements. The aim was to develop all four skills with particular emphasis on speaking to achieve full linguistic performance (Richards and Rodgers, 2014, p. 55).

It will be clear from these admittedly brief accounts of the field that student engagement is not prioritised in either of these approaches and that it would be difficult to align either with the meaningful collaboration or processes of active learning that are expected in contemporary UK HE settings. In such settings, the model with which most IWLP practitioners would identify is that of communicative language teaching (CLT), which represents a paradigm shift from form to function, focusing on 'communicative proficiency' as opposed to 'mastering of structures' (Liu and Shi, 2007). Within this context, communicative competence is seen as the main aim of language teaching (Hall, 2017) and such competence is typically pursued through teaching that provides meaningful context to learning and high levels of student collaboration. For the purposes of this study, it is important to note that the flipped classroom approach is most easily understood as simply facilitating communicative language teaching in these terms when class contact time is insufficient for achieve the same goals.

A detailed examination of the different methods used in language teaching is beyond the scope of this study. However, it is important to note at this point that it would be grossly misleading to imply a one-to-one correspondence between a particular approach, even Communicative

Language Teaching, and the flipped classroom. The general trend in language teaching since the 1990s has been towards an acceptance that language teaching methods represent a combination of 'good practices' that can be adapted according to teaching and learning needs (Hall, 2017). Writing at an early point in this change of emphasis, Prabhu (1990) saw the pursuit of an idealized method as being simply 'illogical'. At a later point, Kumaravadivelu (2006) described the resulting consensus as '[p]ostmethod' and argued for recognition of the fact that language teachers use and adapt different approaches based on their teaching and learning contexts as well as their own beliefs.

At the most general level, and this is the point at which language pedagogy, the UK HE policy context and the flipped classroom approach appear to align, there is always an idea of directed purpose. Thus Reeve *et al.* (2004, p. 16) suggest that student engagement represents student participation in 'educationally purposeful activities'. But there are also questions of how effective and measurable such activities are, and a key dimension to this need to evaluate is where the activities take place and how they are structured. For example, Carini *et al.* (2006, p. 45) define student engagement as 'participation in educationally effective practices, both inside and outside the classroom, which leads to a range of measurable outcomes'. Picking up on the separate idea contained in this definition that student engagement is not spatially defined, Günüç and Kuzu (2014, p. 588) argue for a more holistic and qualitative definition, one that includes 'the quality and quantity of students' psychological, cognitive, emotional and behavioural

reactions to the learning process as well as to in-class/out-of-class academic and social activities’.

The key point arising from this definition is that engagement and how it is measured makes it the responsibility of practitioners, irrespective of where and how it is taking place. This, at least in the context of changing resources and teaching expectations, has the potential to create ambiguity, uncertainty and pressure for professionals, who become responsible for negotiating the impact of sector-wide changes on their immediate environment without necessarily having a great deal of control over that environment. To relate this idea back to language pedagogy and work of language practitioners, if class time is significantly reduced, then quite clearly a practitioner will have to rethink how students are engaged in meaningful tasks and active learning in new spaces in which they, as teacher, may not be directly present for the students.

#### **1.4.2 The Role of Practitioners**

As I noted in the introduction to Section 1.3, the idea of student engagement is underpinned by the constructivist assumption of student participation in ‘active’ and ‘collaborative’ learning experiences (Coates, 2007, p. 122). It is important to emphasise that such learning experiences do not happen of themselves but must be supported by academic staff and university learning communities to develop student educational experience and improve learning outcomes (*ibid.*). One could argue that this has always been the role of universities, although it has not necessarily always been explicitly articulated in these terms. It could also be argued that language practitioners, at least in the spatial location of the physical classroom, are well placed to demonstrate



these forms of learning experience because of the developments in language teaching methodology since the second world war (Richards and Rodgers, 2014).

In the current HE context, however, the overall focus of student engagement goes beyond the confines of traditional educational purposes. For example, it now also focuses on increasing student 'abilities to *learn how to learn* or to become lifelong learners in a knowledge-based society' (Taylor and Parsons, 2011, p. 4). Thus, from a practitioner's perspective, student engagement has become more than just a 'strategy' for enhancing student learning and improving their educational achievement – the issue of measurable educational effectiveness. It has become a more pervasive indicator of personal development and overall satisfaction with their learning experience (Luen, 2012, p. 3). In other words, it has come to be used as a measure of whether an institution has transformed its primary stakeholders in ways that they and society deem useful. In terms of language teaching, and more specifically language teaching on an IWLP, this is much more difficult to demonstrate. On the one hand, students are not fully inducted into the norms of the discipline and there is no intention that they should become specialists; and, on the other hand, there is a reduced resource for achieving benchmarked learning outcomes, which are defined largely in terms of narrow definitions of linguistic and communicative competence.

Against this backdrop of developing a learning culture, supporting student engagement requires more than just 'caring and supporting relationships, sense of respect, fairness, trust and a strong disciplinary climate' (Luen, 2012, p. 5). Although these wider aspects of the educational experience

are very important, there is a specific pedagogic dimension that requires further consideration. In this context, several empirical studies have attempted to address the implications of student engagement specifically for learning and teaching policies and practices within the current HE context. Their aim has been to identify optimal strategies and best practices for achieving high levels of student engagement within disciplinary parameters. However, I am not aware of any work that considers how student engagement, understood as the development of a learning culture, for non-specialists learning language as part of an elective module might best be approached.

As I indicated above, in developing the strategies for engagement practitioners have to mediate an arena of conflicting professional demands. This conflict finds particular focus in the tension between, on the one hand, a neoliberal paradigm and the demands it makes on their practices; and, on the other, the reduced resources and support available to them to face those challenges. As in many sectors that have been subject to market forces, technology has often been the first port of call in Higher Education when attempts are made to negotiate the conflicting pressures of increasing demands and limited resources. My own use of a VLE and interest in developing approaches to support online language learning when faced with substantive cuts to class contact time is but one example of this.

### ***1.4.3 Technology as a Solution***

Shroff and Vogel (2009) note that educational technologies namely, those technologies that facilitate and support the remodelling of learning instruction, have become an integral part of learning and teaching in UK HE. More

generally, researchers have highlighted the fundamental role played by rapid advancements in educational technologies in negotiating changes in the demographics and landscape of teaching and learning in UK HE. In this context, a number of national surveys and studies have investigated specifically how technology has been integrated and developed in UK Higher Education to support learning and teaching. One example, discussed by Walker *et al.* (2016), is the survey of the Universities and Colleges Information Systems Association (UCISA), which reports that, in the past 15 years, educational technology is being increasingly used as a platform to disseminate knowledge and facilitate the delivery of innovative teaching and learning approaches. In the last decade in particular educational technologies have been extensively used across the UK educational institutions and have been used to cater for the learning needs of today's millennial student, those born in the age of the internet.

Prensky (2001), for example, has described these students as 'digital natives' or 'digital immigrants' whilst Oblinger (2005) refers to them as the 'Net Generation'. On one level, these labels highlight the ubiquitous role played by technology in the lives of these students from an early age (Shroff and Vogel, 2009). However, any assumption that this experience translates directly to the effective use of digital tools in a learning environment is naïve and these terms have been widely critiqued (Strecker *et al.*, 2018). From the perspective of students, one can understand that the digitalisation of all their experience can contribute to a sense that any use of technology is analogous to the extension of a language in which they are already fluent. One consequence of this is that any experiences, including those of formal education, which are not

encountered in ways that reflect the use of technology in everyday life is potentially encountered as a disruptor of identity and agency. From the perspective of practitioners, there is also a need to understand what it means to be pedagogically fluent in the language of technology, not just in order to understand what students can and cannot do, or whether they all share the same level of fluency, but, more importantly, to understand how educational principles can be performed through technology and when the two may be in conflict.

The widespread availability of commercial language learning software means the debate about role of technology in language learning has a particular significance in my disciplinary arena. This is not because there has been any serious suggestion (at least, not one of which I am aware) that it offers a credible alternative to credited university language learning, but because it highlights the dangers of seeing technology as a solution to a resource problem without reference to the quality of the underlying pedagogy or the educational context, and without reference to the different and complex roles technology may play in supporting different forms and stages of learning. In other words, technological approaches to language learning may draw on advances in language teaching methodology, but they do not situate language learning within the academic infrastructure associated with a Higher Education learning environment as it has been redefined in an age of reform.

#### ***1.4.4 Technology and Effective Pedagogy***

Notwithstanding my comments above, various studies report the benefits of educational technology in HE settings. These include but are not limited to:

self-paced learning; improved time management and enhanced learner autonomy; better engagement of students; improved knowledge retention; provision of skills necessary for the digital future; and catering for disabled and absent students (Shroff and Vogel, 2009). By way of contrast, some studies have highlighted several drawbacks to this technological paradigm, including occasional technical faults and the high cost of maintenance and staff training. Some researchers further claim that technology may be a source of distraction for some learners (Bruder, 2014), a point which links back to the question of whether all 'digital natives' are equipped to use technology to support their own learning. If the use of educational technology has become more widespread in HE, it is generally understood that the use of technology in itself is insufficient to create an engaging learning environment (Laurillard, 2002). Establishing a positive learning experience, in the sense imagined by the UK HE reform agenda, involves more than merely using different forms of technology to deliver the learning content or satisfy stakeholders: technology is a tool rather than an end in itself. With this caveat in mind, educators have, however, investigated how to adopt innovative student-centred teaching and learning approaches that harness the benefits of technology, facilitate a stimulating learning environment and further capitalise on (reduced or potentially reducible) in-class contact time.

Specific examples of this kind of approach, which are briefly introduced at this early point because of their central relevance to this study, include blended learning and the flipped classroom. Common to both these teaching approaches is that they incorporate in-class and technologically facilitated forms of educational interaction. They also share an assumption that some

aspects of the learning process fit better with technology than others and may enhance aspects of independent learning. For blended learning, the online aspect of the course complements the in-class interaction, whereas the flipped classroom implies a more fundamental reconstruction of a teaching and learning process. The distinction between the two is often approached in terms of the measurable effectiveness of the respective approaches. As Little (2015, p. 265) notes, the flipped classroom ‘reverse[s] the traditional order of events in mainstream educational teaching delivery’, expecting students to undertake rudimentary learning prior to class in order to allow class time to be utilised for more complex activities. By structuring learning in this way and using technology to support the earlier stage of learning, the flipped classroom is perceived by its supporters to allow for the more effective use of class time. It is primarily this aspect of the flipped classroom, and the fact that it is an overall pedagogic approach for educational interactions rather than a specific form or use of technology, that made it attractive in the context in which I worked at the time of this study.

## **1.5 Rationale for and Aims of the Study**

The starting point for this investigation was an earlier piece of work which looked at how advanced Arabic language students studying in a UK HE setting responded to their experience of a flipped classroom (Ahmed, 2018a). This earlier study also questioned whether the flipped classroom enhanced advanced Arabic students’ learning in this context. The primary themes of the study were student autonomy, collaboration and engagement and the aim was to conduct an in-depth study of the students’ response to their flipped learning

experience in these terms. The study was limited by a number of factors. Not only was I researching the impact of my own teaching, the students were all drawn from one grade of one language at one institution and only the student perspective was considered.

The aims of this follow-up study were to examine how a number of UK HE language practitioners designed and implemented the flipped classroom in the context of IWLP delivery of foreign language teaching. This aspect of the design represented an expansion of the possible data for analysis, which was drawn from a number of HEIs. I also, intentionally, excluded my own practice and therefore gave up my position as an insider researcher in order to gain a new perspective on how the flipped classroom was being used in professional settings comparable to my own. An important reason for this potentially comparative dimension was that I had become aware in my earlier research of significant variability in how HE practitioners understood the flipped classroom. This related not only to their depth of familiarity with relevant literature, but also how the approach connected with pedagogic norms and practices within their discipline and how they situated it within the wider context of the evaluation of UK HE values and purpose in light of sector reforms.

A further development in the focus of the research was that this new investigation was designed to consider both practitioners and students' perspectives, a shift which was particularly important for understanding the institutional and professional contexts in which decisions about flipped classroom implementation were made and how they were received. In terms of the practitioner perspective, which was a new element of the research, the investigation focused on their understanding of the pedagogy and the

challenges that affected their practice and how these related to an institutional context. From the student perspectives, the investigation focused on how students understood their learning experience in the flipped classroom. This represented a shift from the earlier study, which had a greater emphasis simply on how the teaching was received. More widely, the study sought to identify principles that would help deal with the difficulties UK HE language practitioners experienced in deciding how to use the flipped classroom within the current sector context.

Three research questions guided the study, which are presented formally below:

**Question 1:** How do the language practitioners included in the sample design and implement the flipped classroom?

**Question 2:** What drives language practitioners to implement the flipped classroom?

**Question 3:** What are the main challenges language practitioners face when implementing the flipped classroom?

## **1.6 Organisation of this Study**

My investigation of flipped classroom implementation on IWLPs in the UK HE sector is organised as follows. In Chapter 2, I review the literature on the flipped classroom, focusing in particular on the pedagogy associated with constructivism. In Chapter 3, I present my research design by reference to its philosophical orientation and describe the methodology I used to collect and analyse data. The findings are presented in Chapter 4, which is organised



according to the major thematic strands that emerged from the analysis. In the discussion and conclusion in Chapter 5, I relate the findings set out in Chapter 4 to my original research questions and to my professional practice, and outline areas for future research.

## **CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Introduction**

In the previous chapter, I presented a picture of the UK HE context which foregrounded the tensions between the imperative to develop a learning culture that is perceived to serve the needs of students in the modern world and the processes of marketisation that, at very least, bring into question traditional academic values. An important aspect of these tensions is the sense of paradox that they can create; for example, how language learning is both valued and devalued at the same time. In more general terms, these sector-wide developments have been accompanied by a rise in the use of technology for educational purposes and an increase in pedagogic experimentation, the motivations for which are often uncertain, complex and, in an institutional sense, unsystematic. It is against this somewhat chaotic backdrop of rapid change that interest in the flipped classroom has proliferated.

My review of the literature on the flipped classroom begins with a discussion of the variant and sometimes conflicting definitions of the approach and how they relate to its recent history. I then consider key issues arising in the literature, focusing on the quality of the research that has been undertaken in comparison with its volume and, more specifically, the extent to which the approach has been subject to adequate evaluation. To support my investigation of the research questions identified at the end of Chapter 1, I then discuss the flipped classroom literature from the perspective of implementation challenges and perceptions of its effectiveness. This is followed by a discussion of the wider theoretical framework in which flipped learning can be

contextualised and the implications for practitioners considered. Finally, I consider the knowledge gap identified through this review, namely the limited empirical studies with evaluation of discipline-specific implementations as their focus, that motivated my investigation. In general terms, the discussion below marks a shift from the broad sector context discussed in Chapter 1 to the specifics of the flipped classroom. It also highlights those areas of learning theories most relevant to the analysis of data in Chapters 4 and 5.

## **2.2 Beyond Definitions**

One of the functions of a definition is to orientate the reader. If one starts from this perspective, the form of the definition proposed by Ireri and Omwenga (2016, p. 1) is perhaps the most useful. They define the approach in broad terms by reference to the acronym “FLIP” where ‘F stands for Flexible environment, L for Learning culture, I for Intentional content and P for Professional educator. It will be clear from this definition that it is not intended to offer specific guidance to practitioners interested in adopting or adapting a flipped classroom; rather it captures aspects of an approach that may take many forms. At this level of generality, the flipped classroom is to be understood as a non-conventional student-centred approach to teaching that has its roots in constructivist theories of learning and recognizes the explicit role of a practitioner in directing and organizing the learning experience.

The flipped classroom is also known by other names; these include the ‘Inverted Classroom’, ‘Classroom Flip’, ‘Just-in-Time Teaching’ and ‘Reverse Instruction’ (Baker, 2000; Lage *et al.*, 2000; Novak, 2011; Mason *et al.*, 2013). It will be clear from the focus of these terms, that something more specific than

the acronym proposed by Ileri and Omwenga (2016) is intended. The nomenclature identifies a teaching approach with one or more specific delivery formats that a teacher might emulate rather than a generally unconventional approach. In this more specific model, the flipped classroom is typically understood as a type of blended learning, the broader approach under which it is subsumed because it uses face-to-face delivery in the form of class contact hours alongside digital media and educational technology (Bliuc *et al.*, 2007).

As I noted in Section 1.3.4 above, what differentiates the flipped classroom from blended learning in an unspecific sense is the reversal of the conventional sequence of teaching and learning practices. This is also what is highlighted in the alternative names for the approach discussed briefly in the paragraph above, but not explicitly formulated in the FLIP acronym. In line with this understanding of sequence and learning culture, material is no longer formally introduced and possibly practised in class and developed or mastered after class. Rather, the flipped classroom provides a range of web-based activities or online materials that students prepare and engage in independently of the teacher before class. They are then exposed to group-based, student-centred activities inside the classroom, with the teacher facilitating learning at that point rather than delivering explicit content. The motivations for a practitioner to take such a step vary from an interest in enacting certain pedagogic values, typically those embedded in constructivist theories of learning, to attempts at addressing student absenteeism (e.g. Bergmann, 2012).

At this point, it is important to stress that it is the changing role of the practitioner and the different nature of the learning in and outside class (the

'environment' and 'culture' identified in the FLIP acronym) that typifies the flipped classroom approach, and not simply the formal inversion of a learning sequence. In this sense, the flipped classroom 'represents an expansion of the curriculum, rather than a mere arrangement of activities' (Bishop and Verleger, 2013, p. 5). This formulation is helpful in foregrounding the decision-making of the practitioner (again, this connects to the 'professional' of the FLIP acronym) and the broadening of learning culture; however, it also returns the reader to a level of unspecific generality. This time, we can note that both the form of the approach and the underlying pedagogic principles are being discussed in isolation of any specific implementation and/or disciplinary context.

Karabulut *et al.* (2018) note that empirical studies have yet to form a consensus and offer a comprehensive definition of the flipped classroom that is useful for both researchers and practitioners. In this respect, attempts to define the approach in terms of its origins are, from the perspective of my investigation, unhelpful. There is, for example, an argument that the approach is not a 'new development' but has its roots in the educational practices of ancient Greece and should be understood in terms of an 'intentional pedagogic strategy' (Bergmann and Sams, 2014; Talbert, 2017). But it is not at all clear how the proposed connection to classical theories of education is of use when trying to make sense of the plural conceptualisations of the approach.

In contrast, several studies relate the origins of the flipped classroom to specific innovations connected to the advent of digital technology. For example, some studies attribute the approach to the work of Lage, Platt and Treglia (2000) who flipped their economics lectures, with the help of digital media, to deliver their courses in more stimulating and innovative ways and

make effective use of the limited contact time. Meanwhile, Hamdan *et al.*, (2013) suggest the approach is more widely credited to Bergmann and Sams (2012), who flipped their chemistry classes to deliver the learning content via video recordings outside the classroom. In both these cases, however, it is also difficult to see how the diversity of ways and means by which the flipped classroom is implemented is adequately explained by reference to the situations in which it originated.

Beyond the interest in origins, the literature written about the flipped classroom shows a lack of consensus over what the approach really means. Arguably, this is the root cause of a proliferation of definitions that are either too broad or too narrow, overly prescriptive or insufficiently grounded in theory. Although having a broad conception of the approach can be beneficial, as I have argued in the case of the FLIP acronym, when coupled with a multiplicity of different definitions, this has specific implications for conducting research, particularly investigation of the diversity of what are presented or understood as implementations of the flipped classroom. Thus Talbert (2017, p. 1) maintains the wide range of loose definitions of the flipped classroom reflect 'too many assumptions for the research to be generalisable and the resulting practice to be replicable'. It is not just that some of these definitions lack depth and are insufficiently detailed to frame the approach's fundamental features; rather, the lack of coherence or stability actively obstructs future studies.

Whilst the lack of a standard definition is often perceived to be problematic, as it can mean there is little or no solid base for future research to build on, it is possible to navigate a course through these ambiguities. But to do this, one needs to focus on implementations that are contextualised in

the pedagogic specifics of a discipline, which has not hitherto been the case: there have been too many attempts to generalise from a range of what are, potentially at least, pedagogically unrelated examples. What I mean by this is that if one characterises the flipped classroom in terms of, for example, the decisions a practitioner takes and the learning culture that is established, the abstraction of an all-encompassing definition is less likely to obscure what is taking place or how it is understood provided these ideas are applied within a given disciplinary context. In other words, the problems of defining the flipped classroom lie in the fact that the definitions are often written without reference to the specifics of a clearly defined disciplinary situation, such as that I outlined for language teaching in Section 1.4 above.

### **2.3 Quality and Depth – A Key Issue**

The concern with definitions is also indicative of an underlying problem in the literature – the quality of the research presented and how it is discussed – and this is of some importance in understanding the tensions in the varied discussions of the approach. It is very clear that some of the studies about the flipped classroom, although published in peer-reviewed journals, lack depth and suffer from a range of methodological and theoretical shortcomings. Talbert (2018, p. 1), for example, notes the very large number of studies discussing the flipped classroom but characterises many as demonstrating ‘lots of heart and enthusiasm but lacking in professional quality’. That there is a large volume of published work about the flipped classroom, conducted in many disciplinary areas, is clearly established. However, the volume of work

is less important than the tensions that cut across discussions, which the literature implicitly suggests need to be understood in historical terms.

Some of the studies into the flipped classroom date back several decades; for example, the work of Anderson (1975), Bennett and Desforges, (1985), Byrne (1988), Walvoord and Anderson (1998) and Deller (1990). But it is almost certainly the rapid advancements in technology and the uses of technology in education that have led to proliferation of flipped classroom implementations and research of the phenomenon. This, it is argued, is not a result of technology *per se*, but is seen as a consequence of the fact that the teacher is no longer the sole source of knowledge in a digital age. Thus, traditional teacher-centred approaches no longer cater for the learning needs or preferences of the 'net generation' students for whom technology is an integral part of their daily lives (Prensky, 2001; Fisher and Baird, 2009; Wang and Heffernan, 2010; Evans, 2011; Richter and McPherson, 2012; Li and Fu, 2013; Furini, 2014; Smith *et al.*, 2020).

Against the backdrop of these developments, the technological advancements specifically in the past two decades, coupled with the increasing availability of the internet, have contributed to the rise in the flipped classroom's popularity among educators (Talbert, 2012; Davies *et al.*, 2013; Halili and Zainuddin, 2015; Sezer, 2017). This increased popularity has, in turn, resulted in a significant increase in the number of academic and non-academic publications written since 2012 with the highest number of peer-reviewed papers evidenced in the year 2017. Commenting on this dramatic increase in papers, Talbert (2018) notes that studies about the flipped



classroom have grown at such a rate that those written in the year 2016 may soon themselves be considered out of date.

However, quantity is no guarantee of quality, and inconclusive statements and factual inaccuracies combine to create a picture of an area of research that is of generally uneven value. For example, while Garrison and Vaughan (2008), Bonk and Graham (2012) and Gross *et al.* (2015) all recognize the flipped classroom as an 'old' concept, Bishop and Verleger (2013), Love *et al.* (2014) and Naccarato and Karakok (2015) suggest that the approach is entirely 'new' and a 'recent' teaching strategy. Of themselves, contradictory statements in peer-reviewed studies published within a close time span can be evidence of a healthy debate, but the lack of consensus on fundamental issues can also be unhelpful to researchers and practitioners alike.

One such issue is that of the social and historical contextualisation of the flipped classroom. Some studies acknowledge the approach's recent history and situate its current popularity in the context of technological developments and the kinds of socio-economic considerations which I discussed in detail in Chapter 1. Yet other studies completely ignore both the approach's background and the broader context, as if the interest they had observed in the flipped classroom had arisen in a vacuum. As well as undermining the contextual implications of their findings, the nature of this approach suggests that these studies have been conducted in isolation of the larger volume of research into the approach. When, for example, Bishop and Verleger (2013), Jensen *et al.* (2014) and Abeysekera and Dawson (2015) all claim the flipped classroom is under-researched and under-evaluated, a

statement that runs contrary to the large number of publications in this area, their remarks are perhaps best understood by reference to the limited quality of some of the work undertaken and a lack of depth overall in the field.

## **2.4. Implementation Challenges**

Whilst a general definition has proven elusive, and the quality of research is often uncertain, the literature is generally consistent that: a) a flipped classroom involves a change to what is typically understood as a conventional sequence of learning; and b) technology is involved in making that change possible. I now focus in greater detail on these two aspects of the approach, linking my discussion to the UK HE sector context outlined in Chapter 1 and the implications for practitioners and students, which will be of relevance to defining the knowledge gap that motivates this study and the methodological design set out in Chapter 3.

### **2.4.1 Learning Sequence**

It is common in the literature to find statements to the effect that the flipped classroom involves an inversion or reversal of a conventional learning process. What is less obvious is that these statements differ in how they conceptualise this change, often in ways that are subtly unspecific. For example, Lage *et al.* (2000, p. 32) describe the approach as ‘events that have traditionally taken place inside the classroom now take place outside the classroom and vice versa’. Here the focus is on the learning “event”, an abstract unit that allows learning to be moved between locations, at least one of which is clearly

defined. But, more problematically, there is no reference to any change in learning culture; to the decision-making of a practitioner; or to the nature of the flexibility that is envisaged in the learning process.

In other words, the idea of delivering and embedding conceptual content is more prominent. Strayer (2012, p. 171) describes the approach as one that shifts 'the lectures outside the classroom and [uses] learning activities to move practice with concepts inside the classroom'. Here it is a specific form of learning event, the lecture, that is moved, and a contextually undefined form of learning ("activities", "practice") that replaces it. Again, there is no reference to any change in learning culture, decision-making or professional demands, though other writers do make reference to an associated 'instructional methodology' (Little, 2015, p. 265).

A third description, provided by Roach (2014, p. 75), identifies the flipped classroom in terms of a learning process that is flipped 'from its traditional scheme'. This time, it is the idea of a scheme of work that is most prominent, and the implicit distinction is between historical convention and modern innovation: a practitioner is experimenting, though to what end and for what purpose is not clearly explained. Moreover, the implications of such experimentation – for both students and practitioners – are not considered. For example, questions that might be considered include the preparations necessary for the experiment to succeed or the actions to be taken in the event of a perceived failure or inadequacy in the evaluation of the teaching and learning.

It will be clear from these examples that the mere identification of a principle of inversion – a common trait in discussion of the flipped classroom –

is unlikely to capture the potential complexity, diversity and sophistication of the pedagogic practices that may be subsumed under a flipped implementation. More specifically, it fails to capture the shifting and potentially uncertain role(s) played by practitioners and negotiated with students in the design and implementation of the learning process. In this respect, questioning whether students being asked to prepare material before class is anything different to a long history of educational practice (e.g. Berret, 2012; Talbert, 2012; Tucker, 2012; Lo and Hew, 2017) is to miss the point. As Mason *et al.* (2013, p. 3) argue, the flipped classroom 'is more than simply requiring students to read the text before coming to class'.

For example, an important point of difference between traditional practice and the flipped classroom is that it is a fundamental requirement for the flipped classroom to work that students complete their pre-class work. Without this, the wider approach to learning that it envisages will not be sustainable (Critz and Knight, 2013). This is not the case with standard pre-class reading, which is typically intended to facilitate understanding of content that will be delivered in a conventional lecture format. Under that approach, it is perfectly possible to deliver a lecture, or even run a seminar, where a significant number of students have not completed pre-class reading to the expected or ideal level of detail.

In contrast, the pre-class learning content in the flipped classroom typically revolves around relatively basic knowledge and activities; for example, recalling simple facts and explaining or organizing basic concepts, activities students can be anticipated to process independently of the teacher (Talbert, 2018). It is important to stress that the intention behind these activities

is not to facilitate comprehension of content that will be presented more thoroughly or more rigorously in class, but to develop a level of fluency and understanding that will allow students to engage independently, or at least with minimal guidance, in a more advanced and more social level of task.

It is a given in all discussion of the flipped classroom that in-class work involves students working actively at a higher level; for example, applying the newly acquired knowledge to problem solving activities and finding connections between the previously prepared material. Moreover, students work on class activities either in pairs or groups so that the learning is more obviously socially constructed. In class, the shifting role of the teacher is to provide guidance on a relatively level playing field – the power dimension of a purely didactic approach is set to one side. The underlying principle in the sequencing of learning in the flipped classroom may thus be restated as the intention to deliver direct instruction, partly or fully, through means that rely on technology and to do so in order to free class time for group work and hands-on activities (Giannakos *et al.*, 2014).

My aim in this subsection has been to review and examine in greater detail the idea of an inverted sequence that is often portrayed as typical of the flipped classroom. One problem with simplistic statements of this principle is that they obscure the changing roles of students and practitioners, rendering a potentially complex process of negotiation and ambiguity invisible. On closer investigation, the pedagogic significance of the reversal of sequence lies in what it aims to achieve – higher levels of understanding and more active and socially facilitated learning in class. However, one problem that has persisted throughout this discussion, perhaps inevitably, is the abstraction of learning

from a disciplinary context, signalled by the repeated reference in the literature to “activities”.

### **2.4.2 Technology**

To a large extent, the main elements of the discussion about sequence set out above apply equally to the treatment and understanding of the role of technology in the flipped classroom. By this I mean that there is a tendency to define the approach in terms of how it uses technology without more detailed consideration of what role the technology is playing in specific implementations: the decisions a practitioner makes; how different disciplines use technology; or the intent behind particular uses of technology. Nor is there much of an attempt to consider how technology influences the learning experience of students beyond the general connections that are made to a wider digital culture. There is, moreover, a tendency to focus on video as the one use of technology that defines the flipped classroom, a point which I discuss in greater detail below.

It is useful to start once again with points of definition. As part of their attempts to define the flipped classroom, some scholars highlight the role technology plays in the way that it is assumed to work and reflect this aspect of the learning process in their definitions. For example, Hamdan *et al.* (2013, p. 4) note that the flipped classroom is a pedagogic approach that integrates technologies and that it does so for a general purpose of individualising learning: to ‘shift direct learning out of the large group learning space and move it into the individual learning space’. In this connection, it is worth noting that by referring to ‘direct learning’ the authors are implicitly making the same points

about sequence rehearsed above: familiarity with concepts is developed before class; high levels of understanding in class. How the direct learning is individualised through technology is discussed later in this section.

An important aspect of the popularity in and interest generated by the flipped classroom is the perception that it is closely connected to the use of technology for educational purposes. For example, Berret (2012) and Lo and Hew (2017) argue that the approach's popularity is primarily due to technological advances in the recent past and the increased reliability of internet connections. This, they argue, makes the approach cost effective and more efficient in terms of saving class time, both points which may make the flipped classroom an attractive proposition to educators and institutions in the context of the financial pressures on specific disciplines described in Chapter 1. Lo and Hew (2017) further stress that instructional videos or audios are 'two necessary elements' of the flipped classroom. In similar vein, Bishop and Verleger (2013) restrict their definition of what constitute a flipped classroom specifically to those designs that employ videos to present the out-of-class activities. Videos, it is argued, allow practitioners to present and elaborate new concepts out of class and, in line with ideas about sequence, facilitate the relocation of direct learning into the individual space (Smith, 2013; Battaglia and Kaya, 2015).

It is probable that the current popularity of the approach is at least partly due to its association with technology. It is also clear from the discussion in the literature that the use of technology in a general sense is motivated by an overarching pedagogic goal that is coherent with the ideas about resequencing learning as part of a constructivist theory of learning. However, it is important

to remember that technology is a means to an end, and the restrictive qualification of some writers that only the use of videos defines a flipped classroom implementation is at odds with the ethos of a flexible learning environment that arguably lies at the core of the approach. It is also a very odd form of education that limits the choices open to a practitioner and associates learning content with a single mode of delivery.

In support of this position, numerous researchers have presented evidence to the effect that the idea that the use of video is both essential and necessary is wholly unsupported. Schneider and Blikstein (2015, p. 1) put this quite bluntly, reminding us that ‘sometimes our intuitions about “what works” are simply dead wrong’. Some have even questioned whether videos are effective in that ways that have been assumed. For example, Plotnikoff (2013) reports some limitations of pre-class videos, while Kettle (2013), DeSantis *et al.* (2015) and Bhagat *et al.* (2016), all report students’ dissatisfaction with the out-of-class videos: their use was described by students as being the ‘least enjoyable activity’ and even ‘unhelpful’.

As further evidence that it is the particulars of specific implementations that need to be looked at in greater detail, I note the study of Liou *et al.* (2016), in which students report frustration for not being able to receive instant answers for queries they had while watching pre-class material. This kind of comment is, at very least, suggestive of a poorly thought through implementation of the flipped classroom. What is not clear from this kind of study is where the problem lies. It may relate to the learning culture of the students; in other words, the teacher may have needed to prepare the students for a new and different set of learning expectations to those with which they



were previously familiar. It may also relate to the decision-making of the teacher in the design of the learning process, from pre- to post-class. Or it may have been a combination of factors obscured by an unhealthy commitment to a particular form of technology.

Developing this idea of focusing on specifics further, I note that in their extensive review of the flipped classroom Akçayır and Akçayır (2018) report that the use of videos in the flipped classroom is not straightforward and poses a range of challenges to both practitioners and students. For practitioners, the process of preparing or selecting videos, requires considerable time commitment and increases their workload. It is essential that the practitioners have certain pedagogical skills and technical knowledge and competency to develop good quality materials. Some studies report that poor quality videos, have a negative impact on student learning outcomes as well as their learning experiences (He *et al.*, 2016).

Other studies discuss a range of considerations which practitioners should take into account when preparing videos (for example, Wells *et al.*, 2012; Mason *et al.*, 2013; Everett *et al.*, 2014; Battaglia and Kaya, 2015; Giuliano and Moser, 2016; He *et al.*, 2016; Attaran and Zainuddin, 2016; Halili and Zainuddin, 2016). The specific details of these considerations are outside the focus of this study, which is focused on a disciplinary-specific implementation of the flipped classroom. Stepping back from the detail of which forms of technology are used in the flipped classroom, I would argue more broadly that the literature has failed to contextualise the relationship of technology to the pedagogy of the flipped classroom in ways that allow for meaningful comparisons across what may be diverse disciplinary practices.

## **2.5 Effectiveness**

In Section 2.4 above I considered two aspects of the flipped classroom in greater detail but without reference to the debate around the approach's effectiveness: the advantages it offers practitioners and students and its limitations. In the discussion that follows I consider these aspects of the literature, focusing increasingly on the connections between flipped classroom pedagogy and theories of learning. This, in turn, paves the way for a more detailed discussion of those aspects of the theoretical framework associated with the flipped classroom which are of most relevance to my investigation.

### **2.5.1 Advantages**

There is a broad consensus in academic literature on the effectiveness of the approach in terms of student learning performance (Bhagat *et al.*, 2016; Wanner and Palmer, 2015). Hamdan *et al.* (2013, p. 9) relate the effectiveness of the flipped classroom to its emphasis on 'student-centred learning' and the fact that a well-implemented flipped classroom helps students to become 'the agents of their own learning rather than the object of instruction'. Along the same lines, González-Gómez *et al.* (2016) and Huang and Hong (2016) note that the approach fosters student autonomy and allows for more opportunities of individualised learning. In more specific terms, key benefits reported in several studies include the claims that it enhances student engagement, namely the active participation of students in their learning, and improves student motivation, namely their willingness to prepare before class and invest

psychological energy in learning (Khanova *et al.*, 2015; Sahin *et al.*, 2015; Huang and Hong, 2016). One caveat that should be borne in mind when assessing the language in which these claims are reported, however, is whether it is the skill of the practitioners that ensure a specific implementation is effective rather than the approach *per se*.

Other benefits that are reported include the approach's effectiveness in enhancing class interaction, collaborative learning, deep learning, use of technology and student-centred classes (Attaran and Zainuddin, 2015; Sage and Sele, 2015; Foldnes, 2016). It will be clear from the previous discussion of definitions, sequence and technology that these benefits are the reasons why practitioners are interested in the formalities of the approach: it brings together diverse aspects of the learning agenda in one format. Yet other studies suggest the approach's benefits go beyond any learning of content; it also helps students to improve their professional skills for 'today's competitive global market and changing work environment' (Karabulut-Ilgü *et al.*, 2018). In the context of the HE reform agenda outlined in Chapter 1, these are obviously desirable traits for the approach to have and, by extension, use of the approach demonstrates a practitioner is engaging with that agenda.

One point that does need to be borne in mind, however, is that these benefits are not exclusive to the flipped classroom. Any student-centred class, even one that uses a conventional delivery format with or without some form of blended learning, should achieve some or all of these aims. Another way of interpreting the effectiveness of the flipped classroom is therefore that it is the student-centeredness inherent in the approach rather than the formalities of the approach itself that makes it effective. However, the flipped classroom

does have one dimension that is specific to it, namely its flexibility, which is achieved through the use of technology and (re)sequenced learning (Bergmann and Sams, 2012; He *et al.*, 2016). Looked at from this perspective, the flipped classroom does appear to facilitate student-centred learning in a general sense. Much more specifically, students benefit more from it by working on more demanding tasks in class with the help of the practitioner, which increases teacher-student interaction, group-based learning and in-class practice (Strayer, 2012; Tucker, 2012; Hamdan *et al.*, 2013).

Another way to understand these benefits is to consider them through the lens of time. Several studies identify the potential of the flipped classroom to maximise the use of limited class time as its key pedagogical contribution (Davies *et al.*, 2013; Mason *et al.*, 2013). This same argument has been made by both students and practitioners as the principal reason for their preferring the flipped classroom to the traditional classroom. It is worth considering just what this means from a student perspective. In a flipped classroom context, students have the opportunity to prepare thoroughly before class and to study the new learning content at their own pace and in their own time. Having repeated access to the learning content over a longer period can enhance learning, allowing students to take control of their learning and individualise how they learn to fit their other commitments. Absent students, slower learners, those with a disability or expressing certain learning preferences keep up to date with their learning because it is available to them outside the classroom environment (Galway *et al.*, 2014).

The efficient use of class time on which the approach is founded also has the effect of shifting 'the responsibility for learning on the students, builds

their sense of ownership and 'self-efficacy' over their self-directed learning and encourages them to 'work towards mastery of the materials' (O'Flaherty and Phillips, 2015, p. 86). Some studies maintain the flipped classroom offers a safe learning environment where stress and anxiety levels are noticeably reduced. This reflects the shift in the practitioner's role in the classroom from presenter to guide and helps to enhance the quality and quantity of student-student and student-practitioner class interaction. Within the flipped 'safe space', hesitant and shy students have more opportunities to actively engage with group activities, clarify understanding and receive individualised feedback (Bergmann and Sams, 2012; Roehl *et al.*, 2013; Talley and Scherer, 2013; King *et al.*, 2014; Vaughan, 2014; Zheng *et al.*, 2014; Gilboy *et al.*, 2015; Wanner and Palmer, 2015; Hardin and Koppenhaver, 2016).

### **2.5.2 Limitations**

Notwithstanding the benefits discussed in Section 2.5.1 above, and the comments about the proliferation of publications about the flipped classroom, empirical studies examining the approach's implementation and, more specifically, its effectiveness in improving student assessment performance have been limited. The limited number and range of studies in this area, and the discrepancies evident across the literature about the efficacy of the flipped classroom, have left the approach open to a wide range of criticisms (Bishop and Verleger, 2013). Love *et al.* (2013) pose one such criticism, questioning the approach's effectiveness when student achievement as measured by assessment is compared to achievement in a traditional classroom.

A potentially more serious criticism is posed by a randomised control trial conducted by Setren *et al.* (2019), which showed that flipped classroom teaching, at least in the format and disciplines used for the trial, privileged 'white, male, and high achieving students' (p. 1). However, it is crucial when considering these conclusions to look at the format of the flipped classroom, the disciplinary context and the depth of pedagogic thinking that went into design beyond the technical formalities of the trial. In this study, students were simply asked to view a video before the class and then undertook problem-solving exercises in class. As an indicator of the importance of student context and learning culture, one finding of interest from this study is that discipline specialists used the videos in ways that were different to non-specialists and potentially more efficacious. But this is a point, along with the wider questions of learning culture, that is not pursued by the authors with reference to any educational theory.

One way to approach this area of uncertainty about its effectiveness is to question whether the flipped classroom does deviate from traditional pedagogy as radically as is sometimes claimed. To put this in more concrete terms, one can ask the fundamental question as to whether, in typical uses of the flipped classroom, it is the variable of learning sequence that is the key variable when compared to other factors in the learning environment. But before considering this question, I will briefly outline the literature in support and against the efficacy of the approach.

It is important to note in this context that assessment performance forms one of the motivations for flipped classroom implementations. Equally, however, the assessment is typically designed to test the curriculum content

in a narrow sense and not necessarily to test the range of the learning characteristics of the flipped classroom for which the approach is promoted. Thus Enfield (2013) and Baepler *et al.* (2014) report the flipped classroom's positive impact on student examination scores and learning achievements. Similarly, Kim *et al.* (2014) note the approach's positive impact on students' formative assessment compared to the traditional classroom. This they relate to several factors, including: dedicating class time for student-centred hands-on activities instead of the teacher-centred lecture; students' pre-class preparation, which helps them to better understand the learning content; the effective manipulation and integration of technology. These are all features of the flipped classroom previously discussed in terms of its benefits (Halili and Zainuddin, 2016; Akçayır and Akçayır, 2018).

However, other studies question the flipped classroom's efficacy in improving student assessment scores and exam performance. For example, Kim *et al.* (2014) and Jensen *et al.* (2015) compare student learning achievement in a flipped to a traditional classroom and report no significant difference between the results of the two groups. That said, Kim *et al.* (2014) argue the flipped classroom promotes collaboration among students and Jensen *et al.* (2015) maintain that the advantage of the flipped classroom is in the integration of 'active learning strategies'. Active learning is mainly 'any instructional method that engages students in the learning process' and requires them 'to do meaningful learning activities and think about what they are doing' (Prince, 2004, p. 223).

Given these contrary indications about assessment outcomes and effective learning, one might ask whether designing and using a flipped

classroom is an effective use of resources. It would, for example, be possible to design a traditional class, supported by a blended approach and effective active learning strategies, rather than devoting time and resources to a full flipped classroom implementation. Indeed, this might be a more efficient use of a practitioner's time in the context of their wider workload. Kay and MacDonald (2016) make just such a suggestion, given that some studies report the approach as resource intensive compared to the requirements of a traditional classroom.

It is important to note that it is not the rearrangement of activities that creates additional demands, but the need to prepare for and contextualise the changing roles of students and practitioners for a flipped classroom implementation to be successful. Within the flipped classroom context, the practitioner assumes different roles and responsibilities to that in the traditional classroom. In a very "hands-on" way, the practitioner is responsible for the design and integration of the learning experience both inside and outside the classroom. To do this, practitioners require both understanding of the pedagogic principles and a level of competency to be able to set, communicate and manage the flipped environment. A key part of this is the requirement to design engaging content with clear guidelines for students to study before class and to plan the sequence so that students can make progress with the material independently of the teacher.

In this context, it is also crucial for practitioners to obtain an adequate level of technology competency and a sound understanding of how to integrate technology and pedagogy effectively. Hamdan *et al.* (2013, p. 6) note the approach requires practitioners to have a complex set of skills to manipulate



technology and, perhaps most crucially, to decide 'when and how to shift direct instruction from the group to the individual learning space'. Selecting or making engaging videos, for instance, of acceptable quality, appropriate length and accessible content can be a challenging task, particularly if there is lack of institutional support. Ensuring that students prepare before class is another key challenge that many practitioners face in the flipped classroom and, without sufficient investment in the learning culture, have little control over even when measures are put in place to guide and monitor engagement.

Studies by Wilson (2013) and Porcaro *et al.* (2016) report the approach can equally be challenging for students. They are now required to prepare the new learning material prior to class and to do so independently, a point which does come down to the cultural capital and learning culture of individual students. It can take students time to adapt to the new approach and find their bearings, which can be frustrating or discouraging for some. Other studies by Chen and Chen (2014) and Khanova *et al.*, (2015) report student dissatisfaction with the heavy workload and with the fact students cannot get immediate help or ask for clarification during their pre-class learning. One important point is that students taking introductory courses have found the flipped classroom too confusing because it requires certain prior 'basic skills' that foundation level students may lack (Strayer, 2012; Bishop and Verleger, 2013; Hardin and Koppenhaver, 2016). Other studies report student dissatisfaction with having to "teach themselves" the new content as opposed to being taught by the practitioners (Smith, 2013; Chen and Chen, 2014). They further perceived the flipped learning style as poor value for money and

question the significance of class meetings (Bishop and Verleger, 2013; Wilson, 2013; Jensen *et al.*, 2015; Khanova *et al.*, 2015).

What emerges from the literature's discussion of the limitations of the approach is that it is important to recognise that the flipped classroom does not spontaneously or naturally provide a successful learning experience. What it essentially provides is 'time' and 'space', both fundamental aspects of any learning experience. It is the practitioner's responsibility to use these elements effectively in order to design, structure and implement a successful learning experience inside and outside the classroom boundaries. However, if certain aspects including time are not used effectively, the learning experience would fail to support students, leading them to feel unsatisfied with their flipped learning experience or not engaging with it fully.

## **2.6 Theoretical Framework**

There are few studies in the flipped classroom literature that discuss the approach's theoretical foundations or give any sense of its overarching conceptual framework. Those studies which do treat the flipped classroom from a theoretical perspective are limited in terms of their detail and depth. It is common for these studies to acknowledge the complexity of the approach and note that it draws upon several key learning theories. A detailed discussion of the full range of theoretical connection is, however, beyond the scope of this study. What is more relevant for more investigation is the sense that the flipped classroom integrates theoretical ideas that are otherwise treated separately.

Thus Bishop and Verleger (2013, p. 1) note 'the [flipped classroom] represents a unique combination of learning theories once thought to be

incompatible' – an idea which underpins the development of a methodology for my investigation in Chapter 3 and is evidenced in the presentation of findings in Chapter 4. In this section of my literature review I focus on three of the theoretical principles that have had the most significant influence on the approach's design and implementation in order to pave the way for these later discussions. It is important to note that in making a selection of just three theoretical reference points, I have set aside others because they are of limited relevance to the design of my study or because they are too broad in scope.

For example, Cohen's (1987) principles of instructional alignment, which foreground the relative coherence of teaching from the learner's perspective, are relevant and helpful to flipped classroom design. However, for a study that is examining how highly experienced practitioners working in a professionally reflective HE environment implement the flipped classroom, the question of alignment would not be a productive perspective on the data. Experienced practitioners were unlikely to develop a flipped classroom that was incoherent in this design sense and other environmental factors, such as consumer attitudes or uses of technology, were likely to have a greater impact on the reception of the approach.

The theoretical reference points I identified as most relevant to my enquiry are Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development (ZPD) and his related concept of scaffolding, and Bloom's (1956) hierarchical arrangement of the learning process through a cognitive taxonomy. The work of both writers is rooted in social constructivism, which immediately connects their ideas to the principles of the flipped classroom, and I provide a brief introduction to the principles of social constructivist theory first.

### **2.6.1 Social Constructivist Theory**

Many studies argue the flipped classroom is 'founded upon a constructivist ideology' (Bishop and Verleger, 2013; Persky and McLaughlin, 2017). In an attempt to provide a brief and coherent summary of the theory of social constructivism, Mascolo and Fischer (2005, p. 1) define it as 'the philosophical and scientific position that knowledge arises through a process of active construction'. In describing how learning takes place, social constructivism thus stresses the importance of the social, cultural and collaborative dimensions of the learning process. In concrete disciplinary terms, this means that language learning has to be grounded in communication. In terms of my own disciplinary context and the focus of this investigation, communication also has to be the foundation of an effective language class.

The underlying assumption of a social constructivist learning environment is that collaborative student-centred interaction, within a meaningful context, is fundamental for learning to occur and for knowledge to develop (Mascolo and Fischer, 2005). This position, which is essentially epistemological in its stance, is closely aligned to the student-centred approach of the flipped classroom. In the flipped approach to learning, students are provided with a framework within which they can communicate and learn from each other and from the practitioner, within a meaningful context, and thereby develop their own meaning as part of a collaborative construction of knowledge.

### **2.6.2 Zone of Proximal Development and Scaffolding**

Social constructivist theory is indebted to the concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD), which Vygotsky (1978, p. 86) defined as:

The distance between the actual developmental level [of the learner] as determined through independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers.

Further to this definition, Vygotsky maintains that what we commonly understand as learning takes place in the ZPD, which represents the difference between what a learner can achieve independently and what they can achieve with the support of 'the more knowledgeable other', whether peers or teacher. This additional element to the concept, namely that 'the more knowledgeable other' may include peers, highlights the importance of social context to the student learning development and informs the ideas that define the flipped classroom learning environment. Creating a flipped interactive collaborative learning environment provides students with different levels of abilities with the opportunity to help each other, share experience and learn from one another and from the practitioner. Subsequently, this allows less capable students to develop their skills within their ZPD (McLeod, 2019).

Vygotsky is clear that proper support and guidance should be given to the learner in order to progress within the ZPD. This support is most effective when it matches the learner's needs and ability. It helps them to successfully accomplish activities that would be difficult for them to do independently. Support can be gradually withdrawn when it becomes unnecessary as the

learner develops their skills and the ability to complete the task independently (Vygotsky, 1978). This idea, referred to as 'scaffolding', is linked to the concept of ZPD and is considered one of the main characteristics of effective teaching. Scaffolding can include 'modelling a skill, providing hints or cues, and adapting material or activity' (McLeod, 2019). Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976, p. 90) define scaffolding as a process 'that enables a child or novice to solve a task or achieve a goal that would be beyond his unassisted efforts'. Within this context the teacher controls the difficult elements of the task that the learner cannot do, thereby allowing them to concentrate on the 'elements that are within [their] range of competence' (*ibid.*). In other words, the teacher constantly adjusts the activities according to the student's level of performance. This additional idea, that of learner performance, can be best understood within the levels of Bloom's cognitive taxonomy, which is discussed below. But it is also reflected in the sequencing of activities within a flipped learning environment: not only should the pre-class activities be scaffolded, but the pre-class activities themselves are also a form of scaffolding for learners to engage effectively in the in-class activities.

### **2.6.3 Bloom's Taxonomy**

Bloom's Taxonomy was first proposed by Bloom (1956) and subsequently revised by Anderson and Krathwohl (2001). The taxonomy has three domains; the cognitive 'knowledge-based domain'; the affective, 'attitudinal-based domain'; and the psychomotor or 'skills-based domain' (*ibid.*). The cognitive domain has received the most attention and has been used extensively in learning theory both to explain the learning process and to structure and

develop curriculum, activities, skills, assessments and learning objectives. It is defined by Talbert (2017) as 'way of categorising cognitive tasks in terms of their difficulty or complexity'. In similar vein, Forehand (2011, p. 4) emphasizes the hierarchical nature of Bloom's 'systematic classification of the processes of thinking and learning' in the cognitive domain and their organisation according to six levels.

These six levels are, in turn, divided into three that are categorised as 'lower-level thinking' and three referred to as 'higher level thinking'. The lower levels are known as 'knowledge', 'comprehension' and 'application'; the higher as 'analysis', 'synthesis' and 'evaluation'. This distinction is obviously relevant to flipped learning with its emphasis on a sequence: pre-class activities "naturally" seem to fit the lower levels of Bloom's cognitive domain; and in-class activities, at least in their aspiration, reflect the higher levels. However, it is worth noting that the taxonomy's cognitive domain has often been criticised for its hierarchical categorisation and the implication that the lower levels are less important than the higher (Tutkun *et al.*, 2012).

This criticism is perhaps most easily dealt with if one understands the hierarchical nature of Bloom's cognitive domain as being a 'cumulative hierarchical framework'. In other words, the notion of hierarchy implies a sequential element, one which requires that a student should achieve an earlier level of skill or ability before they progress to a more complex level (Talbert, 2019). This idea aligns well with the principles of scaffolding discussed in the previous section. However, it can equally be argued that classifying any cognitive tasks into one-dimensional levels both superficial and

reductive given the complex and interrelated cognitive processes involved in any form of learning.

Notwithstanding this objection, the taxonomy associated with the cognitive domain still provides a framework that is seen to be generally helpful for practitioners who wish to design and align the different components of the learning process; for example, the learning objectives, the instructions, the activities, the content, the curriculum and the assessments. It can also be helpful when practitioners wish to divide, order and sequence the learning objective and activities; for example, by using the taxonomy's levels to focus student learning at particular points in the process and to facilitate transitions from simpler to more complex tasks. Again, these ideas have obvious relevance to the flipped learning approach and the ideas about flexible environments and constructivism already discussed.

To consider how this is so, it is worth looking at the assumptions that surround a traditional learning environment. Some studies suggest that in many classrooms organised in terms of traditional instruction, practitioners assume students have little or no prior knowledge of the content and use contact time to introduce new knowledge, focusing in class on the lower-level thinking identified in Bloom's taxonomy. This prepares students to work on homework activities that requires a higher-level thinking, but this necessarily takes places outside of class with minimal or no access to the practitioner's guidance or the support of group collaboration. It is also possible that the journey from lower to higher levels of the taxonomy takes place over several lessons or a unit of work with earlier pieces of home and classwork continuing lower levels of practice before higher level activities are introduced. It should



be borne in mind that this is not necessarily what happens in every traditional classroom or with every group of students but is a presentation of traditional learning that allows flipped learning to explain how it is different.

Thus, when applying Bloom's taxonomy to a flipped classroom environment, the sequence of the taxonomy is maintained (lower precedes higher) but the order of learning environments is reversed (lower takes place outside of class, higher in-class). There is also an unarticulated assumption in brief and often formulaic presentations of the flipped classroom that this sequence of learning, from lower to higher, is consistently enacted within the unit of a single lesson. As the definitions of flipped learning set out, the approach assumes students work independently prior to class on structured activities, those that fit the lower levels of Bloom's taxonomy. In other words, there is an assumption that student's mastery of 'low order thinking skills', such as 'remembering' and 'understanding', can be achieved independently at home. Meanwhile, class time is facilitated by the practitioner to help students work collaboratively on more complex activities that fit into the higher levels of the taxonomy. Thus, class time can be used to achieve mastery of high order thinking levels, such as problem-solving and critical thinking, under the guidance and supervision of the practitioner (Talbert, 2017). It should be noted that this conceptualisation of the flipped learning environment makes no reference to the instructional role of, for example, on-line materials or the support and learning culture that surrounds the "independent" learning.

An elaboration of how Bloom's taxonomy and the flipped classroom may be used by practitioners in a more sophisticated way is provided by Talbert (2017). He proposes a flipped classroom learning framework

consisting of three stages. He also divides the taxonomy into three levels instead of the usual two. Under this approach, learning activities are divided into three phases: pre-class work, which includes 'remembering' and 'understanding' activities that are associated with the bottom third of the taxonomy; in-class work, which includes 'applying' and 'analysing' activities that fit into the middle third of the taxonomy; post-class independent work, which include 'evaluating' and 'creating' activities from the top third of the taxonomy. This third stage includes the most complex activities, ones that typically cannot be completed in class due to time limitations, which students have to complete at home (Talbert, 2017).

Dividing, structuring and framing the activities, design and implementation of the flipped classroom in terms of these three more clearly defined aspects of the learning process is helpful, both generally and more specifically in terms of the focus of this investigation. It provides the practitioner with a clearer image of the overall structure and the different stages of student work. Acquiring a focused perspective is necessary for the practitioner when designing activities, managing time and implementing each stage in the flipped classroom. Designing and setting activities with this framework in mind can also help to increase the practitioner's awareness and judgments when selecting activities for each stage. For instance, presenting students during the in-class stage with complex activities that fits into the top third or the bottom third of the taxonomy can be a frustrating experience for students and an ineffective use of class time and collaborative energy.

Bloom's taxonomy is thus perhaps most useful in highlighting how essential it is to choose the most appropriate activities for each stage of the

learning process to make best use of time both inside and outside the classroom. When practitioners are clear on the focus of the in-class time activities, the opportunity to mismanage class time becomes less likely. Furthermore, the division of activities according to the complexity of the cognitive demands of the task helps students to understand their learning responsibilities at the various stages and hence channel their time and energy more efficiently (Talbert, 2017). It can also be argued that within a successfully designed flipped environment, students' independent learning is an advantage, not just in developing them as learners but also in fulfilling a key objective of HE (Halili and Zainuddin, 2016; Akçayır and Akçayır, 2018).

## **2.7 Knowledge Gap**

Identifying the specific areas of a topic that have not been the subject of rigorous investigation is not always an easy task. In the case of the flipped classroom, when it is understood as a general pedagogic approach, this is made more difficult by a range of factors. Flipped classroom literature often suffers from conflicting definitions and generalisations and, despite the proliferation of papers in recent years, the quality of research is not always of a high standard. My literature search confirms the conclusion of three recent large-scale systematic reviews (conducted by Halili and Zainuddin (2016), Akçayır and Akçayır (2018) and Karabulut-Ilgu *et al.* (2018)), which is that most studies published about the flipped classroom focus on and confirm its perceived efficacy. However, this enthusiasm needs to be set against the fact that the most basic aspects of the approach are not clearly established. As Bishop and Verleger (2013, p. 5) noted:

Despite the buzz around the flipped classroom as an exciting new topic in educational research, there is a lack of consensus on what exactly the flipped classroom is, and there is also a limited amount of scholarly research on its effectiveness.

In terms of its implementation in HE settings, most studies that investigate the efficacy, impact and perceptions of practitioners or students of the flipped classroom have been descriptive accounts and are rarely informed by a rigorous theoretical framework. In discipline-specific terms, implementation of the approach has been under researched in many areas, including language teaching, particularly of non-European languages. Against this context of limited knowledge, the preliminary findings of the IFS (Ahmed, 2018a) encouraged me to conduct a further investigation, one that has greater depth and breadth and is informed by a more extensive review of the flipped classroom literature and the methodological challenges of investigating a relatively ill-defined phenomenon.

It will be clear from the research questions identified in Chapter 1, and the attention to institutional and sector context, that my enquiry represents a shift away from what the flipped classroom actually is and how effectively it works. My focus is rather on what practitioners actually do, how they understand their work, the challenges they encounter and how they learn from them. There is, inevitably, a formal pedagogic dimension to these questions, but it is important that I also emphasise at this point the relational dynamics that are present within teaching and learning structures created by flipped classroom implementations and the wider environments and cultures in which they are situated. These relationships include those of practitioner to students,

of practitioners and students to the UK HE context, or students to their own learning, and of practitioners to their institution.

## **CHAPTER 3 – RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS**

### **3.1 Introduction**

In the previous chapters I have outlined the political and pedagogic contexts to my interest in the application of the flipped classroom to language teaching in the UK HE sector. An important part of this initial orientation to my research questions was to move from questions about how the flipped classroom is defined and whether it is measurably effective to an examination of how and why practitioners use it and how they understand their flipped practice. In this chapter I provide an account of how I designed and implemented my research of these questions by reference to the theoretical framework underpinning the study and its epistemological and ontological orientation. I begin by considering the alignment of what is an exploratory research design to the constructivist-interpretivist approach and a qualitative methodology and examine how these relate to the study's questions and objectives. I then discuss the various stages of data collection and analysis, as well as the rationale behind some of the key decisions about participants and sampling before outlining the details of the ethical approval received from UCL for this study. As an introductory point, it is worth bearing in mind throughout this chapter that qualitative research is inherently subjective (Lincoln and Guba, 2005) and to a large extent the purpose of this chapter is to manage that subjectivity. Moreover, the process of analysing and interpreting participants' narratives, which constitute the data for this study, is not and never can be value-free and is not carried out in an 'epistemological vacuum' (Braun and Clarke, 2013, p. 12). From this perspective, the preliminary discussion in

Chapter 1 is important for identifying the values and conflicts implicit within the researcher's environment.

### **3.2 The Research Approach**

The research approach adopted for this study is interpretivist-constructivist. As an approach, it is commonly used in qualitative research where the concern is to investigate subjective constructions of reality. In this context "reality" should be understood as social reality and the meanings under investigation are social constructs that are 'continually being accomplished by social actors' (Bryman 2012, p. 29). An important consequence of adopting this approach is that there is no single reality: different people have different perceptions and hence construct their own reality and experience the world in different ways. In the interpretivist-constructivist paradigm, researchers are therefore interested in understanding people's lived experiences and how they see phenomena (Creswell and Creswell, 2017).

The interpretivist-constructivist approach is perhaps best understood when it is contrasted with the positivist paradigm, or 'scientific method', which is commonly used in quantitative research and is principally concerned with empirical facts, the objectivity of reality and the laws of cause and effect. Positivists study the social world through observation and measurement, ostensibly using a value-free method similar to that used when studying the natural world (Mackenzie and Knipe, 2006). In the case of the studies discussed in my literature review, there are examples of research conducted competently within an explicitly positivist paradigm (for example, Setren *et al.* (2019)). However, most of the flipped classroom literature is insufficiently

explicit or reflective as to its paradigmatic orientation, though a positivistic trend has dominated, particularly when performance in the flipped classroom is evaluated. It is also the case that much that has been written about the flipped classroom is ill-defined as to what research approach it has adopted.

My main reason for adopting an interpretivist-constructivist approach to the flipped classroom is the sense that emerges from the literature of an educational phenomenon that is constantly being (re)constructed in different and complex contexts without this fundamental uncertainty being acknowledged. Thus Denzin and Lincoln (2011) suggest an interpretivist epistemology fits with studies that aim to gain a deep understanding of participants' perceptions and attitudes in complex contexts. At the same time, my own experiences of using the flipped classroom coupled with an initial sense that the experience and reality of flipped implementations were understood very differently by colleagues, suggested a constructivist ontological position. Approached in terms of pedagogy, I would also align my interest in the flipped classroom with a much broader perspective on how learning culture(s) are created rather than seeing it as a tightly defined mould into which existing content is poured as my review of the literature in chapter 2 suggests. The overall approach taken in this study thus reflects the link Lincoln and Guba (2005, p. 37) establish between the researcher's approach to their research design and how the researcher has chosen to orient themselves to 'the nature of reality'.

An important consequence of adopting an interpretivist-constructivist approach is the need to understand the criteria by which the findings of research undertaken in this modality can be evaluated, particularly at the stage



of the thematic analysis of the data. Lincoln and Guba (2005) suggest four criteria be used to assess qualitative research trustworthiness: dependability, conformability, credibility and transferability. It will be clear from these terms that these give rise to much deeper considerations than establishing validity of analysis through an accepted process of measurement. An important part of the procedure for establishing trustworthiness is to reflect on my own position and values in this study as part of an ongoing process that continued throughout the research cycle. Equally, however, it is important to note that no process of qualitative investigation can guarantee total elimination of biases or subjectivity, and it would be misleading to make this claim. In other words, the data never 'speaks for itself' and the 'confirmability' of the study's findings - the extent to which the findings reflect the participants' perspectives more than the researcher's perspective – is always 'relative' (Cohen *et al.*, 2011).

### **3.3 Design and Methodology**

Research design is typically defined as 'the frameworks [employed] for the collection and analysis of data' (Bryman, 2012, p. 45). Reflecting the open-ended nature of the research questions identified at the end of Chapter 1, and the limited availability of previous research into the flipped classroom conducted within a constructivist-interpretivist paradigm, this qualitative study employed an exploratory research design. Exploratory designs are typically used in research areas that are relatively new or those where limited studies have been conducted (Stebbins, 2001). The exploratory design fitted with the aim of the study, namely, to add to the existing body of (relatively limited) knowledge about the flipped classroom. In doing so, the study explored a

relatively new area of enquiry related to implementation of the flipped classroom (Tucker, 2012), and applied this to a disciplinary area and institutional context

Methodology is typically defined as the philosophy and framework of the overall research process. Providing a sound rationale for the methodological choices a researcher makes is essential for establishing the credibility and authenticity of the research – the trustworthiness previously defined. Many scholars argue that choosing research methodologies is not a straightforward task (Creswell and Creswell, 2017). It is widely accepted that there is no ideal ‘one size fits all’ methodology and whilst each approach will have something to offer, they all have limitations associated with them. Narrowing down the choice and deciding on the most ‘feasible’ and ‘appropriate’ methodology to underpin the research depends on several factors (Blaikie, 2007). These include the research questions, overall aim of the research and epistemological considerations, as well as the researcher’s interests and experience. Trede and Higgs (2009) further stress the importance of methodological, epistemological and ontological considerations, coupled with the research questions, being appropriately aligned.

The interpretivist-constructivist epistemology of this study necessarily provides a qualitative orientation to enquiry. Within this epistemological framework, reality and meaning are viewed as a social construct (Creswell and Poth, 2017), and as I discussed above, there are clear reasons for me to take this approach to the flipped classroom: a qualitative methodology was selected to better reflect the study’s aim and its research questions. As the researcher of this study, I have previous experience in working with qualitative

methodology and have developed an understanding based on experience that it is the best suited to examine and interpret people's experiences and social realities in depth. This position is reflected in Ospina's (2004) view that the central focus of qualitative research is to gain deep understanding of the insights and perceptions of those involved in the studied phenomena.

Building on these design principles, I adopted an inductive approach to reasoning at the point where data collection moved to the identification of themes. In other words, I began with the specific and moved to the more general. Creswell and Clark (2017, p. 23) note that this 'bottom up' approach allows the researcher to use the 'participants' views to build broader themes and generate a theory interconnecting the themes'. This approach reflected both the constructivist-interpretivist orientation to the research reality and the potentially uncertain and negotiated nature of the reality I was seeking to investigate. Once I had adopted this initial inductive approach, the study moved in clearly identifiable stages: from synthesising the research questions, collecting data relating to the participants' views, analysing that data to detect patterns and identify themes, to finally developing general conclusions from these themes.

### **3.4 Participants and Sampling**

Data for this study was generated from semi-structured interviews with practitioners and from a focus group composed of students enrolled on the modules flipped by the cohort of practitioners selected for this study. Qualitative studies such as this tend to use a relatively small sample size,

which fits in with the aim to gain an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon rather than to generalize results. The principle underpinning this approach to sampling is that the use of a relatively small sample size facilitates engagement with the participants and is more suitable for discussion and storytelling. It is also important to recall the relationship of sampling, in particular sample size, to the resources and timescale available for the study and the researcher's expertise. In this section I outline how participants were selected for the interviews and the focus group, drawing primarily on the guiding principle of data saturation (Hennink *et al.*, 2011). This principle refers to the point at which the depth and breadth of the collected data is reached, and thus the data become repetitive and cease to generate new ideas.

#### **3.4.1 Interview Sample (Practitioners)**

This study's sampling frame – the list of potential participants in the focus group and interview samples – was based on the principle of recruiting typical cases, not selected on the basis of probability, that fitted the study's design and ontology. Based on the study's aim and methodological approach, I decided on a sample size of six participants for the interview. I identified practitioners teaching European and non-European languages on university-wide language programmes in three universities. The six participants were all appropriately qualified practice-based language practitioners with, typically, ten years of language teaching experience. They all spoke fluent English and were native speakers of the languages they taught. They were all familiar with the flipped classroom approach which they frequently used in their advanced or intermediate language classes. The sample was selected from three UK HE

institutions including my own institution. The selection of the institutions aimed to provide a balance between institutions with a specialist language focus and those without.

**Table 1: Interview Sample Demographics**

<b>Pseudonyms</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Language Taught</b>	<b>Teaching Experience</b>	<b>Spoken English</b>	<b>Workplace</b>
Ahmed	Male	Arabic	Over 10 years	Fluent	UK HE
Heba	Female	Arabic	Over 10 years	Fluent	UK HE
Ghina	Female	French	Over 10 years	Fluent	UK HE
Hani	Male	German	Over 10 years	Fluent	UK HE
Tina	Female	Russian	Over 10 years	Fluent	UK HE
Rami	Male	Spanish	Over 10 years	Fluent	UK HE

To minimise potential biases and subjectivity of purposive sampling (Bryman, 2012, p. 418), I adopted certain measures. First, I sampled across pre- and post-1992 institutions, which may have different experiences of market forces and different priorities. I also sampled teachers of European and non-European languages because these typically involve different cultures of and approaches to language learning (Ahmed, 2018a). The small sample size was adequate for the study's exploratory design, which was based on a principle of obtaining a time-efficient and cost-effective minimum number of information-rich cases (Palinkas *et al.*, 2015). The collected data provided specific and detailed answers to the research questions. The lack of clear guiding principles that defines when saturation is reached in qualitative studies often poses a challenge in terms of deciding on an adequate sample size (Guest *et al.*, 2006).

### **3.4.2 Focus Group Sample (Students)**

The choice of the sample size of the focus group was underpinned by several considerations. These included the study's objectives, methodological framework, previous research experience and other scholars' recommendations. According to Blackstone (2012) a sample size of six to ten participants per focus group is a reasonable size to reach saturation. In this study, I estimated a sample size of ten participants. However, due to some delay in obtaining ethical approval, the participants' availability changed, and it was difficult to rearrange a day and time convenient for all participants. Therefore, only six students were able to take part in the focus group. Nevertheless, the focus group provided very rich data as the participants were keen to express their views and question each other's perceptions and opinions. I used a purposive sampling frame to identify a homogeneous group with more commonalities than differences. I avoided selecting a heterogeneous group with considerable differences among participants in terms of age, gender, class and educational background since this has the potential to limit participants' contributions and interaction (Hennink *et al.*, 2011).

In this study, the purposive homogenous focus group sample shared similar characteristics (Table 3.2). The six female student participants were all native speakers of English, were of similar age, level of study and had a good attendance and engagement record. The participants knew each other and were all in the final year of their undergraduate degrees. They were studying a foreign language module at advanced level using a flipped classroom approach.

**Table 3.2: Focus Group Sample Demographics**

<b>Pseudonyms</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Language studied</b>	<b>Level of study</b>	<b>Spoken English</b>	<b>Place of Study</b>
Amal	Female	Arabic	Final year	Native speaker	UK HE
Dalia	Female	Arabic	Final year	Native speaker	UK HE
Jasmine	Female	French	Final year	Native speaker	UK HE
Mariam	Female	German	Final year	Native speaker	UK HE
Noura	Female	Russian	Final year	Native speaker	UK HE
Sara	Female	Spanish	Final year	Native speaker	UK HE

### **3.5 Data Collection**

Data collection is claimed to be the ‘key point’ in the research process, during which the researcher systematically collects information, analyses and draws inferences to make decisions about the findings and answer the research questions (Bryman, 2012). Various methods and techniques are used to collect data, yet the aim of the study and the research methodology and questions play a primary role in selecting the most appropriate data collection method (Denscombe, 2007).

In this qualitative study, I used individual interviews and a single focus-group interview to collect data from two groups of participants, namely practitioners and students. I moderated six semi-structured interviews to collect data from the practitioner participants and one focus group to collect data from the student participants. The two methods of data collection complemented each other to elicit in-depth insight of flipped classroom

implementation. When selecting these two methods I considered the study's questions, aims, methodological orientation and theoretical framework.

The six interviews and the focus group took place in the third semester of the academic year 2018/19. The focus group and three out of the six interviews took place in a pre-booked meeting room in my workplace, which served as an appropriate venue. The other three interviews took place at the workplaces of the interviewees. Generally, the rooms were quiet and comfortable, which helped me to conduct the interview in a relatively relaxing environment with no distractions. I made sure to break the ice and build rapport at the start of each session. The interviews and focus group were conducted face-to-face, in English, and were audio-recorded to guarantee data accuracy. Recording the interviews and the focus group allowed the flexibility to verify or refer back to the audio-recordings when needed during the transcription stage.

I transcribed the recordings myself and deleted them after I had written up the data to ensure confidentiality. In keeping with UCL requirements in relation to the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Data Protection Act (DPA) 1998, the stored written data set is regarded as highly confidential and is solely accessible by me. The electronic written data set and any related files have been stored in a Word encrypted format on my password protected laptop. I intend to store the written data for five years for possible future studies (BERA, 2018).



### **3.5.1 Semi-Structured Interview**

The semi-structured interview is a research method that is widely used in qualitative studies. According to Galletta (2013), it is a purposeful open and systematic conversation. It allows the interviewer to use probing questions and expand the participants' responses to gain in-depth understanding of their accounts concerning the studied phenomena. In this study, the framework of the semi-structured interviews provided focused face-to-face communication that enabled data collection through talking and listening to the narratives of the six language practitioner participants. The flexibility of the framework allowed the participants to engage in an in-depth conversation and give detailed responses. The six practitioner participants discussed their opinions regarding flipped classroom implementation and reflected on its challenges and the strategies they used to deal with them. They were able to freely express their views and perceptions about different aspects of the flipped classroom and how to improve their current classes and move forward.

### **3.5.2 Focus Group**

I conducted one 50-minute focus group session to interview and collect data from a group of six undergraduate language students in the final year of their degrees. Focus groups are a qualitative research data-gathering method that are underpinned by the research objectives and guided by a facilitator. Within this context, a small group of participants engage in a moderated and deep open-ended discussion to explore a specific area of interest (Cohen *et al.*, 2011). The group interaction is vital to examine the multitude of perceptions and collect rich data. Some scholars hold the view that focus groups are a

quick data collection method, appropriate to examine complex behaviour and save time and effort. Meanwhile, others criticise focus groups for being complicated and inadequate to capture the complexities of group dynamic and behaviour (Smithson, 2000).

Before starting the focus group discussion I reminded the participants of the following points: the data collected in the focus group would be used for my EdD study and honest responses would therefore be appreciated; they could express their views freely even if they were different to others; participants were made aware that their participation was voluntary and they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason, and to do so before the deadline specified in the participant information sheet; the focus group session would be audio-recorded to facilitate transcription and guarantee data accuracy; their contributions were valuable; and finally, their identities would remain confidential and their anonymity and confidentiality would be safeguarded.

Following the introduction, I started the focus group discussion guided with the help of an interview guide. Similar to the semi-structured interviews, I prepared an interview guide with a list of open-ended questions. The interview guide helped to manage the session's time effectively within the agreed time limit and facilitate and maintain a focused discussion. I used open-ended questions throughout the focus group session. These included for example, '*What did you think about the flipped classroom?*' The open-ended questions served as prompts to provoke thought and encourage discussion. They were useful as they did not imply an expected answer which allowed participants to answer freely. I also used probing questions such as '*Can you give me an*

*example?*' to help participants to elaborate and give more detailed information (Doody and Noonan, 2013). All questions were grouped thematically and were used to explore new themes and find out commonalities and differences between the participants' responses and views of their flipped language classes. The need to check the interview schedule explicitly was minimal and participants' responses were elicited in a spontaneous and exploratory discussion.

### **3.5.3 Transcription**

Transcription is an important stage of data analysis and is not limited to just transforming audio-recorded verbal data into a written text. It is an 'interpretative' process, where meanings are developed and therefore it is considered the first phase in analysing data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). It has received little attention in research and limited studies have dealt with its nature and role despite its significant implications for the validity of data analysis, interpretation and associated theoretical perspectives. Thus Lapadat and Lindsay (1999, p. 1) highlight that 'transcription has implications for the interpretation of research data and for decision making in practice fields.' Transcription is often described as a challenging process, one that has no standard format appropriate for the different approaches or theoretical frameworks of qualitative data collection. There is ongoing controversy around the different transcription strategies, including what to transcribe and what to omit. The required level of detail, and whether to transcribe the data fully, partly or produce a summary, is also debated. Some scholars view the transcription of recorded data without including 'contextual information' to be insufficient

since what is said and how it is said are equally important to the meaning of utterances. Others suggest that the level of transcription should be determined by the level of data analysis (McLellan, *et al.*, 2003). Meanwhile some argue that the 'faithful reproduction' of recorded data is unnecessary in thematic analysis, which analyses common patterns within data (Silverman, 2015).

Taking the above principles into account, the transcription strategy in this qualitative study was based on the principle that it should be appropriate for the research question, and the methodological and theoretical framework, in order to guarantee "rigour". I made the transcription myself to ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants, who were all given pseudonyms or alternative names. I used verbatim word-for-word transcription, which is a commonly used method in qualitative studies that investigate the complexity and deep meaning of social phenomenon (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Verbatim transcription was thus appropriate for this study because it had an inductive interpretivist approach and aimed to explore in-depth how the participants understood the flipped classroom and their experiences.

### **3.6 Data Analysis and Coding**

Data analysis is a complex and demanding process which involves analysing, organising and transforming raw data into a coherent new structure. There are various methods to analyse qualitative data. However, the research question, objectives and theoretical framework of the study determine the most appropriate approach to collect and analyse data (Smithson, 2000). This

qualitative study adopted a thematic data analysis approach, a widely used method in qualitative research that aims to gain a meaningful insight into participants' thoughts and experiences. Therefore, it suited the epistemological and ontological position of this study which aimed to examine the participants' experiences of the flipped classroom. Guest *et al.* (2012, p. 138) write that thematic analysis:

moves beyond counting explicit words or phrases and focuses on identifying and describing both implicit and explicit ideas. Codes developed for ideas or themes are then applied or linked to raw data as summary markers for later analysis, which may include comparing the relative frequencies of themes or topics within a data set, looking for code cooccurrence, or graphically displaying code relationships.

Characterised as a flexible approach, Braun and Clarke (2013, p. 10) note that thematic analysis is not exclusive to any 'pre-existing theoretical framework' and helps analyse data based on participants' views and perceptions without drawing on pre-existing themes. Therefore, thematic analysis can be used within several theoretical frameworks and allows for many analytical options. Yet, the flexibility of this approach has been the subject of much criticism. Scholars claim it can cause confusion as it does not help the researcher to develop specific guidelines or decide on specific aspects of the data to focus on. However, it can be argued that conducting a rigorous and systematic thematic analysis, one that is driven by the research question, has the potential to help the researcher conduct deep analysis of the data and answer the research questions (Braun and Clarke, 2013).

There is no method of analysis that is either perfect or free from limitations. I considered other data analysis methods, including content analysis, which has many similarities with thematic analysis. Content analysis overlaps with thematic analysis as it involves analysing the data qualitatively by examining the common meanings and features of the participants' experiences. However, it also allows quantification of the data by measuring the frequency of the reoccurring codes or categories (Vaismoradi *et al.*, 2013). While frequency occurrence is significant in some studies, I decided not to rely on it for this study, since reoccurrence of codes can happen for various reasons including the participants' enthusiasm or willingness to give an extensive account of an issue of interest (Shields and Twycross, 2008). Furthermore, while thematic analysis allows focusing of the analysis on both the hidden and obvious themes, this is not necessarily the case with content analysis which adopts an either-or approach. Krippendorff (2018) argues that an important first step before starting content analysis is to determine whether the focus of the analysis is the latent or manifest aspects of the dataset. Considering this, thematic analysis was more appropriate for this study, which aimed to explore the deep meaning of the participants' experiences.

It is worth noting that thematic analysis can be used in qualitative inductive and deductive methodologies (Frith and Gleeson, 2004). An inductive approach moves from the specific, namely the participants' perspectives, to general themes and finally to a theory that connects the themes. In contrast, a deductive approach is theory-driven and moves from the general to the specific. It starts with a theory and progresses from hypotheses to data to prove, disprove or even add to a theory (Creswell and

Clark, 2017). In this study I adopted an inductive thematic approach to analyse the data set, develop codes and identify the main themes which are mainly long phrases or sentences that are subject to interpretation and sum up the obvious or hidden meanings of the data (Saldaña, 2014, p. 108).

In line with this distinction, inductive thematic analysis can be described as a data-driven approach, one that allows the data to 'speak for itself' and identifies themes that are closely linked to the data. This helps reduce the researcher's biases and subjectivity when analysing the data (Patton, 2002). Inductive thematic analysis further allows coding and categorising of the data into themes according to similarities and differences. It moves from the specific to the general, offering a broad view of the participants' experiences (Braun and Clarke, 2013). Considering these features, inductive thematic analysis was appropriate for this study. It also helped to avoid imposing a coding frame based on my own motivations as the researcher of the study.

When conducting the thematic analysis in this study, I followed the six stages recommended by Braun and Clarke (2013). Following data collection, I transcribed the data. I did the transcription by myself which helped me to familiarise myself with the data. During this stage I read the transcribed data several times and noted initial thoughts and ideas. In the second phase, which involved coding the data, I continued the process with repeated close reading and conducted a systematic search to note key words and features and identify the relevant data to each code. The third phase involved searching for potential key themes and in the fourth stage, I reviewed the themes and evaluated how well they reflected the data set. In the fifth stage, I defined and named the themes. Finally, in the sixth stage, I completed the analysis and wrote the

report. An example of the coding process for one theme, learner autonomy, and how it emerged from both the student focus group and practitioner interviews, is provided in Appendix 1.

### **3.6.1 Coding**

Saldaña (2013, p. 4) defines coding as ‘a researcher-generated construct that symbolises and thus attributes interpreted meaning to each individual datum for later purposes of pattern detection, categorisation, theory building, and other analytic processes.’ Within this context, coding is not merely a label but rather a link between data and their meanings and is seen as a key aspect of analysis. Sipe and Ghiso (2004, p. 482-3) point out that ‘[a]ll coding is a judgment call’. The coding process is not value-free from the researchers’ ‘subjectivities’, ‘personalities’ and ‘predispositions.’ Meanwhile, Braun and Clarke (2013) stress the importance of coding and state that constructing codes that highlight relevant aspects of the data is critical to developing themes since the latter are developed from codes, rather than from data.

I selected the coding method for this study based on the nature of the study question. Trede and Higgs (2009, p. 18) emphasize that the direction of an enquiry is guided by the research questions, which embed the values and worldview of the study and ‘determine what type of knowledge is going to be generated’. An inductive data-driven coding approach was appropriate for the study’s questions and objectives. Braun and Clarke (2013) explain inductive coding as a flexible coding approach that refines rich raw data, identifies



repeated patterns and allows prominent themes to emerge which helps to minimise biases and subjectivity.

I further conducted a complete coding analysis, by which I identified and coded data that were pertinent and allowed me to address the research question (Braun and Clarke, 2013). I coded the data over three stages. According to Braun and Clarke (2013) there are two levels of data, namely the descriptive surface level and the hidden interpretive level. In the first stage, I familiarised myself with the data set by closely reading the data several times. I systematically identified and highlighted the initial basic codes and then coded and collated the data in a list of codes. Braun and Clarke (2013, p. 19) note that 'no data set is without contradiction'. Bearing this in mind, I was careful not to ignore or gloss over any contradictions and inconsistencies I found in the data set.

In the second stage, the data analysis is focused on the themes, rather than the codes. Accordingly, I analysed and grouped different codes and identified the potential overarching themes. I also identified the 'miscellaneous' codes that did not fit into the main themes (Braun and Clarke, 2013). In the third stage, I refined the themes, that is, I revised the initial themes to ensure that they reflected the coded data and formed discernible patterns (Braun and Clarke, 2013). In the fourth stage, I defined and named the themes which I included in the analysis and checked for overlapping themes. I defined the meaning of each theme and how they fitted in relation to the account I wrote about the data and the research question. The last stage involved writing up

the final report – an analytical narrative with clear examples and coherent argument in relation to the research question (Braun and Clarke, 2013).

Though time consuming, I decided to analyse and code the data manually instead of using a qualitative data analysis software package. This was for several reasons. Although qualitative software packages help manage large volumes of data and can be useful in mapping repeated key words and grouping themes, they have certain limitations. Klenke (2008, p. 304) argues using a software package to code data can cause the researcher to become engrossed in details and lose the ‘overall conceptual message within the data’. I found that coding data manually helped to stay close to the text and sustain ‘a sense of the whole’ (Klenke, 2008, p. 304).

### **3.7 Ethical Approval**

This research project was conducted with reference to the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2018) set of guidelines. It further complies with the UCL research ethics review process. Before embarking on this project, I completed the ethics training provided by my course: the UCL GDPR online training. I fully discussed all ethical considerations relating to my research with my supervisor. I then completed the ethics application form, giving a full and detailed description of the possible ethical issues that may arise in the course of this project. I later submitted my ethics application on 24 February 2019 to the UCL data registration team to obtain a data registration number. On 4 April 2019, I received the data registration reference no Z6364106/2019/04/39 (social research) in line with UCL’s data protection policy. On 10 May 2019, I

submitted my ethics application form along with the data registration number to my supervisor for reviewing. Approval was received on 20 May 2019, after which date, I commenced the project. A copy of the ethics application is provided in Appendix 2. I referred to and complied with the recommendations of BERA (2018) throughout all stages of this project. Consequently, the process of taking ethical decisions related to this project did not stop once ethical approval had been obtained. I made sure to assess and reassess ethical considerations as they emerged in an ongoing and iterative process.

Beyond the formalities of the ethical approval process and compliance with relevant legislation, such as GDPR, I was careful throughout this research to ensure that I demonstrated appropriate respect for the participants in this study. According to BERA (2018, p. 4) guidelines, research 'should be conducted within an ethic of respect for: the person; knowledge; democratic values; the quality of educational research; and academic freedom'. Furthermore, the guidelines highlight the importance of the ethical principle of trust as another fundamental element in the relationship between the researcher and the participants. Scholars highlight the importance of establishing mutual trust and a good relationship with participants to ensure the latter can articulate their views freely and stay focused, which, in turn, has an impact on the quality and quantity of the data (Smith, 2010).

An important aspect of establishing trust is the provision of accurate and relevant information about the study to participants. To ensure transparency as required by the BERA (2018) ethical principles and guidelines I carried out the following steps to ensure the participants were fully informed of what was involved in the study, its aim, objectives and benefits. These steps applied both

to the student focus group and to the semi-structured interviews conducted with practitioners. I started the session by introducing myself and I encouraged the participants to introduce themselves as well; I thanked the participants for taking part in the focus group and spoke informally with them to establish rapport; I gave a short description of the study and its objective; we reviewed the participant information sheet and the participants were given the chance to ask any questions.

### **3.8 Conclusion**

In this chapter I have set out the principles and thinking that underpinned the design of my research and the theoretical reference points in which it is grounded. Compared to the parameters of my previous research in this area (Ahmed, 2018a) this investigation marks a shift away from how students received the flipped implementation of a particular practitioner towards a deeper comparison of the pedagogic decision-making of a small group of practitioners working in similar disciplinary context across different institutions. The overall aim of the research design is to facilitate an exploration of specific flipped classroom implementations to the context in which they take place and the shifts in learning culture that take place. In the next two chapters, I present my findings, organised thematically, before providing a wider discussion of the issues raised.

## **Chapter 4 - Findings**

### **4.1 Introduction**

In this chapter I discuss the data in terms of four themes I identified from the implementations of the flipped classroom that formed part of this study. These themes are: 1) student and practitioner perceptions of learner autonomy; 2) experiences of learning and teaching time and expressions of educational value; 3) the relationships between students and practitioners in the processes of cultural change; and 4) control of the teaching and learning environment and how it is negotiated. For some of these themes I have presented the findings from the practitioner interviews and the student focus group separately because of the complexity of the data; in others I have juxtaposed them directly in the same section to highlight what are more obvious points of contrasts. Before presenting the findings, I provide some important points of context to the data, which, whilst not a theme in their own right, are important for understanding the ensuing presentation and discussion.

### **4.2 Context to the Findings**

The data from the practitioners' interviews showed that all practitioners participating in this study implemented the flipped classroom in a variety of ways and for different purposes. Perhaps the most surprising finding was that none of the practitioners flipped their entire course; they all implemented the flipped classroom in particular sessions. Furthermore, in some sessions they fully flipped the teaching and learning whilst in others they partially flipped the course delivery. Of itself, this is an important initial finding because, as

evidenced from Chapter 3, I am not aware of any identification or discussion of partial implementations in the literature, which tends to present the approach in either/or terms.

The following comment is indicative of the range of practices adopted in the sample I investigated in this study:

I don't flip the whole course. I usually design and flip certain sessions. Sometimes I flip the whole session and sometimes I flip a part of it, which is less risky when you think of it. You see, this way if many students did not prepare before class, it is not a huge problem because this is just a part and not the whole session, and I am not relying totally on whether they all did the preparation or not [...] Well, at the end of the day, flipping a whole or a part of the session really depends on what you want to do. (Heba)

In these and similar remarks, the practitioners highlighted what I would characterise as a flexible approach to flipped classroom design, demonstrating an awareness of the different ways the approach can be implemented and designing specific and partial implementations to reflect learning needs and teaching contexts. In terms of the issues identified in the literature review, it was apparent that practitioners were not influenced in their decision-making by the uncertain forms of definition associated with the approach or the debates about its origins. In terms of the HE context to this study, the ability to incorporate and adapt a new approach to learning as part of one's existing practise is what I would expect to find among experienced practitioners, such as those included in this sample. However, as I noted in the literature review, there is an overlap between student-centred, constructivist approaches to

learning and the flipped classroom and these commonalities arguably allow for the approach to be assimilated to existing practice in this way.

Employing the flipped classroom in a flexible way and manipulating it to achieve specific learning objectives showed the practitioners had a secure understanding of the value and benefits of the approach. But it was also apparent from the data, as evidenced specifically in Heba's remarks, that practitioners used the approach with caution to manage their perceptions of risk. In this sense, it is important to note that the underlying principle in the decision to partially flip the teaching and learning was frequently one of partial mitigation in order that a lesson would not be irretrievably affected if students failed to engage adequately in the pre-class preparation. In other words, the flipped approach was seen as an embodiment of an educational ideal but one that was easily compromised by factors the practitioner could not control.

In setting out to use the part-flipped classroom as a strategy to mitigate associated risks, practitioners were directly referencing the principle of an inverted learning sequence and the associated problems of student engagement with pre-class learning that were identified in the literature review. In terms identified earlier in this chapter, a lesson or course that is part-flipped rather than fully flipped appears to allow the practitioner more control over teaching and the classroom. In positive terms, it goes without saying if both the practitioner and the learner feel that they are in control of their learning environment, this maximises the opportunity for better learning outcomes. But this sense of a need to negotiate a change reflects the much deeper challenge of introducing and maintaining the flipped classroom as a learning culture.

Partially flipped lessons, as the practitioners identified in their initial remarks, also had a specific aim and focus. In the following comments, two of the practitioners elaborated on the purposes for which they flipped their advanced language classes.

I flipped all the speaking and listening classes of my advanced group this year. Doing it that way saved a lot of time for practice. It really helped and saved time to work on improving fluency and pronunciation. It was quite interactive, and we had quality time for practice and feedback. (Ghina)

The underlying point of the design and implementation was to improve students' speaking and listening skills. These need time and attention [...] Before it was always rushed and there was not enough time particularly after the latest cuts on our programme. (Hani)

In general terms, by inverting the instruction and moving the mechanical aspects of learning outside the classroom, practitioners aimed to maximise class time and free it for more active learning techniques. In terms of the specifics of language teaching, the practitioners who participated in this study used the flipped classroom specifically to flip the speaking and listening elements of their course. This had a specific aim of improving advanced students' speaking fluency and proficiency in the foreign language. It should be noted that these practitioners were speaking of more advanced language learners, who had sufficient disciplinary skills to manage the language acquisition element of any pre-class learning adequately. They also felt that



the recent economic changes had impacted negatively on HE institutions, specifically on their discipline, and that quantifiable cuts to contact time had compromised in-class speaking practice. In short, practitioners were using the flipped classroom in ways that were felt to be important to their disciplinary priorities and to address perceived shortfalls in the educational environment.

The disciplinary context to a flipped classroom design and implementation and how practitioners negotiate the interface between a generic approach to learning and the specific learning demands of their subject is important. In discipline-specific terms, insufficient time for one-to-one, individualised, student-practitioner interaction and feedback is an indicator of ineffective language teaching. Guiding student speaking and listening practice, and providing individualised feedback *in situ*, is of particular importance for the progressive improvement of student speaking and listening skills. These require time for practice and consolidation and cannot be achieved in a rushed or pressurised classroom environment. By moving mechanical aspects of language learning outside the class and offering more time, the flipped classroom provided a more relaxed interactive learning environment within which practitioners provided students with individualised feedback and guided them through the practice. It is important to note that such an approach is not entirely consistent with the distinction between pre-class learning/lower levels of Bloom's taxonomy and in-class learning/higher levels of the taxonomy. What the practitioners appeared to articulate was an intermediate area of guided practice and reinforcement that was more in line with the middle zone of Talbert's (2019) three-phase approach.

The disciplinary focus of the flipped classroom implementations discussed by practitioners and the desire to manage risk were not the only reasons for the partial format of the approach evidenced in the data. Wider uses and purposes of the approach which were referenced by practitioners included the employability dimensions of the UK HE skills agenda discussed in Chapter 1. The comments of two of the practitioners illustrate the role this reference point played in their decision-making:

With a well-designed flipped classroom you can achieve a lot. I frame the speaking and listening activities within the context of employability skills which I also integrate [...] The flipped class allows more time to work on this central HE objective. (Tina)

We all know how important it is in Higher Education to get undergraduates ready for the professional world and improve their employability skills. All the speaking and listening tasks and topics I designed for the flipped classes were geared towards that and we had more time this year. It is not just about speaking practice or improving fluency and pronunciation. We also try to improve students' communication skills, critical thinking and social interaction within a professional context. (Rami)

Enhancing student speaking and listening skills and dedicating enough time to develop and consolidate speaking proficiency and fluency in advanced foreign language classes, were the main objectives for which most practitioners designed and implemented the flipped classes. However, within this context the practitioners sought to develop other skills which might seem to fall outside the realm of language learning. Developing undergraduate employability skills

is an HE priority and the majority of the practitioners noted that they had integrated aspects of graduate employability, such as communication, critical thinking and social interaction, in the design and implementation of their flipped classes.

Once again, time was a key driver for practitioners to use the flipped classroom in this way. The development and practice of these skills had become compromised in the practitioners' traditional classes due to the limited amount of time available, a case of having to choose between specific course content and the wider rationale for their programme in the current UK HE context. The practitioners believed the flipped classroom offered more time and opportunities for active learning to practice those skills. The data showed that generally most practitioners were motivated in similar ways when they balanced the risks of implementing a flipped environment and the specific objectives they wanted to achieve.

To sum up the key points associated with the background and context to my findings, in this section I have identified partial implementations as a key feature of the flipped classrooms investigated in this study. By partial implementation, I mean both that some classes are flipped whilst others are not and that parts of a class may be flipped. This appears to be an aspect of flipped classroom practice that has not previously been identified. Among practitioners interviewed for this study, the design and implementation of a flipped classroom in these partial terms was influenced both by discipline-specific considerations and by perceptions of teaching and learning risk. To a lesser extent, the influence of the wider sector context was evidenced in design

and implementation, although this may also have been a feature of practitioner discourse rather than a changed feature of their practice.

### **4.3 Learner Autonomy**

The first theme evident in data clustered around perceptions of learner autonomy. Learner autonomy, in its relationship to flipped classroom pedagogy draws together a range of ideas, values, ideals and experiences, which are often unconnected in student and practitioner discourse. For example, it is an explicit value of the sector that Higher Education prepares students to be independent learners yet autonomy can also be experienced by students as a loss of value because it is not teacher contact time. There are also questions about what constitutes the right level of scaffolding in Higher Education, and more specifically, for non-linguists taking a language course. In this section, the findings from the student and practitioner data are treated separately because of this complexity.

#### ***4.3.1 Student Perspectives***

Findings from the student focus group highlighted the theme of learner autonomy as a defining feature of the learning culture of the flipped language classrooms that were the subject of this study. In particular, the data demonstrated that having access to learning materials before class and being able to “pre-learn” what, in terms of Bloom’s taxonomy, may be considered foundational knowledge, and to do so at a pace convenient to the student, was understood by students to be central to their experience of flipped learning. Most students, even those who did not respond positively to their experience

of the flipped language classroom and preferred a traditional class approach, valued and commented positively on this aspect of their learning experience.

In broad terms, these students' responses to the changes in learning culture they experienced on their IWLP modules can be interpreted across three dimensions. The first, which is defined by reference to the wider sector context, is that most of the students who participated in the focus group understood themselves to be engaged in 'educationally purposeful activities' identified by Reeve *et al.* (2004, p. 16) as core to the UK HE reform agenda and demonstrated the quality of 'emotional and behavioural' reactions envisaged by Günüç and Kuzu (2014, p. 588). These students found their flipped language classes to be meaningful and purposive in ways that reflected the ethos of student engagement the UK HE reform agenda. However, there were exceptions, and it is in the exceptions that I found both aspects of marketisation and the consumer metaphor in the student discourse and attitudes to the curriculum and to learning that were at odds with the reform agenda.

The second interpretative dimension is defined by the impetus for change in the reform agenda, namely that what constitutes knowledge and how it is acquired have changed in contemporary society. By this I mean that all the students who participated in the focus group understood their experience of a flipped language classroom to be a change, for better or worse, to their learning culture. "Culture" here is understood in the sense of Ireri and Omwenga (2016, p. 1) and is associated with an awareness of changing roles, processes and assumptions about learning. It is important to note that none of the students who participated in the focus group connected this change in

learning culture to the utilitarian aspects of the Skills Agenda and their future employability. Rather they understood the advantages or disadvantages of the new learning culture in terms of its restricted relevance to them as learners of a foreign language on a particular module.

The third perspective is pedagogic, in the sense afforded by Bloom's taxonomy (Bloom, 1956; Anderson and Krathwohl, 2001). By this I mean whether and to what extent the students understood themselves to be engaged in a hierarchical process of knowledge organisation: a learning journey based on an organisation of distinctive forms of knowing. The most important connection evidenced implicitly from the student data was the correlation of student consumerism with adherence to lower levels of Bloom's taxonomy coupled with the sense that the flipped classroom disrupted this relationship and left some students lost. In relation to this point, there was some ambiguity in the data about whether this was specific to their experience of IWLP language learning or reflected a more generic experience of the flipped classroom. It was also not clear from the data collected in the focus group whether negative experiences of students were influenced by how effectively independent learning had been scaffolded.

To illustrate these points in greater detail, I note that typical student remarks evidenced the students' awareness of the distinctive form of learning in which they were engaged, and how these aligned with the flipped classroom approach. This sense of distinctive forms of learning, and of the different roles and identities engaged by the different contexts in which the learning took place, is most clearly demonstrated by the remarks of Jasmine and Mariam.

In the flipped classroom, we have to learn things before class and I think I learn better on my own, I like that I do not have to rush and if I don't get something, I can always bring it to class. It is not a problem ... it is more fun to do the activities in class and work with my group ... I can ask them or ask the teacher to explain ... I think I benefit more and I take it seriously and I am more productive! (Jasmine)

I personally prefer the flipped class. I'd rather learn on my own at home or in the library. If I am studying at home, I have time to work things out and I study better ... I realise not everyone likes to learn this way and not everyone likes to learn on their own but I have always learnt this way. (Mariam)

In their remarks both Jasmine and Mariam expressed a preference for self-study or self-directed learning that is consistent with the levels of learner autonomy anticipated by a post-reform UK HE setting. They perceived this independence in terms of agency: they had control of their learning. They also demonstrated an awareness of a learning process consistent with Bloom's taxonomy and understood that independent study of foundational knowledge was required before coming to class and in order to engage with collaborative activities. The perceived reversal of the traditional order of learning within the flipped classroom enabled them to take control of the time and pace and the location of their learning. This is consistent with other reports of the benefits of the approach in the flipped classroom literature (McDonald and Smith, 2013; González-Gómez *et al.*, 2016). As these two students made sense of their learning experience, they were able to 'work things out' in their own

environment and pace their learning without having to rush that earlier stage of “knowing” in a collective setting.

These students’ comments support the notion that the flipped structure facilitates self-learning, at least for some students, who felt they were able to learn independently and advance at their own pace. Jasmine’s comment in particular shows that the flipped classroom structure was perceived to be not only beneficial for the mechanics of learning but also improved underlying attitudes to her learning. She highlighted that her experience of the flipped classroom was positive both inside and outside the classroom, and that this was due to the combination of self-learning outside the classroom and collaborative learning inside the classroom. Overall, what emerged from both students’ remarks is that they understood their learning to be student-centred. The level of engagement with the independent learning is implicit evidence that it had been scaffolded in ways that allowed them to engage and progress.

Such positive views of autonomous learning and its place in flipped learning experiences are in marked contrast to those of Noura, who commented:

I like to be taught by the teacher in class, not by myself ...  
I am not used to this [the flipped classroom] ... If I do not understand something, I can ask the teacher and he or she will explain it and give me the right thing. I mean the right answer. What if I learn the wrong thing? Or I might not understand something if I teach myself ... I do not want to teach myself something wrong and waste my time. (Noura)

The preference for the teacher-centred mode of teaching and learning, by which the teacher introduces the new content in class and the student is a



recipient, is expressed by Noura in stark terms. Central to her expectation is a demand that a teacher own, control and lead the class and exercise, in the student's mind, almost total control of the learning process. By way of context, Noura explained in the focus group that she was unfamiliar with the flipped classroom dynamic. Noura also articulated her sense that the prospect of 'teaching herself' and acting autonomously in the learning process was a personal risk.

These attitudes, in turn, raise questions about the extent to which Noura, and, by extension, students like her, have developed the skills and confidence necessary for them to become independent learners, both in the specific context of a flipped language classroom and in UK HE more generally. An important aspect of Noura's thinking is the possibility of learning the 'wrong thing', a prospect which might mean that learning independently could become a 'waste of time'. This was perceived not as a problem in her learning but as a defect in the educational product. What is important in these remarks is the connection that emerges between lack of engagement and the expression of consumer attitudes on the one hand, and the absence of any sense of a change in learning culture. However, it should also be borne in mind that the negative reaction of students like Noura to a flipped language classroom may be due to difficulties non-specialist linguists experience in the process of learning language.

This possibility, namely that the experience of autonomous learning in a flipped language classroom on an IWLP is difficult because it is a language classroom and not because the learning is flipped *per se*, is underlined by Sara. In the context of these remarks, it is important to note the close connection

between the image of the teacher as the possessor of “correct knowledge”, or to put it more informally, “the right answer”, and a disciplinary construction of language learning that is wholly at odds with the culture of learning envisaged either by the UK HE reform agenda or by the flipped classroom.

In a language class it's literally this word means this ... it is black and white... you need to be told the right answer from the start ... red is red ... one plus one is two ... it's just one thing because this is language. I need to be taught the right thing from the start by the teacher. (Sara)

The phenomenon of seeing the teacher as someone who has the right answers, and that possession of these answers lies behind their authority and position in the class, has been noted in flipped classroom literature. In its most vivid formulation, it can be understood as a contrast between the ‘sage on the stage’ in a teacher-centred class and the ‘guide on the side’ in a student-centred class (King, 1993, p. 30). But it could equally well be understood in terms of the historical chronology of language learning methodology as a contrast between grammar-translation and aspects of the audiolingual method on the one hand and the communicative approach on the other (Richards and Rogers, 2014).

The image of teacher-centred rigour, and the comments that invoked it, are very revealing of the attitudes of Noura and Sara towards their learning. They perceived the experience of being an autonomous learner in a flipped language class to be a risk which they did not want to take, a posture which is primarily a defence against a lack of confidence in their ability to learn ‘the right thing from the start’ independently of a teacher. Furthermore, in justifying their

view, Sara claimed that it was the very nature of language classes that meant it was necessary to be taught by a teacher. This remark suggests a rigid or closed approach to the disciplinary context of language learning, one which limits the acquisition of language to the acquisition of a finite set of facts about linguistic performance and understands deviance from these facts as error. What is not clear from these comments, and it is a question that extends beyond the parameters of this study, is whether it is a difficulty with autonomous learning or with autonomous language learning that lies at the heart of this reaction.

As a concluding remark to this section, I note the absences from the student response. There were, for example, no comments about the particular forms or modalities of technology that were used by practitioners, which would suggest that the students were able to use the technology in ways that were broadly effective to their language learning. Or, to turn this around, there was no evidence of technology being cited as an impediment to the learning. I also note that one of the key difficulties I found in examining the data generated by the student focus group was the limited range of pedagogic concepts and terminology to which, understandably, the students had access. For example, it was difficult for me to be precise about interpretation of pedagogic issues in the discussion and subsequent reflection without having introduced more technical terminology, which would undoubtedly have had the effect of dampening the participant voices.

### **4.3.2 Practitioner Perspectives**

In the discussion immediately above, I have highlighted the contrast between Jasmine and Mariam on the one hand, and Noura and Sara on the other, and presented this as evidence of the dichotomous attitudes to learner autonomy that arose in the context of the flipped classroom implementations that were the subject of this study. In contrast, the interviews I conducted with practitioners revealed a consensus that the flipped classroom implementation offered the learner more autonomy and control over their learning when compared to a traditional student-centred classroom. More specifically, for the flipped classroom to function and for the practitioners' implementation to work, it was frequently noted that it was a requirement of the flipped classroom for students to be active participants and partners in all stages of the learning process. In an important sense, all practitioners understood the role of students to be "vital" in the flipped classroom.

Immediately below, I present a broad range of the practitioner responses to the role of learner autonomy in the learning culture of their flipped classroom implementations before discussing them separately in greater detail. The responses on this point included the following:

If I compare it to a traditional classroom model, I would say that the flipped classroom should give students a sense of ownership and more control ... You can see how some students become more independent and confident over time ... It is a life skill ... This is one of the reasons why I use the flipped class. (Heba)

They have to be independent and manage their learning otherwise [the flipped classroom] won't work. They are

adults but that doesn't automatically mean that they are all able to manage learning on their own. (Ghina)

The flipped classroom gives students independence and I think they know its benefits well, but they still want the traditional style. They just do not want the responsibility that comes with it [the flipped classroom] ... It involves more time and work ... I flip certain parts of the lesson. (Hani)

Students must be independent to be able to work with the flipped classroom ... They have to be independent ... In theory this is what higher education is all about but in actual fact many students struggle and I have to teach in the traditional way ... We have to hold their hands and spoon-feed them. (Haniya)

The above remarks emphasise the practitioners' sense that students' possession of the ability to manage their time and take control of their learning inside and outside the classroom is a prerequisite for them to be able to work with the flipped classroom. From the practitioners' perspectives, not only is learner autonomy embedded in the flipped classroom framework, but learner autonomy is valued as a benefit to the change in learning culture associated with their flipped classroom implementation. In recognising learner autonomy as a 'life skill', if not the very purpose of Higher Education, the practitioners also connected their work to the reform agenda, but not, in this connection to the marketisation of the sector.

Beyond these areas of consensus, however, practitioners had different approaches to and understandings of student autonomy. For example, Heba suggested that students could develop autonomy over time while learning in

the flipped classroom, whilst Haniya thought that students must have autonomous learning skills as a pre-requisite for students to be able to engage with the flipped classroom. In more specific terms, the ability to complete the pre-class learning and engage in class activities were themselves seen by practitioners as key indicators that students possessed these skills.

By implication, practitioners appeared to believe that a lack of autonomous learning skills is the key reason for some students being unable to work well with the flipped classroom. For example, there was no suggestion that other factors, such as issues with flipped classroom design or communication problems between the practitioner and students, might be among the reasons for some students struggling. More widely however, practitioners did not seem to have a clear strategy to develop those skills in students lacking learner autonomy or to mitigate this problem beyond “watering down” the flipped classroom implementation. In the context of an elective module on an IWLP, this is perhaps not surprising; it is generally viewed as the responsibility of a student’s degree programme to address these dimensions of student development in a coherent and systematic way.

Whilst the above remarks reflect the substance of a practitioner perspective on the theme of learner autonomy in the data, it is worth looking at individual statements in greater detail. For example, Heba understood herself to be a reflective practitioner, one who observed her students and noticed changes and developments in their attitudes to learning. She also recognised that when compared to a traditional class format, the flipped classroom had a positive role in empowering students and developing their sense of control over their learning. However, she was also cautious in not generalising this view to

a statement of fact. The careful use of the modal verb 'should' in her statement – 'the flipped classroom should give students a sense of ownership and more control' – suggests that this was an intended outcome but not necessarily an actual result that could be predicted on a larger scale.

The wider use of caveats and qualifiers by Heba was indicative of an element of reservation or uncertainty about the factors that contributed to students developing their autonomy and self-learning skills. This may not be due solely to learning with the flipped classroom; rather there may be other contributing factors outside the flipped classroom context that help them develop as independent learners, and crucially, this process could unfold over time. In other words, the development of independent learning as a 'life skill' is gradual, not immediate. In this sense, while the development of learner autonomy was a key motivation for Heba to use the flipped classroom, she acknowledged that not all students engaged or received the "maximum" benefit in the same way.

In noting the importance of students' autonomy as key to the success of the flipped classroom, Ghina suggested that students must possess a certain set of skills to be able to manage their learning within the flipped classroom environment. Her comments focus attention on the assumptions that some Higher Education practitioners may make, namely that despite being adult learners, students do not necessarily come to Higher Education pre-equipped with the necessary skills to manage their education and be autonomous learners. Moreover, the use of the flipped classroom brings this issue into sharp focus since it necessitates having a set of skills needed to manage time and self-learning for it to work. This potentially adds an extra layer

of difficulty to introduction of the flipped classroom and can be considered a key factor in student resistance to the approach.

The idea that students must come equipped with the skills of an autonomous learner in order to be able to learn in the flipped classroom, and that the absence of these skills can cause resistance to the approach, is reflected in the comments of Hani. He noted that although many students 'know' (in the sense of formally acknowledging) the flipped classroom's benefits, they reject it for the demands it places on them in terms of time and workload. In short, the perceived general benefits do not outweigh the personal costs for them to think it worth engaging with the approach. Hani thus suggested that some adult learners do not want the burden of taking responsibility for their learning and prefer traditional learning approaches that do not require as much from them as the flipped classroom does.

In contrast, the comments of Haniya underlined the importance of learner autonomy and independence in her system of educational values. For her, learner autonomy is a core quality, the importance of which is not exclusive to the flipped classroom; rather, it is an end in and of itself, and the sole goal of higher education. For Haniya, current reality does not reflect that aspiration and, in her view, not all Higher Education students have the skills or ability to be autonomous learners. Therefore, practitioners such as her have to use teacher-centred rather than student-centred approaches to bridge the gap between the ideal and existing reality. The use of parental metaphors, such as 'hold their hands' and 'spoon-feed them', by Haniya reflected a profound sense of dissatisfaction with students' lack of autonomy and an explicit judgement that this situation was less than ideal. But, by the same token, her articulation



of this point also embedded an implicit criticism of teacher-centred approaches and the passive receptivity of students with which these are associated.

To conclude this section on the comments of practitioners, all recognised that students must be independent learners, by which I mean have some level of competence in managing their own learning, to be able to work with the flipped classroom. For example, the flipped classroom explicitly requires students to be able to manage their time and organise their learning independently outside the classroom, a point which is widely reflected in the flipped classroom literature (Bergmann and Sams, 2014; Wanner and Palmer, 2015). Whilst Heba saw a role for the flipped classroom in developing students' skills over time, other participants in the study appeared to work on the assumption that students embark on Higher Education with a set of skills that equipped them to be autonomous learners.

These skills, which were articulated in terms of ideas about time management and taking responsibility for one's learning, were seen as a pre-requisite for students to be able to work productively with the flipped classroom. There was no clear indication, however, that teachers implemented specific measures to help students develop or build these skills. Moreover, as the comments of Haniya evidenced, the use of teacher-centred approaches, referred to in the comments as a 'traditional' classroom, appeared to be the default solution when students did not evidence skills and qualities needed to work effectively within the learning culture of a flipped classroom.

#### **4.4 Time and Educational Value**

As I discussed in the literature review, a common characterisation of the flipped classroom is that it inverts a conventional sequence of learning. I also noted that this was a narrow view of the approach, which could be seen more productively in broader terms as a change in learning culture. An important aspect of this change in culture, but one which is not discussed in the literature in a sophisticated or specific sense, is the reorganisation and revaluation of learning time with which implementations of the flipped classroom are, to varying degrees, associated. In the data collected for this study, the distinctive value of different kinds of educational time and the political significance of defining temporal limits of the flipped learning experience was explicitly articulated.

Thus both students and practitioners expressed the view that the flipped classroom had the advantage of maximising the effective use of class time, and that this was of specific benefit when learning and teaching a language. However, both groups also commented that the time required to prepare for a flipped classroom lesson was considerable. Implicit in the data is a sense that time is a flexible resource, one that can be manipulated for different learning and teaching effects, some of which are explicitly valued by learners and practitioners, albeit for different reasons. There was also a sense that time invested in preparation for a flipped learning experience came at a personal cost, coupled with degrees of ambivalence when evaluating that cost against the perceived benefits of a qualitatively different teaching and learning experience.

Comparing their experience of the flipped classroom with a more traditional mode of teaching in the previous year, students Amal and Dalia commented:

Compared to the traditional Arabic class we had last year, this year we did a lot more practice in class. In the flipped classroom we had more time to ask and work together but it always took a lot of time to prepare for it. (Amal)

We had more time this year to speak and discuss and clarify things in class but it takes a lot of time to prepare for the flipped classroom. It is good to come prepared, but to be honest I do not always have that much time to spend on preparation. It takes a lot of time and work compared to the traditional class which I prefer. (Dalia)

There are points of similarity and difference in how these students reflected on their experience. Amal felt that the flipped classroom facilitated effective use of class time and understood that this provided a student-centred class, one which enabled more intensive practice and group work. Implicit in these remarks is the sense that these were features of the flipped learning experience she valued. Dalia was more specific, and perhaps more instrumental, in her comments: the extra practice is qualified in relation to one particular linguistic skill, speaking, and the distinctive nature of the class is understood as providing opportunities for student to clarify uncertainties, most probably about language form, with the teacher. Both of these comments reflect students' awareness that the flipped classroom rebalanced aspects of their learning experience and provided a focus for them in a class setting, which they valued.

The additional remarks of Dalia, who criticised the flipped classroom for being demanding in terms of the amount of preparation time it assumes of the learner, require further comment. Although Dalia implicitly recognised the benefit of having to come prepared for class, she experienced this as an additional burden. It is also a judgement of value: time spent learning outside the class versus a qualitative difference to in-class learning. In broader terms, the remarks of Dalia also suggest a loss of control over the boundaries that separate their learning from other aspects of their life.

In both these sets of remarks, there is an implicit connection between the perceived benefits and disadvantages for the students of the flipped classroom and the UK HE sector context. In terms of the time burden resulting from the approach, time is experienced primarily as a cost to the student consumer. In terms of the time created by the flipped classroom, the in-class learning is experienced as engaging the student in a process of subject-specific self-development. Absent from these remarks, however, is any sense of connection between the approach and the development of graduate qualities that may be attractive to an employer. There is also no sense of the pedagogic connection between different forms of knowing: the time spent on foundational knowledge and more social and collaborative forms of learning and creative tasks is compartmentalised.

The theme of time in relation to the learning experience was also evidenced in the practitioner data, notably in the comments of Ahmed and Heba, extracts from which are provided below. Their remarks amplify the idea of there being a potential imbalance in the costs and benefits of investing in a flipped learning experience as discussed by the students. But there is a clearer

sense of working towards an educational ideal, embodied in unstated principles of more effective learning, for which sacrifices in personal and/or professional time could be made against a backdrop of an imperfect institutional context. These comments were also underpinned by an idea of teaching staff as a collective, mirroring the frequent use of the collective 'we' by the students when the students discussed their experience.

Drawing a distinction between the background time used to prepare for and structure learning and the effective use of class time, Ahmed commented as follows:

We know many of us flip our classes to use time more efficiently. I have done it many times and I agree it helps when you have limited time and you want to use class time for practice. But what we do not talk about is the amount of time it takes to make it happen. You have to spend a lot of your own time to save the class time. (Ahmed)

As was the case in student remarks, the opportunity provided by the flipped classroom to maximise the effective use of class time is understood by Ahmed as a key driver in their choosing the approach. He also raised concerns about the amount of personal time spent preparing for their implementation of the flipped classroom. But beyond these points, there is also a connection to the institutional context and the marketisation of UK HE: the amount of time and effort spent preparing for flipped classroom is not formally acknowledged or rewarded; for example, in workload allocation. That the practitioner may still want to save class time, even at the expense of their personal time, suggests both that they believe in an approach that uses class time more effectively and

that they identify personally and professionally with the values they perceive the flipped classroom to embody.

Echoing the remarks of Ahmed, Heba also referred to the extra work the approach requires of students, who may develop the kind of potentially negative attitudes identified by Dalia earlier in this section. Of particular importance is the careful distinction drawn by Heba between flipped learning 'in principle' and 'in practice':

Well, from experience it takes a long time to prepare for [the flipped classroom] and it is very demanding. In principle it is good and it can free class time for active learning and some students like the idea at the start but they get put off when they realise the amount of time and work they have to do before they come to class. I sometimes question if it is worth the time and effort! (Heba)

What is important in this comment is that Heba is not just reiterating student attitudes; for example, remarks that were heard in or around the classroom or made in the context of module feedback. Rather, there is a sense of a temporal dimension to the student response and of a change in attitude over a number of weeks that has been witnessed first-hand. Students may have started with a positive attitude and accepted the benefits of the flipped classroom in the short-term, but this attitude changed when they realised the work required of them on a regular basis before they come to class.

The change in attitude noticed by Heba, coupled with the comments made by Dalia, raise important questions about the nature and role of the learning workload in the student learning experience. It is as if, for some

students, there is a tipping point, beyond which they question the benefits they are told to expect. What is not clear from the comments is whether there is an objective, measurable increase in the number of hours spent studying under the flipped classroom implementations that were the subject of this study. Or, is it that the nature of the preparatory work students have been asked to do has resulted in a greater cognitive burden, either because it is inherently unfamiliar to them or because it makes greater demands on them as independent learners? Beyond the surface of the remarks, it also appears that there are deeper questions about learner identity and cultures of learning which may influence whether, why and how students and practitioners identify with a learning approach which makes particular demands of students as autonomous learners.

From the perspective of the practitioners, both Ahmed and Heba recognised the effective use of class time as an explicit advantage of the approach. However, the time this took from them was clearly understood to be a disadvantage. Ahmed expressed dissatisfaction with the implicit lack of support in the institutional context; however, this was not, of itself, sufficient to cause them to stop experimenting with the flipped classroom. In contrast, Heba responded directly to expressions of student dissatisfaction and did question the benefits of continuing with the approach once this point had been reached. What is not clear from the comments is whether Heba was thinking in this way because of factors, such as negative student feedback on module reporting, that were relevant in the wider institutional and sector context.

It is difficult to compare directly and draw detailed conclusions just from the comments of these two practitioners, or from those of the students before

them, but one point that does emerge is that the way time as a resource is manipulated in the flipped classroom is understood in the responses of students and practitioners in dichotomous either/or terms. Students and teachers understood themselves either to be flipping the learning or not, and the implication for their experience of learning and teaching time was similarly clear cut. What was not clear from the data was whether this basic division of experience was a result of pressures in the wider environment (marketisation, consumer attitudes), or whether it stemmed from a limited implementation of and exposure to a very specific form of flipped learning that was, at least in practice, unconnected to the wider experience of HE of which this module was but a small part.

A question such as this probably does not have a clear answer. However, it is possible to avoid being drawn into the either/or dichotomies that these initial responses to the theme of time might suggest. The following comment made by Ghina is more nuanced, both in qualifying how class time is spent, in articulating a compensatory and contextual aspect to flipped language teaching, and in seeing flipped teaching as being one of a number of approaches to student-centred learning:

I think saving time for speaking practice is the main reason why I do it. But I only flip parts of the lesson not the whole thing and I started doing it after some cuts to class time. If you are leading a good student-centred language class and you have got enough time why would you want to do a full flipped classroom? It is too much ... I don't know about others, but for me, it would be unnecessary. (Ghina)



Highlighting what are more specific and limited motivations for their flipped classroom approach, Ghina focused on an activity and issue that is specific to language teaching. She understood herself to be constructing the flipped classroom as part of a broader student-centred approach and used it to compensate for loss of class time as a learning resource. The idea that the flipped classroom introduced extra demands picks up on the points previously made by students and practitioners and evaluates the cost/benefit arguments of flipped learning against 'a good student-centred' class with adequate time. For Ghina, it is thus only in the context of a resource reduction that the perceived benefits of the flipped classroom (in this instance focused on just one aspect of language learning) outweigh the additional and specific burdens introduced by the approach. But it is also important to note that Ghina made no reference to how their learners use time outside the lesson in the alternate context of adequately resourced but more generic student-centred teaching.

To summarise, the in-class time which the flipped classroom provides was considered an advantage by both students and practitioners, but this perceived benefit was counter-balanced, and in some cases outweighed, by the extra preparation time required outside the lesson. Both students and practitioners communicated a sense that the flipped classroom politicised time and contributed to a sense of boundaries and ownership of time that were potentially transgressed. On one level, the move to evaluate the flipped classroom as "good" or "bad" is suggestive of a need to control these boundaries. However, the fact that flipped classroom implementation was also

focused on specific aspects of language teaching, and that student and practitioners saw benefit from it, mitigated the political dimension.

## **4.5 Relationships and Cultural Change**

The idea that an implementation of the flipped classroom has a relational dimension can be approached from the point of view of the approach itself and the cultural change it represents. It is not just that the flipped classroom has a distinctive learning culture, but that the flipped environment itself requires a shift in culture. How one understands that shift, prepares for it and manages the conflict associated with the processes of change was identified as a key challenge explicitly by the practitioners participating in this study and, more implicitly, by the students. It is also important to remember that the local processes of change in one language classroom unfold against the wider sector context, in which relationships of students to their institutions, of practitioners to their disciplines and of educational ideals to utilitarian social values are also being renegotiated. This discussion begins with consideration of the practitioner response.

### ***4.5.1 Practitioner Perspectives***

The findings presented in this section shed light on a number of areas that were challenging but focus primarily on student resistance to the flipped environment and negative attitudes towards the changes it requires of them. It is already established from the discussion of learning time and learner autonomy that the relationship of student autonomy to student workload

means that students may not engage fully with it. This, in turn, leads to questioning of the assumptions underpinning the values espoused by teacher and learner. In the presentation of findings around changes in the learning culture, it was also apparent that practitioners may not know how to promote the flipped classroom effectively to students and students may not know how to engage with it.

A useful starting point for refocusing these previous ideas on a concept of cultural change is the point that some students perceive the flipped classroom as not providing good teaching or value for money. The following comments are indicative of how practitioners construct student resistance to the flipped environment and the values it embodies:

You get resistance from some students which can be frustrating sometimes. They want to be taught in the traditional way. You are not just introducing a new or different style of teaching or class. There is also the issue of tuition fees and what students are paying for. (Ghina)

Well, the flipped classroom is a lot of work and we give students a lot of support and feedback, but we still get students complaining about paying high fees to teach themselves and the teacher not teaching in the flipped classroom. (Hani)

The above comments of Ghina and Hani highlight a set of connected factors that shape students' negative attitudes towards and rejection of the flipped classroom as practitioners understand them. This dynamic may be summarised as follows: some students preferred (or, more probably, "felt safe"

in) a traditional teacher-centred classroom in which they are passive recipients; and therefore, they did not want to be taught in a student-centred flipped classroom which required them to be active participants in their learning. Practitioners clearly understood that being accustomed to a particular learning culture shaped students' expectations of and preferences for their learning experience. Practitioners were also aware that by introducing a different culture they were taking students out of their comfort zone and that this could make them feel uncomfortable.

However, practitioners also expressed frustration at the resistance of and negative attitudes demonstrated by some students, regarding this as a seeming lack of awareness of the amount of work involved in delivering the flipped classroom. They also expressed disappointment at students' failure to acknowledge the amount of support and feedback given in the classroom to support student learning. Students' lack of appreciation and negative attitudes towards the flipped classroom caused the practitioners to feel underappreciated. Ahmed remarked:

I had students who said in one way or another that it's not their job to teach themselves, it's the lecturer's job to teach them. (Ahmed)

This comment underlines the powerful sense of dissatisfaction with the flipped classroom some students experience. The student had a certain perception of what was expected from them and their lecturer. However, these expectations were not met by the flipped classroom which redefines these roles and gives students more autonomy, balancing the power relations of both parties.

However, it is also important to remember that being an independent learner is not easy for some students, as noted by Heba:

Some students feel lost in the flipped classroom. For them it isn't easy to be independent. They want the teacher to teach in the traditional way because this is what they expect or are used to, and it is much easier for them. (Heba)

Heba's comment draws attention to the fact that students' expectations are closely linked to their sense of a learning culture that is familiar to them, one that they do not want to change. In an important sense, the flipped classroom requires students to be independent learners, however not all students are ready for or can adapt to this culture shift in their learning. They may not be equipped with the necessary skills required of an independent learner. Therefore, students may struggle and, in the words of the Heba, 'feel lost'. Becoming an independent learner, making the transition to a learner who is able to engage and cope with the demands of the flipped classroom, requires time and support from the practitioner. If this transition does not take place, for example due to issues with pace or approach, this can result not just in the practitioner feeling underappreciated and defensive but also lead to more formal complaints. This sense of a situation escalating is highlighted in the following comment by Tina:

Many students complained at the start of the year when I started working with the flipped classroom. Almost the whole class, they did not like it and I had to work hard to sell it to them. Some students still wanted to be taught in the traditional way. (Tina)

However, it is interesting to note in this comment how there is also a recognition that student attitudes can and do change over time. For example, it is telling that students complained particularly at the start of the course, suggesting an aversion to the unfamiliar environment of the flipped classroom. Time was needed to change their learning habits and bring them to a point where they could accept the approach. However, this does not happen automatically, nor does it happen with all students. Of particular importance in this practitioner's comments is the sense that a change in learning culture is not just a 'sell', but a "hard sell" at that. The return to a consumer metaphor arguably highlights the importance of having an open discussion with students about their learning to help them understand and accept new approaches to their education, not least to establish a sense that students are partners in the learning process. This need to involve students in discussions about their learning and teaching is key to prepare them for and support their transition into the flipped classroom learning culture, as reflected in this comment by Heba:

Students have certain assumptions, but some teachers also tend to assume that students would understand the purpose of the flipped classroom and their role and the teacher's role just because they signed up to the module. I think if you don't explain to students why you are doing what you are doing and help them to understand the benefits and be patient with them, they would just get fed up of it quite quickly, especially when it becomes challenging or time consuming. (Heba)

In these comments Heba highlights the importance of empathy in managing student expectations and helping students make the transition from a traditional learning culture to a flipped classroom learning culture. Having a continuous dialogue with students, establishing good rapport and developing an environment of mutual trust and respect is essential. Within this environment, the practitioner can engage students and help them develop their autonomy and confidence gradually, in order for them to be ready for the challenges of a new learning culture. Hani and Ahmed noted that the shift in learning culture requires both time and dialogue:

In the flipped class we are basically facilitators and we know it's much harder to be a facilitator than it is to be a teacher. But students do not necessarily see it that way and it is easy to accuse them of being lazy when they prefer the traditional way. But it is our role to help them to understand their role and ours. You should have some form of dialogue about your rationale. You need to be very honest with students, understand how they think, constantly ask for their feedback and if they're not doing the reading, why they are not doing it, and if they are not looking at the videos, why? (Hani)

By the way, it is not just a culture shift for students but also for teachers. Just because you understand what you do and what you want your students to do, there is no guarantee that they will understand it or do it your way. You have to be approachable, keep it fun and light-hearted. We cannot expect them to change overnight. (Ahmed)

Of particular importance in these comments is the sense that practitioners should not make assumptions that students will understand how their role and that of the practitioner work in the flipped environment. These roles should be explained and discussed with students, who are to be approached as active partners in the flipped classroom. Without engaging students in the process of shifting the learning culture, the flipped environment is likely to remain a site of conflict. Ahmed thus highlighted the fact that practitioners should be aware that these changes take time and practitioners themselves should be aware of their own attitudes and the limitations of those attitudes.

#### ***4.5.2 Student Perspectives***

In the practitioner comments above, there was evidence of the consumer metaphor being associated with the challenges of the flipped environment, specifically with the changes in learning culture, how students perceive them and how they express their response. Whilst it is important to acknowledge the presence of the consumer metaphor in student discourse – in a sense it is the socio-political backdrop to the shift in learning culture required in a flipped environment – there is a danger that the forcefulness with which it is invoked by students can dominate other, more subtle responses. There is also a danger that the emotions surrounding one shift in culture (being required to pay for Higher Education) become conflated with the affective response to another (a flipped classroom implementation). The following comments by students are indicative of strength of feeling and consumer overtones that initial questions about the challenges of the flipped environment provoked:



We are not coming here for no reason [sic]. Nine thousand pounds a year is a lot of money and I do not think it's right to end up teaching myself. (Noura)

I agree with [Noura], at the end of the day, we paid so much money to be here and we did not pay to teach ourselves. What's the point! (Sara)

The flipped classroom might be interactive, but I paid tuition fees to get taught by a teacher. (Amal)

All three of these students referenced the substantial amount of tuition fees they now pay in return for their university education, which reinforces how they perceive their education as a product. They all expressed dissatisfaction with the flipped classroom specifically for not providing them as consumers with good value for money. These comments clearly reflect a learner identity that has a consumer orientation to learning. They convey an image of students literally weighing up the costs and benefits of their education and not doing so necessarily in terms of educational values. The comments also demonstrate a student preference for the teacher-centred traditional classroom, specifically because they perceive it to be better value for money when compared to the student-centred flipped classroom. Note that there is no reference to the value of being an autonomous learner or of having more creative and collaborative learning experiences in class in these remarks.

It is also important to note that these comments convey how the roles of both practitioners and students in the flipped classroom did not meet student expectations, which is the point at which concerns about money start to refocus around cultures of learning. For example, Amal's comments indicate that

students' negative views of the flipped classroom persisted despite the acknowledgement that it provided them with an interactive experience and, by extension, active learning. These comments clearly show how student satisfaction is not necessarily linked to pedagogical benefits, which are probably not properly understood, but rather to consumer attitudes and personal expectations.

Students' expectations and student satisfaction play a significant part in teaching decisions and course evaluation. It is important that practitioners have a good understanding of the student consumerist framework and how it may impact their students' attitudes and approach to learning. Awareness of this concept and its impact can help practitioners to manage student expectations and avoid dissatisfaction. It also helps practitioners to understand the complex set of factors that can contribute to resistance to the flipped classroom. What these remarks show is that these wider aspects of culture should be taken into account when evaluating the effectiveness of the flipped environment and the shift in learning culture it seeks to create.

Beyond the expressions of particularly strong views on their experience, the findings from the focus group demonstrate a degree of confusion and some contradictory views among some students regarding the flipped environment. While some students seemed to have adapted to the new learning culture, others clearly did not. The latter preferred the traditional class, despite acknowledging that the flipped classroom has many advantages. The following comment captures this sense of unease that underpin the changes that were taking place and how they were received:

This is the first year I was taught in this way and I am not sure I feel confident or comfortable with it ... We were given the material to prepare at home and come to do the activities in class. I enjoyed working with my group but to be honest, I prefer the traditional classroom and I think teachers should actually teach in class instead of relying on us to teach ourselves. (Dalia)

It is clear from this comment that the student struggled to adapt to the new learning culture of the flipped classroom but did engage with the process of cultural shift. Part of the difficulty here seems to lie with the fact that student did not understand the rationale for or the benefit of being taught in this way, and there is a sense that the rationale was not explained to the student in advance. The student clearly did not value their autonomy or see its benefits. Instead, they interpreted this as the practitioner not fulfilling their role and understood that *teaching* responsibility had been shifted to the students instead. Although the student admitted that they enjoyed the collaborative aspect of the classroom learning and found it engaging, they still preferred the traditional classroom.

An important aspect of these remarks is the student's use of language. Specifically, the use of the passive form in 'I was taught' and 'we were given' suggests a lack of communication between the practitioner and students. There is also a sense that there was no gradual transition from the traditional to the flipped classroom environment: it just happened. In this experience of change, the student did not have the chance to adapt to a new way of learning nor did they have a sound understanding of the new roles and responsibilities

involved. It also appears that their attitude towards the flipped classroom did not improve over time, although they seem to have engaged with the collaborative aspect of flipped learning.

Another student made the following observation:

I can use the online materials and learn on my own ... I can do that, and I know the tutor puts in a lot of work, but I still prefer the traditional class. When you are teaching me, you are motivating me to work, you are encouraging me to study. It's different to when you give me a video. (Sara)

In contrast to earlier responses, Sara's comments show awareness of the students' and the practitioner's roles and responsibilities in the flipped classroom. Within this student-centred framework, they understood themselves to be an independent learner, one who takes responsibility for their learning. The student establishes that they have the ability to learn on their own and do not seem to have a problem with managing their learning in this way. Furthermore, the student is also aware of the practitioner's input in the flipped classroom and acknowledges their effort. However, in spite of this awareness, Sara still expresses preference for the traditional teacher-centred classroom. This sense of a transition made but not embedded is perhaps the clearest evidence of the extent to which a flipped environment demands cultural change of students.

There is an important point about socialisation and learner psychology embedded in these remarks. The social aspect of a classroom makes learners feel that they are in a learning space, as opposed to simply sitting in front of a

computer on their own and taking on information. This emphasises the human element of learning and pedagogy. The student expects the practitioner to motivate them and this motivation is linked to a human relationship, one which online materials or videos do not provide. The practitioner is not only there to teach, guide or facilitate, but they are also important as an extrinsic motivator who gives feedback and reinforcement, and encourages students to acquire new knowledge. According to Sara, one of the limitations of learning technology, namely videos or online materials, is that it does not provide them with the extrinsic motivation needed to learn. For that, human intervention in the form of a “teacher” is required.

However, it is possible to recast a problem of motivation in terms of skills and techniques as the following remarks by Jasmine demonstrate:

It took me a while to get used to the flipped classroom. It was hard for me at the start because I was used to the structured way of the other class. I mean the traditional and the tutor explaining everything in class. I had to find the time to prepare ... Our tutor has been very helpful. He gave me some good tips and a lot of support. I really enjoyed the flipped class. (Jasmine)

In this comment the student draws attention to the importance of having or developing certain skills to be able to adapt to the flipped classroom. Time management and self-discipline are two key skills necessary for the flipped classroom. Shifting from the traditional way of learning to the flipped way was not an easy process. Being accustomed to the traditional teacher-centred classroom gave the student a sense of structure and obligation towards their

learning. Moving to a student-centred learning environment where the student assumes a greater responsibility for their learning requires adaptation and developing new skills.

The comments made by Jasmine also show that the practitioner's support in making this transition was invaluable. The practitioner played a role in helping the student develop the necessary skills of time management and learning discipline to be able to work with the flipped classroom. Developing these skills enabled the student to have a positive attitude towards the flipped classroom and eventually engage with it in ways they understood to be effective. Initially, the traditional class represented a safe learning environment in which the student was familiar with a structure within which the practitioner held greater explicit control. That the student was able to approach the practitioner, receive help and develop skills and consequently a positive attitude over time, shows the importance of practitioners knowing their students' needs and creating a supportive safe environment for a shift in learning culture to take place. Once more, it also highlights the importance of human interaction and the practitioner-student relationship in the development of a new culture of learning.

#### **4.6 Control of the Teaching and Learning Environment**

Reflecting the range and depth of emotional responses discussed in the previous section, all the practitioners participating in this study agreed that the flipped classroom environment is more challenging to create and deliver when compared to that of the traditional classroom. From a practitioner perspective, the rationale for this change is to use class time more actively and to engage

students more deeply with their learning. However, the flipped environment itself involves practitioners in different processes and practices to those with which they are most familiar, reflecting the learning environment it seeks to establish and the changing roles of all participants within the new culture. It follows from the changes to these roles that the control practitioners understand themselves to have over this new environment also changes.

In a flipped classroom environment, in-class practices are strongly linked to and depend on students' self-regulated learning out of class. For the flipped classroom to function adequately, it is generally accepted that the student has to obtain the most basic levels of knowledge and understanding, associated with the lower levels of Bloom's taxonomy (Talbert, 2018) before class. This is for the purpose of allowing the practitioner to facilitate and guide learning of more advanced skills, associated with the higher levels of Bloom's taxonomy, in class. It is also generally accepted that with a flipped classroom approach students are required to exercise greater autonomy, and therefore control over their learning, when compared to traditional models of learning. However, this autonomy and control is also predicated on that initial phase of self-regulated learning.

A consequence of the importance of this initial phase in the learning cycle is that the practitioner's control over the flipped learning environment and the learner's control over their learning are interdependent. Student disengagement has a proportionately greater negative impact on the practitioner's control of the in-class processes in the flipped classroom than it does under direct instruction, when it is generally understood to be easier for a practitioner to respond because fewer assumptions have been made about

the learner and the point at which their new knowledge begins. This sense that practitioners lose an element of control in a flipped environment, and that this is inherently dangerous, is indicated by the following statement made by Ahmed:

The flipped classroom is very risky. In the traditional class, there isn't that much risk. You know the worst thing that can happen is your PowerPoint breaks down or an activity does not go to plan. Well this can still happen in the flipped classroom and you can deal with it, but the real problem is when students don't prepare. (Ahmed)

In these remarks, Ahmed compares the delivery of a traditional classroom with that of a flipped classroom in terms of risk, a concept which is loosely organised around a principle of how well the practitioner is able to manage classroom processes and activities. They state that the flipped classroom involves more challenges and complexity. There is a sense that within the confines of a traditional class, regardless of whether it is student-centred or teacher-centred class, practitioners operate within a comfort zone of the familiar. The challenges of the traditional classroom can, it is assumed, be anticipated and are relatively limited in their scope, ranging, for example, from technical faults to other issues related to ineffective planning.

These kinds of difficulties are not, however, regarded as serious because practitioners have some level of control over these risks and are familiar with how to respond to them *in situ*. Ahmed is also aware that these same challenges occur in the flipped classroom but draws a distinction between them and a qualitatively different level of risk, one which is perceived



to be wholly outside the practitioner's control. This new kind of risk is related to the level of student commitment to the approach, which is generally understood to be crucial for the flipped classroom to work. Specifically, a lack of learner commitment to pre-class self-regulated learning can pressurise the practitioner and result in a compromised learning environment, as highlighted in the following statements:

We are totally reliant on students' commitment. It can get very frustrating when some students are not committed and there is nothing you can do if they have not fulfilled their part of the deal. (Ahmed)

There are so many challenges in the flipped classroom. For a start it is very demanding and requires a lot of work and time, but the real problem is when some students do not do the work at home. It gets stressful ... The class becomes unbalanced and it is unfair on the students who prepared! (Tina)

What is clear from these comments is that having been inducted into the practitioner's flipped classroom, students are understood to be adopting a more active role in the learning process and, crucially, share more responsibilities with practitioners in comparison with traditional modes of delivery. There is a powerful sense in which the whole infrastructure of the flipped classroom is based on students completing their pre-class self-regulated learning, which determines how and if the flipped classroom functions adequately and effectively.

How students are viewed by practitioners, namely as equal partners in the learning process, is most vividly expressed in the Ahmed's use of the term 'deal'. This idea of a transactional exchange in the flipped classroom environment reflects what are perceived to be shifting power relations between practitioner and learners. By giving students more control over their learning, practitioners hand over more of the power that is ordinarily invested in their traditional role. Consequently, they can feel out of control if students do not fully commit, the litmus test for which is an appropriate level of pre-engagement. As Tina noted, a lack of pre-learning may cause frustration for the practitioner, not only in a narrow sense related to the learning process but also in managing tensions within the class; for example, some students may feel their learning in-class is hindered by their peers who did not prepare. This concern was communicated in most of the interviews conducted with the practitioners:

I had to switch to a traditional class many times because students did not prepare for one reason or another. It can be very disheartening. This experience can leave you feeling uncomfortable and not totally in control of what you do. (Heba)

The principle is good, but the flipped classroom isn't every teacher's cup of tea. Learner autonomy is an important principle in Higher Education, but I know professors, researchers, very charismatic lecturers who were cynical and gave it up after a while because students did not commit. (Ghina)

As Ghina notes, an important reason why some academics have reservations about the use of the flipped classroom, either staying away from it altogether, or in some cases trying it but later stopping it, relates to student engagement. These findings reiterate the point that the flipped classroom gives students greater control over their learning and supports student autonomy, which, as noted in the introduction to this study, is one of the key objectives of the Higher Education reform agenda. However, for practitioners it is not without risk. If students do not fulfil their end of the agreement, it can leave practitioners feeling out of control and put them off using the approach.

One of the main aims of flipping a classroom is to maximise the benefit of the in-class time. However, if practitioners do not have clear strategies to manage and mitigate the problems that might arise because of unprepared students then class time might not be utilised in the optimum ways that were intended. Prepared students might feel frustrated when the practitioners' attention is given more to help students who have not prepared. Prepared students should be able to get the practitioners' attention and feedback and receive the guidance and support they need in class, and they should also receive appropriate activities that reflect their level of knowledge at the start of the class.

This, in turn, requires that a practitioner be in control of their classroom management strategies and be able to deal with any gap in learning separating prepared from unprepared students. On one level, it might be questioned whether and to what extent this kind of problem differs from the ordinary processes of differentiation and scaffolding that might be commonplace in other teaching environments. However, participants in this study appeared to

have a sense that the discrepancies in a flipped classroom where not all students had engaged appropriately with the pre-learning were of a qualitatively different order and/or required specific expertise for them to be handled effectively. This idea that a flipped environment requires a specific professional competence was articulated in the following comment:

We already know that some students won't do the work. It is expected in any classroom whether flipped or not, but it is about managing and engaging those students and making sure they don't slow down the class ... This requires a lot of experience ... a novice teacher might feel very threatened. (Rami)

In these remarks, Rami recognised that some students might not fulfil their pre-class learning and expects it as part and parcel of any learning environment regardless. For them, an experienced practitioner should expect this possibility and have plans in place to mitigate its impact and maintain control of the class. For Rami, managing those unprepared students is the main challenge. Having a group of students, some of whom have fulfilled their pre-class learning and others who have not, results, in their view, in unbalanced in-class interactions. The practitioner has to employ various methods and strategies to direct the class practices in a process that caters for those who prepared and those who did not, guiding the learning of both groups.

In the comments of Rami, it is clear that mitigation strategies are considered important in the flipped classroom, but they also note that these strategies require time and practice to master. Whereas in a traditional mode of delivery, by implication, they can be employed with a lower level of expertise

and insight. This idea highlights the importance of experience in being able to control the potentially challenging environment of the flipped classroom. The complexity of the flipped environment might pose challenges to a novice practitioner with limited experience and confidence. A novice practitioner might not be able to deal with the various challenges associated with the flipped classroom or mitigate the range of problems the reversed structure might bring up, including how to manage and engage unprepared students. However, for other practitioners in the study, a bigger challenge lay in designing engaging material, a point which receives comment here because it appears to be an area where practitioners compensate, at least in part, for a loss of control elsewhere. In this regard, the following remarks were typical:

To me designing the right material to engage students is the main issue ... Without the right material we cannot direct student learning and students cannot take control of their learning and this is what really matters. (Tina)

Obviously, among other things, I would say designing engaging material is very challenging. It is not easy, and it can be quite challenging to find or to make engaging and easy to follow activities or videos. You need experience and you need also to know your students' interests as well and try things out. It takes a lot of time and work, but it is worth it when you see your students engaged and you feel in control of what you do. (Ahmed)

The main challenge of the flipped classroom from Ahmed's point of view is creating engaging intentional content, that is to say making or finding suitable learning materials that engage students and facilitate learning both inside and

outside the classroom. Intentional content is essential in any learning environment; however, this appears to be even more so in the flipped classroom, where it is explicitly linked by the data collected in this study to a sense of practitioner control over the 'right' content presented in the 'right' way. Such learning materials allow students to take control of their learning and help the practitioner to guide and direct learning. Thus, intentional content is effective both with regard to student control of their learning and practitioner control over the flipped environment and associated processes.

Closely linked to this idea that well-designed materials provide for greater control is a sense that the design process takes time and effort and, crucially, require knowledge and understanding of the learners. Ahmed refers to the importance of knowing students' preferences and what they find engaging, noting that this process is time consuming and requires testing, refining and experience. For example, instructional videos that are both easy and engaging require a lot of time and expertise to prepare. These issues, in turn, implicitly bring into question the value of the flipped classroom for practitioners, who may question whether it is worth using the approach when it is compared to traditional forms of teaching, including ones that are student-centred but require less time and effort to design and prepare.

Ahmed clearly invests a lot of his own time and effort into making engaging materials; however, he believes it is worth it because it gives him a sense of control to know that his students will be engaged. But this sense of worth does not just derive from a sense of satisfaction in controlling the mechanics of effective learning; it is also clearly related to questions of practitioner identity and the boundaries that determine where one's sense of

professional responsibility starts and ends. This shows a link between practitioner control, professional identity and a need for certain kinds of professionally relevant knowledge. For example, the importance of practitioners having good IT knowledge in order to be able to design and create materials that facilitate learning is clearly stated by Ghina in the following comment:

Having experience and the right materials are all important for the flipped classroom but having good IT skills and knowledge can be challenging for some teachers. My IT knowledge has helped me a lot in making my videos and other online materials. I think it's very helpful to have good IT knowledge particularly when there isn't enough IT support from the institution. (Ghina)

Ghina notes the importance of having IT skills to be able to design and create videos and materials for the flipped classroom. Yet she also acknowledges that not every practitioner has this knowledge, which presents a challenge for flipped classroom environment. This knowledge can be invaluable, particularly if institutional support is limited. Institutional support in terms of providing adequate resources that enable practitioners to design appropriate content is very important: without this, the flipped classroom represents an arena in which lack of control over other aspects of their professional lives is also highlighted.

Not having this support or resources can pose many challenges for practitioners and negatively impacts on their ability to design and provide suitable materials for the flipped classroom. It also limits the implementation and use of the flipped classroom to only those practitioners with good IT skills,

who, by implication, already have a sense of control over this aspect of their professional environment. But the need for control is not just limited to relatively technical areas of the flipped environment, it also extends to the human dimensions of educational interactions. In addition to technical knowledge, to be able to manage the challenges of the flipped classroom successfully, it was felt to be imperative that practitioners possess certain characteristics and interpersonal skills, such as 'flexibility' and 'understanding'. Ghina elaborated further on what she meant by flexibility and interpersonal skills in the following remarks:

In the flipped classroom you also have to have very good personal skills to know how to engage your students. You have to be dynamic, social, very perceptive and very quick and flexible otherwise it will be hard. You need to know how to inspire the students and keep them motivated. (Ghina)

From these remarks, it is clear that Ghina understands the practitioners' role in the flipped environment is no longer solely about imparting knowledge. Within the limits of flipped classroom pedagogy, the practitioner is already a facilitator who guides learners to construct deeper knowledge, gives students feedback and corrects misunderstandings within an active collaborative learning environment. Yet, reflected in these comments, is a sense that the practitioner also has a wider role that goes beyond the formal elements of teaching and involves building a safe and engaging environment in which students can feel inspired and motivated. Another way to understand this is that the antidote to a sense of the loss of control that was often articulated in



the data does not just lie in the specifics of professional competence or technical knowledge as applied to mastery of a flipped environment, but rather in humanising that environment by focusing on the educational relationships that are formed within it.

## **4.7 Conclusion**

In this chapter I have presented my findings in terms of four themes and contextualised the implementations of the flipped classroom I investigated in their disciplinary and sector context. An important point of context to the data is that the form of partial implementation discussed in this chapter derived not from the debates about the flipped classroom, but from disciplinary priorities of practitioners. It was also apparent from the findings that the way in which practitioners and students talked about their experience – the discourse of their flipped classroom – was heavily influenced by the context of the UK HE sector. The pedagogic motivations for implementation largely reflected established principles in communicative language teaching (see, for example, Richards (2005)) and the constructivist underpinnings to Bloom's taxonomy. The relationship of the four themes identified in the data to my original research question is the subject of the discussion in the next chapter.

## **Chapter 5 – Discussion**

### **5.1 Introduction**

In this chapter I discuss the findings of my research in terms of the questions that originally motivated this study. It will be useful to recall at this point that the aims of my study were to investigate how and why UK HE language practitioners implemented the flipped classroom and to consider the challenges they faced in the context of the delivery of foreign language teaching on Institution-Wide Language Programmes. My discussion of how the findings help to answer these questions is followed by a summary of my recommendations for flipped classroom implementation. It should be borne in mind that these recommendations are made in the broad context of UK Higher Education. More narrowly, they are specifically relevant for Institution-Wide Language Programme settings but may have a wider currency in other disciplinary contexts with appropriate adjustments. In the final section of this chapter, I also consider the limitations of my investigation and identify areas for future research arising from this study.

### **5.2 How Practitioners Implemented the Flipped Classroom**

In my investigation I focused on the underlying principles that appeared to influence the decisions practitioners took as they discussed and reflected on their experience of implementing the flipped classroom. This strategic approach reflected the fact that all practitioners implemented the flipped classroom in different ways, and it was not meaningful to make comparisons of specific tactical decisions (for example, at the level of lesson plans, material

design or assessment) when there was considerable variation in the extent to which practitioners drew on and implemented the approach across different languages and different institutions. I note that such variation in forms of the flipped classroom is in line with the definition of the flipped classroom proposed by Ileri and Omwenga (2016). In this respect, an important aspect of their definition is that flipped teaching is subject, *inter alia*, to the professional judgements of the educator.

At this level of generality, the findings from the interviews with practitioners showed that the most striking commonality was that all pursued partial implementations of the flipped classroom; no-one attempted to flip an entire language module. In the context of this research, a partial implementation means the flipped approach was not applied consistently to the teaching of the module or the delivery of all aspects of the curriculum. This basic point of context to the findings ultimately reflects practitioner decisions about the effective use of resources (including their workload and the elective status of IWLP modules) and their understanding of flipped learning as a specific example of a more general blended learning/student-centred approach to communicative language teaching. As a point about the replicability of practice and potential recommendations arising from this study, I note that it is also in line with the recommendations of Kay and Macdonald (2016), which were discussed in Section 2.5.2 of the literature review in connection with the limitations of a fully flipped environment.

It was also apparent from the practitioner reports that the designs of these partial implementations were heavily influenced by constructivist perspectives on learning. This reflects the point made in Section 2.6.1 of the

literature review, namely the claim that flipped learning rests on a constructivist ideology (Bishop and Verleger, 2013, p. 1). More specifically, it shows an understanding by practitioners that their approach was closely linked to ideas about the social, cultural and collaborative aspects of learning generally, and, more specifically, to the methodology of communicative language teaching. However, an important point of detail about the implementations investigated for this study is that in-class activity more obviously reflected the mid-levels of Bloom's taxonomy as discussed by Talbert (2019), rather than the higher levels of the taxonomy that are often envisaged in the flipped classroom literature.

What was less apparent among both practitioners and students was an awareness of the different qualities of the learning time that separated pre-class from in-class, how this distinction was implicitly constructed in these implementations and what its consequences were for learning needs. To a large extent, this reflected a dichotomy in the minds of practitioners about how they operationalised constructivist principles in a flipped environment. It may also have reflected the tension in the minds of the students between ownership of their learning and the value of the educational product. The most valued aspects of learning were consistently identified as the most tangible manifestations of its social, cultural and collaborative dimensions, and these were, in the perceptions of the participants, almost entirely restricted to the physical classroom. Everything that happened before this point was conceived of as the difficult, imperfect and, in many ways, compensatory means to that end. My explanation for this phenomenon is that the pre-class learning involved replacing what may have been previously collectively and creatively

approached at the start of a class with something that students would navigate individually through the medium of technology in relative isolation of the teacher and of each other.

Closely aligned to this point is the fact that much of the careful thinking by practitioners that went into scaffolded processes and instructional design associated with the students' learning before the class was directed purely at the cognitive dimensions of that process. But there was no evidence in the flipped classrooms that were the subject of this investigation of any attempt to socialise or contextualise this earlier stage of the learning. In other words, the pre-learning stage was thought to be difficult because of the practitioner's absence, because it focused on the lower levels of the cognitive domain of Bloom's taxonomy and because students were not thought to possess the skills to manage (primarily in the sense of self-regulation) this kind of learning on their own.

The persistent references to the use of scaffolding in the cognitive preparations for the physical class appeared to obscure in the discourse of practitioners the possibilities for this stage of the learning process to be collaborative and contextualised. It was as if the conceptualisations of in-class/out-of-class learning were constructed to a significant extent in terms of the absence/presence of the practitioner, the creative/not-creative dimensions of the task and the difficulty of self-regulation in isolation of other students and a sage/guide. The necessity of inducting students in the flipped environment was largely directed at these senses of imperfection and absence. Moreover, elements of the student response (the sense of being short-changed by having to "teach" themselves) arguably responded to this sensitive point explicitly and

reflected difficulties some students had in understanding how they were expected to learn.

What is at issue here is not whether the practitioners were sensitive in their understanding of and response to the learning needs of students. In their design and implementation of the courses and their understanding of the risks and limitations of the flipped classroom, awareness of learning needs was clearly evidenced. It was also the case that students were appropriately inducted into the process of what may have been an unfamiliar learning cycle and that this was, in turn, informed by processes of reflection by practitioners from previous academic years. The issue is partly whether the construction of pre-class and in-class learning along the lines of knowledge that is or is not contextualised and socialised is necessary or helpful. But it also relates more widely to the relationship of the flipped classroom to Bloom's taxonomy on the one hand and of language learning to notions of scaffolding on the other. In terms of the flipped classroom itself, these dichotomous attitudes also reflect the tensions that separate an understanding of the approach as a mechanically inverted sequence of learning and its conceptualisation as a much broader shift in learning culture.

To understand this pedagogic blindspot, it is important to return to the context of these implementations as set out in chapter 1. The flipped classroom was used by practitioners in this study to address speaking and listening skills because the approach was perceived to address a threat to a core disciplinary value of communicative language teaching: the goal of the creative use of language for communicative purposes. But whereas this value was articulated in terms of idealised linguistic performance in the classroom as the pedagogic

goal, the findings showed that what students valued in these partial implementations of the flipped classroom was ‘to speak and discuss’, ‘to practice’ and ‘to speak and clarify’. When discussing how the classes went, rather than the principle they were intended to embody, the practitioners also valued the subject-specific support they were able to give in the form of ‘improving fluency and pronunciation’ and the more general trait of being able to give students ‘time and attention’.

### **5.3 Motivations for Implementing the Flipped Classroom**

As I noted in Section 5.2.1 above, one of the key findings to emerge from discussion of the flipped learning experience in the interviews with practitioners was their sense that their use of the approach was an enactment of an educational ideal in circumstances where their ideals had been compromised. The ideal, informally communicated as what constituted “effective” learning in the disciplinary context of language teaching, was manifest in the form of a student-centred language class where there was sufficient time for intensive practice, feedback, group work, meaningful tasks and rich contexts. This ideal had, in the minds of all practitioners, been compromised by significant cuts in class time. By way of charting a way through the professional dimensions of this conflict, their use of the flipped classroom held for the practitioners’ restorative or compensatory potential. For the most part, students also expressed the view that the flipped classroom rebalanced their learning and they valued the class setting they understood it had enabled.

The coupling of a disciplinary ideal to the mechanics of a flipped environment does require some critical attention, however. Among practitioners the most salient consequence of their decision was an increase in workload, for example in new design considerations, and additional emotional demands, for example in taking students into unfamiliar territory. But from my perspective as investigator, the most obvious consequence of the compensatory motivation to maintain a disciplinary ideal was that other benefits of flipped learning were not foregrounded in their thinking. For example, one could implement a flipped environment with the primary intention of developing learner autonomy with or without any specific reference to a given disciplinary context. If this was successfully implemented, it would almost certainly have the consequence of enabling the kinds of language class that practitioners involved in this study sought. But the focus on the in-class goal that was observed in this study brought with it questions about whether there had been an actual change in learning culture rather than just adjustments to behaviour.

For example, the compensatory motivation for implementing a flipped environment, the fact that it was seen to a large extent as a way out of an organisational problem, has explanatory potential in accounting for the limited interactions between the flipped approach and language pedagogy. It was noticeable in the discussions with practitioners that their thinking about the flipped classroom was not informed by consideration of how the flipped environment might overlap with their discipline in terms of the specifics of language learning. Rather the thinking was limited to how to compensate effectively for loss of contact time and the use of the flipped classroom was



limited to this end. By this I mean that no-one I interviewed had thought about the aspects of their teaching that coincided with the approach prior to implementation of the flipped classroom. Preparation of language prior to class, such as the learning of vocabulary or developing some initial fluency with grammatical exercises, is a common feature of language teaching and offered a point of commonality between established and new practice – a potential bridge for students, that was, at very least potentially relevant to their induction in the flipped classroom.

In the context of this discussion about motivations, it is worth noting that many practitioners explicitly commented on the alignment of the methodology that underpins flipped learning with the wider HE objectives of promoting learner autonomy. However, the nature of these remarks was that they were more by way of justifying or legitimising the decision to implement a flipped classroom rather than forming a motivating factor. The immediate consequence of this framing of the flipped intervention, namely in terms of limited forms of cultural change, has already been noted. But the fact that promoting learner autonomy was not part of the immediate motivation for implementing the flipped classroom also says something about the institutional context in which these initiatives took place. The distinction in practitioners' minds between the cuts to class contact time, which were imposed by the institution, and the flipped initiatives that resulted, which were not, was clear-cut. Practitioners spoke at length about what they felt to be a lack of institutional or even collegiate support for their work.

In terms of what institutional support for flipped language teaching might look like, the findings suggest that relatively simple collective actions are the

place to start. For example, the mapping of language pedagogy to flipped environments, or the sharing of good practice in socialising or contextualising pre-class learning online, were noticeably absent from the data collected for this study. More broadly, in the context of the research question about motivations, the lack of connections between individual practice and disciplinary and institutional contexts underlines the point that the motivations of the implementations examined in this study were purely individual. Perhaps the most important consequence of this is that the very principles of flipped learning, such as collaboration and contextualisation, were not reflected in the educational culture of the programmes and institutions in which these initiatives took place.

## **5.4 Challenges of Implementation**

With reference to the challenges experienced by practitioners implementing the flipped classroom and identified as such by them in this study, I have organised the discussion that follows into three sections. These sections focus in turn on: a) the issues surrounding learner autonomy; b) the challenges of negotiating roles between practitioners and students; and c), the questions surrounding institutional support for implementations of the flipped classroom.

### ***5.4.1 Learner Autonomy***

Perhaps the most important finding from Chapter 4 is that there was little evidence of practitioners implementing measures to build skills to develop learner autonomy in their implementations of a flipped learning environment.

In fact, the default response to an implementation that was not proceeding as planned was to revert to a teacher-centred approach. This was in spite of the fact that practitioners viewed students developing as autonomous learners, for whom taking ownership of their learning represented an ideal, if not the very purpose of Higher Education. They were also aware that not all students arrived in Higher Education with the competence to manage their own learning and that the acquisition of these skills took time. The processes by which practitioners inducted students into the flipped classroom appeared to be orientated towards explaining the approach in a narrow sense but did not seek to build learner autonomy beyond communicating the necessity of them preparing for class in order to participate fully in the higher level activities.

This is a point that is closely connected to the discussion of learning needs and design. The major focus of practitioners in the preparation for the flipped implementation was the design of the pre-class learning and ensuring that the activities were appropriately scaffolded for students to be able to engage with the learning in the absence of the practitioner. The anxiety that was consistently expressed by practitioners was that students either would not prepare for class or would not be able to prepare for class. There was no sense of a need to connect the immediate problem of students understanding and engaging with the flipped implementation in the specific context of their language module with the wider backdrop of expectations about learner autonomy in Higher Education and ways in which it could or should be developed.

It could be argued that this would be an unrealistic expectation. Language modules on open language programmes typically contribute around

10-15% of a full-time student's credits for a given academic year and may only constitute 2.5-5% of the total credit requirements for an undergraduate degree. In short, these figures do make the point that one practitioner pursuing a partial implementation of the flipped environment in one optional module is unlikely to have much impact on the wider development of learner autonomy. It is also the case that attributing a "failed" flipped classroom implementation in an HE language class solely to problems with the design and scaffolding of pre-class tasks is equally unrealistic: the factors in the wider environment are almost certainly of greater significance. However, given the close association of flipped methodology and ideas of learner autonomy, it would seem sensible to give much greater consideration when planning and evaluating a flipped classroom implementation to the wider culture of learning across an institution.

There is a further point to emerge from the findings of this study. None of the practitioners or the students interviewed gave any consideration to the question of whether their experience of implementing and learning in a flipped language class was influenced by the fact that the subject/discipline was not their major. In other words, a science or history student learning a language at university may be expected to experience their learning as more difficult than a committed and experienced linguist studying languages as a degree. By this, I do not mean that they may be less committed, but that what might be considered basic learning routines will be less familiar to them. Viewed from this perspective, the focus of practitioners on scaffolding and design or pre-class tasks, and their desire to ensure that there were no obstacles to engagement, makes a good deal of sense. Learning tasks that could be routinely expected of a linguist are less likely to form part of the repertoire of

independent learning skills of a student who may, in this strictly technical sense, be considered a non-linguist. This, in turn, raises questions about the subject-specific dimensions of a learning culture, the generic nature of the concept of learner autonomy and how these ideas can and should apply to discipline-specific implementations of the flipped classroom. Whilst these questions were not asked or answered by this study, they are discussed further at the end of this chapter in the context of areas identified for further research.

#### **5.4.2 *Negotiating Roles***

A striking feature of the interviews with practitioners was their sense of having to negotiate, more or less successfully, with students as part of their implementation of a flipped classroom. Equally striking was how the reluctance of students to change their understanding of their participation in and contribution to learning was almost always expressed in terms of how this shift left them “short-changed”. This sense of being short-changed appeared to result from a juxtaposition of experiences and ideas. Most notably, these included the greater cost to them in terms of preparation time; fears about them having responsibility for their own learning; and their expectations of what practitioners should and could do for them.

There is clearly an overlap in these ideas about negotiating roles and the findings summarised in the previous section on learner autonomy. But whereas learner autonomy is both an individual skill and the product of a learning culture acquired over longer periods of time, a role is something more transient. The fact that discussion of roles should emerge in the context of relatively limited interventions on optional modules is not surprising. It also

focuses attention on the immediate issues that arise on exposing students to a flipped implementation for the first time and for such an implementation to be successful – in the context of a non-specialist language class in an HE setting – it foregrounds the experimental nature of what is being undertaken for all participants.

In short, the comments of practitioners and students about internal disagreements surrounding the implementations of the flipped classroom suggest that separating the negotiation of roles from wider questions of learning culture and educational values may be helpful in managing conflict. For students, in particular where questions of time are prominent, it highlights the fact that the role of the student as learner, and more specifically as a language learner participating in a more experimental form of delivery, this is but one role among many. In terms of the Higher Education agenda of preparing students for employment, the idea that students have different roles, which bring with them competing demands and a need to choreograph and sequence priorities, and more importantly, that this is something that is difficult to do, arguably prefigures many experiences of the workplace (and thereby connects a flipped classroom implementation to the development of employability). From this perspective, engagement in a partially flipped classroom is a relatively minor inflection in a range of constantly shifting roles.

There were specific instances of student attitudes that could have been productively challenged by reference to this idea of roles. For example, in the case of the student who feared they might learn the wrong thing if the teacher were not physically present and teaching them directly, it is possible to reframe this scenario by reimagining it as a discussion in a future workplace setting

rather than responding through a more abstract discussion of learner autonomy. This approach would avoid a problem that was noticeably absent in the practitioners' discussions of their students, namely that IWLP students on their modules were at different points in their university journey: first, second and third-year, exchange and postgraduate. Against this backdrop of student variation, it would be unrealistic to think that the challenges of a flipped classroom implementation could be addressed through discussions in the abstract of learner autonomy.

If I have highlighted the place that roles had in the data, and how these ideas might be developed, I am also mindful of the limitations of the metaphor: roles are linked to performance in the theatrical sense. To speak of roles may be useful in managing a situation of interpersonal or social conflict with a view to removing attitudinal obstacles to learning, but they do not of themselves mean that learning will take place or guarantee that teaching is effective.

#### ***5.4.3 Institutional Support***

In light of the findings of the semi-structured interviews conducted with practitioners, the notion of institutional support may usefully be broken down into three separate but overlapping ideas. The first is the most obvious: a practitioner's interactions with the organisation in which they work at the broadest possible level. The second is the programme or departmental structure within which their teaching is primarily based: for the practitioners involved in this study, this structure was the language programme. The third is the informal pattern of interpersonal relations, conversations and initiatives with colleagues that are typical of educational environments. The most

surprising finding of this study was that none of the practitioners reported any form of support in any of these areas in relation to their flipped classroom implementation. By support, I mean both specific actions that might have helped them implement the approach and conducive factors that were more generally present in the work environment.

The most immediate consequence of this perceived lack of support was an overwhelming sense of isolation. This was most palpable in respect of the absence of meaningful discussions or dissemination with colleagues. Practitioners reported that a debased view of the flipped classroom as a teacher putting knowledge on video for use outside of the classroom was common. In other words, use of the approach was perceived by others to undermine the professional standing of educators (and thereby directly contradict the Ireri and Omwenga (2016) definition). It is possible that this view was due, at least in part, to the fact that the flipped classroom was seen as an unwanted solution to imposed reductions in class contact hours, which may have had an impact on individual contracts, and was potentially a source of considerable extra work without the nature or value of that work being fully understood by colleagues or the wider institution. But there was limited evidence to support a clear conclusion being drawn in this area.

All the manifestations of support mentioned by practitioners required some level of institutional buy-in to their implementation. In an idealised form, this might have taken the form of a teaching and learning strategy, whether at institution or programme level, either one that offered some seed-funding capacity for experimental projects or with responsibility for delivering a longer-term shift in institutional practice, for example towards blended learning.



Resource implications for such initiatives vary, but it is worth noting that most practitioners were primarily looking for networking opportunities with other like-minded professionals, the costs of which are limited and could be shared across an institution or between institutions. In considering the costs of support, it is also worth considering the potentially hidden costs of not providing support, most notably the cost of staff burn-out and the implications of this for the quality and development of teaching.

A final point to emerge from this discussion of those aspects of the data most relevant to research question three, challenges, is that it is easy to provide the wrong support for flipped classroom implementations. The findings show that practitioners understood that the development of their knowledge went beyond an improvement in specific technical skills, whether in connection with particular platforms or the production of materials. It was rather in working towards a more sophisticated understanding of how pedagogy, technology and subject-specific content interacted that professional development opportunities were required. This distinction, in turn, reflected an awareness of the dangers of caricaturing the flipped classroom as a video-led substitute for quality classroom interactions.

## **5.7 Limitations of the Study**

It is useful to consider the limitations of this study against the context of the work that preceded it. In my Institutional-Focused Study (Ahmed, 2018a), I examined student perceptions of the flipped classroom in one class – one language at advanced level from one institution. The sample size was small –

data was collected from one focus group of six participants – and as the tutor of the class I was in the position of insider researcher. The research methodology was constructivist and qualitative in its orientation. In terms of its scope, the present study represents an expansion in the range of data collected: different languages and different levels are represented across three institutions. This represents a shift in perspective, both in terms of my role and in the nature of the data collected. In formal terms, the fact that I was no longer researching my own practice meant that I could focus on the perspective of practitioners and use the student voice to ensure the data were well-rounded.

However, there remain a great many limitations, which should be borne in mind when considering the relevance and application of the findings. First, as the investigation cut across institutions, languages and levels, it was no longer possible to look in detail at the pedagogic specifics of any one implementation. Moreover, the data collected and the findings drawn derive solely from practitioner reflection, balanced by student perspectives on the learning experience: a limited set of perspectives. It should also be borne in mind that the study focused on a particular disciplinary context, languages, and a particular institutional context, Institution-Wide Language Programmes. Second, as this was a qualitative study there was no empirical measurement of the effectiveness of the implementations; for example, through formative or summative assessment data. In fact, given the fact that the implementations were sporadic, relatively recent and from different institutions and languages, a quantitative study would have had to rethink both the research questions and the parameters of the investigation.

For these reasons, it is important to stress that this study is not an evaluation of the flipped classroom as alternative to traditional teaching, nor is it an evaluation of whether the flipped classroom is an effective methodology for languages. Rather it highlights commonalities in how a small number of experienced language practitioners experimented with the approach and learnt from their work, and how students responded to these interventions.

## **Chapter 6 - Conclusion**

### **6.1 Introduction**

In this study I have examined the perspectives of experienced UK HE language practitioners on the design and implementation of the flipped classroom in an IWLP setting. The scope of the study was to examine these perspectives across languages and institutions. Student perspectives were also investigated. My investigation has shown that use of the approach by practitioners and its reception by students is significantly influenced by factors emerging from the marketisation of UK Higher Education and the associated change agenda.

The study has also shown that there is some unease and uncertainty associated with the approach in terms of its reception by students, which, I have argued, limits its effectiveness. For the approach to be effective, I have also argued that implementation needs to be underpinned by an understanding of the areas of pedagogic commonality between the approach and the discipline and a more nuanced understanding of the learning culture it seeks to promote. In bringing this study to its conclusion, I first summarise the broad direction of my argument on a chapter-by-chapter basis before providing recommendations and identifying areas for future research.

### **6.2 Overview**

At the start of this study, in Chapter 1, I set out the professional and institutional context to my enquiry. In terms of the professional context, an important point

in how my study developed was that my initial interest and experimentation with forms of blended learning preceded the budgetary need to make changes to my teaching and my awareness of the political context in which this arose. This distinction allowed me both to separate enquiry into the pedagogy of the flipped classroom from the politicised discourses that surrounded it and to maintain an awareness of how a flipped classroom approach could easily be reduced to an apparently simple solution to an unwieldy complex of problems in the wider environment. I also identified constructivism as a key factor linking the ideals of the flipped classroom to the disciplinary focus of language teaching, which, in turn, reflected the utilitarian turn in UK HE.

In my review of the existing literature on the flipped classroom, set out in Chapter 2, I identified the conflicting definitions, the quality of research and the limited forms of evaluation as problematic. Underlying these problems were two pictures of the flipped classroom: one, which I rejected, was that of a simplistic model of delivery based on the simple inversion of a conventional teaching sequence coupled with use of instructional videos; the second was that of a much broader change in learning culture in which the roles of practitioner and student, the forms of the learning relationship and the uses of technology were redefined as part of a broader student-centred learning journey. An important theoretical step in my identification as a practitioner and researcher with the second of these images was the work of Talbert (2017), whose alignment of a more carefully differentiated flipped classroom approach with Bloom's taxonomy appeared more nuanced than other work in this area.

In Chapter 3, I presented the methodology underpinning my research. This was based on a sense that emerged from the literature review that there

was a need to focus on what practitioners did with the flipped classroom rather than how it was talked about. The limited research in this area meant that I adopted an exploratory design and, because I was interested in how social actors performed a range of uncertain and complex meanings, I took a constructivist-interpretivist approach. Taking an explicit stance on how to manage subjectivity in this form of research, I designed and used research methods that introduced multiple perspectives (practitioner versus student with institutional variation) whilst maintaining the disciplinary context of an Institution-Wide Language Programme as a constant.

The findings from my thematic analysis of the data collected from a student focus group and individual practitioner interviews were presented in Chapter 4, where I identified four main themes. The first of these focused on the contrasting perspectives of students and perspectives towards learner autonomy, which was understood by both groups to be a defining feature of the flipped classroom approach and part of a change in learning culture, for better or for worse, they associated with it. The second theme explored the relationship of different experiences of time and how they were valued. Both sets of participants valued the way in which a flipped classroom approach maximised the value of time in class. They also understood that this came at a cost to them in terms of preparation time, about which there was a considerable amount of unease and equivocation.

In theme three, I identified the importance of the relational dynamic between students and practitioners as an important frame for understanding the experience of cultural change. Practitioners often did not know how to promote this change effectively and students typically conflated their

immediate experience of the flipped classroom with a sense of being short-changed by the HE sector. In the fourth and final theme, I explored the sense of loss of control over teaching and learning boundaries associated by participants with their experience of the flipped classroom and how these informed the practitioner's sense of a need to manage risk in their teaching.

An important point of context to the findings was also identified in Chapter 4, namely that only partial implementations of the flipped classroom were evidenced in the data. This I identified as a previously unreported phenomenon in the flipped classroom literature and one that aligned with the broader conceptualisation of a flipped classroom approach I had discussed in the literature review. More generally, the findings in this chapter demonstrated that how students and practitioners constructed their experience of the flipped classroom was shaped to considerable extent by the factors affecting the wider HE sector discussed in Chapter 1. Specific to the experience of the practitioners, and key to their motivations in using the approach, were the disciplinary priorities of language teaching and a constructivist pedagogy.

In the critical discussion of my findings, set out in Chapter 5, I reformulated the data themes in terms of the original aims of my research identified in Chapter 1. These aims were to examine how and why language practitioners implemented the flipped classroom on Institution-Wide Language Programmes and to consider the challenges. In formal terms these aims were pursued in terms of three Research Questions, which are restated here for convenience:

**Question 1:** How do the language practitioners included in the sample design and implement the flipped classroom?

**Question 2:** What drives language practitioners to implement the flipped classroom?

**Question 3:** What are the main challenges language practitioners face when implementing the flipped classroom?

The answers to these questions developed as part of the discussion in Chapter 5 can be summarised as follows. First, language practitioners in the sample designed and implemented their flipped classrooms based on their professional assessment of the disciplinary requirements of communicative language teaching, linking the approach to the discipline through a constructivist pedagogy. Second, language practitioners pursued these implementations in line with a disciplinary ideal – “creative communication” – in circumstances they understood to have compromised that ideal. Third, the challenges they faced were threefold: how to promote learner autonomy to ensure the flipped classroom functioned effectively; how to effect changes in learning culture and negotiate changes in roles arising through an implementation; and how to function professionally in the absence of meaningful institutional support.

Beyond the broad brushstrokes of these answers, I identified some important points of detail. In terms of the concept of the flipped classroom, these included the fact that in-class time was not used for the higher levels of Bloom’s taxonomy, but the middle levels, a point which supported a broad



understanding of the approach. It was also apparent that the ways in which the pre-class stage of learning was constructed by practitioners overlooked the possibilities of socialisation and contextualisation of the initial phases of learning in favour of a narrowly cognitive approach. In terms of the relationship of the flipped classroom to the discipline of language teaching, the focus on compensating for the impact of budget cuts was self-limiting in that it appeared to prevent the exploration of more productive connections between language pedagogy and the flipped classroom. Finally, in terms of challenges, I identified a need to better understand the institutional context of a flipped classroom implementation, particularly the teaching and learning culture, and to incorporate this understanding into planning.

## **6.3 Recommendations**

There remains the question of whether there are recommendations specific to the flipped classroom that can be identified from this study. Having reviewed the evidence from this study, and reflected on my professional practice, there are three recommendations I can make, which apply specifically to language practitioners working on IWLPs in UK HE settings but may have wider relevance.

### ***6.3.1 Recommendation 1***

My first recommendation is aimed at practitioners, programme leads and senior academic managers and the focus of this recommendation is to explore pedagogic context and connections. By this, I mean that there is a tendency I

observed in the data collected for this study, and one which is reflected more widely in the literature on the flipped classroom, to think of an implementation as a more or less mechanical resequencing of learning without reference to the wider social and political context of learning. An obvious criticism of this narrow focus on how the flipped classroom is engineered is that it limits the potential for meaningful change in learning cultures by ignoring the pedagogic connections with the wider context that already exist. For example, in the case of the language programmes considered in this study, it is probable that aspects of the teaching that were prevalent before the implementation overlapped with or were at least consistent with a flipped approach. It is also the case that alignment of aspects of the implementation which had the potential to connect with other educational agendas, such as employability, at the level of the institution and the sector was not considered. A practitioner who takes the time to explore these connections, and has opportunities for discussion with academic managers, will have a much deeper understanding of the relationship of their initiative to the wider context and will, as a consequence, be more confident in their decision-making, planning and communication.

### ***6.3.2 Recommendation 2***

The second recommendation I make is specifically for practitioners and it is to consider their discourse about the flipped classroom, particularly in communication with students, carefully. In fact, I would question whether, in the case of partial implementations undertaken by a lone practitioner working experimentally in isolation of an explicit departmental or institutional strategy,

the explicit articulation of their work in terms of the flipped classroom has many positive benefits. The risks of introducing a new name into a politicised environment in connection with a project that is short-term and well contained within a module are likely to outweigh the benefits. It is, for example, perfectly possible to induct students into the workings of a module in terms of the approach to the subject and the practitioner's expectations without explicitly naming the approach as anything other than that associated with this module. The advantage of taking a more subtle approach to communication is that it reduces anxiety for students and avoids the unhelpful caricatures that have accumulated around the flipped classroom.

### **6.3.3 Recommendation 3**

The third recommendation is for practitioners and researchers, and it is to avoid dichotomies. The separation of the flipped classroom approach into learning that is either in-class or pre-class, where in-class is the domain of higher levels of learning and collaborative endeavour and pre-class is restricted to cognitive rituals undertaken outside of any social context, is unhelpful. A very obvious consequence of this way of thinking, and one that is evidenced in this study, is that practitioners see themselves as the only resource available to students and compensate for their absence by lowering the level of learning that can take place outside the classroom. In the context of educational and other technologies now available, it is, at very least, possible to ensure that forms of socialisation are available to students engaged in pre-class learning. It is also possible to design tasks that involve some element of collaboration and creativity for this stage of learning. Another

consequence of the split between pre- and in-class learning is that the desire to ensure the in-class experience manifests the higher levels of Bloom's taxonomy itself creates pressures which may be counterproductive to learning that could take place more effectively in other ways.

## **6.4 Further Research**

In the conclusion to my previous research (Ahmed, 2018a), I noted that an understanding of practitioner perspectives would enhance understanding of what makes a flipped classroom implementation successful. I was also aware that because of the tendency of authority figures to view the learning environment in a more positive light than their students (Strayer 2007), inclusion of the student perspective was necessary. In following this approach in the current study, I have also become aware of four areas for future research that went beyond the scope of the original research questions and the methodology I pursued. These areas have emerged in the context of the discussion in this chapter.

First, it would be useful to understand those areas of implicit overlap that connect language pedagogy, particularly those aspects of language acquisition that can and do take place outside the physical classroom, to the learning sequence and environmental distinctions of the flipped classroom approach. Second, the learning needs of non-linguists on IWLPs are worthy of investigation, specifically in relation to learner autonomy and how these needs affect or should be taken into account in the design of flipped classroom implementations for non-specialist linguists on these programmes.

Third, practitioner responses in this study have raised questions about the breadth and depth of understanding of the flipped classroom among HE practitioners and the extent to which attitudes and affiliations are based on anecdotal evidence or caricatures rather than deriving from a body of evidence and critical responses to relevant literature. Fourth, there is a need for greater theoretical consideration of the interface between Bloom's taxonomy, its relationship to where and how learning takes place in the flipped classroom, the application of constructivist principles to pre-class learning, and negative student reactions to how pre-class learning is designed and presented.

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## Appendix 1 – Example of Coding Process

### 1. Overview of Codes, Categories and Theme for Learner Autonomy

Theme	Learner autonomy					
Categories	Learning as purpose (Refers to socially meaningful learning)		Learning as culture (Refers to changes in the learning environment)		Learning as process (Refers to a process of knowledge organization and how learning takes place)	
Codes	Student	Practitioner	Student	Practitioner	Student	Practitioner
	Collaborative learning	Life skill	Resistance to change	Resistance to change	Pre-class learning	Pre-class learning
	Positive FC experience	Developing student independence	Learner preference	Developing student independence	Self-directed learning	Time value
	Responsibility for learning	Class practice	Learner lack of confidence	Dependent learner	Self-paced learning	Time consuming
	Independent learning		Independent learning	Student commitment		Class practice
			Consumer attitude	Teacher loss of control		Watering down implementation
			Resistance to change	Teacher-centered learning		
			Consumer attitude			
			Resistance to change			

## 2. Themed Extracts from Student Focus Group Data with Code Mark-Up

1 In the flipped classroom, we have to learn things before class and I think I learn better on  
2 my own, I like that I do not have to rush and if I don't get something, I can always bring it to  
3 class. It is not a problem ... it is more fun to do the activities in class and work with my group  
4 ... I can ask them or ask the teacher to explain ... I think I benefit more and I take it seriously  
5 and I am more productive! (Jasmine)

6 I'd rather learn on my own at home or in the library. If I am studying at home, I have  
7 time to work things out and I study better ... I realise not everyone likes to learn this  
8 way and not everyone likes to learn on their own but I have always learnt this way.  
9 (Mariam)

10 I like to be taught by the teacher in class, not by myself ... I am not used to this [the  
11 flipped classroom] ... If I do not understand something, I can ask the teacher and he  
12 or she will explain it and give me the right thing. I mean the right answer. What if I  
13 learn the wrong thing? Or I might not understand something if I teach myself ... I do  
14 not want to teach myself something wrong and waste my time. (Noura)

15 In a language class it's literally this word means this ... it is black and white... you  
16 need to be told the right answer from the start ... red is red ... one plus one is two ...  
17 it's just one thing because this is language. I need to be taught the right thing from the  
18 start by the teacher. (Sara)

19 Compared to the traditional Arabic class we had last year, this year we did a lot more  
20 practice in class. In the flipped classroom we had more time to ask and work together  
21 but it always took a lot of time to prepare for it. (Amal)

22 We had more time this year to speak and discuss and clarify things in class but it  
23 takes time to prepare for the flipped classroom. It is good to come prepared, but to be  
24 honest I do not always have that much time to spend on preparation. It takes a lot of  
25 time and work compared to the traditional class which I prefer. (Dalia)

26

27 We are not coming here for no reason [sic]. Nine thousand pounds a year is a lot of  
28 money and I do not think it's right to end up teaching myself. (Noura)

29 I agree with [Noura], at the end of the day, we paid so much money to be here and we  
30 did not pay to teach ourselves. What's the point! (Sara)

1 The flipped classroom might be interactive, but I paid tuition fees to get taught by a  
2 teacher. (Amal)

3 This is the first year I was taught in this way and I am not sure I feel confident or  
4 comfortable with it ... We were given the material to prepare at home and come to do  
5 the activities in class. I enjoyed working with my group but to be honest, I prefer the  
6 traditional classroom and I think teachers should actually teach in class instead of  
7 relying on us to teach ourselves. (Dalia)

8 I can use the online materials and learn on my own ... I can do that, and I know the  
9 tutor puts in a lot of work, but I still prefer the traditional class. When you are teaching  
10 me, you are motivating me to work, you are encouraging me to study. It's different to  
11 when you give me a video. (Sara)

### 3. Table of Code Frequency and Occurrences from Student Focus Group

Code		Frequency	Data Extract
1	Class practice	4	'It is more fun to do the activities in class' 'This year we did a lot more practice in class' 'We had more time this year to speak and discuss and clarify things in class' 'We were given the material to prepare at home and come to do the activities in class'
2	Collaborative learning	4	'It is more fun to do the activities in class and work with my group ... I can ask them or ask the teacher to explain' 'Compared to the traditional Arabic class we had last year, this year we did a lot more practice in class. In the flipped classroom we had more time to ask and work together' 'We had more time this year to speak and discuss and clarify things in class'
3	Consumer attitude	3	'Nine thousand pounds a year is a lot of money and I do not think it's right to end up teaching myself.' 'we paid so much money to be here and we did not pay to teach ourselves. What's the point!' 'The flipped classroom might be interactive, but I paid tuition fees to get taught by a teacher.'
4	Independent learning	4	'I'd rather learn on my own at home or in the library' 'I have always learnt this way' 'It is good to come prepared' 'I can use the online materials and learn on my own ... I can do that'
5	Learner lack of confidence	2	'What if I learn the wrong thing? Or I might not understand something if I teach myself ... I do not want to teach myself something wrong and waste my time.' 'I do not want to teach myself something wrong and waste my time.'
6	Learner preference	7	'I like to be taught by the teacher in class, not by myself' 'It is good to come prepared' 'It takes a lot of time and work compared to the traditional class which I prefer.' 'we did not pay to teach ourselves. What's the point!' 'The flipped classroom might be interactive, but I paid tuition fees to get taught by a teacher' 'I prefer the traditional classroom' 'I still prefer the traditional class.'
7	Pre-class learning	3	'In the flipped classroom, we have to learn things before class' 'It is good to come prepared'

			'We were given the material to prepare at home and come to do the activities in class'
8	Resistance to change	10	<p>'I realise not everyone likes to learn this way and not everyone likes to learn on their own'</p> <p>I like to be taught by the teacher in class, not by myself ... I am not used to this [the flipped classroom].</p> <p>'What if I learn the wrong thing? Or I might not understand something if I teach myself ... I do not want to teach myself something wrong and waste my time.'</p> <p>'In a language class it's literally this word means this ... it is black and white... you need to be told the right answer from the start ... red is red ... one plus one is two ... it's just one thing because this is language. I need to be taught the right thing from the start by the teacher.'</p> <p>'It takes a lot of time and work compared to the traditional class which I prefer.'</p> <p>'We are not coming here for no reason [sic]. Nine thousand pounds a year is a lot of money and I do not think it's right to end up teaching myself.'</p> <p>'The flipped classroom might be interactive, but I paid tuition fees to get taught by a teacher.'</p> <p>'This is the first year I was taught in this way and I am not sure I feel confident or comfortable with it'</p> <p>'I prefer the traditional classroom and I think teachers should actually teach in class instead of relying on us to teach ourselves.'</p> <p>'I know the tutor puts in a lot of work, but I still prefer the traditional class. When you are teaching me, you are motivating me to work, you are encouraging me to study. It's different to when you give me a video.'</p>
9	Responsibility for learning	2	<p>'What if I learn the wrong thing? Or I might not understand something if I teach myself'</p> <p>'I think teachers should actually teach in class instead of relying on us to teach ourselves.'</p>
10	Positive FC experience	2	<p>'it is more fun to do the activities in class and work with my group'</p> <p>'I think I benefit more and I take it seriously and I am more productive!'</p>
11	Self-directed learning	3	<p>'In the flipped classroom, we have to learn things before class and I think I learn better on my own, I like that I do not have to rush and if I don't get something, I can always bring it to class. It is not a problem'</p> <p>'I'd rather learn on my own at home or in the library'</p> <p>'I can use the online materials and learn on my own ... I can do that'</p>
12	Self-paced learning	2	<p>'I do not have to rush'</p> <p>'I have time to work things out and I study better'</p>
13	Student control	5	'In the flipped classroom, we have to learn things before class and I think I learn better on my own'

			<p>'I'd rather learn on my own at home or in the library. If I am studying at home, I have time to work things out and I study better'</p> <p>'We had more time this year to speak and discuss and clarify things in class'</p> <p>'We were given the material to prepare at home and come to do the activities in class'</p> <p>'I can use the online materials and learn on my own ... I can do that'</p>
14	Time consuming	3	<p>'it always took a lot of time to prepare for it.'</p> <p>'but it takes time to prepare for the flipped classroom'</p> <p>'It takes a lot of time and work compared to the traditional class which I prefer.'</p>
15	Time management	2	<p>'I do not have to rush'</p> <p>'I do not want to teach myself something wrong and waste my time'</p>
16	Time value	2	<p>'I do not want to teach myself something wrong and waste my time'</p> <p>'We had more time this year to speak and discuss and clarify things in class but it takes time to prepare for the flipped classroom.'</p>
17	Teacher-centered learning	4	<p>'I realise not everyone likes to learn this way and not everyone likes to learn on their own'</p> <p>'I like to be taught by the teacher in class, not by myself'</p> <p>'If I do not understand something, I can ask the teacher and he or she will explain it and give me the right thing. I mean the right answer.'</p> <p>'In a language class it's literally this word means this ... it is black and white... you need to be told the right answer from the start ... red is red ... one plus one is two ... it's just one thing because this is language. I need to be taught the right thing from the start by the teacher.'</p>

#### **4. Themed Extracts from Practitioner Interview Data with Code Mark-Up**

If I compare it to a traditional classroom model, I would say that the flipped classroom should give students a sense of ownership and more control ... You can see how some students become more independent and confident over time ... It is a life skill ... This is one of the reasons why I use the flipped class. (Heba)

The flipped classroom gives students independence and I think they know its benefits well, but they still want the traditional style. They just do not want the responsibility that comes with it [the flipped classroom] they have to prepare before class... It involves more time and work ... I flip certain parts of the lesson. (Hani)

Students must be independent to be able to work with the flipped classroom ... They have to be independent ... In theory this is what higher education is all about but in actual fact many students struggle and I have to teach in the traditional way ... We have to hold their hands and spoon-feed them. (Haniya)

We know many of us flip our classes to use time more efficiently. I have done it many times and I agree it helps when you have limited time and you want to use class time for practice. But what we do not talk about is the amount of time it takes to make it happen. You have to spend a lot of your own time to save the class time. (Ahmed)

Well, from experience it takes a long time to prepare for [the flipped classroom] and it is very demanding. In principle it is good and it can free class time for active learning. (Heba)

You get resistance from some students which can be frustrating sometimes. They want to be taught in the traditional way. (Ghina)

Well, the flipped classroom is a lot of work and we give students a lot of support and feedback, but we still get students complaining about paying high fees to teach themselves and the teacher not teaching in the flipped classroom. (Hani)



I had students who said in one way or another that it's not their job to teach themselves, it's the lecturer's job to teach them. (Ahmed)

Many students complained at the start of the year when I started working with the flipped classroom. Almost the whole class, they did not like it and I had to work hard to sell it to them. Some students still wanted to be taught in the traditional way. (Tina)

We are totally reliant on students' commitment. It can get very frustrating when some students are not committed and there is nothing you can do if they have not fulfilled their part of the deal. (Ahmed)

There are so many challenges in the flipped classroom. For a start it is very demanding and requires a lot of work and time. (Tina)

I had to switch to a traditional class many times because students did not prepare for one reason or another. It can be very disheartening. This experience can leave you feeling uncomfortable and not totally in control of what you do. (Heba)

The principle is good, but the flipped classroom isn't every teacher's cup of tea... I know professors, researchers, very charismatic lecturers who were cynical and gave it up after a while because students did not commit. (Ghina)

With the flipped classroom students can be more independent... I think it promotes independent learning. (Hani)

### 3. Table of Code Frequency and Occurrences from Practitioner Interviews

Codes		Frequency	Data
1	Class practice	2	<p>'I have done it many times and I agree it helps when you have limited time and you want to use class time for practice.'</p> <p>'it can free class time for active learning'</p>
2	Consumer attitude	4	<p>'They want to be taught in the traditional way.'</p> <p>'we still get students complaining about paying high fees to teach themselves and the teacher not teaching in the flipped classroom.'</p> <p>'I had students who said in one way or another that it's not their job to teach themselves, it's the lecturer's job to teach them'</p> <p>'I had to work hard to sell it to them.'</p>
3	Dependent learner	6	<p>'They just do not want the responsibility that comes with it [the flipped classroom]'</p> <p>'many students struggle and I have to teach in the traditional way ... We have to hold their hands and spoon-feed them.'</p> <p>'I had students who said in one way or another that it's not their job to teach themselves, it's the lecturer's job to teach them.'</p> <p>'Many students complained at the start of the year when I started working with the flipped classroom. Almost the whole class, they did not like it and I had to work hard to sell it to them. Some students still wanted to be taught in the traditional way.'</p> <p>'We are totally reliant on students' commitment. It can get very frustrating when some students are not committed and there is nothing you can do if they have not fulfilled their part of the deal.'</p>
4	Developing student independence	5	<p>'the flipped classroom should give students a sense of ownership and more control'</p> <p>'some students become more independent and confident over time ...It is a life skill ... This is one of the reasons why I use the flipped class.'</p>

			<p>'The flipped classroom gives students independence'</p> <p>'Students must be independent to be able to work with the flipped classroom ... They have to be independent'</p> <p>'With the flipped classroom students can be more independent... I think it promotes independent learning.'</p>
5	Life skill	1	'It is a life skill'
6	Pre-class learning	2	<p>'they have to prepare before class'</p> <p>'We are totally reliant on students' commitment. It can get very frustrating when some students are not committed'</p>
7	Resistance to change	5	<p>'I think they know its benefits well, but they still want the traditional style.'</p> <p>'You get resistance from some students which can be frustrating sometimes. They want to be taught in the traditional way.'</p> <p>'we still get students complaining about paying high fees to teach themselves and the teacher not teaching in the flipped classroom.'</p> <p>'I had students who said in one way or another that it's not their job to teach themselves, it's the lecturer's job to teach them.'</p> <p>'Many students complained at the start of the year when I started working with the flipped classroom. Almost the whole class, they did not like it and I had to work hard to sell it to them. Some students still wanted to be taught in the traditional way.'</p>
8	Student commitment	3	<p>'We are totally reliant on students' commitment'</p> <p>'I had to switch to a traditional class many times because students did not prepare for one reason or another'</p> <p>'I know professors, researchers, very charismatic lecturers who were cynical and gave it up after a while because students did not commit.'</p>
9	Teacher-centered learning	2	<p>'I think they know its benefits well, but they still want the traditional style. They just do not want the responsibility that comes with it [the flipped classroom]'</p> <p>'many students struggle and I have to teach in the traditional way ... We have to hold their hands and spoon-feed them'</p>

10	Teacher loss of control	3	<p>'We are totally reliant on students' commitment. It can get very frustrating when some students are not committed and there is nothing you can do if they have not fulfilled their part of the deal.'</p> <p>'I had to switch to a traditional class many times because students did not prepare for one reason or another. It can be very disheartening. This experience can leave you feeling uncomfortable and not totally in control of what you do.'</p> <p>'The principle is good, but the flipped classroom isn't every teacher's cup of tea... I know professors, researchers, very charismatic lecturers who were cynical and gave it up after a while because students did not commit.'</p>
11	Time consuming	5	<p>'It involves more time and work'</p> <p>'But what we do not talk about is the amount of time it takes to make it happen. You have to spend a lot of your own time to save the class time.'</p> <p>'Well, from experience it takes a long time to prepare for [the flipped classroom] and it is very demanding.'</p> <p>'Well, the flipped classroom is a lot of work and we give students a lot of support and feedback'</p> <p>'There are so many challenges in the flipped classroom. For a start it is very demanding and requires a lot of work and time.'</p>
12	Time value	2	<p>'We know many of us flip our classes to use time more efficiently'</p> <p>'In principle it is good and it can free class time for active learning'</p>
13	Watering down implementation	2	<p>'We have to hold their hands and spoon-feed them.'</p> <p>'the flipped classroom is a lot of work and we give students a lot of support and feedback.'</p>

## Appendix 2 – Ethics Application

Institute of Education



### Doctoral Student Ethics Application Form

Anyone conducting research under the auspices of the Institute of Education (staff, students or visitors) where the research involves human participants or the use of data collected from human participants, is required to gain ethical approval before starting. This includes preliminary and pilot studies. Please answer all relevant questions in simple terms that can be understood by a lay person and note that your form may be returned if incomplete.

#### Registering your study with the UCL Data Protection Officer as part of the UCL Research Ethics Review Process

If you are proposing to collect personal data i.e. data from which a living individual can be identified you **must** be registered with the UCL Data Protection Office **before** you submit your ethics application for review. To do this, email the complete ethics form to [data-protection@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:data-protection@ucl.ac.uk). Once your registration number is received, add it to the form\* and submit it to your supervisor for approval. If the Data Protection Office advises you to make changes to the way in which you propose to collect and store the data this should be reflected in your ethics application form.

*Please note that the completion of the UCL GDPR online training is mandatory for all PhD students. The link is here: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/legal-services/ucl-general-data-protection-regulation-adpr/adpr-online-training>*

Section 1 Project details			
a.	Project title	Flipping the Language Classroom: A Qualitative Investigation of Approaches Taken by Higher Education Practitioners	
b.	Student name and ID number	Abir Mahmoud E. Ahmed 16039317	
c.	*UCL Data Protection Registration Number	Date issued	
	Z6364106/2019/04/39	04.04.2019	
c.	Supervisor/Personal Tutor	Sue Taylor	
d.	Department	Doctoral School	
e.	Course category (Tick one)	PhD	<input type="checkbox"/>
		DEdPsy	<input type="checkbox"/>
		EdD	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
f.	If applicable, state who the funder is and if funding has been confirmed.	N/A	
g.	Intended research start date	20 May 2019 but data collection will take place after obtaining ethical approval	

November 2018



## Doctoral Student Ethics Application Form

Anyone conducting research under the auspices of the Institute of Education (staff, students or visitors) where the research involves human participants or the use of data collected from human participants, is required to gain ethical approval before starting. This includes preliminary and pilot studies. Please answer all relevant questions in simple terms that can be understood by a lay person and note that your form may be returned if incomplete.

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d.	Department	Doctoral School			
e.	Course category (Tick one)	PhD	<input type="checkbox"/>	EdD	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
		DEdPsy	<input type="checkbox"/>		
f.	If applicable, state who the funder is and if funding has been confirmed.	N/A			
g.	Intended research start date	20 May 2019 but data collection will take place after obtaining ethical approval			

h.	Intended research end date	<b>1 February 2020</b>
i.	Country fieldwork will be conducted in <i>If research to be conducted abroad please check <a href="http://www.fco.gov.uk">www.fco.gov.uk</a> and submit a completed travel risk assessment form (see guidelines). If the FCO advice is against travel this will be <b>required</b> before ethical approval can be granted:</i> <a href="http://ioenet.inst.ioe.ac.uk/about/profservices/international/Pages/default.aspx">http://ioenet.inst.ioe.ac.uk/about/profservices/international/Pages/default.aspx</a>	<b>United Kingdom</b>
j.	Has this project been considered by another (external) Research Ethics Committee?	
	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	External Committee Name:
	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ⇒ go to Section 2	Date of Approval:
<p><b>If yes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Submit a copy of the approval letter with this application.</li> <li>– Proceed to Section 10 Attachments.</li> </ul> <p><b>Note:</b> Ensure that you check the guidelines carefully as research with some participants will require ethical approval from a different ethics committee such as the <u>National Research Ethics Service (NRES)</u> or <u>Social Care Research Ethics Committee (SCREC)</u>. In addition, if your research is based in another institution then you may be required to apply to their research ethics committee.</p>		

## Section 2 Research methods summary (tick all that apply)

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Interviews   | <input type="checkbox"/> Controlled trial/other intervention study                                    |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Focus groups | <input type="checkbox"/> Use of personal records  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Questionnaires          | <input type="checkbox"/> Systematic review ⇒ <b>if only method used go to Section 5.</b>              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Action research         | <input type="checkbox"/> Secondary data analysis ⇒ <b>if secondary analysis used go to Section 6.</b> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Observation             | <input type="checkbox"/> Advisory/consultation/collaborative groups                                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Literature review       | <input type="checkbox"/> Other, give details:   |

Please provide an overview of the project, focusing on your methodology. This should include some or all of the following: **purpose of the research, aims, main research questions, research design, participants, sampling, data collection (including justifications for methods chosen and description of topics/questions to be asked), reporting and dissemination.** Please focus on your methodology; the theory, policy, or literary background of your work can be provided in an attached document (i.e. a full research proposal or case for support document). *Minimum 150 words required.*

### Purpose of the research

My institution-focused study (IFS, Ahmed, 2018) I conducted last year, examined the perceptions of Arabic students of the flipped classroom model in one of the advanced Arabic classes I teach in a UK HE institution in London. The study also investigated the perceived advantages and/or disadvantages of the flipped classroom model and its impact on student collaboration and engagement. The findings of my IFS suggested the need for further investigation of how and to what extent decisions about flipped classroom implementation are pedagogically motivated and/or influenced by a perceived need to ensure



student satisfaction by providing particular forms of learning. Professional discussions with colleagues highlighted the challenges many experienced in flipping their language classes. There has also been a lack of clarity in the conversation surrounding the understanding of the flipped classroom and its implementation. This motivated me to examine what I and other language practitioners in HE understand by the flipped classroom model and how we implement it. When HE language practitioners talk about the flipped classroom model and its implementation, are they all talking about the same thing? I also became interested in investigating in greater depth the challenges language practitioners experience in the context of the student-centred flipped classroom and how they reconcile such conflicts. The initial literature review I conducted in this area highlighted knowledge gaps within existing research and suggested a need for empirical research into UK HE language practitioners' perspectives on their role and the decisions they take when implementing the flipped classroom within the current HE context.

### **The Aims of the Study**

The study will examine how UK HE language practitioners design and implement the flipped classroom in institution-wide language programmes. The investigation will focus on their understanding of the pedagogy and the challenges that affect their practice and institutional context. The study will also explore how the implementation of the flipped classroom is experienced by HE language students. By examining the experience of HE language practitioners and students of the flipped classroom, the study aims to deepen understanding of the flipped classroom implementation, design and the main challenges both teachers and students face and how best to address them. The study seeks to identify principles that will help deal with the challenges and enhance implementation of the model.

### **Main research questions – to teachers**

1. What drives language practitioners, included in the sample, to implement the flipped classroom?
2. How do the language practitioners design and implement the flipped classroom?
3. What are the main challenges language practitioners face when implementing the flipped classroom?
4. What suggestions can language practitioners make to improve flipped classroom implementation?

### **Main research questions – to students**

1. From a student perspective, what are the key aspects of learning that the flipped classroom supports in advanced language classes?
2. What are the pros and cons of the flipped classroom from advanced language students' perspectives?
3. What suggestions can language students make to improve how the flipped classroom model is implemented?

### **Research Design and Methodology**

The qualitative study I propose aims to identify how a group of six UK HE language practitioners from three UK universities conceptualise, design and implement their flipped classes. The study will also investigate what drives the teaching decisions of these language practitioners and the main challenges they face when implementing the flipped classrooms. Furthermore, the study will explore how the language practitioners conceptualise the impact of those challenges on their practice and autonomy. The study will also investigate how a group of six students experience the flipped classroom in order to gain an in-depth understanding of how the participants' conceptualise the implementation of the flipped classroom. Therefore, the study will use qualitative methods and adopt an interpretivist epistemology. These methods and the epistemology on which they rest are, according to Marshal and Rossman (1999), more appropriate for studies that look for in-depth understanding of people's views, attitudes, and concepts and investigate complex settings and contexts. I will collect the data from the lecturers via six semi-structured interviews. I will collect the data from the six students in one or two focus group sessions. The institutions will be selected to provide a balance of pre-1992 and post-1992 universities and institutions with or without a specialist language focus.

### **Participants and Sampling**

I will base the sampling frame on the principles of recruiting 'typical cases', a starting point which aligns with the design of the study (Hennink *et al.*, 2011). The concept underpinning the selection of samples in this study is that of purposive sampling, 'a non-probability sampling method' commonly used in

qualitative research (Bryman, 2012, 418). This is an appropriate sampling frame that fits in with the design of the study and ontology and is more suited to address the research questions. Purposive sampling has drawbacks, including the potential for embedding existing biases and subjectivity. This is the main reason for sampling across pre- and post-1992 institutions, which may have different experiences of market forces and different priorities; and for sampling across European and non-European languages, where different cultures of and approaches to language learning may exist beyond the common policy objectives of the open language programme of which they form part. Important pedagogic distinctions, content and learning aims separate open language programmes from language degree programmes, and for this reason language degree programmes will be excluded from the sample. Beyond these distinctions, purposive sampling has specific advantages which make it suited to this study's design and questions. Besides being cost and time effective, it also allows for selection of the sample with the 'research goals in mind' (ibid, 2012). Moreover, a small sample size rather than a large one is more suited to studies with the exploratory design (Robson and McCartan, 2016).

### **Lecturers Participants**

I will identify typical cases of six lecturers who teach credited language courses on university-wide language programmes in three UK HE institutions. I will conduct six interviews with the six lecturers to collect the data in semester three. The lecturers participating in the study will have more than 5 years of language teaching experience. They will all be native speakers of the language they teach and they will all speak fluent English as a second language. The participants will also hold a masters degree in a subject orientation relevant to the language they teach. All participants will be more practice-based than research-orientated professionals. They will teach different language levels, from beginners to advanced, and will have implemented the flipped classroom model in their intermediate and advanced language classes. Within the context of the sample parameters identified below, this study will explore how the six lecturers perceive, design and implement their flipped classes. The study will focus on the responses

and insights of the participants and further explore in-depth the challenges they experience in the flipped classroom within the current HE context.

### **Student Participants**

I will also identify six undergraduate students who study languages on the University-wide language programme in the 2018/19 academic year. I will conduct one or two audio-recorded focus group sessions to collect the data from the six undergraduate students at the end of the second semester. The focus group session will last for 50-60 minutes maximum. The participants will be selected from my institution and the other institution/institutions identified for this study. The six students I identified to participate in the focus group are all of approximately the same age and educational background. They all had good record of attendance and showed interest in their studies. The sample size is chosen for practical reasons, namely to mitigate withdrawals, absence and illness during teaching after a typical students have been discounted. I defined a typical case as that of full-time home or international student and exclude specific characteristics (for example, postgraduate students, members of staff, single-semester exchange students). This sampling frame fits in with the ontology and design of my study and is also an appropriate sampling frame with which to address my research questions. Furthermore, it gives me an opportunity to select a homogenous group. This helps to avoid one or more participants dominating the discussion which is regarded as one of the possible disadvantages of focus groups (Smithson, 2000). By using a focus group to collect data, the study aims to gain a deep understanding of how participants collectively make sense of the flipped classroom.

### **Data Collection**

To enhance the credibility of the data and facilitate validation I will use two different methods: semi-structured interviews and focus groups. Using more than one method to collect data is called triangulation. Creswell (2003) stresses that the triangulation of multiple data sources, voices and insights to generate themes, is a process that adds to the validity of the study. Conversely, the triangulation of several data sources aligns with principles of a qualitative study: It has the benefit of helping the

researcher to view the studied phenomenon from different perspectives and gain a comprehensive and deeper understanding (*ibid*, 2003).

This research study will focus on exploring how participants view and create their reality through narrative. Conducting semi-structured interviews and focus groups suits this study as it will allow collecting data through talking and listening to the participants. The semi-structured interviews allow participants to discuss opinions in their own term, which encourages in-depth responses and provides rich data (Robson and McCartan, 2016). This fits with the aim of the study to explore and gain deep insight into the participants' perceptions about the challenges they experience in the flipped classroom within the current HE context; how they reflect and approach those challenges; what strategies they use to deal with them; and how to improve the status quo and move forward. Semi-structured interviews also allow a lot of flexibility. I will be able to prepare an 'interview guide', namely a list of carefully planned interview questions and topics in advance. Yet, I can still be 'guided by the interviewee's responses in a conversational mode' which offers unique opportunities for understanding or seeing the topic in new ways (*ibid*, 2016).

I will interview each participant twice in the second semester. Prior to conducting the semi-structured interviews, I will arrange brief pre-interview meetings with the participants with whom I have had limited professional contacts, to establish rapport and familiarise them with the aim of the study. I will conduct a total of two semi-structured interviews with each participant. The first interview will take place towards the end of the second semester of the academic year 2018/19 and the follow-up interview will be conducted at the third semester of the same academic year. Polkinghorne (2005) notes follow-up interviews can provide the opportunity to be more focused add remembered information and clarify accounts.

The length of the second semi-structured interview session will average between 50-60 minutes. All interviews will be conducted face-to-face by the researcher. I will arrange for the interviews to take place in a quiet and comfortable setting to minimise distraction. They will be conducted in English and audio-recorded to ensure data accuracy when transcribing the data set. To maintain confidentiality, I will delete

all recordings permanently after transcribing the data set and store the latter in accordance with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998. I may conduct more interviews if needed. However, this will depend on whether or not I have reached theoretical saturation, a stage in which 'new data no longer suggest new insights' and all concepts are well-developed (Bryman, 2012, p.421).

I will conduct one-two focus group sessions to collect qualitative data from the six undergraduate language students. The focus group will serve to promote discussion and encourage participants to express their own perspectives (Cohen et al., 2011). However, focus groups have their limitations and are likely to incorporate shy and dominant members. Smithson (2000, p.106) suggests an approach to this limitation by 'making the focus groups homogenous for example in terms of age, experience, education and gender'. I will ensure I set clear objectives, to be specific, create a relaxed and positive atmosphere and select the focus group members according to the principle set out above. The number of participants in the focus group will have a maximum of six students. Participants will be selected from the two-three HE institutions in which the practitioners work. I will moderate the focus group session and take the notes. Managing both tasks can be a complex task therefore I will audio-record the session.

### **Data Analysis**

I plan to draw on Rayan's and Bernard's (2003) recommendations for thematic analysis (cited in Bryman, 2012). The resulting transcript will be coded using Nvivo, a qualitative data analysis computer software package. Nvivo is claimed to have the advantage of helping researchers to work more systematically and to save time which subsequently helps improve the research quality (Alabri and Hilal, 2013). I will develop the codes inductively to underline the significant issues to the participants and allow the data to 'speak for itself' (Hennink et al., 2011, p.218).

To follow recommendations for good practice and to establish trustworthiness and credibility, I will use a form of respondent validation whenever possible. This will ensure good correspondence between my views and experiences of the participants and my findings (Bryman, 2012). Finally, the analytic framework of the case study will employ the four design principles of Hamdan *et al.* (2013) which include 'flexible environments', 'a shift in learning culture', 'intentional content' and 'professional educators'.

### Section 3 Research Participants (tick all that apply)

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| Tic <input type="checkbox"/> Early years/pre-school<br><input type="checkbox"/> Ages 5-11<br><input type="checkbox"/> Ages 12-16<br><input type="checkbox"/> Young people aged 17-18 | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Adults <i>please specify below</i><br><input type="checkbox"/> Unknown – specify below<br><input type="checkbox"/> No participants |
|--|--|

**NB:** Ensure that you check the guidelines carefully as research with some participants will require ethical approval from a different ethics committee such as the [National Research Ethics Service \(NRES\)](#) or [Social Care Research Ethics Committee \(SCREC\)](#).

### Section 4 Security-sensitive material (only complete if applicable)

Security sensitive research includes: commissioned by the military; commissioned under an EU security call; involves the acquisition of security clearances; concerns terrorist or extreme groups.

- |    |   |                                |                             |
|----|---|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| a. | Will your project consider or encounter security-sensitive material?  | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> * | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b. | Will you be visiting websites associated with extreme or terrorist organisations?                                     | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> * | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c. | Will you be storing or transmitting any materials that could be interpreted as promoting or endorsing terrorist acts? | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> * | No <input type="checkbox"/> |

\* Give further details in **Section 8 Ethical Issues**

### Section 5 Systematic reviews of research (only complete if applicable)

- |    |  |                                |                             |
|----|--|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| a. | Will you be collecting any new data from participants? | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> * | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b. | Will you be analysing any secondary data?              | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> * | No <input type="checkbox"/> |

\* Give further details in **Section 8 Ethical Issues**

*If your methods do not involve engagement with participants (e.g. systematic review, literature review) and if you have answered **No** to both questions, please go to **Section 8 Attachments**.*

### Section 6 Secondary data analysis (only complete if applicable)

- |    |  |                               |   |
|----|--|-------------------------------|---|
| a. | Name of dataset/s  |                               |   |
| b. | Owner of dataset/s   |                               |   |
| c. | Are the data in the public domain?   | Yes <input type="checkbox"/>  | No <input type="checkbox"/><br><i>If no, do you have the owner's permission/license?</i><br>Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No* <input type="checkbox"/> |
| d. | Are the data special category personal data (i.e. personal data revealing racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, or trade union membership, and the processing of genetic data, biometric data for the purpose of uniquely identifying a natural person, data concerning health or data concerning a natural person's sex life or sexual orientation)? | Yes* <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/>   |
| e. | Will you be conducting analysis within the remit it was originally collected for?  | Yes <input type="checkbox"/>  | No* <input type="checkbox"/>  |

f.	<b>If no</b> , was consent gained from participants for subsequent/future analysis?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No* <input type="checkbox"/>
g.	<b>If no</b> , was data collected prior to ethics approval process?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No* <input type="checkbox"/>

\* Give further details in **Section 8 Ethical Issues**

If secondary analysis is only method used **and** no answers with asterisks are ticked, go to **Section 9 Attachments**.

## Section 7 Data Storage and Security

Please ensure that you include all hard and electronic data when completing this section.

a.	<b>Data subjects</b> - Who will the data be collected from? <b>Data will be collected from six university language lecturers and six undergraduate language students.</b>		
b.	<b>What data will be collected?</b> Please provide details of the type of personal data to be collected <b>Qualitative data will be collected via six semi-structured interviews and one-two focus group sessions.</b>		
c.	<b>Is the data anonymised?</b>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No* <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Do you plan to anonymise the data?	Yes* <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Do you plan to use individual level data?	Yes* <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Do you plan to pseudonymise the data?	Yes* <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
	* Give further details in <b>Section 8 Ethical Issues</b>		
e.	<b>i. Disclosure</b> – Who will the results of your project be disclosed to? <b>Supervisors and examination board and with participants upon request.</b>		
	<b>ii. Disclosure</b> – Will personal data be disclosed as part of your project? <b>No</b>		
f.	<b>Data storage</b> – Please provide details on how and where the data will be stored i.e. UCL network, encrypted USB stick**, encrypted laptop** etc. <b>The data will be stored on the researcher's password protected personal laptop. The files will also be encrypted.</b> ** Advanced Encryption Standard 256 bit encryption which has been made a security standard within the NHS		
g..	<b>Data Safe Haven (Identifiable Data Handling Solution)</b> – Will the personal identifiable data collected and processed as part of this research be stored in the	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>



	UCL Data Safe Haven (mainly used by SLMS divisions, institutes and departments)?	No
	How long will the data and records be kept for and in what format? <b>The focus group and interview recordings will be stored in mp3 format on my personal password protected laptop until I write it up and then I will delete it. The transcription will be saved in Word format and the file will be encrypted and kept on my password protected laptop for five years.</b>	
h.	Will personal data be processed or be sent outside the European Economic Area? (If yes, please confirm that there are adequate levels of protections in compliance with GDPR and state what these arrangements are) N/A	
	Will data be archived for use by other researchers? (If yes, please provide details.) N/A	
i.	If personal data is used as part of your project, describe what measures you have in place to ensure that the data is only used for the research purpose e.g. pseudonymisation and short retention period of data' <b>The focus group and interviews recording will be stored in mp3 format on my personal password protected laptop. The recording will be transcribed by myself and stored in a Word encrypted format for five years for possible use in future studies. I will delete the audio-recorded interviews and focus group after I transcribe and write up the data. I will store all electronic data and files related to the study, securely on my password protected laptop (BERA, 2018). The data collected in this study will be treated as confidential and will only be accessible to myself, the researcher of the study.</b> <b>I will ensure participants' confidentiality and privacy are carefully safeguarded throughout all stages of the study. I will not report the names of the participants and their institutions and I will assign pseudonyms instead. I agree with Yin's (2009, p.208) advice that using pseudonyms is not enough to ensure anonymity. Therefore, I will make sure not to disclose any personal details that might indicate the identity of any participant.</b>	
	* Give further details in <b>Section 8 Ethical Issues</b>	

## Section 8 Ethical issues

Please state clearly the ethical issues which may arise in the course of this research and how will they be addressed.

**All** issues that may apply should be addressed. Some examples are given below, further information can be found in the guidelines. *Minimum 150 words required.*

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Methods</li> <li>- Sampling</li> <li>- Recruitment</li> <li>- Gatekeepers</li> <li>- Informed consent</li> <li>- Potentially vulnerable participants</li> <li>- Safeguarding/child protection</li> <li>- Sensitive topics</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- International research</li> <li>- Risks to participants and/or researchers</li> <li>- Confidentiality/Anonymity</li> <li>- Disclosures/limits to confidentiality</li> <li>- Data storage and security both during and after the research (including transfer, sharing, encryption, protection)</li> <li>- Reporting</li> <li>- Dissemination and use of findings</li> </ul> |
|---|--|

## My role as an insider researcher

Bryman (2012) notes the importance of considering the researcher's position within the research and its

influence on the process of inquiry and interpretation. I will have two positions in this study namely as an insider and an outsider researcher. As an insider researcher situated and involved in a 'shared setting' I will have a privileged access and knowledge of the participants, the culture and information within the institution in which I work. There are many advantages when interviewing participants from the researcher's institution. Participants are more likely to trust and feel at ease with an insider researcher with whom they are familiar, have shared interests and values, and a similar understanding of the topic. Consequently this can help eliminate misunderstanding, saves time spent in clarifying meaning and motivates participants to provide rich data (Smyth and Holian, 2008).

However, being an insider researcher can also cause some ethical concerns which include biases, closeness and assumptions (DeLyser, 2001). To counterbalance these potential biases, I will recruit participants from my institution and participants from two other institutions with no personal connection to the researcher. I will thus be an insider researcher in one institution and an outsider researcher in the other institutions. Being an outsider researcher or, in other words, a 'professional stranger' involves having no access to privileged knowledge in the other institution or strong links with the participants from that institution (Agar, 1996).

Having multiple identities in this study will help me gain deeper understanding, wider perspectives and mitigate some of the limitations resulting from being either an insider and or an outsider researcher. I will also adopt a reflexive approach in order to understand my position in relation to the subject, the participants and the study context and process. This should help acknowledge, assess and understand my influence as a researcher on the study and hence minimise biases (Cohen *et al.*, 2011).

### **Interviewing Peer Participants**

I will conduct 6 interviews with 6 peer participants. In studies that involves interviews, the relationship between the participants and the interviewer is important and has a significant implications. In this study, the researcher or the interviewer and the peer participants share a professional relationship and share similar roles and a common context of professional knowledge. However, this very professional relationship and the researcher's professional identity could also result in the participants feeling judged or under scrutiny. When phrasing questions that seek information on the participants understanding of concepts, I have to be very cautious and sensitive so the participants do not understand them to be testing their professional competence or understanding.

### **Practitioners' Informed Consent**

Before commencing the interviews and obtaining the written consent of the participants, I will individually explain in person, to each participant, the following: the aim and value of the study; the importance of their participation; how and to whom the data will be reported; and their right to withdraw from the study (BERA, 2018). Participants will receive and complete consent forms (Appendix B) and be informed that taking part in the study is voluntary. They can withdraw from the project and from having their data used at any point before the submission deadline for the study by 1st September 2019. I plan to empower the participants by sharing with them the final draft of the research and by making the results of the study available to the participants. Participants will be given a detailed explanation of how their confidentiality and anonymity will be protected as explained in section 7.

### **Informed Consent**

Before commencing the interviews and obtaining the written consent of the participants, I will individually explain in person, to each participant, the following: the aim and value of the study; the importance of their participation; how and to whom the data will be reported; and their right to withdraw from the study (BERA, 2018). Participants will receive and complete consent forms (Appendix B) and be informed that taking part in the study is voluntary. They can withdraw from the project and from having their data used at any point before the submission deadline for the study by 1st February 2020. Participants will be given a detailed explanation of how their confidentiality and anonymity will be protected as explained in section 7.

## Power Relations

I will identify three language students from my institution and three students will be identified from the two other institutions. Being possibly the former tutor of one or two of the possible participants from my institution, I am aware of power relations and the possibility that they may feel obliged to provide positive responses. I will ask the participants to be as honest as possible and express their own views and experiences freely. I will explain that this is very important to the study and also to enhance my future practice. I will ensure I create a friendly relaxed atmosphere throughout the sessions and reassure the participants that they are able to withdraw at any time. They will be told they may freely express negative as well as positive views. I will collect the data without prejudice as much as possible. I will avoid leading questions and make sure not to affect the participants' responses in any way during the focus group session. I will also make sure to give each participant a fair share in the discussion and deal with them in a friendly yet professional manner. Participants will be attending specifically for the focus group. I will thank them for their participation at the start and end of the session.

Participants will receive a clear open explanation of the study, its aims and the uses to which the data will be put. This also includes clarifying the responsibilities, roles and rights of the researcher and participants during the focus group. I will make careful use of the language to ensure that it is suited to the participants' capabilities and life experience (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2005).

Participants will receive and complete consent forms (Appendix B) and be informed that taking part in the study is voluntary. They can withdraw from the project and from having their data used at any point before the 1st February 2020. I plan to empower the participants by sharing with them the final draft of the research and by making the results of the study available to all participants.

Participants will be given a detailed explanation of how their confidentiality and anonymity will be protected as previously explained in section 7. The data collected will be treated as confidential and will only be accessible to myself, the researcher of the study. All information identifying the participants will be kept anonymous. The recorded focus group will be transcribed by myself and the audio file will then be deleted. The Word file of the transcript will be stored on my personal laptop and password protected. The participants will be offered the opportunity to see the transcript, the results following analysis and information about the findings of the study.

Please confirm that the processing of the data is not likely to cause substantial damage or distress to an individual Yes

## Section 9 Attachments Please attach the following items to this form, or explain if not attached

a.	Information sheets, consent forms and other materials to be used to inform potential participants about the research ( <i>List attachments below</i> )	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
	<b>Appendix A-1 Participant Information Sheet (practitioner)</b>		
	<b>Appendix A-2 – Proposed interview 'warm up', prompts questions and 'cool down'</b>		
	<b>Appendix B-1 Participant Information Sheet (student)</b>		
	<b>Appendix B-2 Proposed interview 'warm up', prompts questions and 'cool down'</b>		

<b>Appendix C-1 – Informed Consent Form (practitioner)</b>			
<b>Appendix C-2– Informed Consent Form (student)</b>			
<i>If applicable/appropriate:</i>			
b.	Approval letter from external Research Ethics Committee		Yes <input type="checkbox"/>
c.	The proposal ('case for support') for the project		Yes <input type="checkbox"/>
d.	Full risk assessment		Yes <input type="checkbox"/>

## Section 10 Declaration

I confirm that to the best of my knowledge the information in this form is correct and that this is a full description of the ethical issues that may arise in the course of this project.

I have discussed the ethical issues relating to my research with my supervisor.

I have attended the appropriate ethics training provided by my course.

### I confirm that to the best of my knowledge:

The above information is correct and that this is a full description of the ethics issues that may arise in the course of this project.

Name	Abir Mahmoud E. Ahmed
Date	24.02.2019

Please submit your completed ethics forms to your supervisor for review.

## Notes and references

## References:

- Ahmed, A. (2018) *Student Perceptions of the Flipped Classroom*.
- Alabri, S. and Hilal, A. (2013) Using NVivo for data analysis in qualitative research. *International Interdisciplinary Journal of Education*. [Online] 2 (2). Available from: [http://www.ijoe.org/v2/IJJOE\\_06\\_02\\_02\\_2013.pdf](http://www.ijoe.org/v2/IJJOE_06_02_02_2013.pdf).
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- Rooney, P. (2005) Researching from the inside - does it compromise validity? [Online] Available from <http://level3.dit.ie/html/issue3/rooney/rooney.pdf>.
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- Tucker, B. (2012) The flipped classroom: online instruction at home frees class time for learning. *Education Next*. 12 (1), p.82-83. [Online] Available from: <http://educationnext.org/the-flipped-classroom>.
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## Professional code of ethics

You should read and understand relevant ethics guidelines, for example:

British Psychological Society (2018) *Code of Ethics and Conduct*

or

British Educational Research Association (2018) *Ethical Guidelines*

or

British Sociological Association (2017) *Statement of Ethical Practice*

Please see the respective websites for these or later versions; direct links to the latest versions are available on the Institute of Education <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/ioe/research/research-ethics>

## Disclosure and Barring Service checks

If you are planning to carry out research in regulated Education environments such as Schools, or if your research will bring you into contact with children and young people (under the age of 18), you will need to have a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) CHECK, before you start. The DBS was previously known as the Criminal

Records Bureau (CRB) . If you do not already hold a current DBS check, and have not registered with the DBS update service, you will need to obtain one through at IOE.

Ensure that you apply for the DBS check in plenty of time as will take around 4 weeks, though can take longer depending on the circumstances.

### Further references

The [www.ethicsguidebook.ac.uk](http://www.ethicsguidebook.ac.uk) website is very useful for assisting you to think through the ethical issues arising from your project.

Robson, Colin (2011). *Real world research: a resource for social scientists and practitioner researchers* (3rd edition). Oxford: Blackwell.

This text has a helpful section on ethical considerations.

Alderson, P. and Morrow, V. (2011) *The Ethics of Research with Children and Young People: A Practical Handbook*. London: Sage.

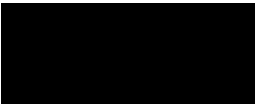
This text has useful suggestions if you are conducting research with children and young people.

Wiles, R. (2013) *What are Qualitative Research Ethics?* Bloomsbury.

A useful and short text covering areas including informed consent, approaches to research ethics including examples of ethical dilemmas.

## Departmental use

If a project raises particularly challenging ethics issues, or a more detailed review would be appropriate, the supervisor **must** refer the application to the Research Development Administrator (via [ioe.researchethics@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:ioe.researchethics@ucl.ac.uk) so that it can be submitted to the IOE Research Ethics Committee for consideration. A departmental research ethics coordinator or representative can advise you, either to support your review process, or help decide whether an application should be referred to the REC. If unsure please refer to the guidelines explaining when to refer the ethics application to the IOE Research Ethics Committee, posted on the committee's website.

Student name	Abir Mahmoud E. Ahmed
Student department	Learning & Leadership
Course	EdD
Project title	<b>Flipping the Language Classroom: A Qualitative Investigation of Approaches Taken by Higher Education Practitioners</b>
<b>Reviewer 1</b>	
Supervisor/first reviewer name	Susan Taylor
Do you foresee any ethical difficulties with this research?	No – Abir has given a detailed and very full account of her research and potential ethical issues and how these might be mitigated against
Supervisor/first reviewer signature	
Date	13 May 2019
<b>Reviewer 2</b>	

Second reviewer name	Joseph Mintz
Do you foresee any ethical difficulties with this research?	I agree that the project has been well thought out. I think it might be an idea to consider whether the information provided to participants within the researchers' own institution might need to be different in any way to that provided to those outside. The balance between in/out participants was not quite clear to me so this might be something to review with your supervisor.
Supervisor/second reviewer signature	Joseph Mintz
Date	20.5.19
<b>Decision on behalf of reviews</b>	
Decision	Approved <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Approved subject to the following additional measures <input type="checkbox"/>
	Not approved for the reasons given below <input type="checkbox"/>
	Referred to REC for review <input type="checkbox"/>
Points to be noted by other reviewers and in report to REC	
Comments from reviewers for the applicant	
<b><i>Once it is approved by both reviewers, students should submit their ethics application form to the Centre for Doctoral Education team: <a href="mailto:IOE.CDE@ucl.ac.uk">IOE.CDE@ucl.ac.uk</a>.</i></b>	

## **Appendix A-1**

### **Participant Information Sheet for (practitioners)**

**UCL Research Ethics Committee Approval ID Number: Z6364106/2019/04/39**

**Study title: Flipping the Language Classroom: A Qualitative Investigation of Approaches Taken by Higher Education Practitioners**

Department: Doctoral School

Researcher name: Abir Mahmoud E. Ahmed

Contact details: [abirm\\_2005@hotmail.com](mailto:abirm_2005@hotmail.com)

Supervisor's name: Sue Taylor

Dear [REDACTED]

I would like to invite you to participate in a research project about approaches taken by Higher Education practitioners in the flipped classroom. I am undertaking this research study for the doctorate in education thesis which I am doing with University College London, Institute of Education.

Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. You are free not to take part or to withdraw up until the submission date of the study on the 1<sup>ST</sup> February 2020 without giving a reason. If you agree to participate in the study, please e-mail me on the above e-mail address. I will then send you an electronic consent form to sign to show you agreed to take part. I will also send you in the same email some suggested dates and times for the focus group session so that you can choose those convenient for you. Before you decide please take your time to read carefully what the study is about and what it would involve for you.

I am inviting six language practitioners who teach a language on the University-Wide language programme to take part in a 50-60 minute audio recorded semi-structured interview. The interview will take place in the University of Westminster Student Union quiet area in the Regent Campus.

The study aims to deepen understanding of the flipped classroom implementation, design and the main challenges both teachers and students face and how best to address them. Therefore the session aims to find out your experiences, views and implementation of the flipped classroom model. The session also aims to explore your understanding of the pedagogy and the challenges that affect your practice and institutional context.

During the session, please feel free to express your views, perspectives and experiences whether negative or positive. Your input is not only valuable for my study; it will also help to increase my understanding of what went well and what needs improving in the language flipped classes. Sharing your valuable input will subsequently help identify principles that will help deal with the challenges and enhance implementation of the model.

Your confidentiality and anonymity will be safeguarded during and after the study and it will not be possible to identify you from any publications. The information I will collect in the interview will be treated as strictly confidential and will only be accessible to me. Any information identifying you as a participant will be kept anonymous. I will audio record and save the information collected from the interview on my personal laptop. After I write up the data, I will delete the audio file permanently. I will save the written data in a password protected Word file for 5 years for possible use in future studies. All data will be collected and stored in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.



If you decide to withdraw from the study before the 1<sup>st</sup> February 2020, I will delete all the information I collected from you from all the study files. Please contact me on the above e-mail address there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

## **Local Data Protection Privacy Notice**

Notice:

The controller for this project will be University College London (UCL). The UCL Data Protection Officer provides oversight of UCL activities involving the processing of personal data, and can be contacted at [data-protection@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:data-protection@ucl.ac.uk)

This 'local' privacy notice sets out the information that applies to this particular study. Further information on how UCL uses participant information can be found in our 'general' privacy notice:

For participants in research studies, [click here](#)

The information that is required to be provided to participants under data protection legislation (GDPR and DPA 2018) is provided across both the 'local' and 'general' privacy notices.

The categories of personal data used will be as follows:

Name

Address

...

The lawful basis that will be used to process your personal data are: 'Public task' for personal data and 'Research purposes' for special category data.

Your personal data will be processed for 5 years required for the research project. If we are able to anonymise or pseudonymise the personal data you provide we will undertake this, and will endeavour to minimise the processing of personal data wherever possible.

If you are concerned about how your personal data is being processed, or if you would like to contact us about your rights, please contact UCL in the first instance at [data-protection@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:data-protection@ucl.ac.uk).

Detail any intended recipients of personal data if not explained elsewhere, and also advise if any personal data will be transferred outside the EEA, and if so to where.

## Appendix A-2

### Proposed interview 'warm up', prompts questions and 'cool down'

#### Warm up

Thank you for coming and for taking part in this interview. Before we start let me remind you quickly of a few points mentioned on the Informed Consent form which you received and signed. As you know this session will be audio-recorded. I would like to assure you that your information will be treated as strictly confidential. Anonymity will be maintained and it will not be possible to identify you from any publications. Do you have any questions so far?

Let me tell you quickly of what is going to happen during this interview session. I'll be giving you some information and asking you some questions. My study aims to deepen understanding of the flipped classroom implementation, design and the main challenges both teachers and students face and how best to address them. Therefore, I am interested in learning about your views of and experiences with the flipped classroom model you used in delivering your language classes this year instead of the traditional learning model. I would also like to know more about your implementation of the flipped classroom and understanding of the pedagogy and the challenges that affect your practice and institutional context. Do you have any questions?

During the session, please feel free to express your views, perspectives and experiences whether negative or positive. Your input is not only valuable for my study; it will also help to increase my understanding of what went well and what needs improving in the implementation of language flipped classes. Sharing your valuable input will subsequently help identify principles that will help deal with the challenges and enhance implementation of the model. I understand that sometimes people feel embarrassed or do not like to talk about negative aspects, but it would be very beneficial for the study if you could be as open and honest as possible and share your negative and positive experiences with me.

#### Possible prompts and questions:

##### 1. What drives language practitioners to implement the flipped classroom?

Could you tell me how you first heard about the flipped classroom and why you were interested in it?  
What pedagogic approaches to the teaching of foreign languages do you use in your teaching?  
How have your students responded to your use of the flipped classroom and has this changed your approach?  
What response have you had from colleagues about your use of the flipped classroom?  
How would you evaluate the lesson in terms of how it was designed and delivered? Is there anything you would change?

##### 2. How do language practitioners included in the sample implement the flipped classroom?

Could you describe how you came to use the flipped classroom in your teaching?  
How does it differ from what you did previously?  
Could you outline the design process for the courses you teach?  
What does your flipped classroom look like from the student perspective?  
What materials and activities do you use and why?

Could you tell me about your learning aims for the lesson and the decisions you took in planning it?

### **3. What are the main challenges language practitioners face when implementing the flipped classroom?**

Could you tell me about the most important challenges, if any, you experienced in your flipped classrooms?

Could you compare the attitudes and expectations of your students at different points in time? (For example, when you first taught at your institution, five years ago, now)

How has your institution changed in recent years and has this affected the rationale for and workings of your programme?

How does your use of the flipped classroom reflect teaching and learning priorities in your programme and institution?

[After lesson observation]

How would you explain your implementation of the flipped classroom to a student, to a colleague and to a manager?

### **4. What suggestions can language practitioners make to improve flipped classroom implementation?**

What would be the main thing/things you would change in order to maximise the benefit of your flipped classes?

In your view, what are the main points that mark a successful flipped classroom?

What would you advise practitioners who want to improve their flipped classroom?

What recommendations about flipped classroom implementation would you make to managers in your institution?

### **End of the session**

Thank you very much for your great contribution today and the very interesting discussion. The information you submitted will be published as a report. I will be in touch to check if you would like me to send you a copy. Please remember that if you decide at any time up until the 1<sup>st</sup> February 2020 that you no longer wish to take part in this project, you can notify me and withdraw immediately without giving a reason. Before we go, I would like to thank you again. It has been a pleasure meeting you today and listening to your experience and views which certainly gave me a lot to reflect and think of. Take care and enjoy the rest of the day.

## Appendix B-1

### Participant Information Sheet (student)

**UCL Research Ethics Committee Approval ID Number: Z6364106/2019/04/39**

Study title: **Flipping the Language Classroom: A Qualitative Investigation of Approaches Taken by Higher Education Practitioners**

Department: Doctoral School

Researcher name: Abir Mahmoud E. Ahmed

Contact details: [abirm\\_2005@hotmail.com](mailto:abirm_2005@hotmail.com)

Supervisor's name: Sue Taylor

Dear [REDACTED]

I would like to invite you to participate in a research project about approaches taken by Higher Education practitioners in the flipped classroom. I am undertaking this research study for the doctorate in education thesis which I am doing with University College London, Institute of Education.

Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. You are free not to take part or to withdraw up until the submission date of the study on the 1<sup>ST</sup> February 2020 without giving a reason. If you agree to participate in the study, please e-mail me on the above e-mail address. I will then send you an electronic consent form to sign to show you agreed to take part. I will also send you in the same email some suggested dates and times for the focus group session so that you can choose those convenient for you. Before you decide please take your time to read carefully what the study is about and what it would involve for you.

I am inviting six undergraduate students who study a language course on the University-Wide language programme in the academic year 2018-19 to take part in a 50-60 minute audio recorded focus group session. The session will take place in the University of Westminster Student Union quiet area in the Regent Campus.

The aim of the session is to find out your experiences, views and opinions about the flipped classroom model used this year in your language class. During the session, please feel free to express your views, perspectives and experiences whether negative or positive. Your input is not only valuable for my study; it will also help to increase my understanding of what went well and what needs improving in the language flipped classes. Sharing your valuable input will subsequently help improve the language courses that have started using the flipped classroom model across the University.

Your confidentiality and anonymity will be safeguarded during and after the study and it will not be possible to identify you from any publications. The information I will collect in the focus group will be treated as strictly confidential and will only be accessible to me. Any information identifying you as a participant will be kept anonymous. I will audio record and save the information collected from the focus group session on my personal laptop. After I write up the data, I will delete the audio file permanently. I will save the written data in a password protected Word file for 5 years for possible use in future studies. All data will be collected and stored in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.

If you decide to withdraw from the study before the 1<sup>st</sup> February 2020, I will delete all the information I collected from you from all the study files.

Please contact me on the above e-mail address there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

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Name

Address

...

The lawful basis that will be used to process your personal data are: 'Public task' for personal data and 'Research purposes' for special category data.

Your personal data will be processed for 5 years required for the research project. If we are able to anonymise or pseudonymise the personal data you provide we will undertake this, and will endeavour to minimise the processing of personal data wherever possible.

If you are concerned about how your personal data is being processed, or if you would like to contact us about your rights, please contact UCL in the first instance at [data-protection@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:data-protection@ucl.ac.uk).

Detail any intended recipients of personal data if not explained elsewhere, and also advise if any personal data will be transferred outside the EEA, and if so to where.

## Appendix B-2

### Proposed focus group 'warm up', prompts questions and 'cool down'

#### Warm up

It is very nice to see you all. Thank you for coming and for taking part in this focus group. Before we start let me remind you quickly of a few points mentioned on the Informed Consent form which you received and signed. As you know this session will be audio-recorded. I would like to assure you that your information will be treated as strictly confidential. Anonymity will be maintained and it will not be possible to identify you from any publications. Do you have any questions so far?

Let me tell you quickly of what is going to happen during this focus group session. I'll be giving you some information and asking you some questions to find out more about your perspectives, experiences and views about the flipped classes you had this year. As you know, I'm interested in learning about your experiences with the flipped classroom model used in delivering your language classes this year instead of the traditional learning model. With the flipped classroom you learn the content at home and come to class to work on your homework. This is basically opposite to the traditional learning model. Do you have any questions?

I am particularly interested in your views of your language flipped classes and what you like and/or dislike about it. I understand that sometimes people feel embarrassed or do not like to talk about negative aspects, but it would be very beneficial for the study if you could be as open and honest as possible and share your negative and positive experiences with us.

#### Possible prompts and questions:

How did you find your language flipped classes this year?

What did you like the most? Why?

What did you like the least? Why?

How long it took you to get familiar with the flipped classroom structure?

How did you find the interaction with colleagues and teacher in the flipped classes?

Did the flipped classroom suit your learning preference or not?

What did you think about the online materials?

Would you recommend using this model in future language classes? Why?

Would you recommend using this model in other modules?

What would you have liked to see/have in your language flipped classes?

Any suggestions to improve the language flipped classes?

#### End of the session

Thank you very much for your great contribution today and the very interesting discussion. The information you submitted will be published as a report. I will be in touch to check if you would like me to send you a copy. Please remember that if you decide at any time up until the 1<sup>st</sup> February 2020 that you no longer wish to take part in this project, you can notify me and withdraw immediately without giving a reason. Before we go, I would like to thank you again. It has been a pleasure meeting you today and listening to your experiences and views which certainly gave me a lot to reflect and think of. Take care and enjoy the rest of the day.

## Appendix C-1

### CONSENT FORM FOR PRACTITIONERS

Please complete this form after you have read the Information Sheet and/or listened to an explanation about the research.

**Title of Study: Flipping the Language Classroom: A Qualitative Investigation of Approaches Taken by Higher Education Practitioners**

**Department: Doctoral School**

**Name and Contact Details of the Researcher(s): Abir Mahmoud E. Ahmed**

**Name and Contact Details of the Principal Researcher: Sue Taylor**

**Name and Contact Details of the UCL Data Protection Officer: Lee Shailer [data-protection@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:data-protection@ucl.ac.uk)**

**This study has been approved by the UCL Research Ethics Committee: Project ID number: Z6364106/2019/04/39**

Thank you for considering taking part in this research. The person organising the research must explain the project to you before you agree to take part. If you have any questions arising from the Information Sheet or explanation already given to you, please ask the researcher before you decide whether to join in. You will be given a copy of this Consent Form to keep and refer to at any time.

**I confirm that I understand that by ticking each box below I am consenting to this element of the study.**

**I understand that it will be assumed that unticked boxes means that I DO NOT consent to that part of the study.**

**I understand that by not giving consent for any one element that I may be deemed ineligible for the study.**

		Tick Box
1.	*I confirm that I have read and understood the Information Sheet for the above study. I have had an opportunity to consider the information and what will be expected of me. I have also had the opportunity to ask questions which have been answered to my satisfaction and would like to take part in an individual interview	
2.	I consent to participate in the study. I understand that the information I provide in the interview will be used for the purposes explained to me.	
3.	I understand that according to data protection legislation, 'public task' will be the lawful basis for processing. I understand that according to data protection legislation, 'research purposes' will be the lawful basis for processing special category data.	
4.	I understand that all personal information will remain confidential and that all efforts will be made to ensure I cannot be identified.	
5.	I understand that my data gathered in this study will be stored anonymously and securely. It will not be possible to identify me in any publications.	
6.	I understand that if I decide at any time up until the 1st February 2020 that I no longer wish to take part in this project, I can notify the researcher and withdraw immediately.	
7.	I understand that the information I have submitted will be published as a report and I wish to receive a copy of it. Yes/No	
8.	I consent to my interview being audio recorded and understand that the recordings will be destroyed within 2 months following transcription.	

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

## Appendix C-2

### CONSENT FORM FOR STUDENTS

Please complete this form after you have read the Information Sheet and/or listened to an explanation about the research.

**Title of Study: Flipping the Language Classroom: A Qualitative Investigation of Approaches Taken by Higher Education Practitioners**

**Department: Doctoral School**

**Name and Contact Details of the Researcher(s): Abir Mahmoud E. Ahmed**

**Name and Contact Details of the Principal Researcher: Sue Taylor**

**Name and Contact Details of the UCL Data Protection Officer: Lee Shailer [data-protection@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:data-protection@ucl.ac.uk)**

**This study has been approved by the UCL Research Ethics Committee: Project ID number: Z6364106/2019/04/39**

Thank you for considering taking part in this research. The person organising the research must explain the project to you before you agree to take part. If you have any questions arising from the Information Sheet or explanation already given to you, please ask the researcher before you decide whether to join in. You will be given a copy of this Consent Form to keep and refer to at any time.

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**I understand that by not giving consent for any one element that I may be deemed ineligible for the study.**

		Tick Box
1.	*I confirm that I have read and understood the Information Sheet for the above study. I have had an opportunity to consider the information and what will be expected of me. I have also had the opportunity to ask questions which have been answered to my satisfaction and would like to take part in an individual interview	
2.	I consent to participate in the study. I understand that the information I provide in the focus group will be used for the purposes explained to me.	
3.	I understand that according to data protection legislation, 'public task' will be the lawful basis for processing. I understand that according to data protection legislation, 'research purposes' will be the lawful basis for processing special category data.	
4.	I understand that all personal information will remain confidential and that all efforts will be made to ensure I cannot be identified.	
5.	I understand that my data gathered in this study will be stored anonymously and securely. It will not be possible to identify me in any publications.	
6.	I understand that if I decide at any time up until the 1st February 2020 that I no longer wish to take part in this project, I can notify the researcher and withdraw immediately.	
7.	I understand that the information I have submitted will be published as a report and I wish to receive a copy of it. Yes/No	
8.	I consent to my interview being audio recorded and understand that the recordings will be destroyed within 2 months following transcription.	

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature