

# **Optimization of the language learning process in the flipped classroom model. A case study of a language school.**

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## **Summary**

The pandemic period in the last two years has become a catalyst for a global change, the educational context included. The need to adapt to dynamically evolving socio-economic conditions has arisen in a wide range of educational organizations, from universities, through primary and secondary schools, to institutions belonging to the non-formal education sector, such as language schools. Especially the latter must undergo transformations to compete for the attention and satisfaction of the student / customer. The concepts of "remote" and "hybrid", considered until now as complementary forms of learning, have become an integral part of our reality.

A solution that seems to be an accurate response to the changing reality and evolving educational needs is the flipped classroom didactic model (FC model). It was introduced in the SLA context, and more specifically in the process of teaching and learning Spanish language, in one of the language schools in Lublin, Poland. As described in the case study, the School has been the first institution in the private sector of teaching Spanish to officially introduce the FC model as the main principle for the organization of teaching/learning processes and keeps on successfully applying it. Due to its uniqueness, from an SLA point of view, this phenomenon is an interesting and inspiring research area.

The methodological and IT teams of the above mentioned language School, whose work was coordinated by the author of this dissertation, introduced FC as an organizational and learning/teaching model. An integrated system of teaching Spanish was developed, partly as a result of works involved in the project entitled *Research and development in the field of an innovative flipped classroom method aimed at developing a new process of teaching foreign languages supported by a prototype of an online system*. The project was co-financed by the European Union, under the European Regional Development Fund, Regional Operational Program of the Lubelskie Voivodeship for the years 2014-2020. Since the completion of the research

project, the system continued to be developed and the teaching process has been subject to a continuous improvement.

The dissertation is an attempt to present comprehensively the flipped classroom model application in SLA. Its aim is to evaluate the optimization of the language learning process in the FC model by identifying the positive and negative effects of the application of the FC model in a language learning cycle in a language School environment. Moreover, the dissertation aims to indicate ways to optimize the work of the student, teachers and the management staff.

The central part of the dissertation is the analysis of the learners', teachers' and management staff reflections on the FC model application in their School. The study is limited to learning/teaching Spanish as a foreign language at beginner levels (A) in a private language School. The factors focused on in the study are, for instance, goals, assumptions and motives of all the participants involved in this particular didactic process as well as the language School perspective. On the one hand, the study offers the insight into the FC application from the perspective of the institution, i.e. teachers and management staff. On the other, the perspective of the learner is analyzed in order to arrive at a comprehensive evaluation of the quality of the learning process.

Admittedly, the generic assessment of the effectiveness of language teaching is very difficult. Effectiveness is usually examined from a certain angle, be it language subsystems, strategies or methods used. For example, Komorowska (2002a) points out that the prerequisite for the effective foreign language teaching using the communicative method is the so-called classroom atmosphere, i.e. good relations between the teacher and students. Ellis (2008), on the other hand, emphasizes that importance of the interactive processes during lessons as a factor enhancing the learning effectiveness. Other approaches point to, for instance, the environment in which the learning process takes place or individual capabilities of students. Summing up, it is virtually impossible to account for the effectiveness of teaching a language.

As the assessment of the effectiveness of teaching is a major research challenge, for the purposes of this dissertation it was decided to conduct a study focused on a descriptive (in the form of a case study) and qualitative assessment of the optimization of the SLA process in the conditions of a language School where the FC model was applied. In a broader, more universal aspect, the research questions that are addressed in this work are: what areas of the FC model can be optimized and to

what extent is the process of learning a foreign language optimized in the FC model? In addition, who benefits from optimization - learners, teachers or both parties? And at what stage does optimization take place – before the stationary lesson? In the middle of it? During both stages? Lastly, how is such a didactic process organized and managed?

Due to the complex nature of the presented phenomenon, the applied research methodology is hybrid. On the one hand, research is based on empiria, on the other hand, it is descriptive and partly model-forming. The empirical approach is dictated by the formula of a case study: the analysis encompasses a specific institution and the organizational and SLA processes that take place in it. The research methods used are report in the form of a case study, questionnaire research, observation, experiment and interview. Data acquisition instruments used are observation sheets, questionnaires (from students, teachers, School's management staff), research notes from the experiment and interview. In the subject of focus fields of the study the following areas can be distinguished: the institution of a language School, the teaching system based on the developed FC model, groups of people: students and teachers, and management staff.

For the sake of a synthetic and comprehensive presentation of the developed standards and solutions the study was divided into two parts: a case study presenting an SLA model using FC in the phase before the onsite lesson and during stationary classes in a language School.

In the first chapter, the definition and the scope of the SLA research are discussed. As the research field is wide, the analysis is presented in the form of a dichotomies compilation, i.e. key SLA terms which traditionally represent opposing views. This aim of such presentation is to outline landmarks and define the research aims of the work. The main ideas discussed in this part are nativist theses, the role of the first language acquisition in SLA, the relationship between SLA and psychology, language acquisition as a specific social situation and the important role of various types of didactic systems – including neuronal ones – in learning a second language.

The second chapter presents the process of learning a second language from a wide processing of information with universal examples for the creation of cognitive patterns, through general learning models, to an SLA perspective, oriented towards learning and teaching, also taking into account the perspective of the formation of communicative competence. Various schemes illustrating the cognitive and knowledge-forming processes accompanying learning are presented,

i.e. information processing, memorization, storage, understanding or performative stage. The second part of the chapter presents the evolution of SLA systems, inspired by communication paradigms.

The following chapter is devoted to the presentation of the constructivism paradigm, its evolution, characteristics and the state of research. The evolution of this paradigm is presented, starting from its precursor, J. S. Bruner, to the theories of Lev Vygotsky and Jean Piaget, ending with John Dewey. The contribution of constructivism to the evolution of FC is shown. At a later stage, the concept of FC is presented as an eclectic and multidimensional issue. From the theoretical perspective, FC focuses on an active, cognitively conditioned knowledge-forming process with a constructivist bent. In order to further conceptualize the FC paradigm, the second part of the third chapter presents issues related to the application of information and communication technologies in teaching with a particular emphasis on the computer assisted language learning (CALL). Finally, the SLA literature on the use of the flipped classroom model in a language lesson is analyzed.

In the next, fourth, chapter of the dissertation, a case study describing the SLA model of an inverted lesson implemented in a specific language School is presented. The context is described and, according to the methodology of building the case study, the addressed questions are: who?, what?, how?, where? and why? The first part of the case study presentation focuses on the description of the social and economic context. The business environment is discussed as well as the state of the didactics of the Spanish language in Poland, both in the formal and non-formal contexts. Next, In the educational reality of a particular language School, the FC SLA model (SLAFCM) and system (SLAFCS) models are presented. This chapter also describes the methodology of the research conducted as part of the case study, along with a description of the theoretical structure of the research.

The fifth chapter describes the methodology of the questionnaire research, observation of lessons, preparation of online materials and pro-quality and management activities. This study enables a critical look at the applied didactic solutions in the FC model. The chapter is the most extensive part of the work due to the triangulation of the conducted research: from pilotage, through the study of students in the context of online learning, through the perspective of the teacher, to the conclusions from the observation of stationary lessons and an interview with the School's

management. All presented and analyzed data are the basis for determining the areas that need improvement in the context of the effective use of the FC model in the SLA practice of the School.

In the final chapter the theoretical layer presents universal, original proposals for the definition of the SLAFC model and layout along with their brief analysis. This is the starting point for the presentation of the conclusions from the conducted research in the context of the process of learning Spanish optimization in the SLAFC model. The areas in which it is possible / should intervene are shown, as well as recommendations for possible improvements to be introduced in the future in the scope of the SLAFC model used by the School and its implementation in a specific SLAFC system.

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