

The Impact of Flipped Classroom Approaches in English Language Teaching and Learning in a Multilingual Society

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Abstract

This paper examines the impact of the Flipped Classroom Approach (FCA) on English Language Teaching (ELT) in multilingual societies. Drawing on recent scholarship (2021–2025), the study explores how flipped instruction restructures traditional pedagogy by shifting foundational content delivery outside the classroom and dedicating in-class time to interactive, communicative tasks. Evidence indicates that FCA enhances language proficiency, learner autonomy, engagement, and speaking confidence, particularly in linguistically diverse environments where proficiency gaps and unequal exposure to English are prevalent. The approach aligns with sociocultural perspectives that emphasise mediated interaction and scaffolded learning, making it especially relevant in multilingual classrooms. However, successful implementation depends on inclusive material design, teacher preparedness, digital infrastructure, and equitable access to technology. Without these supports, flipped pedagogy risks reinforcing existing inequalities. The study concludes that while FCA presents a transformative opportunity for multilingual ELT, its effectiveness relies on context-sensitive adaptation, institutional investment, and culturally responsive practices.

Keywords: Flipped classroom, multilingual education, English language teaching, learner autonomy

Introduction

English language teaching (ELT) in multilingual societies is shaped by linguistic diversity, varied proficiency levels, and complex cultural identities. Recent research emphasises that such classrooms require pedagogies that recognise learners' multilingual repertoires rather than imposing monolingual standards (García & Wei, 2022; May, 2022). In many regions where English functions as an additional language, inclusive and flexible instructional models are necessary to address differentiated learning needs (Rose & McKinley, 2022). However, traditional teacher-centred approaches have been criticised for limiting interaction and disadvantaging less proficient learners (Macaro, 2022; Richards, 2023).

The flipped classroom approach has emerged as a learner-centred alternative that restructures instructional time. In this model, foundational content is delivered before class through digital materials, while classroom sessions focus on collaborative and communicative tasks (Bond, 2022; Lo & Hew, 2023). Recent meta-analyses report positive effects of flipped learning on engagement, autonomy, and academic achievement across disciplines, including language education (Chen et al., 2022; Strelan & Adlington, 2021). In ELT contexts, studies associate flipped instruction with improvements in speaking skills and vocabulary development due to increased opportunities for guided practice (Li & Li, 2024; Teng, 2023).

The theoretical foundations of flipped learning align with constructivist and sociocultural perspectives that prioritise interaction and scaffolded meaning-making in language development (Kim & Kim, 2022; Lantolf et al., 2021). Its flexibility, such as allowing learners to pause, replay, or access captioned materials, supports differentiated pacing and reduces cognitive overload in multilingual classrooms (Lo & Hew, 2023; Zhang & Zou, 2022). Given the expanding role of English as a global lingua franca, evaluating flipped pedagogy in multilingual ELT settings remains pedagogically relevant and timely (Jenkins, 2022; Rose et al., 2023).

Flipped English Language Teaching in Multilingual Societies

Multilingual societies operate within educational systems where English functions as a second or foreign language and often serves as the medium of instruction despite not being learners' first language, particularly in contexts such as Nigeria and South Africa. Makalela (2022) notes that

overlapping linguistic repertoires shape classroom participation and comprehension, while May (2022) argues that instruction must reflect learners' diverse linguistic identities rather than impose monolingual norms. Such diversity frequently results in uneven proficiency outcomes, as Taiwo (2023) links L1 variation to differences in pronunciation, vocabulary, and interaction, and UNESCO (2022) highlights urban–rural disparities in access to quality English exposure. García and Wei (2022) therefore identify translanguaging and code-switching as natural strategies for bridging comprehension gaps.

These realities demand flexible and inclusive ELT methodologies. Richards (2023) contends that teacher-centred, grammar-focused approaches often fail to develop communicative competence in heterogeneous classrooms, while Macaro (2022) maintains that traditional models may disadvantage learners with limited exposure to English. Consequently, scholars advocate differentiated instruction and scaffolded interaction in multilingual settings (Rose et al., 2023). Within this context, the Flipped Classroom Approach (FCA) restructures instruction by shifting foundational content to pre-class digital engagement and dedicating class time to collaborative application (Bond, 2022), thereby enhancing meaningful interaction (Lo & Hew, 2023).

Research affirms FCA's pedagogical relevance. Chen (2024) reports improved engagement and task completion, and Li and Li (2024) identify gains in speaking proficiency and vocabulary retention. Grounded in sociocultural theory, FCA aligns with Lantolf et al.'s (2021) emphasis on mediated interaction and Swain and Watanabe's (2022) view of collaborative meaning-making in language internalisation. It also promotes learner autonomy: Teng (2023) associates self-paced learning with stronger self-regulation, while Zhang and Zou (2022) show reduced cognitive overload among lower-proficiency learners. More recently, Chen (2025) highlights equitable participation, and Bond (2025) underscores differentiation without compromising instructional rigour.

Applications in English language teaching

Flipped classroom applications in ELT extend across primary, secondary, tertiary, and adult education, with particular relevance in multilingual contexts. According to Lo and Hew (2023), digital platforms such as learning management systems and video-sharing tools are commonly used to deliver grammar explanations, vocabulary instruction, and listening tasks before class. Bond (2022) reports that this

structure increases opportunities for active engagement during face-to-face sessions. In multilingual EFL classrooms, this shift allows in-class time to prioritise productive skills, speaking and writing, through discussions, peer collaboration, and presentations, which are essential for academic and professional advancement (Li & Li, 2024).

In bilingual and English-medium university settings, flipped instruction supports content and language integrated learning (CLIL). According to Macaro (2022), integrating language development with subject content enhances both disciplinary knowledge and linguistic competence. Chen (2024) claims that flipped pre-lecture materials enable students to familiarise themselves with academic discourse conventions before engaging in collaborative workshops. This model has proven particularly relevant in contexts where English functions as the medium of instruction despite students' diverse L1 backgrounds (Rose et al., 2023).

Flipped learning is also increasingly applied in teacher education and school-level ELT. Teng (2023) argues that pre-service teachers benefit from engaging with pedagogical theory online before participating in in-class simulations and reflective practice. Similarly, Zhang and Zou (2022) report that young learners develop oral fluency and confidence when given opportunities to prepare digitally before interactive classroom tasks. Digital discussion forums and messaging platforms further facilitate asynchronous participation, allowing learners in linguistically diverse settings to collaborate beyond classroom time (Lo & Hew, 2023).

Beyond formal schooling, flipped approaches are used in community-based and adult ELT programmes. According to UNESCO (2022), mobile-accessible instructional materials expand opportunities for migrant and refugee learners with irregular schedules. Chen (2025) claims that culturally responsive digital content enhances learner engagement and retention in multilingual adult education contexts. Bond (2025) argues that the adaptability of flipped pedagogy makes it particularly suitable for resource-constrained environments, as it supports flexible pacing while maintaining interactive classroom practice.

Impacts on learning outcomes in multilingual societies

Flipped learning has been shown to positively influence language outcomes in multilingual contexts by strengthening both cognitive and affective dimensions of learning. According to Li and Li (2024), learners in flipped EFL classrooms demonstrate measurable gains in vocabulary retention and speaking proficiency due to increased opportunities for active practice. Chen (2024) claims that structured pre-class exposure enhances reading comprehension because students arrive better prepared for analytical tasks. In linguistically diverse settings where proficiency levels vary widely, the ability to control pacing before class supports differentiated progression and more equitable participation (Teng, 2023).

Beyond linguistic gains, flipped instruction improves learner autonomy and engagement. According to Bond (2022), students in flipped environments exhibit higher levels of behavioural and emotional engagement compared to traditional lecture-based settings. Teng (2023) argues that self-paced digital preparation fosters self-regulated learning strategies, which are essential in multilingual classrooms where learners require varying degrees of scaffolding. This shift from passive reception to active participation reinforces student-centred interaction and increases motivation across diverse EFL and ESL contexts (Rose et al., 2023).

Flipped models also contribute to anxiety reduction and confidence building. Zhang and Zou (2022) report that the opportunity to preview instructional materials reduces cognitive overload and performance anxiety during communicative tasks. According to Chen (2025), learners in multilingual classrooms feel more confident participating in discussions when they have had prior exposure to content in a low-pressure digital environment. This preparatory space is particularly beneficial in societies where cultural attitudes toward language errors may discourage spontaneous participation (Macaro, 2022).

The approach further impacts teaching practices and classroom management. Lo and Hew (2023) explain that pre-class quizzes and reflections provide instructors with diagnostic insights, enabling data-driven lesson

The Potential of Flipped Classroom Approaches in Multilingual Contexts

The flipped classroom approach offers significant advantages in multilingual societies. Its flexible pacing allows learners to review pre-class materials repeatedly and, where necessary, access L1 support such as subtitles or translations, thereby bridging comprehension gaps. It maximises in-class time for interactive practice, discussions, group work, and speaking tasks, which strengthens communicative competence through active learning and peer scaffolding. The model also promotes learner autonomy by encouraging responsibility for pre-class preparation, independent study habits, and time management. Furthermore, it supports differentiated learning, as slower learners can revisit content while advanced learners progress at their own pace, ultimately improving engagement, collaboration, and motivation.

However, the approach presents notable challenges in contexts such as Nigeria. Limited access to smartphones, computers, and reliable internet, especially in rural or low-income communities, can widen inequality. Low student preparation and weak digital literacy among learners and some teachers may reduce the effectiveness of pre-class engagement. Teachers also face increased workload in creating digital materials and facilitating active sessions. Language barriers in English-only content, cultural resistance to non-traditional methods, difficulties in monitoring preparation, and the demand for strong classroom management further complicate implementation in multilingual settings.

Challenges in multilingual contexts

Despite its documented benefits, flipped classroom implementation in multilingual societies presents notable challenges. According to UNESCO (2022), persistent digital divides, particularly in rural and low-income communities, limit reliable access to internet connectivity and devices necessary for pre-class engagement. Lo and Hew (2023) report that inadequate technological infrastructure can reduce the effectiveness of flipped instruction when learners are unable to access preparatory materials consistently. Teacher workload also remains a concern; Bond (2022) argues that designing culturally responsive and linguistically inclusive digital resources demands significant time and pedagogical expertise. In multilingual classrooms where materials may require adaptation to diverse linguistic backgrounds, this demand becomes even more pronounced (Rose et al., 2023).

Learner-related factors further complicate implementation. Teng (2023) claims that students unfamiliar with self-directed learning may initially resist flipped models, particularly in contexts where traditional teacher-centred instruction is culturally valued. Zhang and Zou (2022) report that differences in digital literacy can widen participation gaps if adequate scaffolding is not provided. Although Chen (2024) affirms that flipped instruction can enhance proficiency, motivation, and classroom participation in multilingual ELT settings, Bond (2025) argues that its success depends on equitable access to technology, teacher preparedness, and inclusive instructional design. Without these foundational supports, flipped pedagogy risks reinforcing existing inequalities rather than mitigating them.

Conclusion

This study affirms that the flipped classroom approach (FCA) offers a pedagogically sound and context-responsive model for English language teaching in multilingual societies. Recent scholarship demonstrates that flipped instruction strengthens language proficiency, learner autonomy, engagement, and classroom interaction by reallocating instructional time toward communicative practice (Li & Li, 2024; Chen, 2024). According to Bond (2022), learner-centred digital preparation enhances behavioural and emotional engagement, while Teng (2023) argues that self-paced exposure fosters self-regulated learning, an essential factor in linguistically diverse classrooms. These outcomes are particularly significant in multilingual societies where disparities in proficiency and exposure often shape classroom participation.

However, the effectiveness of FCA depends on structural and pedagogical readiness. UNESCO (2022) highlights the persistent digital divide affecting equitable implementation, and Lo and Hew (2023) caution that insufficient teacher preparation may limit impact. Bond (2025) argues that without inclusive design and infrastructure support, flipped pedagogy risks reproducing existing inequalities. Therefore, while FCA demonstrates strong potential to transform multilingual ELT, its success relies on inclusive materials, institutional investment, and culturally responsive adaptation.

Recommendations

Effective flipped implementation in multilingual ELT contexts requires inclusive materials and strong teacher preparation. Pre-class resources should include multilingual subtitles, glossaries, and culturally

relevant content to improve accessibility and engagement (Zainuddin, 2017). Teachers need sustained professional development in digital pedagogy and scaffolding strategies within the Zone of Proximal Development (Eun & Lim, 2009), supported by peer collaboration and mentoring.

Equity concerns demand hybrid delivery models. Combining digital platforms with offline materials such as printed notes or USB drives can reduce access disparities (Webb & Doman, 2016). Broader infrastructure investment, reliable internet, affordable devices, and institutional partnerships, remains essential for sustainable implementation.

Multilingual peer collaboration and flexible assessment further enhance outcomes. Structured code-switching and peer mentoring can strengthen comprehension and confidence (García & Negueruela-Azarola, 2016). Alternative assessments, including portfolios and reflective tasks, better capture communicative and intercultural competence in diverse classrooms (Turana & Akdag-Cimena, 2020).

Finally, pilot programmes and community engagement support long-term success. Iterative feedback helps refine practice and address resistance or self-directed learning challenges. Parental and community involvement also improves acceptance and contextual relevance of flipped learning (Afrilyasanti et al., 2017).

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