A LEARNER-CENTERED MODEL
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Abstract
This paper presents an approach for a student-centred model. It highlights the importance of occasionally flipping classes in an attempt to provide a reliable alternative to the traditional teaching/learning method. The purpose is to reinforce active learning where the roles of teachers and students change focusing on higher order thinking skills. The results of a questionnaire conducted on students will be shared with the reader to further illustrate the findings of the proposed model.

Keywords: student-centred learning, flipped classes, active learning, teaching, reversed, higher order thinking skills.

1 INTRODUCTION
A student-centered model in the teaching/learning environment shifts the focus of activity from the teacher to the learner. This method includes: active learning where students from the beginning take full responsibility of their learning, cooperative learning where students come to class with more willingness to collaborate in pair or group work, and inductive teaching and learning where students are confronted with challenges rather than teacher ready-made explanations. The benefits of this method are numerous. The learner-centered model has repeatedly been proven to be more effective to the traditional teacher-centered approach of instruction. This is evident in a variety of learning outcomes such as long-term retention, depth of understanding of course material, and acquisition of critical thinking skills.

One such student-centered model is the reversed or flipped classroom which has recently been acknowledged as a reliable alternative to the traditional classroom setting, the standard practice of teacher/student face-to-face encounter. Students, through this learning strategy, often demonstrate a better tendency for learning since it allows them to become more engaged in the learning process in which they depend on their individual efforts and, thus, more predisposed to autonomous learning, the most important pillar in the teaching/learning process. This occurs when students gain their initial exposure to new material prior to class encounter. Another essential benefit of flipped classrooms is that "they speak the language of today's students" (Bergmann & Sams, 2012, p. 20) who are accustomed to turning to the web and social media for information and interaction (Goodwin & Miller, 2013). Students are given a short video/ a documentary to view, or a reading assignment before class, and class time is, therefore, devoted to hands-on activities, exercises, workshops where the teacher acts basically as a facilitator/mentor. This kind of prior-to-class exposure can be more conducive to learning since students develop lower levels of cognitive work outside of class and reserve class time to higher order cognitive development, manifested in synthesizing, evaluating and analyzing, which eventually “focuses on how to support the learners in achieving a higher level of the taxonomy domain.” (Lankford, 2013)

2 METHODOLOGY
In this study and through the time span of one semester, students were occasionally exposed and expected to complete a variety of online assignments before attending the class in order to familiarize themselves with a particular learning skill and engage in the required activities. Due to the fact that the program is based on teaching a variety of integrated skills, the tasks had to vary in type in order to accommodate these skills.

These assignments, relevant to the different disciplines taught during this semester, included watching a video on teaching summary writing in order for students to be introduced to the conventions of the skill. In another assignment, they were asked to watch a video on the history of human rights to summarize the historical events that eventually led to the declaration of human rights and to read the 30 articles to learn the new terms. Another learning task was to read a chapter from their text book and to give a two minute presentation on a computer crime that is related to the chapter they read.
Internet research was also conducted to give another two minute presentation on famous female figures. Finally, students were asked to provide answers to multiple choice questions and vocabulary questions in answer to an article that they had been assigned to read.

These prior-to-class assignments were followed by class activities to ensure students’ involvement and participation. Class time was spent “on application and higher-level of learning rather than listening to lectures and other lower-level thinking tasks” (Nederveld and Berge, 2015) together with exploring topics, ideas, and concepts in greater depth, thus creating a more mature and enriched learning environment. Students were teamed in pairs or groups to elicit and discuss their feedback on the assigned topics. This motivated students and encouraged them to overcome their weak points, which eventually helped generate a more collaborative atmosphere.

The teacher is not any more the center of attention, and s/he becomes a facilitator that uses class time in mentoring students’ collaboration, work, discussion, and application of knowledge.

3 RESULTS

The subjects of the survey were freshman university students taking an intensive English course before joining their different majors. In this course, they study the conventions of writing an academic essay, summarizing an article, and answering comprehension and vocabulary questions on a specific text. The duration of the course is approximately four months with four sessions per week and each session lasts for three hours. This is essential background information that should render occasionally flipping the classroom an enjoyable experience to students that goes side by side with the regular traditional teaching.

At the end of the semester these students (30) were given a questionnaire of fourteen questions to gather information about their experience with this new method of teaching and to obtain an overall measure of their attitudes and opinions. The first question was “I feel that the flipped classroom model has enhanced my learning experience”, and 95% of the students’ answers ranged from strongly agree to agree and the rest 5% were undecided. This highly indicates that the great majority found the new strategy conducive to a better learning experience. The second question was whether they believe that flipping classes allows for class time to be used more effectively in, for example, class activities, exercises, discussions, presentations, etc. Again the majority, 93%, ranged from strongly agrees to agree and 8% were undecided.

The rest of the questions all showed how the greater majority of students preferred flipped classrooms to traditional ones. In one of the questions 79% found it “more engaging” and in their final comments one of them said that working at home allows them to concentrate more and thus acquire more skills and information. This corresponds to the 81% who find reading at home more beneficial than in class. A byproduct of watching videos and listening to talks at home is that 29% of the students said that they learned how to take notes and to consult other resources when they did not understand a specific concept. This is significant. When the teacher is not available, students become autonomous learners and start searching on their own for more information to understand the lesson better.

All in all, the answers of the respondents were all positive towards flipping the classroom. When they were asked how the flipped classrooms can be improved, the answers indicated preference for more in class group work, in class presentations, video lectures and documentaries that can be watched at home, and more surprisingly students required that a specific percentage of the course grade for flipped classroom assignments would be included. In all the fourteen questions not one negative comment was pronounced. Even when they were asked to write their comments, they said that they enjoyed and benefited from it.

4 CONCLUSIONS

Based on the study conducted and comments made by students, the researchers have reached the conclusion that flipped classrooms are a valid option to both teaching and learning, where students develop a deeper understanding of the topic because class time is spent in discussion, clarification, exercises or other learning activities to enhance the application of knowledge.

We can also add that this approach can be more beneficial and enjoyable in intensive programs where the students meet their instructor on almost a daily basis and the session lasts for many hours, which precisely applies to our program. The idea of the traditional teacher talking and lecturing and students are just negative recipients is not acceptable in this modern age where students are on the net most of
their time. Richter and McPherson (2012) rightfully state that in today's digital age, students can easily access many free Internet learning resources such as online video lectures, allowing them to watch these free contents everywhere and at their own convenience. Additionally, the traditional learning approach where the teacher is the centre of knowledge has become secondary in today's digital age (Wang & Heffernan, 2010).

The findings of this study align with the theory of Bloom's revised taxonomy for cognitive domain (Brame, 2013). It explains how students’ brains process knowledge and comprehension in a hierarchical fashion engaging them in lower levels of cognitive work prior to the higher levels of synthesis and creativity. The former is practiced individually outside of class at their own pace and the latter is reinforced in the classroom among peers and in the presence of their teacher, who acts as a facilitator.

REFERENCES


