Integrating MALL into English Flipped Classroom at the Tertiary Level

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Abstract

The teachers who teach large classes usually face problems in catering to the needs of the students who have different learning abilities. The traditional classroom method arguably does not address this issue, and as a result, slow learners among the students become demotivated and disengaged. Incorporating flipped teaching model will be effective in dealing with the diversity of the learners as well as the disproportionate class strength. This paper attempts to highlight the advantage of integrating MALL into flipped classroom over the traditional classroom and explains the ways to implement flipped classroom especially in English language classes.

Keywords: MALL, flipped classroom, traditional classroom, ICT, direct instruction, student-centred learning.

Digital Natives

The 21st century is characterised by the widespread proliferation of technology and quicker dissemination of information as compared to the previous century. The intervention of technology is changing the way teaching and learning take place across the world. Most of the learners even from less developed nations are tech-savvy and they can handle the modern gadgets like smart phones, tablets, PCs with ease. To use two phrases popularised by Marc Prensky, learners belonging to this generation can be called "digital natives", and the teachers with inadequate exposure to the use of technology who struggle to handle this generation may be referred to as "digital immigrants" (Prensky).

To keep pace with the tech-savvy learners it becomes essential to incorporate technology in the teaching learning activities. Once the technology is integrated in the classroom, especially in a language classroom, the learners become more autonomous as technology "allows language

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practice and study away from the confines of the classroom" (Pete Sharma & Barney Barrett). The 'digital natives' among learners are also 'netizens' or habitual users of internet who utilize smart phones to the maximum for many purposes, and learning being one of them. Hence, the situation demands the implementation of a suitable teaching model in which technological devices like smart phones can be used as learning aides.

Flipped classroom model, which uses MALL (Mobile Assisted Language Learning), can be presented as a viable alternative to older as well as conventional models to meet the demands of the digital natives. MALL has immense teaching/learning potential considering the fact that almost everyone irrespective of their geographical location use smart phones with or without internet connectivity.

MALL (Mobile Assisted Language Learning)

MALL, a sub-branch of computer assisted language learning (CALL), is usually defined as the use of "mobile technologies in language learning, especially in situations where device portability offers specific advantages" (Kukulska-Hulme). UNESCO states that mobile learning "involves the use of mobile technology, either alone or in combination with other information and communication technology (ICT), to enable learning anytime and anywhere" (UNEVOC).

Experts in the field of mobile learning claim that "Mobile-assisted language learning is not simply the transfer of current teaching and learning materials and practices to a mobile device, but a complete reconceptualization of these" (Agnes Kukulska-Hulme, Lucy Norris and Jim Donohue). The slow learners in a traditional language classroom sometimes get disappointed when they find that their language proficiency has not improved even after spending many years on it. Spada and Lightbown referred to this type of method as a 'drip feed approach' and pointed out that studying in this way "often leads to frustration as learners feel they have been studying 'for years' without making much progress" (Patsy M. Lightbown & Nina Spada). Van Lier described the situation of learners who are engaged only with language during class hours where "progress will either not occur or be exceeding slow. The students' minds must occupy themselves with the

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language between lessons as well as in lessons, if improvements are to happen" (Lier). Contrary to this mobile learning motivates the learners and connects them to the real world.

Usefulness of Mobile Technology

Ubiquitous learning has been made feasible for the learners with the explosion of mobile technology in the form of smartphones, where they can access the learning materials anytime and anywhere. Particularly, encouraging the learners to make use of mobile technology in English classrooms will be a motivating factor for them, as the learning materials are delivered to them and could be accessed at their own time even if they have missed the class. But it would be a serious misconception to think that one can learn just by mobile learning tools and does not need the help of a teacher. Mobile learning gadgets are only instructional tools, and could not be replaced by teachers. Similarly, the effectiveness of mobile learning depends on the existence of a feasible teacher who is equipped with sound knowledge of the subject. Though mobile learning is usually used in the blended learning which is a form of traditional classroom, it could be used more effectively in flipped classroom, which encourages classroom teaching and ubiquitous learning.

Flipped Classroom

The teachers handling big classrooms always find difficulty in reaching the students; though they choose activities to involve the students, there will be always be some who find those activities easy or too difficult, as a result of this they become either discontented or uninterested. One way to address this issue, probably is to deliver the lessons to students in short parcels prior to the class. Flipped classroom or flipped learning helps those teachers who face the problem of addressing larger classes with different kinds of learners. It makes the demotivated, disengaged and passive learners to participate actively in the classroom activities and caters to the needs of students with different abilities.

The flipped classroom uses audio, video and text materials prepared in advance and delivered to the students prior to classroom teaching making use of devices like smart phones, tablet PCs and laptop computers to disseminate the learning materials. Flipped Classroom has wide applicability in imparting lessons to the technologically-driven generation of learners. It is

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generally called an inverted classroom as it is a pedagogical model in which "direct instruction is done through video, or some other learning object that students can use individually prior to coming to class. This time shift then allows the teacher to use class time for work that is either better done as a large group, or that requires individualized teacher attention" (Jonathan Bergmann & Aaron Sams). Cockrun defines flipped classroom as "Using technology to deliver asynchronous direct instruction with the intention of freeing up class time for student-centred learning" (Cockrum). One of the main aims of the flipped classroom is to "provide a free, world-class education for anyone, anywhere" (Khan). It restores "the excitement— the active participation in learning and the natural high that went with it—that conventional curricula sometimes seemed to bludgeon into submission" (Khan).

In comparison with traditional classroom, flipped Classroom is more-learner-centred. Obviously, traditional classroom is centred on teachers as their presentation is the main source of learning for the students. The functioning of traditional teaching is at times described as 'jug and mug' - the way knowledge being transferred from one person to the another and is often considered as the teacher spending most of the class time using the board to explain things with occasional questions to or from the students and they will be made to do some exercises to test their understanding of what is taught. Throughout the process of teaching, the teacher is the one who controls the subject related things, makes decisions about the classroom activities and gives directions to learners, presumably talks more and is the most active person in the classroom. Whereas, the role of students is to listen and concentrate and perhaps take notes. Bearing in mind the short attention span of students, this method is generally thought of as ineffective. Some theorists claim that "ten to eighteen minutes was about the limit of students' attention spans" (Khan). On the contrary, when the teacher leaves the stage and becomes a facilitator of learning, instead of being a presenter of content, the classroom becomes a centre for learning where the students are the focus of the classroom. A flipped classroom provides an alternative to the traditional classroom, in which classrooms becomes a place for activities discussions and clarifications.

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In a flipped classroom, the teachers spend the time helping the students instead of being centre of attention in the classroom, and working with individuals who are struggling and have the opportunity to guide them and clear up their misconceptions (Jonathan Bergmann & Aaron Sams). The subject related content is made available to the students when they are ready for it, and it is not necessary for them to access it from their home, they can access it from anywhere, in the class or outside the class. Flipped Classroom is more effective in retaining the attention of the students in the classroom as they are made to engage in some learning activity, whereas it is not so in traditional classroom as they get distracted easily. In 1996 an article was published by two professors of Indiana University Joan Middenlorf and Alan Kalish, about the ebbs and flows of students' concentration during a class hour, it was time where there was no technological innovations such as texting and tweeting, which usually distracts the attention of the students. They claimed that "students needed a three-to-five-minute period of settling down, which would be followed by ten to eighteen minutes of optimal focus" (Khan). In a traditional classroom, the pace of the class is set by the teacher and goes ahead with the teaching based on the material that is to be delivered during the classroom time whether the students understand the content or not. Due to this, the slow learners get further behind, and sometimes they are punished for being slower. In the flipped classroom model the slower students are not penalised, instead, ample opportunities are given to them to relearn and remediate (Jonathan Bergmann & Aaron Sams).The advantages of flipped classroom is presented by an educationist thus: "Flipped learning, at its core, is individualized learning. There are many methods, variations, and types of student-centred learning-differentiated instruction, problem/project-based learning, inquiry-based study, and many others. When combined with the flipped learning concept, these strategies become practical to implement. Flipped learning is fundamentally learner-centric" (Cockrum). According to Young & Moran, "Flipped Classroom is really about being student-centred and flexible with the options you have once you've freed up this class time" (quoted in Cockrum)

Integrating MALL into English Flipped Classroom

The teachers of English language usually complain that it is expected from them to complete everything in the prescribed book, which also confines the quantity of time they can spend on activities-based language activities. One of the advantages of integrating MALL into

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English flipped classroom is that it provides the opportunity to make students learn some contents of a lesson out of the classroom and go online. In this way the teacher can spend most of the valuable time with the students and engage them in a meaningful interaction in the target language. This method is essential in ELT because it maximizes the talk time of students in English during class hours.

By flipping the English classroom, the teacher can reach students with different learning styles. For instance, the students who are visual learners, required to see the words that they are learning both as pictures and in written form and those who are auditory learners, prefer to listen to the language. Students who have kinaesthetic intelligence, have to interact with the language by doing physical activities; and those who are analytic would need to see rules and examples. In this way flipped classroom reaches all sorts of students.

Video of a Lesson

By making a video of a lesson with text images, audio, and interactions, and sharing it through smart phones, the teacher can reach more students effectively. The prime advantage is the fact that students can play, pause, and repeat the lesson a number of times, which is not obviously possible in a classroom. This also paves the way to complete the syllabus materials and increases learner autonomy (Puppo). According to Russell it is not necessary to flip all the English classes, nonetheless the method could be used for certain lessons or some part of the syllabus. For instance, almost all English teachers have to teach grammar, explain different writing genres and construction of paragraphs very often in the classroom. Hence, materials related to this could be made online so as to enable the teacher to spend more time in the class helping the learners (Stannard).

In the article "Is the Flipped Classroom relevant to ELT?" Stannard explains by giving an example of teaching the construction of paragraphs using flipped method.

Let's imagine that we are looking at the construction of paragraphs. We could make a video/screen cast that explains to students how a paragraph is normally made up.

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It might include an explanation of what a subject sentence is and how it should be supported by the rest of the paragraph. Perhaps there is also a simple quiz that the students have to do to check understanding after they watch the video. In class, the students are giving a series of paragraphs where the sentences have all been mixed up. The students work in groups and order the sentences, making sure the topic sentence is at the start of the paragraph. They then have a second exercise where they been provided with a topic sentence but are asked to write the rest of the paragraph in groups. (Stannard)

Help for Implementation of Flipped Classroom

Implementing flipped classroom with the help of mobile technology becomes handy for those English teachers who think of doing lots of imaginative things during the class time to motivate the students and encourage them to work on tasks in groups and pairs, especially for the group activities such as discussions, debates, presentations, group planning etc. The students could be made to watch video about a topic prescribed in the syllabus in their mobile screen and thereby encouraging students to discuss or debate and to give a presentation on the topic (Stannard). Tara Arntsen is of the view that adopting the flipped classroom approach in teaching English "maximizes the amount of time students speak English in class and minimizes of teacher talk time" (Arntsen).

Possibilities for Indian Students

The Indian students who pursue degree courses learn English language as a subject which comprises literature, language skills and grammar for a period of two years. Most of them grow up with the digital technology and they make use of gadgets such as smart phones regularly. To address the requirements of those tech-savvy learners, it becomes essential to employ flipped classroom with the help of mobile technology, as it induces students to make proper use of technology in English classrooms.

By integrating MALL into Flipped classroom, the English teachers could deal with different kinds of students with different abilities in a classroom with the strength between 50 and

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70 with ease. Here the Flipped method, if properly presented, enables the teacher to reach out to each and every student in the classroom. As the flipped classroom integrates technology in itself, it would be one of the motivating factors to keep the students engaged actively inside and outside the classroom. It is evident that most of the students use smartphones with reasonable internet speed, hence, the teachers should think of making use of those gadgets.

Teacher Preparation

In order to implement the Flipped method, teachers need to prepare themselves for creating their digital content. One of the major steps involved here is creating videos on the language and other items to be taught. It is not necessary to make videos for all lessons; videos made by other teachers which are available online could be also made use of. The videos should be made available to the students prior to the classroom discussion. The teacher may adopt many ways to make it convenient for the students to watch the videos: YouTube channel could be created to upload the videos, as they become accessible from anywhere; videos could also be shared to smartphone via suitable mobile applications; those who do not have internet connection at home or have mobile device without internet package; videos could be shared using offline methods like Bluetooth. If the situation necessitates, the students could also be allowed to watch the videos in the classroom before initiating the discussion. The videos made by the teacher should not be of monotonous lectures, instead they should be interactive with pictorial representations of the lessons along with subtitles, voice over, meaning of difficult words and explanation of stanzas. As the saying goes 'a picture is worth thousand words', pictorial representation of prose, poetry and grammar has a visual impact on the viewers, hence, the teacher should make a careful selection of pictures along with the text of the lesson to create impression on the students. While recording his/her own voice for the video the teacher should ascertain that words were pronounced correctly and clearly, so that the students could learn the correct pronunciation of words. The duration of the video should be from five to seven minutes, as the present day students belong to YouTube generation, and "they want things in bite-sized pieces" (Jonathan Bergmann & Aaron Sams).

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To Conclude

To conclude, this paper suggests that by integrating MALL into flipped classroom would be able reach students with different abilities in a large classroom effectively. Though the teachers may have problems in the initial stage in implementing the flipped classroom, once they are acquainted with it, they may find that even disoriented and disengaged students would actively involve themselves in classroom activities. Especially, adopting flipped classroom along with mobile technology in the English language classroom at tertiary level will help the students in enriching the knowledge of literature and in improving the language skills as this approach makes proper use of technology.

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