Integrating Flipped Learning Pedagogy in Higher Education: Fitting the Needs of COVID-19 Generation

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Abstract :

During COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, new pedagogies in higher education environments were introduced. Educational activities were carried out remotely using websites, digital platforms…etc. Though online learning contributed a lot in saving students' academic outcome; yet, it cannot reduce from the importance of face-to-face classroom instruction. The "Flipped Learning" classroom, another facet of Blended Learning, which makes an efficient use of class time, offers a teaching/learning environment that enhances students' learning outcomes. Adopting this approach in higher education becomes a suitable alternative both for teachers and students especially with the resumption of face-to-face studies within the new protocol set up for the academic year 2020-2021. This paper attempts to investigate students' knowledge and awareness about this new pedagogy; mainly that the FL classroom has proved efficient in multiple English as Foreign Language (EFL) settings. To reach the study objective, this descriptive analytical investigation delves into EFL learners' learning experience within FL model so to facilitating the safe integration of this teaching/learning approach in higher education, and to empower EFL teachers surmount the major teaching/learning challenges to meet COVID-19 generation students' needs and aspiration.

Keywords: Blended learning, COVID-19 generation, EFL students, flipped learning, higher education, pedagogy.

Introduction :

As the information and communication technology is in a continuous progress, higher education keeps up to date with it. In accordance with, a bulk of innovative teaching/learning approaches were introduced as a reaction to this continuous technological progress. When breaking the walls of the traditional teaching/learning environment and incorporating the ICT's tools to complement face-to-face sessions, Blended teaching/learning (BL) environment comes to satisfy the new generation learners' needs and exigencies[1].With the wide spread of Blended Learning (BL) approach in university education[2]; a new model of classroom design emerges. It is all about "Inverted" or "Flipped" classroom[3]. Despite the fact that flipping the classroom can be organized in non-technology supported learning environments, it is mainly found in BL environments[4]. In Flipped Learning model (FL model), the notion of classroom based learning is inverted in that students are introduced to materials and lectures before coming to class, at home, via distant online learning. Class time is, then, devoted to expand students' understanding through problem solving activities, and classroom discussions with their peers and their teacher as well. On that account, the traditional trans-missive lecture is removed and replaced with active in- class tasks and pre-/post-class work[5].

E-learning system was launched in the Algerian universities since 2006 when Algeria collaborated with "Thompson" and "Microsoft" [6]. To facilitate the integration of eLearning

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at higher education, Moodle as a web-based learning software was created. Moodle that facilitates the creation of a web learning content where the learner utilizes the Internet features during his interaction with this content represents the second generation online systems. The latter target is not only to certify the delivery of content from teacher-to-student; yet, it goes beyond into facilitating student-to-student communication to teacher-to-teacher as well as student- and teacher-to-the-future avenues as well[7]. Since the introduction of Moodle, training university teachers to take benefits from Web learning systems was the target in almost all Algerian universities. During the COVID 19 pandemic lock down, "Algerian schools and universities have adopted various designs for distance education, like online lectures, distance drills and exercises, virtual tutorials, video conferences, group works, and assessments"[8]. Post to COVID 19 pandemic with the new protocol suggested by the ministry of education to resume classes using the mode of waves, students were given the opportunity to carry on learning online. This implies combining F2F classroom learning with online learning where students start receiving instruction at home via eLearning tools. Hence, adopting FL pedagogy seems the key solution to the post COVID 19 exceptional teaching/learning conditions at the Algerian universities. To make use of technology so that EFL instructors at tertiary level do less 'teaching' in the class and focus more on group work and task based learning in the lesson,

   For the sake of facilitating the implementation of FL classroom at tertiary education, this paper aims to explore EFL students' perception towards the use and the utility of FL model in higher education. To gain insights from the terrain, the researcher explored via a real context involving a survey how far EFL learners at the ENSC are aware about the importance of FL by checking their knowledge about FL classroom time redesign, course objectives, instruction, teacher's and learners' new roles. Moreover, the study went further by digging deep in students experience to determine the learning difficulties faced during a FL and to look for what would facilitate the implementation of this pedagogy at higher education so that to satisfy COVID 19 generation learning needs.

   To reach the study objectives listed above, we departed from the following research questions:
   1. Are students knowledgeable about FL pedagogy?
   2. What is EFL students' attitude towards FL course design?
   3. Are EFL students at the ENSC aware about the objectives of FL course design?
   4. How do EFL students perceive the role of FL course design in other subjects?
   5. What difficulties do students face when learning via a FL course?
   6. What would facilitate the implementation of a FL course design?

1- Literature Review :

1-1 Getting to Know Flipped Learning:

   Actually the concept of FL which can be traced back to Eric Mazur's (1991) "*Peer instruction*" model of teaching/learning and "*Khan Academy*" funded project (2006) is gaining more and more popularity. This popularity is due to "the ubiquitous omnipresent nature of the tools that teachers use to accomplish the flip such as iTunes, YouTube, and Learning Management Systems (LMS)"[9]. The continuous technological progress served a lot in the wide spread of FL pedagogy and in the modification brought on the classic FL classroom. Sharing the same objective which is providing an interactive-based teaching for instructors and a collaborative learning strategy for students in and out of the classroom activities, Mazur utilized the text book instead of recorded videos as it is the case of nowadays FL classroom[10]. The influence of ICTs progress gives FL model a new shape. "FL course use activities made up of asynchronous web-based video lectures that are perceived by learners before class; yet, during F2F contact, students are involved in discussion, analysis via synchronous communication"[11].

   FL has been approached from various perspectives depending on which components are stressed on when implementing it. When the focus is given to the classroom redesign

where "the events that have traditionally taken place inside the classroom take place outside the classroom and vice versa, it is all about inverting the classroom"[12]. This implies that the pre-class learning component is the major criterion in a FL model. When the emphasis is oriented towards the use technology, FL model becomes an extension or rather say another facet of BL. FL is hen regarded as a specific type of blended learning design where technology is utilized to remove lectures from the classroom to outside the classroom and uses learning activities to move practice with concepts inside the classroom[13]. Hence, in a FL model, the best of both Face-to-Face (F2F) and online strategies are combined to create an innovative and effective learning experience for students. According to Birgili and his associates (2021), FL cannot be imagined without the use of technology. "Internet technology is recasting education. Massive open online platforms offering courses such as Coursera, edX, Udemy or learning management systems such as Blackboard have facilitated the application of flipped learning to remote learning"[14].

1-2 Flipped Learning Pedagogy

FL classroom or the inverted classroom comes with a new classroom redesign where the activities that traditionally used to be fulfilled in the classroom start at home, and what was intentionally done at home is completed in the classroom.

The first stage in a FL involves a "*Pre-class Learning*". The pre-class instruction starts when the teacher uploads an online recorded lecture that is to be viewed by learners at home where a basic knowledge is to be developed prior to the class session. The success of this phase is mainly based on how much students could benefit from the content of these videos; so that to get ready for the in-class activities[15].

After completing the pre-class learning, leaners move to higher order thinking levels in the next learning phases: in-class and post-class learning and assessment activities. During "*In-class learning*", class time is devoted to engaging learners in a deep analysis and evaluation of this newly acquired information via clarifying concepts and engaging learners in a deep learning. The latter is achieved when the teacher engages his students in discussions that require analysis and problem solving to realize an efficient comprehension of the teaching content. Tasks that fit in-class learning phase should stimulate students to engage in classroom discussions and debates. For example, "whenever a PowerPoint presentation on a cultural topic that students had seen at home sparked a critically comparative debate in class about German and U.S. American "deep" culture" [16].

Extending learning comes at the last phase of the FL through "*Post- class learning*". After achieving the course objectives, the teacher involves learners in tasks that require the transfer of the new learning to new situation out of the classroom walls. The post-classroom activities revolve around giving students at home assignment, project work and research…etc.

This classroom redesign requires new roles to be adopted by both teachers and learners. The teacher is required to keep some roles and adopt other roles in FL. He is always considered as the "*course-designer and materials provider*". However, different from the traditional classroom, in a FL classroom the teacher is asked to "*pre- assess his students' understanding to the course content*" at home and before starting in-class activities. The types of activities prepared for the in-class learning are completely different from the traditional ones. In a FL, the teacher should prepare activities that promote HOT growth. To achieve this objective, the teacher "designs worksheets which prepare students for class debates or presentations in order to enable students to receive formative feedback during

class, or that students can continue working on at a deeper level during class with peers or individually"[17]. additionally, he should be ready to *"provide immediate feedback when necessary"*. *As for* the learner, his new roles are limited to the following:

> ➢ Acquiring new content knowledge prior to coming to class through "Watching videos or screencasts of mini online lectures and completing readings with either quizzes or tasks"[18]. Additionally, he collaborates in online discussions via Synchronous (chatrooms), or Asynchronous modalities.

> ➢ Carry out research at home while engaging in concepts in the classroom with the guidance of a mentor. Before F2F class, the students prepare for tasks on e-learning for the face to face activities which will take place in class, identifying questions to ask the teacher during the face to face session[19].

1-3 Why Flipped Learning

At the very beginning with Bergmann and Sams (2012), "flipping the classroom was intended only to get absent students caught up and later to ready all students at home for an upcoming lesson so that learners could obtain a more active, hands-on experience in the classroom with their instructors' help"[20]. With the popularity of this new pedagogy, new objectives are added such as promoting active learning, satisfying leaners' learning styles, and enhancing higher order thinking skills (HOT).

Flipped classroom as a model of BL where the best of both F2F and online strategies are combined creates an innovative and effective learning experience for students[21]. Besides, FL entices active learning. Because learners are first exposed to activities made up of asynchronous web-based video lectures before class, During F2F contact, they are involved in discussion, analysis via synchronous communication.

FL promotes both individualization and personalization. Instead of one size fits all activities, online delivery promotes the individualization of course activities that is a major factor in the effectiveness of the teaching/learning process FL varies for students and teachers ways of interacting, sharing, collaborating and asking questions either in real-time via Synchronous technologies support; or allowing more time for student reflection via Asynchronous technologies support. FL course design can accommodate students who have different expertise levels, prefer different learning strategies and who are self-directed learners[22].

As the Lower Order Thinking cognitive levels of learning are targeted outside the class time via watching online recorded videos, or readings materials, and introducing students to the related basic knowledge and key concepts before getting to the class; once in class, teacher could easily supervise the progress of the Higher Order Thinking levels of thinking[23].

2- Methodology :

A descriptive analytic research design was adopted to supply answers to the study research questions (listed above). Sixty one (61) EFL students at the ENSC participated in the current investigation. An online questionnaire was utilized and a quantitative data analysis procedure was followed to analyze the generated data; so that valid conclusion might be reached.

Data collection started when the online questionnaire was posted to sixty one (61) EFL university students majoring in English at the department of English in the ENS of Constantine- Algeria. The rationale behind selecting this sampling was that all participants who responded to this questionnaire received a FL instruction in written expression subject. The online questionnaire was posted via the following google link:

https://forms.gle/GZHUqVyL7x2u8ypB9 and the online responses were also saved via the same link.

To ensure collecting valid data, the questionnaire targeted a population of students who have been subject to a FL writing course; so that the researcher could test the raised assumptions in a fertile setting. The questionnaire that started with an introduction explaining to the participants the purpose of the questionnaire included fifteen (15) items that vary between Likert scale items, closed-ended questions, rating scale items and open ended question items. Using a variety of questions enables the researcher to gather reliable data from the informants. For example, The Likert- scale method is recommended in second language research investigation because it is simple, versatile, and reliable. Via this scale, the respondents are given the opportunity to express their degree of agreement or disagreement to a proposition by marking one of the responses ranging from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree [24]. Closed-ended questions, however, are said to be objective in that "their coding and tabulation is straightforward and leaves no room for rater subjectivity" [25]. Moreover, open ended items give the informant freedom of expression. This particularity allows the researcher to gain data that is "a far greater "richness" than fully quantitative data" [26].

3- Results and Discussion :

3-1 Result Analysis:

From the total number of informants (N=61) who responded to the questionnaire, 36 of them were 2nd year students, and the remaining others (25) were 3rd year students. As far as the informants' exposure to online learning at the ENSC, all the informants (100%) are exposed to both F2F and online instruction when learning mainly writing. To know exactly when their online learning began, the interrogated students' responses to Q3 provided data that is summarized in the table below.

Options	Participants	Percentage
Yes	48	78.7٪
No	13	21.3٪

Table (01): Learning Writing Online Started before/after COVID 19 Pandemic

It can be perceived from Table (01) that the majority of the respondents certify their exposure to online learning started after COVID 19 pandemic. The remaining students (21.3%) certified being exposed to online learning before the COVID 19 pandemic.

When asked whether they like or dislike studying via online learning (Q4), less than the half (48%) expressed their likeliness. The left portion (52%), however, expressed a negative feeling (see figure 1).
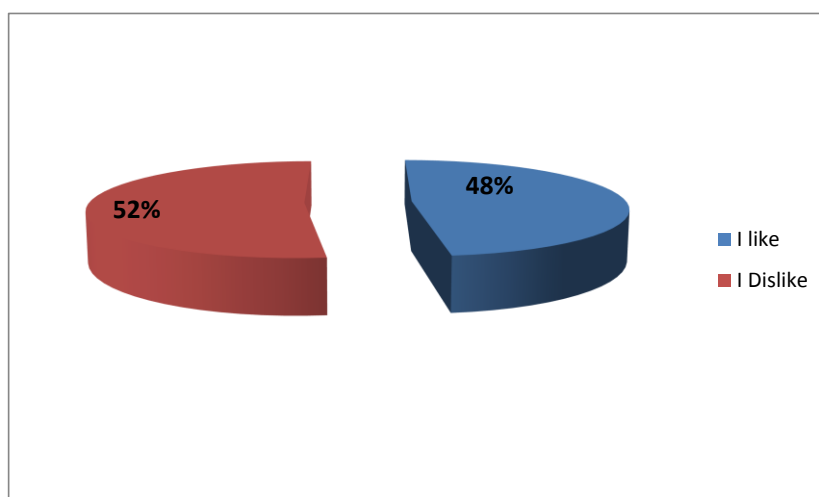
Figure :(01) Students' Attitudes toward Online Learning

To support their attitudes whether positive or negative, the questioned students used a set of reasons. Those who favoured online learning related their rating to factors such as time pressure release, decrease of anxiety…etc. "*When I am in class I feel distracted and anxious. I cannot think freely and I am afraid of the teacher's comment in case I failed. However, at home I feel at ease I can search for information and I have plenty of time to organize my writing*" confirmed one of the responded. Within the same context, another one added: "*online learning allows me not to rely on the teacher as it is in the classroom; instead, I can use many other learning resources which may help me improve my writing*".

Students who disliked online learning support their stands to a number of negative factors activated via online learning such as laziness, lack of understanding, lack of motivation…etc. One of the interrogated students declared: "*I don't like online learning since I feel myself like I'm not getting more information. I'm becoming lazier. I can't understand the lessons well. I can't even manage my time, so I think it's affecting me badly*".

To dig deep, we questioned the respondents whether or not they are aware about the advantages they could gain from an online learning. From **figure 2**, we can see that online learning could provide EFL leaners with many benefits such as increasing opportunities to foreign language culture (82%), reducing frustration (36%), increasing one-to-one teacher/ student interaction (21%), allowing students for more extra activities (43%) as online learning offers them more time to learn, and they could get in touch with the teacher at any time thanks to the online asynchronous modality (43%).
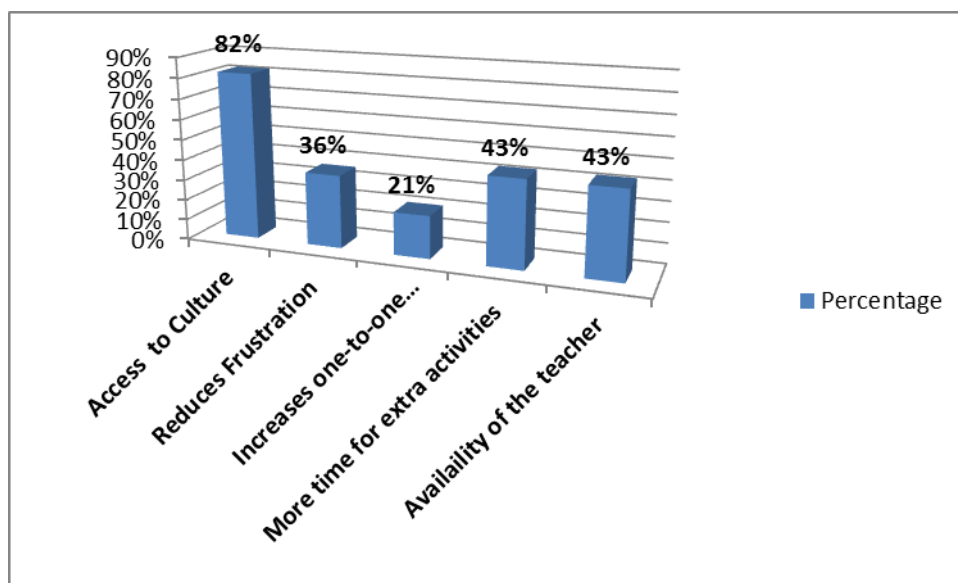

Figure: (02) Online Learning Benefits

As for the technological tools relied on during online instruction, a high percentage of the respondents (70.5%) learn via Moodle platform. Google classroom is classified as the second in their rating (55.7%), emails as third (47.5%), then Social media such as Facebook, messenger…takes the last position (21%).

To check if students are knowledgeable about FL pedagogy, at first we asked them if they receive the online instruction at home and then carry on learning in the classroom. The following table summarizes their responses.

Options	Participants	Percentage
Yes	51	84٪
No	10	16٪

Table (02): FL Pedagogy to Course Design was Followed After COVID 19 Pandemic

We notice from table 01 that students' exposure to FL starts after the COVID 19 pandemic as affirmed the majority of the interrogated students (84%). Yet, to test learners' knowledge about this pedagogy, we asked them via Q7 if they know that "*when a lecture starts and then it is completed in the classroom the model is referred to as a FL model*". A large portion of students (80%) have no knowledge about it, and the remaining portion have heard about (20%) (**See figure 03**).
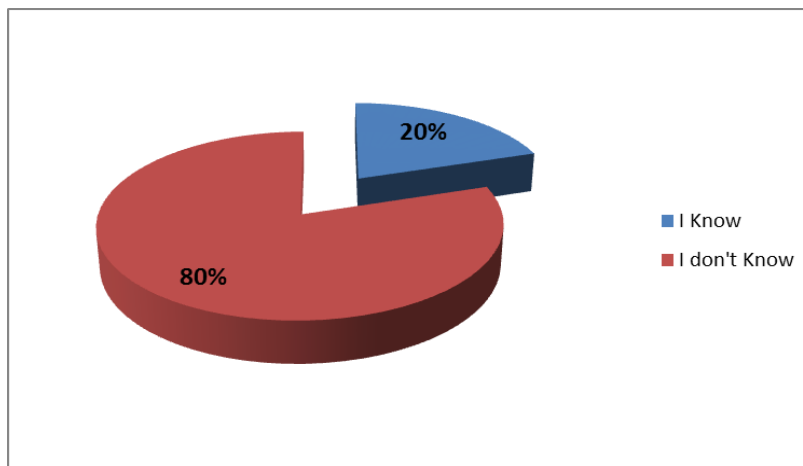
Figure: (03) Students' Knowledge about FL Model

Students who already know about the FL model were asked to explain by specifying the learning conditions. "*Yes, we are receiving our lectures in a flipped way in the these days of covid-19; so the lectures start at home before dealing with it at classroom*" asserted one of the respondents. Another one added: "*this method focuses on giving the students more tasks to be completed at home so that it would be easier for them to understand in the class*". One more knowledgeable students described FL model as follows:

> "*Yes, I know this is called flipped learning which means that the teacher provides his/her students with for example videos to watch different books resources to check, etc. It means that the learner prepares himself, arranges his ideas in order to practice in the classroom*"

As students affirm being involved in a learning process based on FL pedagogy during their written expression subject without having knowledge about it (as displayed in figure 03), the researcher wanted to explore their attitudes towards the 3-stages FL process via Q8.
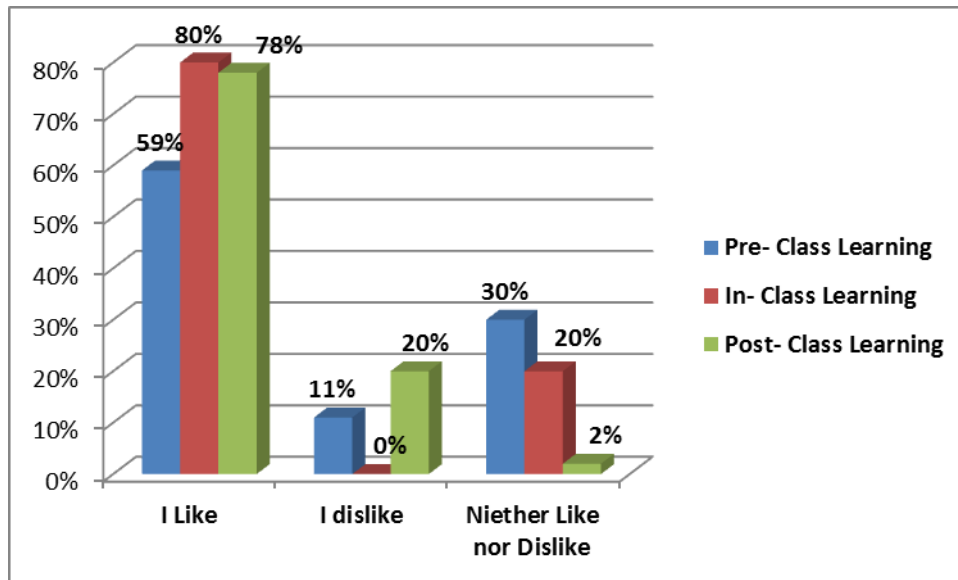
Figure: (04) Students' attitudes towards FL Process

When glancing at figure 04, it is noticeable that students displayed high degree of likeliness towards the three phases of FL model: (59%) for pre-class learning, (80%) for in-class learning, and (78%) for post-class learning. 30% of the respondents neither like nor dislike pre-class learning. To raise students awareness towards the importance of pre-class learning mainly when preparing their lessons at-home, the informants were asked to respond to **Q9**. Table 03 sums up their responses.

Options	Participants	Percentage
Gives students the opportunity for greater face-to-face interactions with their teacher	**43**	**75.5%**
Allows students spend class time thinking and doing problems, rather than listening to the instructor talk	**25**	**41%**
Increases students opportunity to have more classroom writing practice	**32**	**48.5%**
Expands students' opportunity to receive more feedback from their teacher	**41**	**67.2%**
More	**3**	**5%**

Table (03): At home Learning main Benefits

As displayed in table 03, most respondents find that "at-home preparation gives them the opportunity for greater face-to-face interactions with their teacher" (75.5%). When preparing themselves before attending class, they are provided with more opportunities for their teacher's feedback (67.5 %), more time for classroom writing practice (48.5 %), and spend class time thinking and doing problems, rather than listening to the instructor talk (41 %).

When interrogating them about the abilities and skills that a FL course develops via **Q10,** their responses reveal the data displayed below.

Options	Participants	Percentage
Students' interaction and learning flexibility	**29**	**47.5%**
Take full responsibility of their own learning	**46**	**75.4%**
Students' writing skills	**32**	**48.5%**
Critical thinking and problem-solving skills	**24**	**39.3%**
More	**26**	**42.6%**

Table (04): FL Course main Gains

Table 04 reveals that a high percentage of them found that this kind of courses enable them to take full responsibility of their own learning (75.4%). Moreover, FL targets other skills such as developing their writing skills (48.5%), interaction and learning flexibility (47.5%), Critical thinking and problem-solving skills (39.3%). Yet, less than half of the informants (42.6%) saw that more other skills are targeted by this model of learning. When they were interrogated to specify them they did not respond.

These findings stimulated to question students through Q11 if other subjects, different from written expression module, are designed via FL model to course design. The respondents' responses are displayed in the figure below.
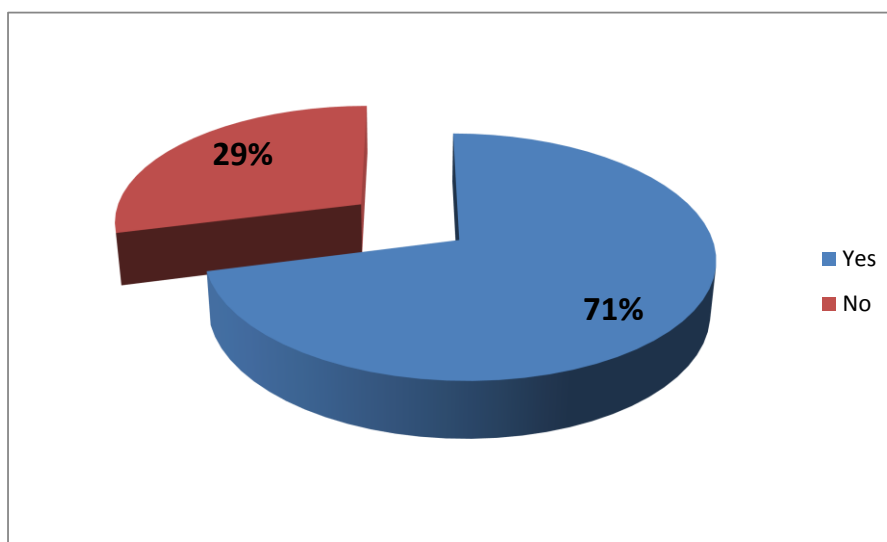
Figure: (05) FL could be Beneficial in other Subjects

As displayed in figure 05, the majority of the respondents agree that FL model could be beneficial in other subjects (71٪). Still a minority finds no utility to approach other modules via flipped learning approach to course design. When they were interrogated to specify them, they mixed between practical subjects (modules that require practical sessions) such as: grammar, speaking and phonetics, oral expression….etc; and content subjects like: Civilisation, Pedagogical Trends, Psychology…etc.

Difficulties are always standing as hindering factors towards fulfilling ones objectives. To check which factors stood as obstacles during their learning via FL model, they were interrogated to rate the statements displayed in the figure below.
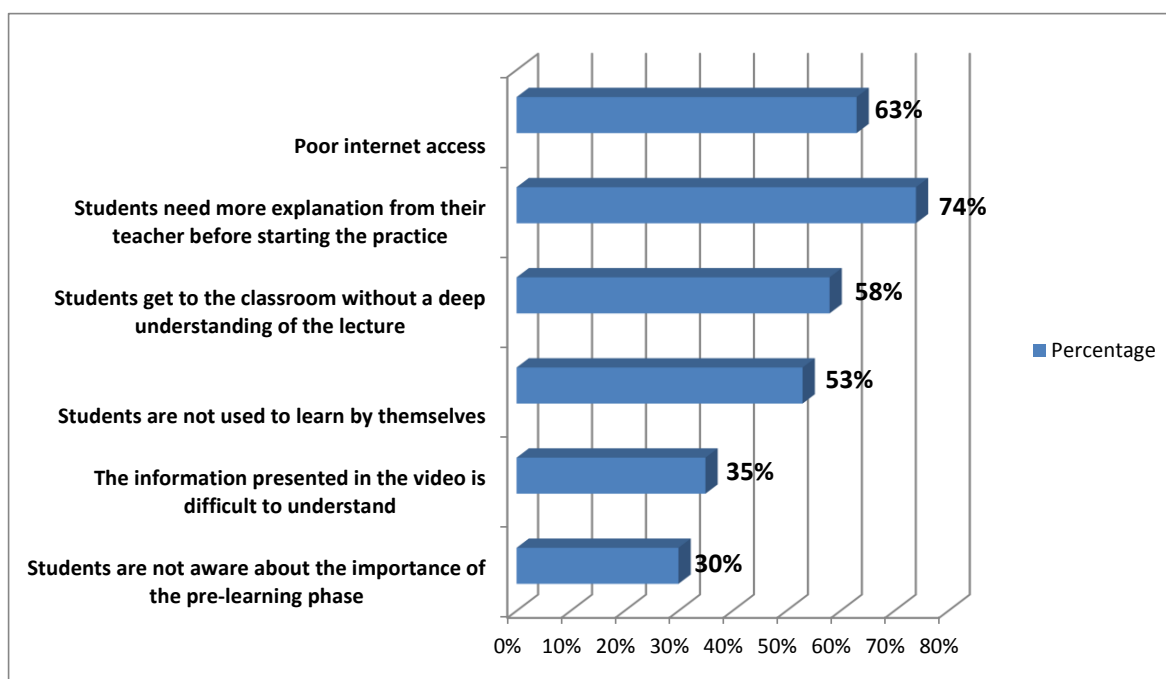
Figure: (06) FL Encountered Difficulties

According to figure 06, the need for more explanation from their teacher before engaging in the in-class practice stands as the major difficulty (74٪). Poor internet access is regarded as another important problem that hinders rather than advances their learning (63٪), the lack of deep understanding is another bothering obstacle for more than half of them (58٪), not used to learn by themselves is another factor for nearly half of the

informants, difficulty of the video content (35٪), and not being aware about the importance of the pre-class learning (30٪) represent some of the problems that stood as obstacles during a FL process.

Being aware of the difficulties that prevent them from learning motivated the researcher to ask the respondents if they could suggest some solutions for these problems in Q13. The interrogated students welcomed the question. Solving the problem of the internet access, the need for teacher in-class support and explanation, simplifying the content of the videos, raising the students' awareness about the importance of pre-learning phase were apparent in most of the suggestions. What we liked in the students' feedback is their engagement and motivation to provide solutions. One of the respondents showed a raised awareness towards the situation of FL in Algeria. He said the following:

> *For me,the flipped learning won't succeed in our country for many reasons: first, because of the poor internet access, second, there are even students who haven't smartphones. Also, honestly, our flipped learning I mean in Algeria isn't a real flipped learning. The teachers posted only pdf documents, they didn't even try to ask their students if they understand the lessons or not (not all the teachers of course but the majority of them). Moreover, if we want to succeed flipped learning, we should first make a plan like in European countries. I think it's better to use Google meet or zoom. The teachers should use zoom or Google meet like in other countries. In Europe and USA, the teachers and the students interact online through Google meet which allows the students to understand more the lessons and even help the teachers to interact with them.*

3-2 Discussion

From the data displayed above, students manifest a raised awareness towards the utility of FL in higher education. Despite the majority of students are not knowledgeable about FL pedagogy; however, their assertions proved to a large extent their willingness to learn via this model. Previous research in other EFL settings certified the positive impact of FL model on learners' learning outcome in general and on their attitude in particular. In a study undergone by Karimi and Hamzavi[27] on fifty EFL Iranian university students where the researchers attempted to examine the impact of flipped classroom model on students' reading comprehension and attitudes. By adopting a mixed research design based on pre/ posttests control group and a questionnaire study design. Results revealed that the FL model had a positive impact on learners' reading comprehension. Moreover, learners from the treatment group displayed positive attitudes towards the flipped classroom. In another study undergone at Abdulrahman University in Saudi Arabia in 2017, Al-Jasser[28] examined the effect of FL on students' academic outcome. The results certified that FL classroom transforms learning, teaching, and lecturing more exciting and interesting. Additionally it makes learners more positive, engaged and more responsible about their own learning process.

EFL students perceive the utility of FL course design not only for a writing course but for other subjects. The nature of courses such as Civilization, Psychology… and all those content subjects necessitates at-home preparation and in-class debates and discussion. This finding could be backed with Bergmann and Sams' Conclusion[29]. In their book, "*Flip your Classroom: Reach Every Student in Every Class Every Day*", Bergmann and Sams demonstrate that Flipped classroom is proved to work best in subjects such as science, math, and foreign language learning. Moreover the utility of FL design in practical subjects such as grammar, phonetics…etc, could be supported by Kang's findings[30]. This scholar flipped his general English course where twenty four EFL university students were

involved. Findings proved that the classroom displayed statistically significant changes both in grammar and vocabulary knowledge which was not the case for the participants under the control condition. Additionally, Zhang and his associates[31] proved the utility of FL in teaching Phonetics. In their investigation into the effectiveness of the flipped teaching mode in the English pronunciation course, the researchers' findings certified that FL mode is more effective in teaching pronunciation than the traditional mode.

Students throughout this study claim that to acquire knowledge at-home just by relying on the videos uploaded by their teachers is not difficult for them. Some of them suggested the need for training on how to learn online. "*The online lectures process needs to be scaffolded. We need to be taught how to watch, take notes, and engage in the content*" claimed one of the respondents. Difficulty in understanding the contents of the online lecture and the quality of videos uploaded to learners online are proved in this study as a main obstacle for learners during a FL process. When the quality of the video is very poor, learners find difficulty to understand and develop the LOT levels of understanding. As a result, they could not engage in the in-class problem solving activities. This will stop the growth of the HOT levels of thinking. Literature provides some solutions on how to overcome these problems so that safely implement a FL course. Teachers do not need to be experts in designing and producing videos, they can use any online source that presents in a simple way the subject be it PDFs, recorded sounds, websites[32]. To facilitate students' understanding of the pre-learning online content, teachers are required to record short videos and design concise understandable online lectures. Farmer [33] advised teachers who are interested in producing online videos to rely on "Richard Mayer's book Multimedia Learning (Mayer, 2009)" which sets out a number of research-informed best practice guidelines for the production of multimedia content.

Conclusion:

The need for a teaching pedagogy that could address the wants and the exigencies of the 21st century students makes from FL model the mostly wanted. This investigation helped us to perceive FL pedagogy via students 'lens. The research findings gathered via the online questionnaire proved to large extent student' likeliness and positive attitude expressed towards FL writing course.

Digging deep into EFL learners' learning experience with FL enabled us to raise a number of issues and concerns related to the difficulty to cope with this classroom redesign mainly that they have not been trained to learn via this model. One desperate student said: "*unfortunately, I don't think that flipped learning will succeed in our country because we still in lack of many things*". Via this quote, this student is raising a call for all what can facilitate the implementation of FL classroom at higher education: be it teachers, designers, authorities…etc.

To help EFL students surmount the major learning challenges teacher are requested to develop their knowledge about FL pedagogy and to carefully consider researchers' recommendations on how to overcome the main challenges when flipping their courses so that to meet COVID-19 generation students' needs and aspiration.

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