Supporting Struggling Students in Foreign Language Learning: The Flipped Classroom

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This work explores the use of the Flipped Classroom teaching methodology in the FL classroom with struggling students, with the aim of establishing whether such teaching methodology can represent a way of supporting students who, due to their individual characteristics, struggle to cope in the foreign language classroom.

The first chapter of this work provides the definitions of Special Education Needs (referred to as BES - Bisogno Educativo Speciale, following the definition provided by the Italian law) and Specific Learning Disability (referred to as DSA – Disturbo Specifico dell’apprendimento). The chapter then goes on to provide an overview of those impairments (referred to as BiLS – Bisogni Linguistici Specifici) that have an impact on language and communication abilities, and can thus represent the cause of the difficulties experienced in foreign language learning by students affected from such impairments.

The second chapter analyses the Flipped Classroom, its theoretical foundations and its strengths, also compared to traditional teacher-led instruction. The Flipped Classroom is an emerging teaching methodology that reverses the traditional teaching-learning cycle made of lecture – homework/self-study – test. Lectures are moved out of the classroom time, and contents are delivered via video lessons or other web tools by mean of which teachers explain students the concepts and that can be watched at home instead of doing traditional homework, thus freeing class time that can be used for more engaging, collaborative and communicative activities.

In this way, the teacher can use class time to walk through the desks while students are working on some tasks, answering students’ questions and conducting mini-lectures to clarify any difficult points, thus becoming a guide that helps students to understand contents and to focus on their cognitive processes, instead of just being a dispenser of facts.

Chapter 3 explores the characteristics of the “Communicative Language Approach”, commonly used in foreign language teaching and learning, and how the Flipped Classroom can favour the creation of a learner-centered language classroom. The chapter also provides a review of the literature regarding attempts at Flipping the foreign language classroom, made by language teachers across many countries. Research has shown that this methodology can represent a potential way to help struggling students in the foreign language classroom. Videos can be stopped, moved back or forward, and replayed as many times as necessary in order to grasp the important concepts. Students who struggle can thus acquire contents at their own pace, and come to class prepared to conduct activities based on those contents and to use language to interact with their peers on a more equal level. Furthermore, they can receive
individualized instruction during class time when they most need it with beneficial effects on motivation, perceived self-efficacy, and self-esteem.

Chapter 4 outlines the methodology of the research of an attempt of Flipped Classroom that I carried out in some classrooms of an Italian High School.

The Flipped Classroom was carried out in two classrooms of the 3rd year of a vocational study course in the field of “Agriculture, Rural Development, and Livestock”, and a classroom of the 2nd year of a vocational study course in the field of “Social and Health Care Services”.

Results of the participants’ insights regarding the implementation of the teaching methodology in object are reported in Chapter 5, where results are compared within subgroups “Struggling” and “Non-Struggling”, in order to assess whether the Flipped Classroom played a role in supporting struggling students in the classrooms object of the research.
Introduzione

Negli ultimi anni, si assiste ad una crescita di interesse da parte della ricerca a livello internazionale per quelli che sono definiti come “disturbi del neuro-sviluppo”, termine con cui si indica un ampio ventaglio di categorie diagnostiche, tra le quali figurano i disturbi dell’apprendimento e del linguaggio. Lo studio di tali differenze neuro-evolutive non è tuttavia relegato al campo clinico, ma è stato assunto ad oggetto di interesse anche da parte della ricerca pedagogica, ed in particolare dalla glottodidattica, nell’intento di delineare quali disturbi del neuro-sviluppo incidano in maniera diretta sull’apprendimento delle lingue, e quali strategie didattiche garantiscano un’educazione di tipo inclusivo, rispettosa delle caratteristiche individuali degli alunni che presentano tali disturbi (Daloiso, 2016a, pp. 25-29).

1 - Definizione di BES

Con l’acronimo BES ci si riferisce alla macro-categoria dei Bisogni Educativi Speciali. Tale acronimo viene utilizzato per indicare la categoria educativa all’interno della quale rientrano gli alunni che, in età evolutiva (entro i 18 anni di vita della persona), manifestano importanti difficoltà sia a livello di acquisizione spontanea di alcune abilità, sia di apprendimento di tipo formale in contesto scolastico. Il Bisogno educativo speciale può essere definito come:

“Qualsiasi difficoltà evolutiva di funzionamento, permanente o transitoria, in ambito educativo e/o apprenditivo, (…), e che necessita di educazione speciale individualizzata”

(Ianes e Macchia, 2008, pp. 22-23).

Tale definizione pone l’attenzione solo sulle “difficoltà di funzionamento” che emergono in età evolutiva. Essa è inoltre volutamente generica, non specificando quali siano le cause del BES, che possono essere di tipo:

- endogeno: cioè interne al soggetto, come in casi di disabilità sensoriale o disturbo di clinicamente significativo;

La definizione introduce inoltre il concetto di reversibilità. In alcune situazioni le difficoltà in ambito apprenditivo derivanti dal BES possono essere infatti solamente temporanee, vedi il
caso di alunni stranieri neo-arrivati con una scarsa conoscenza della lingua italiana e che per tale motivo possono presentare un bisogno speciale di tipo temporaneo. In altre situazioni tali difficoltà possono invece essere di natura più persistente, ad esempio in caso di presenza di Disturbi Specifici dell’Apprendimento o del linguaggio.

Indipendentemente dal tipo di cause sottostanti il BES, ciò che accomuna tutti i soggetti che rientrano in questa categoria, è un funzionamento problematico relativo solo ad alcuni determinati aspetti, e dal quale scaturisce un bisogno educativo, il quale, non trovando riscontro adeguato nelle normali attività scolastiche, necessita di interventi educativi ad esso finalizzati. È necessario sottolineare come non tutte le difficoltà di funzionamento siano all’origine di un BES. Tale nozione appartiene infatti all’ambito educativo ed ha l’intento di delineare quegli alunni le cui peculiarità sono causa di limitazioni significative a livello di apprendimento, tali per cui le normali attività scolastiche risultano essere inaccessibili per questi studenti, tanto da rendere necessari interventi mirati all’inclusione.

A livello europeo, in un panorama ancora per la maggior parte costituito dall’istituzione di scuole speciali, l’Italia rappresenta un punto di riferimento per l’inclusione scolastica degli alunni con BES. In particolare, la Legge 170/2010 ha rappresentato un punto di svolta per quanto riguarda il sostegno a questi alunni. Essa regola infatti il diritto di questi studenti a ricevere un supporto educativo adeguato alle loro difficoltà attraverso la personalizzazione del loro percorso scolastico, da realizzarsi tramite l’adozione di strumenti compensativi, e misure dispensative in relazione a quei compiti che lo studente non riesce a svolgere a causa delle proprie caratteristiche individuali.

Questa normativa ha reso possibile dirigere l’attenzione delle istituzioni scolastiche su quali fossero le finalità educative e gli obiettivi essenziali delle singole discipline scolastiche, e attraverso quali modalità fosse possibile raggiungere tali finalità ed obiettivi in modo tale da non lasciare indietro nessun alunno (Daloiso, 2015, pp. 5-20).

2 – Definizione di DSA

L’acronimo DSA sta ad indicare la macro categoria dei Disturbi Specifici dell’Apprendimento. Tale categoria include un insieme eterogeneo di disturbi che si manifestano con significative difficoltà a livello di acquisizione e uso di abilità di ascolto, espressione orale, lettura, ragionamento e matematica. Tali problematiche sono relative allo sviluppo cognitivo e all’apprendimento scolastico, non sono primariamente dipendenti da condizioni di handicap mentale, ma vengono definite in base al mancato raggiungimento di
criteri di apprendimento attesi in relazione alle potenzialità del soggetto. Tali disturbi si definiscono “specifici” in quanto essi interessano in modo significativo uno specifico ambito di abilità, tuttavia mantenendo intatto il funzionamento intellettuale generale, creando quindi una discrepanza tra le abilità interessate dal disturbo, che risultano quindi deficitarie rispetto a quanto atteso per età cronologica e/o classe frequentata, e l’intelligenza del soggetto che risulta essere adeguata all’età cronologica. Tali disturbi presentano inoltre caratteristiche quali:
- carattere evolutivo;
- associazione ad altri disturbi, detta comorbilità, che determina l’elevata eterogeneità di manifestazione dei DSA;
- impatto significativo e negativo per quanto riguarda l’adattamento scolastico e/o le attività della vita quotidiana (Cornoldi, Tressoldi, 2007, pp. 9-12).

I DSA possono essere suddivisi in due categorie:
- DSA di natura maturativa: anche definiti come Ritardi Semplici dell’Apprendimento, che si manifestano in difficoltà di apprendimento che si risolvono dopo il primo anno scolastico;
- DSA di natura disfunzionale: rappresentano disturbi che, accompagnando il bambino anche durante gli anni successivi, inducono a ritenere l’esistenza di alterazioni più complesse dei meccanismi volti all’acquisizione dei codici di lettura, scrittura e/o calcolo.

I DSA si manifestano dunque in disturbi quali:
- Dislessia: difficoltà di apprendimento della lettura;
- Disortografia: difficoltà di apprendimento della scrittura, spesso associata alla presenza di dislessia;
- Discalculia: difficoltà dell’apprendimento dell’aritmetica.

Tali disturbi si manifestano in soggetti caratterizzati da presenza di intelligenza normale e in assenza di deficit sensoriali o compromissione delle forme di ragionamento logico e di simbolizzazione (Militerni, 2009, pp.259-263)

3 - Definizione di BiLS

La nozione di BiLS (Bisogno Linguistico Specifico) nasce in ambito glottodidattico al fine di individuare all’interno della macro-categoria BES (Bisogno Educativo Speciale), una specifica categoria di alunni che presenta difficoltà di apprendimento linguistico, e che pertanto richiede una particolare attenzione da parte del docente di lingua (Daloiso, 2016a, pp. 25-29).
È stato riscontrato infatti come una significativa parte di alunni con BES manifesti difficoltà di acquisizione linguistica, tali per cui l’applicazione di metodologie didattiche inclusive non è di per sé sufficiente a garantire l’apprendimento della lingua straniera ed il miglioramento delle competenze in lingua materna.

Il BiLS è stato definito dalla glottodidattica, come segue:

“Per Bisogni Linguistici Specifici (BiLS) si intende l’insieme delle difficoltà evolutive di funzionamento, permanenti o transitorie, in ambito educativo e/o apprenditivo, (…), che interessano primariamente lo sviluppo della competenza linguistica nella/e lingua/e materna/e, e che incidono significativamente sull’apprendimento di altre lingue (seconde, straniere, classiche) al punto da richiedere interventi di adattamento, integrazione o ristrutturazione del percorso di educazione linguistica.” (Daloiso, 2015, p.25)

Questa definizione pone quindi l’attenzione sui bisogni formativi, di tipo linguistico, derivanti da atipicità che possono causare ostacoli all’apprendimento linguistico non paragonabili alle difficoltà di carattere più generale che uno studente può comunemente incontrare nel suo percorso di apprendimento (Daloiso, 2015, pp. 20-26).

Da notare come la provvisorietà presente in entrambe le definizioni di BES e BiLS, insieme al minore impatto stigmatizzante portato dal termine bisogno rispetto a disturbo, apportino un maggior senso di transitorietà e reversibilità rispetto alle definizioni presenti nelle tradizionali diagnosi, permettendo così di rendere più lieve l’impatto psicologico e sociale della valutazione per il soggetto e la sua famiglia (Ianes, Cramerotti, Cattoni, 2016, pp. 37-38).

4 - Classificazione dei BILS

I Bisogni Linguistici Specifici possono influire sulla competenza comunicativa orale oppure sulla competenza comunicativa relativa il codice scritto.

Le tipicità individuali dei BiLS nei diversi soggetti vengono descritte in relazione allo sviluppo linguistico del soggetto nella sua lingua madre (L1). Tuttavia le difficoltà degli alunni possono differenziarsi od essere più estese in caso di apprendimento di lingue non materne, a causa di variabili legate alla metodologia impiegata e/o al contesto di apprendimento.
4.1 BiLS e oralità

I BiLS riguardanti la competenza comunicativa orale possono essere divisi in tre categorie a seconda dell’area linguistica interessata dal disturbo. Ritroveremo quindi BiLS relativi alle seguenti aree:
1. area fonetico-fonologica;
2. area morfo-sintattica;
3. area semantico-pragmatica.

4.1.1 BiLS dell’area fonetico-fonologica

Le competenze fonetico-fonologiche sono alla base del corretto sviluppo della letto-scrittura, in quanto il codice scritto si configura come la rappresentazione simbolica di suoni linguistici. In questa categoria rientrano il disturbo fonetico-fonologico e la disprassia verbale:
- Disturbo fonetico-fonologico: consiste in una difficoltà nella rappresentazione mentale dei suoni linguistici e nella codifica degli stessi. I soggetti affetti da questo disturbo sembrano avere un inventario fonetico ridotto rispetto agli standard attesi per età cronologica, ciò comportando errori caratteristici nella produzione dei fonemi, come ad esempio eliminazione del suono finale della sillaba o di sillabe non accentate, riduzione di gruppi consonantici e sostituzione di consonanti a causa di errori relativi al luogo e modo di articolazione delle stesse.
Queste difficoltà di processamento fonologico incidono sullo sviluppo della competenza comunicativa, in quanto rendono difficoltosa l’acquisizione di parole nuove che, soprattutto nei primi anni di vita, vengono apprese tramite analisi delle sequenze sonore, ostacolandone quindi la formazione di capacità meta-fonologiche necessarie per imparare a leggere e scrivere. Il disturbo fonetico-fonologico comporta inoltre importanti limitazioni a livello di:
- percezione e discriminazione dei suoni che compongono la stringa sonora dell’enunciato;
- funzionamento della memoria di lavoro e della memoria a lungo termine. Per quanto riguarda la memoria di lavoro le cause sono state riscontrate in limitazioni relative al canale uditivo-verbale. In relazione alla memoria a lungo termine, le cause sono state riscontrate nelle atipicità che ostacolano l’accesso in maniera rapida e automatica alle strutture grammaticali e morfologiche, e rallentano il recupero lessicale.
- Disprassia verbale: interessa la pianificazione dei movimenti fisici, oro-linguo-facciali necessari alla produzione dei suoni del linguaggio orale. Questo disturbo causa una sorta di
incoerenza nella produzione fonologica, in cui il soggetto realizza uno stesso suono (sia consonantico che vocalico) in maniera diversa nonostante esso sia inserito nello stesso contesto fonetico. La disprassia implica difficoltà articolatorie in relazione alla capacità di mettere in sequenza i fonemi, e fatica nella gestione dei passaggi tra i diversi piani articolatori, con conseguenti produzioni linguistiche caratterizzate da tentativi di ricerca delle combinazioni articolatorie corrette, ed errori. La disprassia causa inoltre alterazioni nella velocità, nel ritmo e nell’intonazione dell’eloquio, ed errori negli accenti di parola. Infine, sembra che le ridotte abilità meta-fonologiche possano portare conseguenze per quanto riguarda l’apprendimento delle abilità scritte, e difficoltà nello sviluppo delle abilità di comprensione del testo scritto (Daloiso, 2015, pp. 48-56).

4.1.2 BiLS dell’area morfo-sintattica

Rientra in questa categoria il Disturbo Specifico del Linguaggio (DSL). I soggetti affetti da questo disturbo mostrano difficoltà nel padroneggiare alcuni aspetti morfologici ed alcune strutture sintattiche. In alcuni casi il disturbo si manifesta a livello di produzione linguistica, mentre in altri casi il disturbo può incidere sulla comprensione di strutture morfo-sintattiche.

I soggetti affetti da DSL risultano essere più lentì rispetto ai coetanei nel rispondere a stimoli sia linguistici, quali parole e frasi, sia visivi non verbali come immagini e simboli grafici. In questi soggetti sembra inoltre essere presente un deficit a livello di attenzione selettiva, che ricade sull’elaborazione dello stimolo linguistico in entrata causando la perdita di una parte dell’informazione da analizzare. È stato infatti riscontrato come questi bambini, alla fine di una frase, riescano a ricordare un numero di parole inferiore rispetto ai coetanei, e come fatichino nella ripetizione di non parole contenenti un elevato numero di sillabe. Ciò sembrerebbe dipendere dalle limitazioni della memoria di lavoro a causa delle quali i bambini con DSL faticano a trattenere ed analizzare le informazioni sonore delle parole, ciò che costituisce il primo stadio verso la memorizzazione stabile.

Seppure il disturbo può a volte essere associato ad altre aree del linguaggio come ad esempio la fonologia, l’atipicità maggiormente riscontrata afferisce alla comprensione ed uso delle strutture grammaticali della L1, normalmente gestite dalla memoria procedurale. È stata notata in questi bambini una tendenza ad utilizzare l’apprendimento dichiarativo (contrapposto a quello procedurale, il quale consente l’utilizzo delle regole della lingua senza necessariamente saperle descrivere) come strategia compensativa, tentando di immagazzinare le strutture linguistiche grammaticali come fossero delle frasi fatte, allo stesso livello del
lessico semantico solitamente immagazzinato nella memoria dichiarativa, dando così origine a conseguenti errori di utilizzo degli aspetti morfo-sintattici soggetti a cambiamenti in relazione al contesto e all’intenzione comunicativa (Daloiso, 2015, pp. 57-61).

4.1.3 BiLS dell’area semantico-pragmatica

Rientra in questa categoria il disturbo semantico-pragmatico del linguaggio. I disturbi finora discussi, relativi all’area morfo-sintattica e fonetico fonologica, rappresentano un ostacolo alla fluenza comunicativa ma non hanno ripercussioni sull’efficacia socio-pragmatica. Il disturbo semantico-pragmatico incide invece sulla capacità del soggetto di usare la lingua per farsi comprendere e raggiungere i propri scopi comunicativi nel rispetto delle regole di interazione sociale, ostacolandosi così la comunicazione e l’uso sociale della lingua.

Dal punto di vista linguistico, il disturbo interessa in maniera selettiva due aree del linguaggio interconnesse tra loro, quali l’area semantica e l’area pragmatica. Dal punto di vista semantico, il soggetto affetto da questo disturbo, non presenta difficoltà a memorizzare parole, riuscendo quindi a sviluppare un repertorio lessicale quantitativamente nella norma. Tuttavia il problema si manifesta nella creazione dei collegamenti tra le parole memorizzate ed i concetti ad esse legati, provocando difficoltà di interpretazione del discorso, che sembrano aumentare in presenza di significati non letterali come nel caso di metafore, allusioni, ironia.


Queste difficoltà possono causare nel soggetto una sorta di rifiuto nei confronti della conversazione, in particolare quando si tratta di attuare produzioni linguistiche autonome libere, non basate sulla ripetizione. I bambini affetti da disturbo semantico-pragmatico riescono a produrre frasi grammaticalmente corrette, ma presentano scelte linguistiche ripetitive, spesso non adeguate alle richieste della situazione comunicativa, manifestano confusione nell’uso dei pronomi e dei riferimenti deittici, difficoltà di comprensione del testo...
sia scritto che orale, che si acuiscono quando i testi fanno ricorso a linguaggi di tipo metaforico, ironico o allusivo (Daloiso, 2015, pp. 66-70).

4.2 BiLS e abilità scritte

I BiLS relativi alle abilità scritte si dividono in:
Bisogni linguistici della lettura di cui fanno parte:
- Dislessia;
- Disturbo specifico della comprensione del testo.
Bisogni linguistici della scrittura nella quale categoria rientra il:
- Disturbo della scrittura.

4.2.1 Bisogni Linguistici della Lettura

La lettura è un processo composito che include due processi fondamentali, quali decodifica e comprensione.
La decodifica si realizza nel riconoscimento dei simboli grafici costituiti dalle lettere e della relazione che esse instaurano con la pronuncia. Si tratta di una competenza di tipo tecnico, basata sulla conoscenza dei meccanismi di funzionamento del codice scritto in termini di lettere, sillabe e regole di combinazione dei grafemi.
La comprensione si definisce nell’accesso al significato di parole, frasi o del testo oggetto della lettura. In questo caso si tratta di una competenza di tipo strategico, nella quale rientrano quei processi cognitivi e linguistici che consentono di comprendere un testo formulando ipotesi sul suo significato, mettendone in relazione le sue diverse parti e rielaborandone il contenuto (Daloiso, 2015, pp. 87-88). Decodifica e comprensione sono processi indipendenti, che possono essere quindi selettivamente interessati da deficit, dando vita a disturbi di tipo diverso quali:
- Disturbo specifico della decodifica del testo, anche definito come dislessia;
- Disturbo specifico della comprensione del testo.
Il termine “specifico”, precedentemente utilizzato per definire il “disturbo specifico del linguaggio”, sta ad indicare che, generalmente, tali disturbi sono indipendenti da cause esterne come ad esempio un ritardo cognitivo, e si manifestano separatamente investendo cioè una sola abilità, o un numero ristretto di abilità. Un soggetto affetto da disturbo della decodifica del testo scritto non avrà quindi problemi di comprensione quando tale testo è presentato in

4.2.1.1 La Dislessia

Non esiste sul piano internazionale, una definizione univoca di dislessia. Le due definizioni maggiormente riconosciute dalla comunità scientifica internazionale sono quelle formulate rispettivamente da:

- **International Dyslexia Association:**

  “La dislessia è un Disturbo Specifico dell’Apprendimento di origine neurobiologica. E’ contraddistinto da difficoltà di riconoscimento di parole a livello di accuratezza e/o fluenza, e da scarse abilità di spelling e decodifica. (…) risultato di un deficit nella componente fonologica del linguaggio, (…) inaspettato rispetto alle altre abilità cognitive (…). Tra le conseguenze secondarie si possono riscontrare problemi nella comprensione scritta e un contatto ridotto con i testi scritti che impediscono l’espansione del bagaglio lessicale (…) (International Dyslexia Association, 2002).

- **British Dyslexia Association:**

  “La dislessia è un Disturbo Specifico dell’Apprendimento che colpisce principalmente lo sviluppo della lettol-escrittura e di abilità legate al linguaggio. (…) E’ caratterizzata da difficoltà nell’elaborazione fonologica, nella denominazione rapida, nella memoria di lavoro, nella rapidità di elaborazione e nello sviluppo automatico di abilità. (…). Tende ad essere resistente ai metodi didattici tradizionali, ma i suoi effetti possono essere mitigati da interventi specifici (…) (British Dyslexia Association, 2008).

Stando a queste definizioni è possibile individuare alcuni aspetti comunemente riconosciuti. In primo luogo le difficoltà causate da questo disturbo sono di tipo selettivo, interessano cioè solo alcune abilità, in presenza di uno sviluppo cognitivo nella norma. Inoltre, seppure il disturbo è di tipo permanente, i suoi effetti possono essere in un certo modo contrastati tramite interventi mirati ad aiutare il soggetto nello sviluppo di personali strategie di compensazione delle sue carenze.

Le aree maggiormente interessate dalla dislessia sono:

- L’elaborazione fonologica: il soggetto presenta difficoltà nell’elaborazione dei suoni di cui è composto il flusso sonoro, percependo in alcuni casi una velocità d’eloquio maggiore rispetto a quella reale. L’impatto di questa atipicità si manifesta in particolare nello sviluppo
dell’abilità di decodifica, per la quale è necessaria una buona competenza meta-fonologica al fine di analizzare le relazioni tra grafemi e fonemi.

- La memoria di lavoro: la componente della memoria che consente la ritenzione temporanea di alcune informazioni al fine di una loro rielaborazione e riutilizzo. Limitazioni in quest’area della memoria possono influenzare la qualità dell’analisi fonologica e/o visiva delle parole, creando difficoltà nel trattenere le informazioni visive della parola, nel collegare tali informazioni alla forma fonetica e nel mettere in atto i programmi motori legati alla pronuncia.

- La rapidità di elaborazione: la dislessia causa difficoltà nell’automaticizzazione di alcune abilità che risulta in una lentezza di svolgimento di attività che tipicamente richiedono rapidità di esecuzione, o l’utilizzo di più abilità contemporaneamente. La rapidità di elaborazione permette una decodifica rapida ed accurata. La dislessia interessa non solo la lettura ma più generalmente il processo di letto-scrittura, in quanto i processi legati alla lettura e alla scrittura non sono separati ma in parte sovrapponibili.

L’insieme di tali atipicità può creare difficoltà nello sviluppo di abilità che implicano un uso automatico della lingua scritta ed orale al fine di svolgere compiti di elaborazione/ cognitivi complessi es. studiare. E’ stato osservato che spesso gli alunni soggetti a dislessia cercano di compensare le loro limitazioni di automatismo tramite una maggiore concentrazione che causa però stanchezza ed un conseguente rapido esaurimento dell’attenzione (Daloiso, 2015, pp. 90-93).

A livello di sviluppo linguistico, è difficile riscontrare nei primi anni di vita del bambino segnali inequivocabili di possibili future difficoltà nella letto-scrittura. Si è osservato che alcuni bambini manifestano ritardi nello sviluppo del bagaglio lessicale e della componente fonologica, che costituiscono aree del linguaggio importanti al fine dell’apprendimento della letto-scrittura. Tuttavia nei primi anni di età sussiste un’alta variabilità individuale e ritmi di apprendimento diversificati tali per cui non è possibile considerare un ritardo nell’acquisizione del bagaglio lessicale come elemento predittivo della dislessia. Segnali più evidenti sono riscontrabili nella scuola primaria, con l’avvio del processo di alfabetizzazione, anche se lo sviluppo ed il quadro linguistico di ciascun alunno sono soggetti a variabilità individuale. Seppure la dislessia interessi principalmente la decodifica del codice scritto, i suoi effetti possono interessare anche altre abilità linguistiche nella lingua madre, e nello studio delle lingue straniere.

Le limitazioni a livello di memoria di lavoro tipiche della dislessia, incidono sulla capacità di trattenere, elaborare e immagazzinare gli elementi linguistici, la quale rende possibile
l’apprendimento linguistico. La dislessia non implica limitazioni dei canali sensoriali, i quali sono tutti attivi e funzionanti, permettendo al soggetto di ricevere l’input verbale orale o scritto, e trattenerlo per il tempo necessario a trasferire tale informazione agli altri magazzini di memoria che hanno il compito di elaborarlo. Le difficoltà di elaborazione emergono quando le informazioni contenute nell’input vengono trasferite alla memoria di lavoro. Quest’ultima è composta di 3 elementi, che si attiveranno a seconda del tipo di input ricevuto: 
- l’esecutore centrale: coordina e focalizza l’attenzione;
- il ciclo fonologico: elabora le informazioni a partire dalle loro caratteristiche sonore, si attiva con la parola udita;
- il taccuino visuo-spaziale: analizza le informazioni sulla base delle loro caratteristiche visive, si attiva con la parola vista.

Nel caso in cui una parola sia vista ed udita, si attiveranno sia il ciclo fonologico, sia il taccuino visuo-spaziale.

L’apprendimento linguistico avviene servendosi della memoria dichiarativa per organizzare in modo ordinato le informazioni, e della memoria procedurale per crearsi modelli linguistici da utilizzare in maniera automatica. Gli studenti affetti da dislessia possono incorrere in difficoltà legate a questi due tipi di memoria ed in particolare difficoltà nell’immagazzinare le informazioni e nel loro recupero rapido. Inoltre possono manifestare difficoltà a livello di memoria procedurale nello svolgimento automatico di alcuni compiti, incidendo così sulla rapidità e sulla qualità di esecuzione.

Queste limitazioni hanno importanti ricadute su come l’alunno vive il contesto scolastico, causando ansia, difficoltà e frustrazione in attività tipiche della didattica tradizionale, come ad esempio leggere a voce alta e tradurre di seguito, attività di comprensione del testo con domande, scrivere sotto dettatura, copiare dalla lavagna, memorizzare elementi in sequenza come numeri, lettere o parole, svolgere attività in lingua straniera che richiedono improvvisazione.

Le esperienze negative vissute dagli alunni in relazione ai continui fallimenti in queste attività possono portare all’insorgere di stati d’ansia, basso grado di autostima, stati depressivi, reticenza/riluttanza alla comunicazione con adulti e coetanei (Daloiso, 2015, pp. 97-102).
4.2.1.2 Il Disturbo Specifico della Comprensione del Testo

Questo disturbo interessa alunni che, pur in assenza delle caratteristiche tipiche della dislessia, manifestano difficoltà specifiche nella comprensione del testo scritto, ottenendo risultati inferiori rispetto ai loro coetanei nei test standardizzati di comprensione del testo.

A differenza della dislessia che interessa il processo di decodifica del testo, ciò che maggiormente caratterizza il disturbo di comprensione del testo è la difficoltà di comprendere il significato ed interpretare il testo nella sua forma scritta. Il disturbo verte cioè sulla competenza strategica, caratterizzata da quei processi che consentono di comprendere il significato del testo relazionando tra loro le varie parti di cui esso è composto e rielaborandone il contenuto.

In linea di principio, non è clinicamente riscontrata co-morbilità tra dislessia e disturbo della comprensione del testo. Lo studente che presenta questo disturbo, non potrà cioè presentare contemporaneamente anche una dislessia. Tuttavia gli alunni affetti da dislessia potrebbero manifestare alcune delle caratteristiche tipiche del DCT, soprattutto se oltre alle misure atte a compensare le carenze di competenza tecnica, non viene curata anche la competenza meta strategica. Con l’andare del tempo, gli studenti dislessici potrebbero migliorare la loro capacità di decodifica, ma nonostante ciò ottenere un peggioramento dei risultati scolastici in quanto l’aumento del carico di lettura richiesto, rende necessario l’utilizzo delle competenze meta strategiche fino a quel momento lasciate in disparte. La competenza meta-strategica non è facilmente trasferibile dalla L1 alle altre lingue di studio. Ne consegue dunque che alunni che anche abbiano recuperato tale componente della lettura nella L1, potrebbero necessitare di un percorso rivolto al potenziamento ed applicazione della stessa nelle altre lingue studiate (Daloiso, 2015, pp. 107-110).

4.2.2 I Bisogni Linguistici della Scrittura

La scrittura è un processo composito che coinvolge diverse dimensioni (grafo-motoria, ortografica, linguistica, metacognitiva) ed il cui sviluppo è soggetto a forte variabilità individuale. Tra le componenti soggette ad atipicità in caso di disturbo figurano quella ortografica, quella motoria e la componente espressiva relativa all’organizzazione ed elaborazione del processo di scrittura del testo.

Allo stato attuale della ricerca, sembrerebbe che il disturbo interessi in maniera selettiva solo l’aspetto ortografico, dando origine ad una disortografia, e l’aspetto motorio causando così
una disgrafia. Per quanto riguarda i disturbi della dimensione espressiva essi sembrano manifestarsi in associazione con disturbi relativi alle altre due componenti ortografica e motoria.

4.2.2.1 La Disortografia

Questo disturbo interessa la componente ortografica della scrittura, e si manifesta in una difficoltà di uso delle regole convenzionali di rappresentazione dell’oralità tramite il codice scritto. I bambini affetti da questo disturbo compiono errori nel rapporto fonema/graﬁema, errori di manipolazione delle sillabe, omettendole, aggiungendole o invertendole, errori nella segmentazione delle parole separandole o unendole in maniera scorretta, ed errori di ortografia (Daloiso, 2015 p. 112).

4.2.2.2 La Disgrafia

Il disturbo interessa la dimensione motoria di esecuzione del segno grafico alfabetico, numerico o iconico, e sembra quindi rappresentare una sorta di disprassia relativa all’esecuzione dei movimenti necessari alla scrittura. Gli studenti disgrafici possono manifestare difficoltà a livello di impugnatura e scorrettezza nello scorrimento della mano sul foglio, difficoltà di orientamento nello spazio grafico del foglio, esercitazione di pressione inadeguata sul foglio, incertezza nello svolgimento del gesto grafico, difficoltà nel riprodurre figure geometriche, nella ricopiatura di parole e frasi.

Dal momento che il disturbo di disortografia, causa atipicità a livello di coordinazione dinamica e visuo-motoria, l’alunno che ne è affetto potrebbe manifestare alcune limitazioni nello svolgimento di attività quotidiane e di routine che involvono la coordinazione motoria e oculo-manuale, ma anche l’orientamento spaziale e temporale e la localizzazione di oggetti.

Nell’apprendimento della scrittura gioca un ruolo fondamentale la memoria di lavoro, la quale permette nelle prime fasi di controllare la codifica e i processi di recupero e trascrizione di lettere e sillabe. Mano a mano che tali processi si automatizzano si libera spazio nella memoria di lavoro per poter svolgere compiti più complessi come la pianificazione del testo, l’organizzazione di informazioni ecc. Negli studenti affetti da disturbo della scrittura questi processi di base faticano a diventare automatici, mantenendo la memoria di lavoro impegnata nella loro gestione a discapito dei processi cognitivi superiori. L’alunno potrebbe quindi faticare nella scrittura di un buon testo a livello stilistico e organizzativo in quanto utilizza.
una quantità eccessiva di risorse cognitive nella fase di esecuzione della scrittura (Daloiso, 2015, pp. 112-115).

5 – Educazione Linguistica e BiLS

L’educazione linguistica, intesa sia come approfondimento della propria lingua madre, sia come apprendimento di una lingua straniera, ha lo scopo primario di sviluppare la competenza comunicativa, intesa come:

“realtà mentale che si realizza come esecuzione nel mondo, all’interno di eventi comunicativi che hanno luogo in contesti sociali dove chi usa la lingua compie un’azione” (Balboni, 2013, p. 8).

Tale realtà mentale è composta da diverse competenze, quali:

- La competenza linguistica: intesa come la capacità di manipolare gli elementi di cui è composto il linguaggio e di utilizzarli nell’ambito delle quattro abilità di base quali lettura, scrittura, ascolto, dialogo.
- La competenza extralinguistica: cioè la capacità di comprendere e produrre linguaggi non verbali.
- La competenza socio-pragmatica: cioè la capacità di utilizzo della lingua in contesti comunicativi diversi, sapendo gestire le differenze legate a stile, cultura, registro, ecc... (Balboni, 2013, pp. 8-9).

Il raccordo tra queste competenze, che hanno luogo nella mente, e la lingua utilizzata per agire nel mondo all’interno di eventi comunicativi, è dato dalla capacità di trasformare tali processi mentali in attività comunicative “fisiche”, che consentano di agire linguisticamente nel mondo.

In questa sorta di passaggio dalle competenze interne alla mente, alla loro realizzazione nel mondo, si può verificare un divario tra la competenza dell’alunno e l’efficacia della sua performance comunicativa, causato dalle caratteristiche tipiche del disturbo linguistico, comunicativo o dell’apprendimento primariamente all’origine del BiLS, il quale interpone un ostacolo alla trasformazione dei processi mentali in attività comunicative, creando conseguenze sulla capacità del soggetto di utilizzare la lingua per agire socialmente con essa nel mondo (Daloiso, 2015, p.27).

Mentre il trattamento clinico del disturbo è prerogativa di specialisti di ambito clinico, l’educazione linguistica dell’alunno con BiLS è affidata al contesto scolastico, il quale ha il compito di mettere in atto metodologie didattiche che tengano in considerazione le peculiarità
degli studenti al fine di creare un ambiente educativo inclusivo che possa favorire l’apprendimento linguistico. In quest’ottica, l’ambiente (inteso come l’interdipendenza dei fattori classe, metodologia, strategie didattiche, materiali ecc.) in cui è inserita la didattica svolge un ruolo fondamentale nel facilitare o nell’ostacolare l’apprendimento di tutti gli alunni, ed in particolare modo di coloro che presentano un BiLS. Dal momento che l’educazione linguistica avviene in un ambiente formale e strutturato, ed è gestita da specialisti che compiono scelte relative a strumenti, materiali e metodologie impiegate, il successo dell’alunno nell’apprendimento linguistico dipenderà molto dal grado di accessibilità della didattica portata avanti dai docenti di lingua.

Tale accessibilità glottodidattica riguarda tutte le fasi dell’insegnamento linguistico e si realizza su due livelli definiti come:

- Macro: nel quale l’accessibilità si realizza attraverso le scelte teoriche di fondo come ad esempio la selezione degli obiettivi di apprendimento e la scelta della metodologia didattica.
- Micro: dove l’accessibilità riguarda le strategie che rendono accessibili i singoli segmenti del percorso didattico, come ad esempio la struttura della lezione, delle unità didattiche, le tecniche di apprendimento ecc., e gli strumenti operativi quali risorse e materiali didattici (Daloiso, 2016b, pp. 205-212).

6 - BiLS e didattica nella classe di lingua

A differenza di quanto accade nella L1 la cui acquisizione avviene fuori dall’ambiente scolastico in una condizione di immersione naturale, lo studio della lingua straniera avviene in un contesto scolastico, di tipo formale e strutturato, in cui l’insegnamento avviene tramite l’utilizzo di materiali didattici ed è gestito dai docenti secondo svariate metodologie didattiche. Per queste ragioni il contesto di apprendimento legato alla classe di lingua può concorrere ad acuire le difficoltà dell’alunno con BiLS.

Secondo lo schema dell’atto didattico delineato da Balboni (2011), l’apprendimento avviene solo mettendo in relazione lo studente con la lingua. In questa visione il docente svolge un ruolo di facilitatore, promuovendo l’interazione tra le due variabili attraverso il supporto metodologico. Tuttavia nel caso di alunni con BiLS sorge un problema a livello della relazione lingua-studente, in quanto le difficoltà create dalle caratteristiche intrinseche dei differenti BiLS, sopra delineate, creano ostacoli all’apprendimento impedendo la messa in relazione tra le due variabili (Daloiso, 2015, pp. 133-135)
6.1 Lo Studente

Le specificità individuali tipiche degli alunni con BiLS, sono all’origine di difficoltà, non equiparabili a quelle più generali nelle quali possono incorrere i compagni durante lo studio delle lingue straniere. Diventa importante per il docente conoscere tali caratteristiche individuali al fine di progettare una didattica più funzionale ed inclusiva. Al fine di raccogliere informazioni preziose sulle caratteristiche dell’alunno e costruire un “profilo glottomatetico funzionale” che raccoglie la sintesi delle abilità dello studente, il docente può avvalersi di alcune pratiche come l’osservazione sistematica al fine di raccogliere informazioni sui punti di forza e debolezza dell’alunno con BiLS, avvalersi del supporto della diagnosi specialistica per comprendere la pervasività del disturbo, riflettere sulla propria metodologia didattica e sullo stile di apprendimento dell’allievo. Queste pratiche vanno effettuate sempre tramite l’ausilio di strumenti specifici che permettano di raccogliere dati significativi sulle difficoltà dell’allievo nella lezione di lingua, sui segnali comportamentali atipici, ma anche sui punti di forza dello studente (Daloiso, 2015, pp. 136-140).

6.2 La Lingua

Per quanto riguarda la lingua materna, i bambini che entrano nel sistema formativo obbligatorio sono solitamente in possesso di competenze linguistiche informalì che hanno acquisito in maniera naturale attraverso gli scambi comunicativi. Tuttavia negli alunni con BiLS tali competenze sono incomplete, a causa di un deficit nella componente fonologica del linguaggio che incide sull’analisi astratta dei suoni della lingua ostacolando l’associazione suono-lettera. Dal momento che l’apprendimento del lessico avviene inizialmente attraverso questo processo, la limitazione a livello fonologico crea ripercussioni sulla capacità di memorizzare lessico impedendo di ampliare il proprio bagaglio lessicale con conseguenti difficoltà di comprensione e studio del testo. Inoltre, sempre a causa della parzialità delle loro competenze linguistiche informali, gli studenti con BiLS possono incorrere in difficoltà di uso e analisi dei meccanismi ed elementi grammaticali della lingua, in quanto non pienamente acquisiti.

Date le difficoltà di questi alunni nella propria lingua madre, è spesso dibattuto se lo studio di una lingua straniera sia consigliabile. Obbligare questi studenti allo studio di una materia in cui continuano ad esperire fallimenti, potrebbe causare demotivazione, incidere sulla propria autostima con conseguenze a livello emotivo e comportamentale. Dall’altro lato, sollevare
dallo studio di una lingua straniera significherebbe deprivarli dell’opportunità di apprendere una materia che potrebbe essere utile per la loro vita futura (Crombie, 1997). Tuttavia, per quanto riguarda la lingua straniera, il suo studio è diventato obbligatorio anche per gli studenti con BiLS, tranne in casi di severità tale da rientrare in ambito di disabilità. Date le limitate competenze nella L1, è attendibile che tali studenti manifestino difficoltà nell’apprendimento della LS, tuttavia non è stato dimostrato che un recupero del deficit relativo alla L1 si trasferisca alla LS, in quanto questi studenti manifestano fatica nel trasferimento di competenze e conoscenze tra diversi ambiti, e perché il processo di apprendimento della L1 non è equiparabile all’apprendimento della LS. Nella L1 l’accostamento al codice scritto è graduale, e avviene dopo anni di esposizione naturale alla lingua orale ed è realizzato attraverso attività tese a rendere esplicita l’associazione fonema-grafema. Ciò che invece non avviene nell’insegnamento della LS, nella quale la pronuncia viene insegnata partendo dalla forma scritta, creando ulteriori difficoltà agli alunni che già presentano aree di debolezza. Inoltre, a livello di analisi linguistica, se nella L1 l’alunno può fare leva sulle proprie competenze informali al fine di esprimere giudizi di correttezza su elementi linguistici, nella LS questo processo è invertito, presentando dapprima un insieme di regole ed elenchi lessicali da applicare poi, facendo quindi leva sulla capacità di memorizzazione, tipicamente carente negli alunni con BiLS. Una possibile soluzione, potrebbe risiedere in un potenziamento su due fronti L1 e LS di alcuni aspetti particolarmente problematici (Daloiso, 2015, pp. 145-156).

6.3 La Metodologia

Come precedentemente introdotto, la metodologia utilizzata per l’insegnamento della LS può essere fonte di ulteriori difficoltà per gli alunni con BiLS, ostacolando così l’accessibilità glottodidattica. Al fine di favorire l’accessibilità, i docenti possono mettere in atto interventi su due livelli, macro e micro.

6.3.1 La Macro – accessibilità

Per quanto riguarda la scelta del tipo di approccio, entrambi gli approcci grammaticista o funzionalista, presentano pro e contro. L’approccio grammaticista ha il vantaggio di consentire un approccio graduale alle strutture linguistiche, in quanto non richiede all’allievo di produrre lingua nelle fasi iniziali. Tuttavia
esso rende lo studio della lingua più un esercizio di memorizzazione iniziale di regole e lessico, più che di sistematizzazione, creando difficoltà agli studenti affetti da disturbo della comprensione del testo e disturbo semantico-pragmatico per via delle limitate abilità metacognitive, e a coloro affetti da disturbo specifico del linguaggio a causa delle difficoltà a livello morfosintattico.

L’approccio funzionalista, spinge invece l’allievo a comunicare fin dall’inizio, enfatizzando lo sviluppo della capacità comunicativa più che della correttezza grammaticale. Tale approccio potrebbe aiutare gli studenti con BiLS tra quelli sopra citati, ma penalizzare coloro che presentano un BiLS legato all’espressione orale come ad es. disturbo fonetico-fonologico, disprassia verbale, e alcuni casi di disturbo specifico del linguaggio.

Per quanto riguarda il posizionamento della fase di riflessione sulla lingua, l’introduzione della grammatica all’inizio del percorso glottodidattico risulta ostacolare molti alunni con BiLS, in quanto in questo modo lo studio della grammatica diventa un’attività di memorizzazione di regole. L’inserimento invece della grammatica in un contesto di significato, a partire cioè da un testo o situazione comunicativa, permette di attivare differenti canali sensoriali nella scoperta delle regolarità e dei meccanismi della lingua, permettendo all’alunno di utilizzare le sue conoscenze ed esperienze pregresse, riducendo in questo modo le difficoltà legate al carico di memorizzazione. Inoltre, dal momento che l’approccio al codice scritto rappresenta un elemento di difficoltà per molti alunni con BiLS, essi potrebbero essere favoriti dall’inserimento nella didattica di un programma di potenziamento della fonologia ed ortografia della lingua straniera, area spesso trascurata dalla didattica tradizionale delle LS. Infine, gli alunni con BES risultano favoriti da attività didattiche che ne prevedano un coinvolgimento attivo. In quest’ottica quindi, la didattica dovrebbe prevedere spazi per attività parallele al lavoro sui contenuti, rivolte ad insegnare agli studenti a riflettere sulle proprie strategie di apprendimento di tali contenuti e migliorarle o apprenderne di nuove e come costruire supporti per lo studio individuale, con lo scopo di rendere lo studente via via più autonomo (Daloiso, 2015, pp.160-163).

6.3.2 La Micro – accessibilità

La micro accessibilità riguarda l’insieme degli interventi mirati a rendere accessibili i materiali didattici e l’impianto delle lezioni. La lezione di lingua straniera presenta caratteristiche peculiari che possono essere causa di difficoltà per gli alunni con BiLS.
Innanzitutto, spesso lezioni vengono tenute nella LS oggetto di studio. Sebbene in Italia si sia imposto un modello che alterna durante la lezione L1 e LS è opportuno tenere in considerazione il carico cognitivo causato dall’esposizione prolungata alla LS, in particolare se non viene chiarito lo scopo dell’attività didattica proposta. Infatti, la varietà di attività ed esercizi rivolti a sviluppare l’insieme di abilità e conoscenze di cui è composta la LS, può disorientare l’alunno con BiLS, che a causa di deficit a livello di memoria di lavoro e di attenzione sostenuta, potrebbe faticare a cogliere il filo conduttore della lezione.

Un primo passo per fare fronte a tale disorientamento, consiste nel fornire all’alunno una sorta di anteprima del “percorso lezione”, tramite diapositiva o fotocopia, in modo che possa essere visibile durante tutto lo svolgimento della lezione. A seconda del grado di autonomia degli studenti, tale anteprima può essere realizzata anche tramite una serie di domande chiave le cui risposte saranno ricavate durante lo svolgimento delle diverse attività, oppure tramite una scaletta parziale da completare durante il corso della lezione.

Il passo successivo è rappresentato dalla divisione esplicita della lezione in fasi di lavoro, intervallate da momenti di ricapitolazione, che servano da segnale di passaggio tra le varie fasi della lezione. Infine, in chiusura delle attività didattiche previste per quella lezione, è opportuno inserire una fase di riepilogo del percorso svolto oppure, nel caso in cui si siano fornite agli alunni una serie di domande, prevedere una fase di formulazione delle relative risposte. Questo tipo di impostazione della lezione permette di tenere traccia di quanto svolto in classe, e può rappresentare un punto di partenza per lo studio individuale a casa. Inoltre, questo tipo di percorso che agevola gli studenti con BiLS, si rivela altamente efficace con tutti i tipi di studenti.

Tra alcune delle pratiche tipiche di una lezione di LS ce ne sono alcune che risultano essere particolari fonte di difficoltà per gli studenti con BiLS. Tra queste rientrano:
- lettura a voce alta: ostacola la comprensione in quanto costringe l’alunno a concentrare maggiore attenzione alla decodifica, esaurendo le risorse attentive necessarie alla comprensione del contenuto. Ciò può essere ovviato dall’insegnante fornendo in prima persona una prima lettura del testo lasciando agli alunni del tempo per rileggerlo silenziosamente, e poi qualora necessario, a voce alta;
- dettato: crea particolarmente difficoltà a studenti con dislessia, disgrafia, disortografia, e disturbi dell’area fonetico-fonologica. L’utilizzo di tale strumento come metodo di verifica della padronanza della forma grafica delle parole studiate, risulta inadatto per quanto riguarda gli studenti con BiLS, in quanto rappresenterebbe un test nelle loro aree di debolezza;
ricopiatura: in particolare dalla lavagna. Per gli alunni che presentano difficoltà di letto-scrittura la ricopiatura costringe ad utilizzare le abilità di codifica e decodifica che risultano deficitarie, con conseguenze negative sulla performance.

attività non strutturate: come ad esempio rispondere a domande, improvvisare dialoghi o brevi monologhi non strutturati, in cui non sono cioè presenti indicazioni sugli elementi che devono essere contenuti nella risposta o nel dialogo. Gli alunni con BiLS, a causa delle difficoltà nell’automatizzazione delle abilità linguistiche, trovano difficoltà in queste attività.

Tra gli elementi di micro-accessibilità va inoltre tenuta in considerazione l’accessibilità del manuale di lingua, il quale nonostante rappresenti la principale risorsa scolastica per l’apprendimento della lingua straniera, può presentare diverse barriere per gli alunni con BiLS. Oggi sono sempre più diffusi i cosiddetti libri “misti” che aggiungono al tradizionale manuale, una serie di supporti multimediali che, integrati nella didattica quotidiana, possono assumere il ruolo di veri e propri strumenti compensativi. Tra le risorse audio-video, le registrazioni audio delle letture, presenti in alcuni manuali anche con la funzione karaoke che evidenzia le frasi del testo pronunciate dalla registrazione, possono favorire quegli alunni con limitate abilità di decodifica. I vari tipi di esercizi interattivi rendono invece la scrittura meno problematica per gli studenti con difficoltà di scrittura.

Un’ulteriore strumento di sostegno alla didattica in ambito di BiLS è rappresentato dalla lavagna interattiva che permette di convertire eventuali appunti e schemi scritti alla lavagna in file che possono essere salvati e condivisi tra gli alunni, evitando agli studenti la ricopiatura dalla lavagna. Esistono infine software di sintesi vocale che consentono la lettura di qualsiasi documento in formato digitale, fornendo così una risorsa sia per gli studenti con limitate abilità di decodifica, sia per coloro che presentano deficit a livello fonetico-fonologico, purché le informazioni vengano presentate in forma sia orale che scritta (Daloiso, 2015, pp.164-171).
CHAPTER 2

Theoretical Foundations of the Flipped Classroom

Introduction

Research carried out between 2008 and 2012, both in Italy\(^1\) and in other European countries\(^2\), has attested how the traditional teacher-led lesson is still the most widespread instructional practice among teachers. The lecture practice was originally based on the need of spreading the book’s cultural contents, by reading it aloud or dictating some of its passages to the students. Before the invention of the print books were manuscripts, and therefore extremely precious items that could only be reproduced by copying. Nowadays, thanks to the invention of print, which has made books largely and easily available, lessons no longer need to be characterized by the teacher reading or dictating the book’s contents to the students. Nowadays, the teacher’s task has become that of explaining the book’s topics to the pupils providing his own personal interpretation, deriving from his analytical abilities and from his practical experience in explaining with the aim of facilitating students’ comprehension (Cecchinato, Papa, 2016, pp. 3-8).

1 - Critical Aspects of Direct Instruction

In a traditional teacher-led lesson students are expected to listen silently to the teacher’s lecture, study the book’s pages individually once at home, and report the learned contents during written or oral tests. In this way, knowledge is simply reproduced through the different stages of school’s traditional recurrent structure consisting of: lesson – self-study – test – repeat (Cecchinato, Papa, 2016, p. 16). In this model, all students are expected to receive the same education at the same pace, and it becomes difficult for educators to reach struggling students with their own different needs (Bergmann, Sams, 2012, pp. 6-7).

In nowadays’ society, this structure is losing its value due to the great development and spreading of information technologies. Today’s students live in a rapidly changing society, that no longer needs school to reproduce knowledge, which the web has made largely and

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\(^1\) MIUR art. 1, c.4 DPR 89/2009 http://hubmiur.pubblica.istruzione.it/web/istruzione/prot2085_12
\(^2\) Creating Effective Teaching and Learning Environments, OCSE, 2008
https://www.oecd.org/edu/school/43023606.pdf
easily accessible to everyone, but has the necessity of fostering the development and growth of the new generations’ individual talents and potentialities.

A weak aspect of the direct instruction practice becomes visible when taking into consideration the students’ real understanding of the lesson’s topics. During an explanation, every teacher will pay attention to the feedback given by the students, that can either be spontaneous or elicited from the teacher with questions or requests for intervention. The problem is that often times the feedback comes from just a small part of the classroom and cannot thus account for the totality of the students (Cecchinato, Papa, 2016, pp. 17-19). Usually, feedbacks come from those students who are more interested, motivated or outgoing, while those more introverted, or experiencing difficulties and that might have the same questions, rarely voice them and opt for remaining silent, waiting for someone else to open the discussion (Bergmann, Sams, 2012, pp. 80-81). Furthermore, these feedbacks do not account for a real understanding of the concepts that are being explained but only for an assumption of their understanding. A more trustworthy feedback will come later on by mean of a test, which is usually administered after all the topics have been explained. In this way, a clear overview of the students’ actual understanding will only be obtained through the correction of the tests that are often handed back to the students a few weeks after the topics have been presented thus hampering the necessary processes of revision, make-up, and correction.

If the lesson is not carried thus to support an active participation of the students, they will be required to listen passively to the teacher’s reasoning, an activity that does not produce a meaningful learning in terms of knowledge’s stable acquisition, but only a temporary memorization. Students will then try to internalize the concepts by mean of individual study, engaging their cognitive resources to critically elaborate and acquire the contents presented in class. During this stage, students will have to deal on their own with any difficulties that might emerge, using their motivation as leverage in order to overcome the obstacles.

If classroom activities have not been successful in creating interest and engagement towards the topics object of the learning unit, students will lack the motivational component residing in cognitive curiosity, namely the human curiosity towards discovery. Therefore, they will experience self-study as an obligation imposed by the school, which will induce them into avoidance practices, such as copying or mnemonic learning, with the only aim of avoiding the consequences deriving from a negative mark.
In this context, testing also follows the traditional model in its being aimed at certificating, instead of having an actual educational value as it establishes the student’s profit rather than improving his learning.

If we compare this instructional practice with the ways in which students, who are digital natives, experience learning in their daily lives, a divergence can be observed between informal out-of-school learning and formal in-class learning. New digital medias encourage an active learning, made of attempts and mistakes, with real-time feedbacks, characterized by the engaging modalities of play and simulation. In the traditional school setting students are instead expected to listen and understand what is being transmitted verbally by the teacher. This practice has been criticized by the educational research and accused of inhibiting the human spontaneous instinct towards discovery, which is at the basis of the motivation in engaging to find solutions, interpretations and explanations, all processes that lead towards a deeper learning.

Providing students with ready-made knowledge without according them the chance of carrying out an individual journey of meaningful learning, entails two negative consequences. Firstly, it prevents the students from activating those necessary cognitive processes that are needed to acquire a real understanding of those topics they are expected to learn. Secondarily, it inhibits those emotional processes such as curiosity, and the satisfaction deriving from successful autonomous understanding or accomplishing of tasks that were not mastered before (Cecchinato, Papa, 2016, pp. 18-25).

Reasons against lecturing have also been put forward by Gibbs, who claims that lectures are not the most efficient way of getting students to learn contents nor to think, as attention tends to steadily decrease over a long period of time such as a lecture. Evidence has shown that the maximum students’ attention span over a lecture amounts to 20-30 mins, thus making long-hour lectures of little significance in terms of what is being learned.

Lectures are not the best way of transferring contents either since the construction of personal knowledge is an individual activity depending on different variables such as the person’s previous body of knowledge and the possibility of negotiating meaning. Furthermore, lectures are not the best way to encourage students to think, as during a lecture students’ attention is divided between trying to understand what is being said and putting it down by taking notes. Even if the student decided to just listen, the pace of the talking might be faster than the rate at which the student can make sense of what is being explained. Therefore, in either case, the student’s mind cannot engage in problem-solving, synthesising or inter-relating information (Gibbs, 1981).
2 - The Flipped Classroom

In higher education, the flipped classroom teaching methodology has recently been receiving a large body of attention. The underlying idea is that of creating video lectures in which teachers explain students the concepts, and that can be watched at home instead of doing traditional homework, thus freeing class time that can be used for more engaging and collaborative activities. The term “Flipped Classroom” is attributed to two Colorado teachers who started to create video lectures for their students in 2006 (Milman, 2012, p. 85).

2.1 How the Flipped Classroom Was Born

The flipped classroom practice first started with two chemistry teachers (Aaron Sams and John Bergmann) of a Colorado (USA) High School. The teachers were faced with the problem of having many students missing lessons because of sports, events or because they spent a considerate amount of time travelling to and from school. The two teachers thus had the idea of recording their lessons and posting them online in order to avoid the students missing the lectures, and in turn avoiding teachers spending most of their class time re-teaching previous lessons to those students who had missed school. The idea had a great success amongst students who liked the recorded lessons so much that they started to use them to revise course topics before tests.

The two teachers thus realized that students did not physically need the teacher to convey them the books’ contents. The students were able to learn those contents by themselves and instead needed the teacher’s support when they encountered difficult points within the study materials. So, the two teachers began to record all of their lectures and started to give them to the students as homework while using classroom time to help students with the concepts they had found difficult to understand. At the end of the school year, the two teachers administered students the same tests they had used the previous year during which they had taught with the lecture-homework methodology. The results seemed to indicate that the flipped classroom model had granted the students a better knowledge of the course topics (Bergmann, Sams, 2012, pp. 1-6).
2.2 How It Works

The flipped classroom methodology overturns the common explanation-self-study-test structure. In doing so it takes inspiration from the scientific procedures inherent the different study fields, which usually take place in a reversed way with respect to traditional teacher-led instructional methods. In fact, the scientific process is inductive and originates from the observation and study of cases, with the aim of putting forward a number of hypotheses from which to derive laws and principles. Unlike lectures, a flipped lesson starts by presenting students the practical problems for which they will need to find a solution under the guidance of the teacher. Furthermore, in the flipped classroom model students are prompted to analyse study materials in a critical way, as they are explicitly required to ask questions, that must be interesting and not simple obvious questions asked just in order to get by. Questions must be related to the contents and must be ones for which the student does not know the answer, and every student is required to ask at least one question per lesson (Bergmann, Sams, 2012, pp. 80-81).

The teaching-learning cycle is based on three stages:
- challenging the students: the first step entails activating the students’ interest, curiosity and desire to know about a certain topic. They will be asked to solve a problem, analyse a case, carry out a research or project. In this stage, the teacher’s task consists in transposing the topics’ contents from an enunciative structure into a doubting and hypothetical form so that they can be integrated into activities linked to the students’ daily reality. Students could also be asked to go through some preparatory activities at home, requiring them to explicitly express their opinions on the study materials and report any difficult points. This serves the dual purpose of providing students the competencies needed to carry out classroom activities and check that preparation has been effectively carried out at home;
- carrying out the challenge: students are required to question the concepts rather than just assimilate them in a passive and uncritical way. In this way they are stimulated into activating those mental processes that are at the base of knowledge building, such as: being critical, learning how to formulate appropriate questions and hypothesis and discover methods to test the veracity of their deductions. During this stage, students will be asked to produce materials or documents that will be used during the third and last stage;
- Closing the challenge: the last stage can be carried out through a collective process of reflection on what has been learned during the lesson or the learning journey, thanks to the teacher’s guide and to the contribution of every student. The aim of the discussion is that of
making concepts more clear and explicit by using the works produced in the second stage as a starting point. During this stage, the teacher’s role becomes that of a guide that helps students to understand contents and to focus on their cognitive processes, instead of just being a dispenser of facts (Cecchinato, Papa, 2016, pp. 25-29).

3 – Flipping the Lesson

Lessons no longer start with the teacher introducing the topic of that day, but with a discussion about the video watched at home, in order to clarify any misconceptions and give the students the chance to ask any questions they feel the need of being answered (Bergmann, Sams, 2012, pp. 13-14).³

This change requires a shift in focus from contents to those cognitive processes that enable students to develop their own autonomous abilities of research, analysis, and implementation of the acquired knowledge.

In enunciative teaching, concepts are expressed in a finite way and the student is required to accept them as they are. Hypothetical teaching instead creates a cooperation between the teacher and the student who together build a path that brings the latter towards the discovery of knowledge. This method has advantages such as a boost in logical thinking skills, as in hypothetical reasoning students are encouraged to assign meaning to the information they are analysing in order to discover regularities and correlations. In addition, this method can also be of help in supporting a shift in motivation from extrinsic to intrinsic, in which the reward is embodied by the pleasure of discovery.

Students driven by extrinsic motivation will make use of alternative strategies such as learning by heart, applying rules mechanically or copying, in order to succeed. In the case of intrinsic motivation, the mentioned expedients cannot subsist, as recurring to them would entail preventing them from enjoying the satisfaction that comes with discovery. When a task is carried with interest, students will be able to experience success and failure in a different

³ Producing a video lesson can sometimes be difficult, since talking in front of a Pc screen entails a lack of immediate feedback and thus requires abilities that are different from those needed when talking in front of a classroom. In order to overcome this difficulty, it is possible for teachers to exploit the resources offered by the web, where can be found videos produced by other teachers or educational institutions (Cecchinato, Papa, 2016, p. 37). Examples can be found in:
- Khan Academy (www.khanacademy.org);
- BBC Learning English (www.youtube.com/user/bbclearningenglish);
- TED-ed Youtube channel (www.youtube.com/user/TEDEducation);
light, no longer as rewards or punishments but as new pieces of information in the building of their path towards the final objective (Cecchinato, Papa, 2016, pp.42-46).

3.1 Challenging the Students

One of the school’s negative aspects is embodied by the passive and detached attitude that students show towards it, that is often caused by activities that grant them only a marginal role in which they cannot find any ways to express themselves.

When challenging the students, learning activities need to be reconsidered in order to regard contents as objectives that need to be conquered, just like it would happen in a game. In order for the challenging activity to be successful, a few guidelines need to be followed:

- the aim has to be shared with the students and needs to be immediately identifiable and easily understandable by them;
- the activity should help students to link the contents that need to be learned in conjunction with their life experiences;
- students should be able to start the activity immediately and the challenge’s level of difficulty should be adequate to the students’ abilities thus to give them the impression of being able to solve it and being able to perceive their self-efficacy;⁴
- activities should be designed to be carried out in a limited time frame and with the use of technological devices;
- assessment parameters should be clearly defined and shared with students from the start;
- any mistakes made by the students in the attempt of reaching a solution should not be marked negatively but used as a resource for improvement.

The challenge can be introduced by showing students some puzzling images or by asking questions that clash with their previous knowledge. If the question is enough challenging and the students put forward different alternatives, a comparison or debate can be carried out also with the aid of technological devices (Cecchinato, Papa, 2016, pp. 49-54).

⁴ It is important to position the challenge at the adequate level, thus to make it possible for students to work in the “zone of proximal development”, as defined by Vygotsky in 1934. The zone of proximal development can be defined as the area between the learner’s actual level of development, and the level of potential development that can be reached through the guide of a competent adult, or by collaborating with more competent peers (Cecchinato, Papa, 2016, p. 52).
3.2 Closing the Challenge

The closure of the challenge represents the final stage of the learning journey and should test the level of learning with respect to the established objectives. The closure of the challenge coincides with the closure of the learning unit and for this reason, it should include retrospective activities aimed at summarizing what has been learned, in view of the final test. During this stage, the role of the teacher is that of stimulating a reflection on the topics covered so far, providing the students a number of meaningful questions through which they can explicitly make the point of what they feel they have learned.

The reflection can be started by giving students some sentences to complete, or can be conducted in small groups by following some guiding questions, and shared with the classroom in a subsequent moment (Cecchinato, Papa, 2016, pp.152-157).

3.3 Digital Medias in the Flipped Classroom

It is difficult to identify a social activity that is not supported by the use of medias. Turning off their devices in the classroom brings students into a reality they are not used to live. The Flipped Classroom involves the use of digital technology in order to support students’ engagement and to help them developing awareness towards the new medias’ potentialities, but also introducing them to their risks and limitations. By giving students the chance to use their devices to complete activities during the lesson, the flipped classroom attempts to build a bridge between students’ life at school and out of school, helping them to overcome the gap that makes them perceive the school setting as a reality distant from their daily out-of-school life. In this context, the challenge can be introduced by providing the students digital learning materials aimed at awakening their curiosity, interest, and their motivation in finding possible solutions.

Since the final mark will assess students’ efforts, creativity, and courage into putting forward possible hypotheses, students will be asked to provide a feedback regarding their personal thoughts, with the purpose of making them feel free to express themselves without fear of a negative mark. The answers can be collected with the aid of an online learning environment and examined by the teacher in order to create groups of work that include students with different opinions and perspectives that will be compared during the following activity. In order to check that students have actually carried out the required preparatory activities, the teacher can ask them to stop the video in order to produce notes on their personal thoughts, or
ask them to clearly point out which passages they found clear and which they found confusing or difficult, and include the assessment of the preparatory activities in the final mark (Cecchinato, Papa, 2016, pp. 71-85).

4 – Flipping Self Study

This stage of the flipped classroom methodology aims at leaving behind traditional homework practices such as repetition, exercises, summaries of the studied contents, in order to move the focus from the contents to the cognitive processes activated while learning, by engaging students in social and constructivist activities. Traditional homework requires students to apply knowledge in order to consolidate it and transform it into competence, thus moving from “beginner” to “expert” and acquiring the contents that will be assessed in a test. The greatest part of students disregard homework, consider it boring and unrelated to their daily life reality and find it difficult to derive any competence that can turn out useful in their future.

What is more, traditional exercises value only one correct answer, but real problems generally do not have only one correct solution that can be reached through just one correct path. A problem is a partially defined situation that requires exploration of many different paths from which several different but equally valid solutions can be drawn; it requires the original and creative application of different kinds of knowledge which are not only of the school-based kind. When facing a problem, students are required to make use of deeper intellectual processes such as hypothetical, analytical and deductive reasoning.

In light of these considerations, the designing of the learning activities should be reversed as well. The range of abilities and competencies that need to be developed should be used as a starting point since the cognitive processes that will give origin to learning are activated from the problematic situation, and not from the final product or the exercises per se (Cecchinato, Papa, 2016, pp. 89-97).

4.1 Flipping the Text Book

A simple strategy that can help to discriminate between simple exercises and problems can be that of taking one of the book’s exercises as a starting point for reflecting whether the information required to solve the exercise has already been faced with the students in an activity, or not.
In the first case, students will be required to retrieve the already owned knowledge and apply it in order to complete the exercises. In the second case, the activity itself can consist in considering the exercise as a real problem, and ask the students to create a strategy that can lead to its solving, rather than just providing the answer. In this way, even a textbook exercise can become a starting point for a challenging activity in which students will need to use their analysis and critical reasoning skills.

Otherwise, the teacher can use an exercise based on the contents he wants to explore and have students do the opposite process of the one that led to its design, by defining which competencies the exercise aims at developing, and relating such competencies to the students’ reality. Differently from exercises, in which the solving procedure has already been presented to the students, daily life’s problems have a known result (the result you want to obtain) but do not have an already known solving procedure (Cecchinato, Papa, 2016, pp. 89-98).

5 – Flipping the Evaluation Stage

In traditional instruction, evaluation is usually the final moment of the learning journey aimed at collecting the marks explicitly required by the school system. In the flipped classroom this last moment acquires a more central role as it becomes distributed along the entire learning journey.

By modifying the learning stages in a flipped classroom perspective, the teacher is freed from the need of reproducing the disciplinary contents with the aim of transferring them to the students. He can thus devote classroom time to the observation and tutoring of single students or groups, thus being able to carry out an individualization of the instructional approaches by mean of a just in time feedback. Such feedback should not be referred to the person, but to the performance, and should help the student to understand which factors have contributed to the success of his performance and which did not, and therefore need to be revised or improved.

In this way, the evaluation acquires a double purpose: evaluating the student’s progress and providing useful prompts on how to improve his learning. Students have in fact been reported to learn better when they:
- clearly understand what they are expected to do;
- receive a feedback on what they are doing or need to do in order to reach the agreed objective;
- are immersed in a positive classroom climate that engages them into the decisional process;
- can count on the teacher’s help if they feel in need of guidance.
By following these precautions, teachers can help students to acquire the idea that learning and the development of their cognitive abilities happen by incremental steps. Tests are no longer solely based on the transcription of the studied contents. They can be based on problem-solving activities, critical reasoning, and teamwork, a range of skills that students will be required to master when called to face a problem in their real life. Since real life problems do not have only one correct answer like traditional tests, students are also evaluated for their ability to sustain their hypotheses and points of view (Cecchinato, Papa, 2016, pp.133-141). Tests are designed so that to succeed students need to demonstrate a minimum level of proficiency, that can be reached by mastering the key objectives. A higher score can be obtained by mastering further objectives that are not essentials for success in the following lessons. This decision is left to the students as a way of making them take responsibility for their own learning. Students who do not show mastery of the minimum level will have to re-take the test and can be allowed to retake a test even if they showed mastery, but want to obtain a higher score. In the same way, if students hand in poor quality assignments “just to get by”, these are handed back to them who are asked to fix their work. This should prevent disinterested students from turning in poor works, as they know they will be asked to redo it (Bergmann, Sams, 2012, pp. 88-89).

5.1 Flipping Assessment Tools

When shifting from lecturing to a more interactive and engaging teaching methodology, the evaluation modalities should be changed as well in order to adapt to classroom activities. In the flipped classroom the learning cycle starts with the fruition of contents outside the classroom. This moment in which the student takes contact with the learning materials provides the chance for a first assessment, which needs to take its distance from the evaluation of homework in which marks are regarded in terms of rewards for completion of homework, or punishment in the case in which homework has not been done. The focus should be put on the analysis of the student’s performance, and the evaluation should be carried on the basis of some indicators such as the use of critical reasoning, research of information and its critical judgment. In this way, even a partially correct answer as long as sufficiently reasoned can be positively assessed.

In order for the assessment to become an integral part of the teaching-learning journey, it needs to be designed together with the learning activity, and its criteria need to be shared with the students. To do so, a helpful tool is embodied by directories made of entries that are
initially defined by the teacher according to the activity proposed and then discussed with the students with the aim of engaging them in the decision of which skills will be assessed during the task.

The assessment should not test competencies that have already been acquired but serve as a way to encourage their development, something that can be helped by means of frequent feedbacks, and by supporting a positive attitude towards risk and mistakes, that traditionally prevent weaker students from actively engaging in classroom discussions. Students should instead be helped in changing their point of view towards mistakes and accept them as an opportunity for growth and improvement (Cecchinato, Papa, 2016, pp. 145-149).

6 – The Flipped-Mastery Classroom

The flipped classroom model can be implemented and become a flipped-mastery model. Mastery learning was made popular by Benjamin Bloom in 1960, and its underlying idea is that every student can learn any content, as long as provided with enough time and support. Research on this model, in which students can learn a series of objectives by working at their own pace, has shown positive outcomes such as improvement in students’ achievements, increased cooperation among students and increased self-esteem and self-efficacy.

In a Flipped-mastery classroom, at the beginning of every lesson students are organized in groups that work on different topics during the same time span. Teachers walk around the classroom and work with students in every group in order to help them to reach mastery of the set objectives, or helping struggling students in providing alternative ways of demonstrating their mastery. In this way, students can identify and discuss any misconceptions and a course of action can be planned in order to correct them.

This model enables teachers to carry out the much sought after personalisation of instruction, which can also be implemented through:

- the use of different standards for different students: excellent students can be asked to meet higher standards in their assignments, while struggling students can be assessed for essential understanding, allowing them some minor mistakes;
- providing students with different forms of learning materials: if learning is their own responsibility, then they can choose how to learn, in order to make use of their best learning strategies according to their intelligence style;
- according students multiple chances to demonstrate their understanding: summative tests, verbal discussions, power point presentations, or other methods put forward by them.
In doing so, it is possible for teachers to meet students’ exigencies at the time when they most need it, instead of students meeting the teacher’s requirements at a set time in the course of the curriculum. In this model, students learn how to take responsibility for their own learning in order to succeed, which becomes no longer an imposition on their freedom, but a choice for which they assume responsibility (Bergmann, Sams, 2012, pp. 51-55).

6.1 Keeping Students Motivated

In order to make students responsible for their own learning, it is important to involve them in the decisions regarding the various stages of the instructional process such as topics, methodologies, evaluation modalities. Along with this, students should be praised for the cognitive capabilities they show, rather than for the marks they obtain, providing them the idea that cognitive capabilities can be improved and developed through a constant commitment. In this context, each student’s performance is evaluated not just on the basis of its quality but also in the light of the progress accomplished and the originality of the strategies implied to solve the problem rather than just the accuracy of the answer. In this way, mistakes are considered as an integrant part of the learning process and students can feel free to express their own ideas and opinions without fearing a negative judgment (Cecchinato, Papa, 2016, pp. 107-109).

7 – Benefits of the Flipped Model

The flipped classroom model can bring about several advantages:
- use of technology: today’s students have grown up surrounded by technological devices, and their own mobile phones are often more powerful than the school’s computers. In the flipped classroom students can be allowed to use their technological devices (mobile phones, tablets, laptops) to complete classroom assignments, thus discovering how their learning can be benefited from their use instead of telling them to switch off any digital device when they are learning;
- time flexibility: since the content is delivered through on-line videos, students can choose when it is the best time for them to learn, and can even work ahead if needed. If the videos regarding the following topics have already been provided by the teacher, students can choose to work ahead by watching the videos and completing the related activities. Thanks to this
flexibility students can approach learning when they feel most ready to, thus learning how to manage their time and workload;
- increased interaction and personalisation: in teacher-led lessons, students who get the most are usually the brightest or more interested, while the remaining students just listen passively. In the flipped model, as lessons are pre-recorded, students can re-watch videos at home as many times as they need in order to grasp the important concepts, knowing that in classroom teachers will use the time to walk around the desks helping them with what they are finding difficult to understand. This increased interaction is beneficial to all students but becomes a crucial change for those who struggle most, as teachers will have the chance to work with them individually or conducting mini-lectures in small groups during classroom time thus being able to personalize the learning of students with a wide range of abilities. Flipping also increases interaction between students, who, by working in groups can help each other learn instead of immediately turning to the teacher;
- better classroom management: in a traditional classroom can often be found students who aren’t paying attention because bored or unruly, and that by doing so distract their peers, affecting negatively the lesson time. In a flipped environment students use classroom time to do practical activities, so many classroom management related problems should disappear, as students no longer have an audience and are engaged in learning (Bergmann, Sams, 2012, pp. 20-29).

8 – Cooperative Learning

The relations between students are as important as those between teacher and students. The flipped classroom makes great use of cooperative learning activities in which students reciprocally support their learning. The research has shown how this methodology produces many positive effects such as empowerment of reflection and argumentation abilities, and an increase in psychological well-being, self-esteem, and self-efficacy. The use of cooperative learning activities also helps to improve ideas’ development processes, the evaluation of others’ opinions and triggers metacognitive processes. This is especially important in our contemporary society, in which people are increasingly being praised and rewarded for their abilities to solve problems and put forward innovative solutions.

For this methodology to be successful, groups must be characterized by homogeneity of levels, thus to avoid the risk of influencing the students’ perception of their abilities, producing negative effects on self-esteem and motivation. A degree of heterogeneity should
instead be based on elements from which can derive a formative value such as the students’ capabilities, country of origin, socio-economical status.

The decision on how to form the groups should not be left to the students as they would be likely to reproduce their friendship relations thus forming groups that are too much homogeneous. As every student is characterized by a different degree of motivation towards effort, in order to avoid that less motivated students will take on a passive role delegating their tasks to their more motivated peers, activities should be organized so that “positive interdependence” can be produced. In this way, the final common objective will be reached only if every member of the group strives to do his part, just like what happens in teamwork (Cecchinato, Papa, 2016, pp. 111-114).

8.1 Peer Learning

Another cooperative learning method is embodied by peer learning, in which understanding of topics is reached through a confrontation between students that have similar competence levels.

A student who has gained a full understanding of a topic can be of great help to his peers who have not yet reached such understanding. Moreover, the fact that the student will have to verbally reconstruct the mental processes that led to his understanding and explain it to the others will activate metacognitive processes that will reinforce his abilities of reflection and expression.

The principles of peer instruction can easily be reconducted to those underlying the Flipped Classroom, as both methodologies believe that classroom time would be better spent if devoted to the application of contents rather than to their explanation. In peer instruction, study materials are presented before classroom activities with the aim of obtaining an initial knowledge, and students are asked to provide a feedback on the comprehension of the topics, clearly stating which points they feel were clear and which ones were not. The feedback can be provided through on-line medias so that the teacher can check whether students have actually read the materials, and obtain useful information in order to prepare classroom activities based on the students’ feedback.

In class, the lesson will start with asking students a conceptual question that does not simply entail retrieval of the contents presented by the study materials but tests their real comprehension through an effective application of such contents. Questions are multiple choice ones in which only one answer is correct. Students will be asked to provide a first
answer without consulting their study materials nor asking their peers, but basing on their reasoning or beliefs. Answers can be collected through online systems that allow students to vote their answer by connecting to a website on their mobile phones. Examples of these websites are Pingo (http://trypingo.com/de/), Kahoot (https://getkahoot.com/), GoSoapBox (http://www.gosoapbox.com/). Students’ answers can lead to three different scenarios:
- more than 70% of students give the correct answer: in this case, the teacher will provide an explanation targeted to those pupils who still haven't understood the topic, also by engaging those students who gave the correct answer;
- less than 30% of students give the correct answer: such score could derive from a scarce understanding of the topics, or from an excessive difficulty of the question. In this case, the process stops as it is necessary to review the topics presented to the students;
- answers fall into an intermediate range: it is possible to move onto the next stage, in which students are divided into groups including students who gave different answers, and in which every member will have to sustain his opinions and try to convince his peers. It is during this stage that real learning takes place. In the group every student takes on both sides of sustaining his ideas and disproving his peers’ positions, thus generating and making use of critical thought. At the end of a set time, the starting question is posed again and students will have to provide their answers once again. It has been statistically reported that after discussing their opinions with their group members, a larger number of students will provide the right answer, as the students who answered correctly the first time have been more effective in convincing their group members. At the end of the activity, the teacher will then provide an explanation aimed at those students who still have not understood, clarifying what exactly leads them towards misunderstanding. At the end of this cycle, another question can be posed and the entire lesson can be conducted with this methodology, considering that a cycle can last from 10 to 20 minutes (Cecchinato, Papa, 2016, pp. 116-123).

9 – Flipped Classroom, Constructivism and Cooperative Learning

The major change introduced by the flipped classroom is the inversion of the cyclic structure lecture in class – homework/self-study at home – test, by turning away from direct teaching to embrace the principles of constructivism, with the aim of turning students from passive listeners into active and self-conscious learners (Cecchinato, Papa, 2016, pp. 31).
9.1 What is Constructivism

Constructivism is a philosophical theory that regards knowledge acquisition as a subjective process in which the individual’s personal experiences shape and structure the knowledge as he connects them to his already acquired body of information. These connections that the individual makes in order to link previous knowledge to new experiences, add up to his already existing knowledge base and restructure it.

In this light, constructivism considers knowledge as follows:
- people do not discover knowledge but they create it by relating or connecting it to their previous knowledge;
- learning takes place by actively restructuring one’s way of thinking, also by using personal experience and social interaction to create meaning;
- cognitive growth is stimulated when people are confronted with problems that require them to change their way of thinking (Pelech, Pieper, 2010, p.8).

According to these assumptions, knowledge cannot simply be transferred from one person to the other but must be constructed individually through the process of trying to give meaning and sense to new information starting from what the individual already knows (King, 1993, p.30).

Under the term constructivism can be found a large number of views that seem all agreeing on the fact that:
- learning occurs through a process of construction rather than acquisition;
- instruction is the process through which the construction of knowledge can be supported rather than communicated (Duffy, Cunningham, 1996, p. 171).

The characteristics of constructivism are also shared by three regarded learning theories: brain-based learning, multiple intelligences, differentiated learning.

- Brain-Based Learning: this theory states that the brain changes itself by connecting different storage areas. Learning happens by recognizing patterns and making the necessary connections so that the recognized patterns can travel from the working memories into the brain’s long-term storage areas. In this way, new information fits into the already existing network, and the cells contained in the brain and the nervous system connect in patterns of neural pathways. These connections make it possible for the brain to rewire itself with every new stimulation. This view of the brain parallels the constructivist notion of restructuring prior knowledge and connecting it with new experiences.
- Multiple Intelligences and Multiple Skills and Domains: refers to Gardner’s definition of intelligence as the “ability to solve problems, or to fashion products, that are valued in one or more cultural or community settings” (Gardner, 1993, p. 7). The view that contexts define intelligence, is coherent with the constructivist principle that people learn by acting in a context of solving problems.

- Differentiated Instruction: it consists of strategies through which teachers can meet the different needs of each student in a classroom, in terms of:
  - content: what is taught, the contents that need to be learned;
  - process: the designing of activities so that every student can make use of his strengths in the learning process;
  - product: the tools students use to demonstrate that their learning has taken place (Pelech, Pieper, 2010, pp. 15-17).

9.2 Constructivism and Cooperative Learning in School

Very often in schools, the teacher takes on the role of a lecturer who owns the knowledge and transfers it to the students who will have to memorize it and reproduce it during an exam. In this model, students assume a passive role that does not help them to develop skills such as critical thinking and problem solving that are among the most required in our contemporary society.

In the constructivist model instead, students actively engage in processing and reconstructing information in personally meaningful ways. By reformulating the presented information or producing new pieces of information based on the already existing ones, students help their brains to build those cognitive structures that make it possible for new ideas to connect with the already existing ones.

The flipped classroom follows the constructivist model in placing students at the centre of the learning process by using classroom time to engage them in active learning, working with the information, thinking and discussing ideas and making use of cooperative learning (King, 1993, pp. 30-31).

Cooperative learning is linked with constructivism’s tenet stating that knowledge evolves through social negotiation and the evaluation of other individuals’ understanding. In this view, the social environment and the others play a crucial role in the development of our individual understanding. In cooperative learning activities, it becomes possible for all members to test their understanding by confronting it with that of the other members, who
represent a primary source of contrasting views that challenge our own set of mind, thus stimulating new learning.

In cooperative learning, students work together in a small group with the aim of accomplishing a common goal, under conditions of interdependence and both individual and group accountability. The essence of a group is thus its interdependence that can be positive when all individuals interact by encouraging and facilitating each member’s effort to learn thus leading to cooperation, or negative when individuals discourage and distrust each other’s efforts thus producing competition. Studies have shown that when such interdependence is positive and leads to cooperation, higher academic goals can be achieved than in conditions of competitiveness (Savery, 1995, pp. 32-36).

9.3 The Changing Role of the Teacher

As the focus is moved from the teacher to the students, the role of the teacher becomes that of a guide, a facilitator, that helps students to get involved with the materials that are presented in ways so that students can do something with the information, interact with it, manipulate it and relate their previous knowledge to it, instead of passively receiving it and memorizing it. All this entails a shift in roles for teachers from the ones who own the knowledge and do the talking, towards the role of facilitators who supervise the context, provide resources and materials, and pose questions to stimulate students along their learning journey (King, 1993, pp. 30-31).

This is especially true, considering the learning of foreign languages. In this way, it is possible for the teacher to assume the sought–after role of Language Acquisition Support System hypothesized by Bruner, and to help students transforming their mental competence into communicative competence (See Chap. 1, Par. 4).
CHAPTER 3

The Flipped Foreign Language Classroom

Introduction

The flipped classroom methodology explored in the previous chapter can be applied to a wide range of school subjects, including foreign languages.

In the flipped classroom, teacher’s lectures are moved outside classroom time and delivered by mean of videos (or other digital learning tools), which students watch as homework before coming to class. This shift enables teachers to make better use of class time, allowing students to conduct activities in groups or pairs or setting aside some time to support those struggling students who need more individualized attention (Bergmann, Sams, Gudenrath, 2015, p. xii).

Several studies on the use of the flipped classroom methodology in the teaching of foreign languages have reported the great potential of this instructional practice in terms of benefits for both teachers and students. Classroom time can be used for more learner-centered activities such as discussing concepts, problem-solving, hands-on activities, thus making the teaching practice consistent with active learning and constructivist approaches.

Furthermore, turning the classroom into a student-centered environment allows the teacher to take on the sought-after role of facilitator of the learning processes, thus guiding students in the construction of their own learning rather than passively acquiring information (Basal, 2015, pp. 28-29).

1 - The Communicative Language Approach

The communicative language teaching approach has its origins in a shift in the idea of language learning, brought about in 1962 by Austin, with the publication of his book “How to do things with words”. The publication of this book entailed a change in the idea of what exactly meant knowing a language, which up to that time had been considered in terms of “knowledge about the language”, that is, knowledge about its elements and grammar rules. With the publication of the book, the concept of knowing a language shifts towards the idea of “knowing how to do things with language”, in terms of being able to use the language to pursue communicative aims.
This idea will be assumed in 1967 by the Modern Language Project of the European Council, and used for the development of its threshold levels ranging from A1 to C2 including lists of language functions such as thanking, asking/telling the age etc., that increase in complexity accordingly with the threshold level in which they are inserted.

Ten years after, Hymes put forward the notion of “communicative competence” thus starting a sort of revolution in the field of foreign language teaching. At its basis is the idea of the social and pragmatic nature of the language:  
- the language has a social nature in the sense that it is used to communicate in social contexts, and it changes depending on the communicative context in which the speaker finds himself;  
- the language has a pragmatic nature in the sense that it is used by the speaker to achieve a communicative aim (Balboni, 2014, pp. 32-34).

1.1 Communicative Competence

In the light of the previous considerations, the knowledge of a language resides in the communicative competence of the speaker, which is composed of five sub-levels:  
- linguistic level: which includes abilities regarding the phonological, morpho-syntactic, lexical-semantic and orthographic sub-levels, and the four language abilities of reading, writing, listening and speaking;  
- textual level: the ability to elaborate text and discourse;  
- pragmatic level: the ability to use the language in socio-cultural contexts;  
- extra-linguistic level: the ability to use non-verbal communication;  
- strategic: the ability to use strategies in the elaboration of input and production of output and to face communicative problems.

The learner of a foreign language needs to be able to move efficiently within these dimensions, mastering a competence in the use of the language (procedural competence) and a competence related to the use of the elements of which the language is composed (declarative competence) (Coonan, 2015, pp. 65-66).

As already mentioned in chapter 1, the communicative competence is composed of the just mentioned competencies that reside in the learner’s brain. Such knowledge of the language and on the language is transformed into communicative actions when the language is used in communicative events that take place in social contexts, in which the language is used to reach a communicative aim (Balboni, 2014, pp. 86-87).
2 – The Human Brain in the Learning of a Language

Every human being is provided with a genetic mechanism residing in the brain, that makes it possible to acquire verbal language, called LAD – Language Acquisition Device. Such device is triggered by the presence of language in the environment, and its functioning follows a 5 steps’ path that can thus be summarized:

a. observation of the language input provided by the environment or by the language teacher;

b. creation of hypothesis on the functioning of the observed language elements;

c. testing of the hypothesis by mean of their confirmation or correction from the speaker or the language teacher;

d. fixing of the hypothesized and verified mechanisms;

e. creation of rules based on the observed mechanisms.

These steps are followed by the brain at an unconscious level with regard to the acquisition of the mother tongue, whilst they are followed more consciously and helped by the teacher when learning a foreign language (Balboni, 2013, p. 68).

2.1 The Teacher as LASS

With regard to foreign language learning, the LAD – Language Acquisition Device needs the help of a LASS – Language Acquisition Support System, which is embodied by the language teacher, whose role should be that of following the Gestalt sequence (global perception – analysis – synthesis) to guide the learner of the foreign language through the first three steps of activation of the LAD. More specifically, given a language input the teacher should:

- direct the learner’s attention towards some relevant aspects of such input;
- ask the learners to make hypotheses on the functioning of the observed language elements;
- guide the learners in testing the veracity of their hypotheses (Balboni, 2013, pp. 68-69).
2.2 The Teacher as a Facilitator

In this context, the teacher takes on the role of a facilitator that helps students to reflect on the language rather than teaching its rules in a direct way. Nowadays, with the development of technological tools, the teacher is no longer the sole provider of the language input that students can easily find in their textbooks’ audio materials or on the web but rather works as a facilitator, helping students to relate to such input with the aim of building a communicative competence. In order to do so, the teacher should interact and communicate with the students during the lessons. However, the percentage of lesson time in which the teacher talks, defined as TTT - Teacher’s Talking Time - should not overcome the amount of time in which the students talk and produce language, as that would be detrimental to the learner’s performance (Balboni, 2014, pp. 69-70).

3– The Learner-Centered Flipped Classroom

As already explored in detail in the previous chapter of this work, the flipped classroom overturns the traditional structure characterized by explanation in classroom – homework/self-study at home, by inverting the settings in which these two activities take place (Bergmann, Sams, 2012, p. 13).

However, the flipped classroom does not only entail replacing lectures with video lectures and having students do their homework in class. Having students watch pre-recorded lessons at home serves the wider purpose of freeing useful class time that can be thus used for more engaging activities, discussing concepts and clarifying difficult points, problem-solving and hands-on activities, thus transforming the classroom into an active learning place, in which students can make use of higher-order thinking skills. Furthermore, as the teacher is freed from the duty of lecturing, he can employ the lesson time to walk around the desks and talk with the students thus providing personalized and differentiated learning (Basal, 2015, pp. 28-29).

In this way, the classroom can be changed from a teacher centered to a student-centered one, in which students come to class more prepared, and ask more questions, so that instructional time is spent on students’ needs, doing supplementary work or questioning and answering (Sung, 2015, pp. 162-163).
3.1 The Learner-Centered Language Classroom

Research on foreign and second language teaching methodologies based on the communicative approach has shown how a shift from a teacher-centered class to a learner-centered one can be beneficial in creating an environment favourable to language learning. The communicative approach is more learner-centered in several aspects of classroom instruction:
- the curriculum is developed by taking the learner’s needs as a starting point;
- the learner is engaged in communicative activities;
- the teacher assumes the role of a facilitator in the communication process.

By moving lectures out of the classroom, the flipped classroom frees up useful class time that can be used by the teacher to engage the students in activities that promote the students’ active mental participation in the negotiation of meaning, language forms, and rules. Such active engagement is crucial to language (foreign or L2) acquisition, since, according to Krashen’s comprehensible input hypothesis, language acquisition is triggered by input that is comprehensible to the learner. Since cognitive development, which is at the base of learning, originates in a social context all these activities create opportunities for increased interaction between learners and between teacher and learners, thus providing chances for using higher psychological functions, which originate in the interaction between individuals.

However, comprehensible input alone is not enough to produce acquisition, which is also triggered by output. Output production, in fact, plays a role in raising the learner’s consciousness about linguistic forms, testing the learner’s hypothesis about language, and engaging him in reflection about the language he is learning. Hence the importance of interaction, that provides input, but also requires the speaker to produce output.

The flipped classroom advocates the use of pair and group work, which in the language learning field can be used for communicative activities. Linguistic production provides opportunities for negotiation of meaning and forms through communicative exchanges, which is beneficial to language learning (Antón, 1999, pp. 303-314).

4. How to Flip the Language Classroom

As advocated by EFL teacher and teacher trainer Fausto Puppo, an often complaint from teachers of English as a foreign language, is that the number of topics presented in the
textbooks and to be covered in class limits the amount of time that can be devoted to engaging students in communicative activities during language lessons. By moving some parts of the lesson out of the classroom, more time can be made available to engage students in meaningful interactions using the foreign language of study while the teacher is present and can provide feedback or help whenever needed. This becomes especially useful in maximizing students’ talk when studying a foreign language which is not spoken outside the classroom.

In addition, by flipping the classroom, teachers can reach students’ different learning styles. Recording a lesson and integrating it with text, images, audios, makes it more interactive and suitable for different learning styles. Visual learners can be provided with the words both in written form and as images, auditory learners can listen to the voice explaining concepts or speaking the language, and so on. Another benefit resides in the fact that videos can be played, paused and repeated as many times as necessary, something which is not possible in the classroom setting (Puppo, 2014).

4.1 Review of Studies on Flipping the Foreign Language Class

In this section, I am going to provide an overview of how foreign language teachers across many countries have applied the Flipped Classroom to their foreign language classes.

4.1.1 Flipping Foreign Language Writing

M. A. E. A. S. Ahmed (2016) explored the effect of a flipped classroom on a group of students’ writing skills in English as a foreign language and their attitude towards flipping. The author used a sample of 60 students from Qassim University in Saudi Arabia, divided into 2 groups, experimental and control, of 30 students each.

Given the large body of research considering writing as one of the most difficult language skills to master, the author tries to overcome these difficulties by using the flipped classroom methodology, also with the aim of making learning more student-centered.

The study aimed at (1) measuring the effect of flipping the classroom on the students’ writing skills in EFL, and (2) measuring students’ attitude towards flipping. In order to compare instructional results, students in both groups were administered an EFL writing
pre-test at the beginning of the course. Additionally, the experimental group was administered a questionnaire to assess students’ attitude towards flipping and whether the flipped methodology can be helpful in improving writing skills or not. The same questionnaire was administered before the experiment, and at the end of the course. Throughout the course, students had to watch a total of 15 videos, each one paired with recommended online activities and further reading and practice. In-class lessons were employed for writing practice and tasks were designed with the aim of allowing more independent learning practice to students in the experimental group. Students were told to consider the videos as their homework and come to class with the information required to tackle in-class writing practice tasks. Students in the control group received traditional instruction in class but were presented with the same tasks, except that the responses were completed as homework. At the end of the experiment, the same post EFL writing test was administered to both groups. Results showed:
- a significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental group (X1=20) and the control group (X2=11.3) in the post-test in all sub-skills of writing (ideas and content, organization, style, voice) in favour of the experimental group.

The experimental group outperformed the control group, and the authors attributed such result to the use of the flipped classroom methodology. Concerning students’ perception, flipped learning received the most positive remarks in the qualitative surveys, especially with relation to the use of class time (Ahmed, 2016, pp. 98-114).

Hambalee Jehman (2016) applied the flipped classroom to the teaching of English as a foreign language in a freshman course at the University of Thammasat, Thailand. Participants were twenty students of English II and the aim of the study was that of investigating how the flipped classroom learning approach influenced Thai EFL learners’ beliefs and developments in their English writing skills. At the beginning of the course, students were asked to write a paragraph related to a topic assigned as homework, a task they had to complete without any instructional materials. During the course, students were asked to interact with the study materials and videos uploaded on the course’s learning platform and were required continuous practicing during the semester. At the end of the course students were asked to:
- complete a final exam which included an essay;
- complete a course evaluation satisfaction survey provided by the university.

Data collected from the evaluation survey showed that learners were extremely satisfied with the course, and had graded the nine entries of the evaluation rubric (related to
teaching techniques, students’ support from the teacher, learning activities and learning environment) with percentages almost all above 90%.

The writing assignment was scored using a rubric composed of 4 categories (organization, accuracy of facts, spelling, and punctuation, focus on the assigned topic). Results showed improvements in all the categories:
- 12% improvement in terms of organization;
- 6% improvement in terms of accuracy of facts;
- 14% improvement in terms of spelling;
- 11% improvement in terms of focus on the assigned topic.

In conclusion, the flipped classroom approach helped students to improve their mastery of their EFL skills, and especially their writing skills (Jehman, 2016, pp. 54-65).

4.1.2 Flipping Foreign Language Content-Based Class

Kiwan Sung (2015) looked into a flipped English content-based class, with the aim of examining students’ perceptions on the advantages and disadvantages of flipped learning. The participants were 12 university students enrolled in an “English Curriculum and Evaluation” course at Kyung Hee University (South Korea) with the aim of becoming English teachers in the future.

Each week, before coming to class, students were required to:
- read assigned readings and view videos on course topics;
- use the learning management system (LMS) to engage in discussion or team activities based on course contents;
- upload Thought Papers (TPs) on important concepts or issues after reviewing the following week’s readings or study materials in advance.

During each class, TPs were shared in the group, then each student was given his TP with the instructor’s feedback. Papers were used by the instructor to comment on some issues or contents found in them or used as the topics of in-class activities conducted in pairs or groups.

After classes, students were asked to:
- revise their TPs based on the instructor’s and their peers’ feedbacks and upload them in the LMS;
- review the Power Point Presentation used in class by the instructor to explain key concepts or important points related to the course materials;
- write weekly entries regarding their reflections about the process of content learning during in-class lessons.

At the end of the course students were administered a formal course evaluation test required by the University, and an informal survey in order to gain a deeper insight on what students liked or disliked about the course.

According to the results of the official evaluation, students rated the course very high (97.17 out of 100 points). Students listed as strengths the following entries:
- sufficient individual feedback from the instructor that helped understanding difficult points;
- many opportunities to discuss course contents and communicate with the instructor;
- activities based on the content learned that helped to retain concepts.

Only 2 aspects were listed as weaknesses. They were: too many assignments and the low definition of the classroom projector screen.

The internal course evaluation showed that:
- students appreciated the use of the LMS;
- students valued the course materials uploaded in the LMS as useful and relevant;

With regards to students’ reflections, many commented that increased interaction with their peers and instructor, and reading course materials in advance helped them to enhance their learning and thinking abilities, learn how to organize their thinking and analyse concepts from a critical perspective.

Students’ only concern with the flipped modality was the excessive amount of assignments required by the course (Kiwan, 2015, pp. 159-187).

4.1.3 Flipping the Classroom for Learner Autonomy and Performance

Yu Jung Han (2015) conducted a study on a flipped classroom model for an adult community English language program in the United States in order to assess the feasibility of applying the flipped model to second language learning and to observe the impact on the students’ learning autonomy.

Participants were 14 adults from nine countries, with varying backgrounds and varying English proficiency levels, enrolled in a five-week English as a second language intensive course at a private graduate institution located in the US’s East Coast. Given the short duration of the course, its primary aim was that of training students to become autonomous language learners, rather than producing dramatic language improvements.
Course materials were uploaded on a learning platform and were aimed at helping students to familiarize with different methods and tools they could use to obtain meaningful language input. Materials were authentic multimedia language inputs, contextualized with the course book’s topics, in order to provide students with repetitive and contextualized linguistic items.

In-class sessions were characterized by cooperative activities in which students were required to use what they had learned from the study materials uploaded on the learning platform. On some occasions, students studied grammar rules from YouTube video tutorials and gave each other lessons on the studied topics. At the end of every textbook unit, students were required to produce an oral presentation on a topic using Google Voice.

At the end of the course, students were administered a summative assessment and were required to work on a final project consisting of a 20-minutes oral presentation.

Indications of the learners’ fostered autonomy came from:
- the students’ Google Voice submissions, as more than half of the students provided more than the number of submissions requested;
- the students’ final project for which they actively searched for authentic and easily accessible technological tools thus demonstrating the development of their learning autonomy, and enhanced language abilities (Han, 2015, pp. 98-109).

Hsiu–Ting Hung (2015) attempted to integrate flip teaching into language classes by using a WebQuest active learning strategy with the aim of examining the possible impacts of this strategy on the students’ academic performance, learning attitudes and participation.

Participants were 75 first year English majors between 18-19 years, with an intermediate level of English, enrolled in a six-week communicative English course at the University of Taiwan.

The flipped classroom approach was applied in three different formats:
- structured units of flip lessons in the form of WebQuests (experimental group 1);
- semi-structured units of flip lessons with the use of the video-sharing platform TED-Ed (experimental group 2);
- non-flip lessons with task-based learning activities in class and homework to be completed in a traditional manner. Study materials’ contents were identical to those provided to the other groups but were presented in print format (control group).

During each lesson (total 3 lessons per week) students in each group were required to:
- explore useful English learning websites and online materials;
- watch video clips as discussion prompts and share their ideas and opinions with their peers;
- work collaboratively with their peers to complete a communicative task in written or oral form.

Lessons were developed into three different formats based on the instructional conditions of each group:
- experimental group 1: in and out of class learning materials were made available before each class, and students were required to watch some videos and complete comprehension questions before coming to class. Class time was used to discuss study materials, and to conduct activities in pairs while the teacher assisted the students when needed;
- experimental group 2: only out of class learning materials were made available in an electronic format before class, while worksheets were provided in a print format. Class activities were identical to those in experimental group 1;
- control group: in and out-of-class learning materials were presented in print format and delivered during in-class activities. Class time was used to work on listening and speaking activities and students were required to compose a story based on in-class activities as their homework.

Data was collected by mean of:
- lesson assessments: completed by the students at the end of each lesson’s cycle (2 weeks) which tested vocabulary, videos comprehension, oral or writing performance. Students completed a total of 3 assessments during the 7 weeks of course;
- students’ study logs: designed to guide students to self-monitoring their learning assessing how much time they spent on videos and study materials out of class, and the amount of vocabulary learned during lessons;
- learning experience questionnaires: a 26 items questionnaire on the distinction between deep and surface learning, and on students’ learning satisfaction, which was administered at the end of the course;
- semi-structured interviews: conducted on 18 participants, with the aim of eliciting students’ perceptions on the flipped classroom experience.

Regarding the students’ performance, significant differences were found in the scores of assessments no. 2 and no. 3 among the three groups. Results of assessment no. 2 in Experimental group 1 were higher than in the other two groups. Results of assessment
no. 3 were higher in Experimental group 1 and did not differentiate much between the other two groups. Results seem to indicate that the structured flipped classroom (experimental group 1) facilitated and improved students’ learning.

Regarding the students’ perception and attitude towards flip teaching, the flipped classroom had a significant effect on students’ perceived learning engagement as participants were more engaged in out of class study and more active during in-class sessions when compared to the control group. Furthermore structured and semi-structured flipped classrooms both showed high levels of satisfaction related to the flipped learning experiences, compared to the control group.

Lastly, with regard to students’ participation levels, they were higher in the structured flipped classroom than in the semi-structured one.

In conclusion, the author states that the flipped classroom led to positive results on the students’ participation, satisfaction and performance (Hung, 2015, pp. 81-96).

Evseeva and Solozhenko (2015) tried to evaluate the effect of the use of technology in the flipped classroom in the process of teaching and learning English language at a technical university. The objectives of the research were:
- evaluating the efficiency of the flipped classroom in teaching and learning the English language;
- considering what advantages the flipped classroom could provide.

Participants were second-year students enrolled in an English language course at the Institute of Power Engineering at Tomsk Polytechnic University, Russia.

The course was delivered in a blended modality, where face-to-face lessons represented 50% of the course, while the other 50% was replaced by activities on a Learning Management System (LMS). Before attending in-class lessons students were required to watch video lectures on the lesson’s topics, study additional on-line resources uploaded on the LMS, and contribute to discussions on the LMS forum. Classroom time was used to clarify any difficult grammatical or lexical aspect. After classes students were required to complete some activities on the LMS such as: assess their peers’ work, take tests based on the learning materials to verify their understanding and share their opinions on the lesson.

In order to find out students’ opinions on the use of technology in the flipped classroom, students were administered a survey. Results showed that:
- 85% of the students liked the idea of integrating flipped classroom technology into the language learning course;
- the remaining 15% expressed dissatisfaction because of some issues they faced such as problems with internet access, lack of time for carrying out the online tasks, difficulty in self-organizing their work;
- 98% of the students expressed availability of the learning materials as one of the major advantages of the course;
- 75% of the students indicated appreciation towards collaboration and communication on the LMS.

Teachers listed as benefits of this learning approach the flexibility in the timetable, the greater involvement of students in the learning process and increased academic performance.

The authors concluded that despite some technical and organizational issues, the flipped classroom led to an improvement in the students’ academic performance (Evseeva, Solozhenko, 2015, pp. 205-209).

4.1.4 Flipping the Learning of Foreign Language Lexical and Idioms

Hsieh, Wen-Chi, and Marek (2016) explored the benefits of the flipped classroom for EFL learners by using Wen’s output-input model. Such model states that the need for output pushes learners to search for input, which in turn enables learners to produce output. The model was used by the authors to design an oral training course which included online written and verbal communication, with the aim of enhancing learners’ motivation, engagement and ability to use idiomatic English.

Participants were 48 sophomore English majors between the ages of 19 and 20, divided into two classes: class A experienced conventional lecture-based instruction for the first eight weeks of the course and then shifted to the flipped classroom, while class B experienced the flipped classroom instruction during the first eight weeks and then shifted to traditional lectures.

The aims of the study were those of:
- observing any differences in the participants’ learning outcomes between the two classes;
- obtaining information on how the participants perceived the flipped classroom learning experience and the learning platform selected for this instructional method (LINE smartphone app).
In the flipped classroom students were randomly assigned to LINE groups. Before coming to classes they were required to read the assigned book’s chapters, watch the assigned instructional video presentations, develop a short story employing the idioms covered in the book and video and upload it in form of an oral recording on the LINE group and discuss it with the group’s members. In-class time was used to engage students in collaborative activities with the aim of strengthening their knowledge of the studied idioms.

Conventional class meetings were characterized by the instructor’s explanation of idioms, reading of the chapters’ contents, and engagement of students in collaborative activities.

Data was gathered by mean of:
- pre and post tests of English idioms;
- two questionnaires;
- semi-structured focus group interviews;
- in-class observation by the instructor.

With regards to differences in the learning outcomes, comparison of the results of pre and post test in conventional and flipped instruction, showed that post-test's mean score was higher for the flipped instruction group B. Results indicate that in the flipped instruction class students learned idioms more effectively.

With regards to the students’ perception of the flipped instruction towards motivation, effectiveness, engagement, and satisfaction, results showed high levels of satisfaction with the incorporation of the LINE app in the course as it provided a realistic and stimulating English learning environment. Students stated that flipped instruction led to more participation and mentioned working with partners and immediate feedbacks as ways to enhance absorption of knowledge.

The results of the study revealed how flipped instruction motivated the participants, enhanced their idiomatic knowledge and oral ability, and engaged them actively in the learning tasks (Hsieh, Wen-Chi, Marek, 2016, pp. 1-25).

Nick Fallows (2013) explored the use of spaced repetition with the aim of pre-teaching the vocabulary to be used in a flipped classroom.

Participants were female students enrolled in Level 03 class at Dubai’s Women College. Spaced repetition is a vocabulary learning technique introduced in the college in 2012-2013 academic year. In order to flip the classroom, English teachers created video
modules to teach 10-11 words each. Students had to watch a total of three video modules every week before attending classes, in order to learn the relevant vocabulary. Videos were created using the e-learning software Articulate Storyline. Each word was presented within a 30 second to one-minute time frame in which the word was explained, inserted in a sentence to contextualize it, and translated into Arabic. For each of the target words, four cards were created, at the bottom of which students were given three choices as to when they wanted to see the card again:
- red button: if they don’t know the answer. The card was brought back after a minute;
- green button: if the student made a mistake, but was close. The card was brought back in 10 minutes;
- black button: the card was brought back in four days.
Students were required to watch the videos and complete the relative questions before attending lessons. On their first lesson of the week students would be administered a quiz to test their knowledge of the words and during classes throughout the week, they would engage in different activities aimed at consolidating and extending their knowledge of the already studied words.
At the end of the course, the teacher reported that the use of the flipped model allowed him more time for vocabulary development and reading, and reported that students’ response to the videos and the spaced repetition software was very positive (Fallows, 2013, pp. 35-39).

4.1.5 Assessing the Benefits Gained From Flipping the Classroom

Bauer-Ramazani, Graney, Marshall, and Sabieth (2016) explored the application of a flipped learning project in an intensive English program in order to consider its benefits and challenges for TESOL educators (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages).
Flipped learning was incorporated into a high-intermediate level intensive English program at Saint Michael’s College in Vermont, USA. The course contained elements of blended, mobile and project-based learning. Students were required to access contents outside of class and then interact with their peers and instructors, thus combining face-to-face learning and working in a blended mode. As their final assignment, students were required to produce a 3-minute video project that would be uploaded on YouTube, in which students in pairs interviewed experts in particular
fields. Videos were then watched in class, and the best were voted using the mobile app Polleverywhere.

Among the benefits of the use of this flipped modality, teachers expressed more free time in the classroom for them to observe, give feedbacks and assessments. Benefits stated by students included ownership of their own learning, immediate feedback, and support from the instructor, application of the out-of-class content in communicative activities during in-class lessons.

Challenges were found in increased time to set up adequate technology support, finding online resources for developing language and assessment activities and designing tasks for critical thinking (Bauer-Ramazani, Graney, Marshall, Sabieh, 2016, pp. 429-437).

Ahmet Basal (2015) focused on the perceptions of future English teachers, and on how to implement the flipped classroom into an English language classroom. Participants were 35 pre-service teachers enrolled in the first year of the Advanced Reading and Writing I-II at the state University of Istanbul, Turkey. At the end of the course, students were asked to answer the question: “What are the benefits of using video lecture in Advanced Reading and Writing II?”. The question was intentionally stated in this form since students were not given any information about the flipped learning model.

Students’ answers expressed:
- more personalization created with video lectures as they could be re-watched as many times as needed and allowed students to progress through the materials at their own speed;
- in-advance students’ preparation allowed for increased participation thus improving understanding of the contents;
- decreased physical limitations of the classroom by providing out-of-classroom learning chances;
- a variety of learning activities that could address the needs of all learners and suit different learning styles.

In conclusion, the study showed how the flipped classroom can bring several advantages to ELT teachers. However, the author states how the key to successful use of technology in language teaching resides in teachers’ human capacity of planning, designing, and implementing educational activities (Basal, 2015, pp. 28-37).
5 – Flipping the English Language Arts Classroom

In the field of English Language Arts, Bergmann and Sams, together with April Gudenrath provided an overview of how teachers flipped their English language arts lessons in terms of Reading, Writing, Grammar, and Vocabulary.

5.1 Flipping Reading

Matt Bowers flipped his class on the identification of a story’s protagonist and antagonist by producing a video where he defines the two terms and reads a simple story in which the two roles are easily identifiable. During class time students were engaged in reading another story aloud, find out the two characters and explain how they reached their conclusions.

Kate Baker flipped her class on Romeo and Juliet. She had students listen to passages of the book on the audiobook recordings website librivox.org in class, while simultaneously reading it on the website curriculet.com, on which she had also uploaded instructional materials. Students could thus work at their pace during class time and complete the remaining tasks as homework. The students’ reports on Curriculet were reviewed by the teacher, and any issues were discussed during next day’s class, during which the teacher had the time to work individually with struggling students while the others engaged in the day’s activities.

Since the greatest part of information students will have to process in the world is nonfiction, April Gudenrath paired fictional texts with pieces of nonfiction. In her flipped unit on Athol Fugard, she shared a video and an online article on South Africa’s current issues, so that students could understand the importance of reading such literature piece even if residing in another continent.

Danesa Menge flipped her poetry reading class by assigning students video-homework explaining terms such as alliteration, simile, metaphor, etc. that would be used in class. During class time she showed them some pop music videos featuring the elements explained in the video and that students had to find in the songs’ lyrics (Bergmann, Sams, Gudenrath, 2015, pp. 49-56).
5.2 Flipping Writing

Actual writing is often assigned as homework, and little time is spent in class on practicing with the help of the teacher or collaborating with peers.

Jen Ward used the Pennsylvania National Writing Project mentor texts to flip her writing class. She assigned them to the students as “article of the week”, so that they could focus on specific elements. At times, she had students doing a literary analysis of a New York Times article, in order to analyse how journalists talked about real world events.

In order to give her students a feedback on their individual writing assignments, April Gudenrath used a screencasting software to record her computer screen while a student’s paper was displayed. During the recording, she manipulated the text while explaining the reasons for her edits. In order to get students to think she had them write down a reflection on the provided feedback saying how they would incorporate the suggestions in their next revision.

Natalie Stotz, an English teacher in a high school in Maine asked students to complete pre-writing assignments or rough drafts as homework thus using class time to edit students’ pieces of writing in order to provide them immediate feedback.

Kate Baker engaged groups of students in peer editing each other’s work. In-class students composed their writings on Google docs and posted them in a group on the LMS Edmodo, where other students provided feedback on the uploaded materials, and where students could ask for help with any specific issues they were struggling with (Bergmann, Sams, Gudenrath, 2015, pp. 57-64).

5.3 Flipping grammar and vocabulary

Beth Oing, a high school English teacher flipped a unit on Shakespeare by assigning students grammar work on topics such as parallelism, clauses, and phrases using NoRedInk (www.noredink.com), in order for students to fully understand Shakespeare’s sentence manipulations. The teacher also had students using Quest-Based Learning by completing quests on 3D Game Lab (www.3dgelab.com) to unlock new levels as they progressed in their learning.

Travis Phelps, an eighth grade English teacher, created videos to teach grammar concepts and had students write a summary of what they had learned together with
questions on the topics. In class, he engaged students in identifying grammatical errors by using Google Forms.

Domingo Chica, an English and Spanish secondary school teacher gave his students a video on grammatical elements to be watched at home as homework, and used class time to engage students in the completion of exercises in groups of four or five, and practicing what they had learned from the video.

Danesa Menge introduced grammatical concepts using a five-minute video. In class, she engaged students in scanning Twitter celebrities’ accounts looking for incorrect tweets. When students found some mistake, they could reply to the tweet by correcting its grammar.

Natalie Stotz used the software Membean (membean.com) to build a vocabulary list and provide each student a personalized learning plan. The site consists in a webpage for each vocabulary item showing its etymology, the word in context etc., after advancing through a certain number of words, the website provide students a quiz to demonstrate their understanding of words (Bergmann, Sams, Gudenrath, 2015, pp. 65-70).

6 - Flipping the Classroom for Struggling Students

As already mentioned in Chapter 2, by flipping the classroom it is possible to provide asynchronous direct instruction, thus effectively introducing a differentiation that can be beneficial to students who are struggling or are affected by learning disabilities, in inclusive settings.

In this way, attention is redirected from the teacher to the learner and the learning, allowing for increased collaboration between students, between teachers and students, and for immediate feedback on the learning tasks, with the teacher assuming the role of a learning coach. Students who are struggling can thus get the help they need, as the teacher is freed from the duty of lecturing and can spend part of class time working with them individually or in small groups.

The use of videos for the delivery of contents has been reported to be beneficial to all students, and especially to those facing difficulties, as it allows students to absorb information at their own pace. Quick learners can watch the video once and engage into more challenging activities while struggling students can watch the video as many times as needed in order to grasp all important contents thus being freed from the need of taking notes during class time in the attempt of recording what the teacher is saying.
Additionally, as informal assessments can be carried continually, students can have an immediate feedback on their learning (Lindquist, Altemueller, 2014 pp. 520-521). Furthermore, according to Lage, Platt, and Treglia, a discrepancy between a teacher’s teaching style and a student’s learning style can cause students to learn less and be less involved in the subject matter. In order to reach the majority of their students’ learning styles, instructors should include in their course a variety of teaching styles as to match students’ learning types. Unfortunately, instructors’ chances to differentiate their teaching styles is often limited by time constraints, thus making it difficult to conduct lectures for students who learn best via lecturing, conduct experiments for more practical learners, assign group activities for the collaborative and cooperative students, and oversee self-study for independent learners. However, both the increased students’ access to multimedia and the advances in ease of technology use have created multiple chances to address the broad range of learning styles. The flipped classroom, by making use of learning technologies, provide students options for their learning, thus allowing students to choose the best way to reach the set outcome (Lage, Platt, Treglia, 2000, pp. 30-43).

In the flipped classroom approach, content delivery is moved to the individual learning space, and classroom lessons become an interactive learning environment in which the teacher takes on the role of a guide that supports students while they apply concepts and engage with contents. This shift makes it possible for teachers to maximize the value of in-class time, enabling them to incorporate aspects of personalized learning into their classes by spending more time with their students teaching and talking to them, instead of using the time to deliver information. In this model is thus possible to support a personalized instruction, based on flexibility towards each student’s different learning needs, strengths, and preferences, making it also possible to focus on metacognitive, social, and emotional competencies. More specifically, by modifying how class time is spent, the flipped classroom can support personalization in:

- the pace of content delivery: as this instructional phase is moved out of the classroom and contents are delivered by mean of learning technological tools, the explanations’ pace can be adjusted according to each student’s needs, as the content is always available to be paused and reviewed;

- as class time is now free for individualized work, teacher’s expertise can be better used to assess students current skills and level of knowledge of the course topics with the aim
of selecting appropriate practice opportunities targeted to reinforce or support students’ weaknesses emerged from that assessment;

- students are provided with increased opportunities to actively engage with content during classes, and increased class time may also offer opportunities for teachers to work on skills such as critical thinking, communication, and collaboration.

Flipping the classroom can thus have a role in supporting a more student-centered learning, helping to enable individualized, differentiated, and personalized instruction.

Additional benefits have been observed in:

- as the teacher guides students while they are applying what they have learned, all students have greater opportunities to be actively involved during class, and especially struggling students will be more likely to receive the most teacher attention;

- students can obtain immediate feedback on their work as it is evaluated in class. Teachers can thus check understanding, gain insights on students’ difficulties and misconceptions and recommend additional resources to overcome the obstacles;

- teachers can obtain immediate feedback on how well their explanations were understood by the students and elaborate or modify their instruction on the base of such feedback. This two-way feedback for both students and teachers can have a powerful effect on learning.

- as class time is focused on student work, there are increased opportunities for interaction and collaboration within students, so that students who understood the content can help their struggling peers.

Furthermore, the flipped classroom can help in creating a more equitable learning environment by granting all students equal access to quality educational experiences. Through differentiated instruction, increased time spent individually with students provides chances for struggling learners who are at risk of falling behind in traditional classes (Bergmann & Sams, 2014, pp. 55-64).
CHAPTER 4
Methodology of the Research

1 - Aims of the research

The aim of the study was to carry out a qualitative study based on the practices of the action-research scientific community and apply it to the field of foreign language learning and teaching. More specifically, the study had the purpose of applying the Flipped Classroom instructional methodology to the teaching and learning of English as a foreign language in an Italian high-school context in order to:
- gain insights on the participants’ feelings and perceptions related to the implementation of the teaching methodology;
- gain insights on struggling students’ feelings and perceptions related to the implementation of the teaching methodology;
- identify any difficulties or problems related to the use of such teaching methodology in the high-school classrooms object of enquiry;
- draw conclusions related to the implementation of the methodology in the different classrooms’ contexts, comparing struggling students’ perceptions with those of their non-struggling peers in order to assess whether such instructional practice can represent a way of helping students facing difficulties in the foreign language classroom.

As the main objective of the study was to experiment the “Flipped Classroom” in the classrooms object of the research, the findings of the research are not meant to be generalized, due to the small sample size. However, they can represent a starting point for future research on a larger scale.

2 - Description of Participants

The Flipped Classroom was applied in three classrooms of an Italian high school. More specifically, the classrooms object of the study were:
- two classrooms (A and B) of the third year of a vocational study course in the “Agriculture, Rural Development, and Livestock” field;
- one classroom of the second year of a vocational study course in the “Social and Health Care Services” field.
Classroom A was composed of 13 students, 5 of which composed the sub-group identified in the study as “struggling students”. Description of each of these students’ specific difficulties is reported below:

- two students are defined “Obiettivi minimi” as stated by the Italian law 104/92 (legge 5 Febbraio 1992, n° 104). They both have been reported to have limited cognitive abilities and one of them has a certificate of dyslexia. Nevertheless, they are included in the mainstream classroom and follow the national curriculum, also with the support of a special needs teacher and are assessed for simplified learning goals set by each subject’s teacher at the beginning of the school year;

- one student is affected by cognitive delay. He is included in the mainstream classroom and follows a differentiated learning plan, also with the support of a special needs teacher, as stated by the Italian law 170/10 (legge 8 Ottobre 2010, n° 170);

- one student is affected by a mild degree of dyslexia. She is included in the mainstream classroom, follows the national curriculum and is entitled to compensatory tools and dispensatory measures as stated by the Italian law 170/10 (legge 8 Ottobre 2010, n° 170);

- one student is an Italian language learner and presents some linguistic weaknesses due to her recent moving to Italy, she is included in the mainstream classroom and follows the national curriculum.

Classroom B was composed of 12 students, 3 of which presented difficulties of varying nature, and were therefore included in the sub-group “struggling students”. Description of each of these students’ specific difficulties is reported below:

- one student is affected by a mild cognitive delay and a mild hearing loss. He is defined “Obiettivi minimi”, is included in the mainstream classroom and follows the national curriculum, also with the support of a special needs teacher. He is assessed for simplified learning goals set by each subject’s teacher at the beginning of the school year (legge 5 Febbraio 1992, n° 104);

- one student is affected by dysorthography. He is included in the mainstream classroom, follows the national curriculum and is entitled to compensatory tools and dispensatory measures as stated by the Italian law 170/10 (legge 8 Ottobre 2010, n° 170);

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Information on students’ difficulties was taken from the students’ personal files, after being granted permission from the school’s head teacher. Permission was granted in order to gather data for the research’s purposes with the agreement of keeping data anonymous thus respecting the school and students’ privacy.
- one student is affected by a mild cognitive delay. He is included in the mainstream classroom and follows a differentiated learning plan, also with the support of a special needs teacher, as stated by the Italian law (legge 8 Ottobre 2010, n° 170);

The second year classroom was composed of 20 students. Among them only two presented certified difficulties, which are described below:

- one student is a foreigner and due to his incomplete knowledge of the language has been temporarily defined “Obiettivi minimi”. He is included in the mainstream classroom, follows the national curriculum, and is assessed for simplified learning goals set by each subject’s teacher at the beginning of the school year as stated by the Italian law 104/92 (legge 5 Febbraio 1992, n° 104);

- one student is affected by Down Syndrome, she follows a differentiated learning plan, also with the help of a support teacher, as stated by the Italian law (legge 5 Febbraio 1992, n° 104).

In the classroom, there were three other students who had been reported by the teachers as having some cognitive weaknesses such as difficulties in maintaining concentration for long periods of time, difficulties in logical reasoning skills, and poor individual study strategies. Even though such students are not certified, and therefore follow the national curriculum, they were included in the “struggling” subgroup, considering their difficulties with the study of the foreign language.

3 - Description of the Context

In the agriculture, rural development and livestock study course the English curriculum for the third year includes the study of texts about various topics related to agriculture, rural development and livestock.

For the selection of the topics from the textbook the teacher based the choice on topics the students had already studied in the other agriculture and livestock-related subjects, which included for the third year the study of different farming systems and their characteristics. This decision had the aim of facilitating students in the understanding and retrieval of the information presented by the book in English, as they had already studied the topic in their mother tongue, thus avoiding them to deal with an unknown topic in a foreign language.

The decision also derived by the widespread difficulties with the English language presented by students across the classrooms. The English Language teacher reported
that many learners and their families considered her subject marginal. In many of the school’s classrooms a lack of engagement with the subject was observed, sometimes also deriving from the families’ opinion that the study of the English language is not so useful.

3.1 3rd year - Agriculture, Rural Development and Livestock, Classroom A

From my observations, emerged that during English Language classes students were generally distracted and disinterested. Many showed a lack of motivation and engagement towards classroom activities. Many of the students did not pay attention during lessons and often talked to each other, laughed or used their phones (see Appendix A, observation of 14/02/2017).

Many needed to be reminded to actually take their books and notebooks out of their bags when the lessons started and did not take any notes during the teacher’s explanations (see Appendix A, observations of 07/04/2017 and 02/05/2017).

A widespread lexical deficiency was observed: during oral tests, many students struggled to retrieve correct terms. During written tests, many students asked the teacher for the meaning of simple words or phrases or complained about the difficulty of the exercises as they couldn’t remember the rules or terms required to complete them (see Appendix A, observation of 7/02/2017).

Many students did not complete their homework, and during homework correction, very few looked interested in correcting their mistakes or took any notes of the teacher’s explanations (see Appendix A, Observation of 21/02/2017).

Often during the lessons observed, the teacher needed to interrupt the explanation in order to rebuke distracted students, and often needed to actually tell them to open their books and notebooks and to take notes.

3.2 3rd year - Agriculture, Rural Development, and Livestock - Classroom B

During the lessons, students generally looked attentive and didn’t make much noise. Most students appeared like listening to the teacher’s explanations and the lesson usually flowed smoothly without the teacher needing to stop in order to rebuke disturbing students. Nevertheless, very few students usually took any notes and some
needed to be reminded to actually take their books and notebooks out of their bags (observation of 21/02/2017, 23/02/2017 and 27/04/2017). Homework corrections did not usually take an excessive time amount and students generally looked engaged, even though some students did not complete homework at home or did not have the book or the materials required for that day’s lesson, and many did not take any notes (see Appendix A, observation of 21/02/2017, and 27/04/2017). A widespread lexical deficiency was observed, and during tests, many students asked the teacher for the meaning of words or phrases or complained about the difficulty of the exercises as they couldn’t remember the rules required to complete them.

3.3 2nd year – Social and Health Care Services

Concerning the second year classroom of the social and health care services study course, the English language curriculum includes the study of English language grammar and vocabulary.

For the choice of the topics from the textbook, the teacher chose a learning unit which presented topics that were part of the national English language curriculum for the second year of the study course in object. The decision to include such unit in the implementation of the Flipped Classroom was taken with a dual aim:
- have students work on topics related to the national curriculum;
- allowing students to keep using a familiar tool represented by their textbook during the implementation of a new teaching methodology, that could potentially cause a sense of disorientation.

With relation to the classroom’s context, it was characterised by a generally positive disposition towards the study of the English language.

It is a vivacious classroom, and often lessons were characterised by moments of chatter and the teacher needed to remind them to be silent (22/02, 14/03). Nevertheless, most of the students were attentive, and whenever asked any question they were able to answer correctly. When provided an activity to complete in class, most of the students worked positively both individually or in pairs, and generally completed the assigned activities (8/03).

During explanations they usually looked engaged for the most part of the lesson, many took notes and some raised their hands to ask for clarifications.
4 - Data Collection

Data regarding the classrooms’ characteristics and participants was collected during a period of three months observation during the current school year, carried out during the classrooms’ English language lessons, for a total of 15 hours in each of the 3rd year classrooms, and in the 2nd year classroom.

Data was collected in a qualitative form by mean of an observation diary in which the researcher reported any observations regarding how the teachers usually structured the lessons, what kind of activities were presented to the students and what were their reactions and attitudes to the teachers’ instructional choices.

During the lessons, the researcher sat in a corner of the classroom from where the students, the teacher, the blackboard and interactive whiteboard could be easily observed.

In order to avoid the risk of students behaving differently from usual because of the researcher’s presence as an observer, they were told that the observer was a university student in the field of foreign language teaching with the aim of obtaining useful insights on how English language teaching was carried by teachers in their school, without mentioning the focus on the students’ reactions.

The stage of observation was followed by a more active stage of actual implementation of the Flipped Classroom methodology during classes.

During the implementation of the Flipped Classroom methodology, due to the researcher’s active engagement in carrying the lesson, moments during the lesson in which students were working on assigned tasks or activities, were used to take notes on their reactions towards the previously presented activities.

In order to collect data about the students’ perception of the flipped classroom methodology, students were asked to complete a questionnaire regarding their opinions and personal experience with the implementation of the methodology. The questionnaire was administered during a class at the end of the learning unit. In order to understand how students in the different classrooms perceived the implementation of the methodology, the questionnaire’s statements were divided into 5 categories (see the description of the questionnaire in the section “Materials” and copy of the questionnaire in Appendix D). Students’ answers for each category were counted and divided into 3 sub-categories (do not agree, indifferent, agree).
The questionnaire was kept anonymous for the students, but the copies given to students defined as “struggling” were secretly marked in order to identify questionnaires from the “struggling” sub-group with the aim of comparing their answers with those of the remaining part of the classroom defined as “non-struggling”.

Students were divided into 2 groups “struggling” and “non-struggling” and for each group, answers were counted for each category and sub-category and transformed into percentages (see Chapter 5 for results). Results were collected by mean of tables created with Microsoft Excel (tables are reported in Chapter 5).

In all classrooms, the subgroup of struggling students was also interviewed in order to gain insights about their personal opinions related to the implementation of the methodology. In order to avoid their peers to become suspicious on the reasons behind the choice of students to interview, struggling students were divided into 2 groups and each group was interviewed together with one or two randomly chosen students, in order to form groups of 3 or 4. Groups were interviewed during a class at the end of the learning unit, in a quiet room in their school.

Finally, the classrooms’ English teachers were interviewed during a class at the end of the learning unit, in order to obtain information about their perception of how the classroom and the subgroup of the struggling students reacted to the implementation of the methodology.

Answers were collected by the researcher in a written form, by taking notes of the students’ and teachers’ answers during the interviews.

Questions asked to the teachers and the students can be found in Appendix C.

5 – Characteristics of the Flipped Learning Units

The learning unit was based on the principles of the “Flipped Classroom” teaching methodology, already described in the previous chapters.

In both 3rd year classrooms, the topic explored in a “Flipped” methodology was a text on “Organic Farming”. Choice of the topics and learning units was made in order to respect the program choices made by the teachers at the beginning of the year in accordance with indications from the ministerial curriculum guidelines.

Nevertheless the differences in the topics between classrooms, the learning paths were designed on the same principles:
- teacher-led explanations were moved out of the classroom space and time, and delivered by mean of video lectures that students watched at home;
- in-class time was used to actively engage students in activities aimed at elaborating the contents already seen at home, while instructors walked through the desks helping students or answering any questions they had related to the activity they were working on.

In the third year classrooms, the methodology implementation regarded 5 hours of lesson, plus individual work at home, plus one hour for administering questionnaires and interviewing struggling students. During in-class lessons, students were required to work in pairs to complete activities such as:
- translate the text on Organic Farming;
- complete sentences with the correct missing parts;
- create and answer True or False sentences.

The initial explanation video was created using the website Powtoon.com which enables to create videos with text, animations, pictures, and music.

At home students were required to:
- watch the video and take notes;
- study vocabulary items by mean of some interactive exercises created on purpose;
- complete the parts of translation they didn’t finish in classroom;
- create some incomplete sentences that were then used as classroom activity;
- answer some true-false questions and some open-ended questions that were then corrected in class by mean of power point presentations.

The last two activities, true-false and open-ended questions were assigned as “traditional” homework as they were intended for students to individually engage with the already explored contents. They were then corrected in classroom by mean of power point presentations in order to make correction more interactive and to give students the chance to assess their knowledge of the topic, and obtain answers to any doubts or questions.

The vocabulary exercises were created by mean of the website quizlet.com which enables to create interactive exercises such as quizzes, flashcards, word-matching.

In order to facilitate struggling students, an mp3 recording of the book’s text and of the translation, a correct version of the translation, and a correct version of every activity carried in class or at home, were uploaded on the classroom’s learning management system so that students could have a correct copy of every activity that they could use.
whenever they felt the need to. All materials were created taking into consideration the British Dyslexia Association guidelines regarding materials, font, layout, and style. Some of the in-classroom activities were differentiated in order to meet the needs of certified students following a differentiated curriculum. Such students were provided with some simplified activities such as simple sentences to complete, English vocabulary items to match with their Italian translation, conceptual maps to complete, answer some simple true-false questions. These students could complete such activities with the help of the textbook and in some cases with the help of the special needs teacher or were supported by the instructors.

The other struggling students defined as “obiettivi minimi” followed normal classroom activities. During classroom time the researcher and the class teacher who walked through the desks gave particular attention to these students to make sure they were processing through the day’s activity without problems and gave them some facilitating advice when needed.

In the 2nd year classroom, the “flipped” instructional path regarded a learning unit from their English language textbook. The instructional path regarded 6 hours of in-class lesson, plus individual work at home, plus one hour to administer questionnaires and interview struggling students.

Usually, in this classroom lessons were conducted by the teacher that explained concepts and then had students complete some exercises from the book. At home students usually completed the exercises presented by the book for each acquisition unit such as gapped sentences or texts, re-ordering of sentences, dialogues to fill with the correct words or phrases.

By applying the “Flipped Classroom” methodology the researcher tried to overturn this structure. Explanations and activities that usually took place in the class were moved out of the classroom. Explanations were delivered by mean of videos that students were required to watch at home as homework, together with some exercises or activities to complete, aimed at providing something to do with the information presented by the videos.

The learning unit carried in a “Flipped” modality was composed of 6 acquisition units regarding:

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- two vocabulary lessons related to time expressions and numbers, and adjectives to
describe people’s personality;
- two grammar lessons related to the future form “will/won’t” and the first conditional
form “if + present simple”;
- one reading comprehension lesson;
- one writing lesson.
Before each lesson students were assigned with videos to be watched at home
explaining grammar rules, reading comprehension and writing strategies, or some
preparatory activity taken from their book and consisting of parts that were normally
done in the class as part of the lesson.
Each day before starting the lesson the researcher would ask students if they had
encountered any difficulties, and had any doubts or questions they wanted to ask and
would correct any exercises or activities they completed as homework. After that, the
day’s activities would be introduced and students could work in pairs to complete them.
While students worked the researcher and the class teacher usually walked through the
desks and asked if they had any doubts or difficulties, and would answer any questions
they had, sometimes conducting “mini-lectures” related to aspects of the topics that
students felt being unclear.
In this classroom, activities were not differentiated as the only two certified students
followed normal classroom activities, one of them also with the help of a support
teacher. With regard to the other 3 struggling students, their difficulties were not such as
to require a differentiation in the normal activities. By walking through the desks, it was
possible to give attention to every student, thus making sure that weaker students were
proceeding through activities without difficulty and give them the right support when
needed.

6 - Procedure of Implementation

The “flipped classroom” methodology was implemented during lesson hours. Before
starting the “flipped” learning path, students of all classrooms were informed that the
upcoming learning unit would have been carried out by mean of a different instructional
methodology and they were explained what the methodology would consist of and how
lessons would have been carried.
In order to not clash with students’ habits, and seen their familiarity with the school’s learning management system, homework was dictated in class and uploaded on the LMS as their teacher usually did.

Considering the inclusion of multimedia materials such as videos, websites, and the use of e-mails required to complete assignments at home, in each classroom one student was assigned the role of “reporting member”. Such student was given the researcher’s phone number and was allowed to contact her if anybody in the classroom was facing problems with videos, websites, e-mails or activities to be completed on-line. Given that each classroom had its Whatsapp group, any student facing problems was supposed to write on the group, or write directly to his “reporting” peer who would, in turn, contact the researcher. In this way, the researcher would try and find a solution to the problem (sending the videos’ links directly to the Whatsapp group, or granting access via a different link in case one of the links did not work).

Every day before starting the lesson, the researcher would take some time to talk with students and ask them if they had encountered any difficulties with their homework or had any doubts or questions. After that, the day’s activity would be introduced. Students were provided the day’s materials when needed and were asked to work together in pairs to complete activities or compare their answers before correcting homework.

At the end of the learning path, students were asked to complete an anonymous questionnaire regarding their feelings and perceptions in relation to their experience with the implementation of the methodology. Students were explained that the purpose of completing the questionnaire was to obtain some feedback on their perceptions, opinions, and feelings related to the implementation of the methodology. Students were instructed to carefully read the 25 statements regarding both the flipped classroom and the traditional lessons, give an answer choosing a number from 1 (don’t agree) to 5 (fully agree), according to how they felt throughout the implementation of the flipped classroom.

The questionnaire was administered in Italian, the students’ mother tongue, in order to avoid difficulties related to the use of a not fully mastered language, and the statements were taken from Elfatah and Ahmed’s paper cited in chapter 3 and adapted to better suit the learning path experienced by the students.

CHAPTER 5

Analysis, Discussion of Results and Conclusion

Introduction

This chapter includes the results obtained from the questionnaires administered to the students in the three classrooms in which the “Flipped Classroom” was carried out. In each classroom students were divided into 2 groups, “Non-Struggling Students” and “Struggling Students”, and results were reported for each questionnaire’s category, for the classroom as a whole, and for the 2 subgroups. Individual results can be found in Appendix D.

Results of the two subgroups “Non-Struggling Students” and “Struggling Students” are compared in each classroom.

All results are then discussed with regard to each classroom, with a particular focus on results from the “Struggling Students” subgroups, with the aim to establish whether such subgroup was favoured by the use of this methodology or not, and know about the students’ perceptions, also in the light of the answers obtained from the questionnaires and the interviews.

1 – Third year Classroom A – Agriculture and Rural Development

Total students = 13  Non Struggling Students = 8  Struggling Students = 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3A</th>
<th>NON STRUGGLING STUDENTS (8 Students)</th>
<th>STRUGGLING STUDENTS (5 students)</th>
<th>WHOLE CLASSROOM (13 students)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CATEGORY</td>
<td>DO NOT AGREE</td>
<td>INDIFFERENT</td>
<td>AGREE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In advance preparation</td>
<td>35,42% 27,09% 37,50%</td>
<td>16,67% 46,67% 36,67%</td>
<td>28,21% 34,61% 37,18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flipped classroom</td>
<td>31,25% 15,63% 53,12%</td>
<td>10% 50% 40%</td>
<td>23,07% 28,85% 48,08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional instruction</td>
<td>27,50% 50% 22,50% 44% 40% 16%</td>
<td>33,85% 46,15% 20%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement and motivation</td>
<td>28,12% 59,38% 12,50% 30% 20% 50%</td>
<td>28,85% 44,23% 26,92%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use and availability of resources</td>
<td>22,92% 33,33% 43,75% 13,33% 40% 46,67% 19,23% 35,90% 44,87%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1.1 Classroom as a whole

Percentages related to the whole classroom group showed that the majority of students considered the flipped classroom positively in the different aspects reported by the questionnaire’s categories, except for the category “Engagement and Motivation”:
- 37,18 % of students’ answers regarded positively the possibilities given by video lectures, such as preparing in advance for classes, having enough time to acquire concepts and having the chance to use class time to apply concepts learned by mean of the video lectures watched at home;
- 48,08 % of students’ answers showed appreciation towards the Flipped classroom for its use of interactive and multimedia resources, its video lectures and the frequent chances of working in pairs and in groups;
- 33,85 % of students’ answers indicated that they did not prefer traditional instruction over the Flipped Classroom and that traditional instruction was not considered more effective than the flipped classroom in order to acquire and understand concepts.
- 44,87 % of students’ answers expressed the usefulness of the interactive and multimedia materials and resources in helping their learning.
- 44,23 % of students’ answers expressed indifference towards the Flipped Classroom as they felt it did not help them to feel more engaged and motivated, but neither made them feel less motivated and engaged.

1.2 “Struggling” Versus “Non-Struggling”

By comparing the percentages of the two subgroups, some differences can be observed. In particular, percentages’ patterns between the two subgroups differed in the following categories:
- Traditional Instruction: the 44% of struggling students’ answers showed that this subgroup seemed to prefer the Flipped Classroom over traditional instruction, unlike their non-struggling peers whose answers’ highest percentage was 50 % in the “Indifferent” category.
- Engagement and Motivation: while the 59,38% of answers from the “Non-Struggling” group were related to the “Indifferent” category, the highest percentage (50%) in struggling students’ answers were related to the “Agree” category, indicating that the Flipped Classroom helped them in feeling more engaged and motivated.
1.3 Discussion of Results

Regarding the first question of the research related to the general perception of the flipped classroom by the participants, results for the third year, classroom A, suggest that overall the students perceived the implementation of the Flipped Classroom in a positive way. Results were positive for all categories except for “Traditional Instruction” and “Engagement and Motivation”. Regarding the first category, results showed a general feeling of indifference indicating that students do not dislike traditional instruction but at the same time did not consider it better if compared to the flipped classroom, for which students expressed appreciation. Regarding the second mentioned category, results again showed a feeling of indifference, indicating that they did not feel more engaged or motivated by the use of the flipped classroom methodology, but neither felt less engaged or motivated.

The same pattern of answers was observed in the subgroup “non-struggling” students, except for some categories. Regarding the category “traditional instruction”, such feeling of indifference might be deriving from the fact that the flipped classroom methodology was carried out for only a short period of time, and so, even if students liked this methodology, they might not have perceived any noticeable advantages or improvements in their learning, compared to traditional instruction. Indifference towards the category “engagement and motivation” might be deriving from the general students’ attitude towards school noticed during the period of observation, characterized by poor engagement and motivation towards instructional activities.

With regard to struggling students’ answers, some differences were observed. These students expressed indifference towards the categories “In advance preparation” and “Flipped classroom”. These results might be deriving from some of these students’ attitude of indifference and lack of interest and motivation in carrying out any activity given to them as homework, which might be a consequence of the difficulties experienced throughout their school career. This result is coherent with opinions expressed by some students, and also by the teacher, during an interview:

Student 1: “I don’t like studying or doing exercises at home, I don’t feel like doing any homework or studying when I go home after school”;

Student 2: “With traditional instruction, I struggle to find the will to do homework”.

Teacher: “Some of the students who struggle more are characterized by a lack of autonomy in carrying out homework or individual study, so they sometimes do not even
try. Some of them would need the presence of a person of support in order to carry out homework”.

Some of these students felt that the flipped classroom did not allow them to prepare in advance for classes, as some of them did not watch instructional videos nor completed at-home activities, with the consequent result of not feeling sufficiently prepared for carrying out in-class activities and thus not perceiving any improvement in their learning. Again, indifference related to the category “Flipped Classroom” might be deriving from the short period of time of the implementation, as such short time might not have been sufficient for these students to clearly determine whether they liked working with the Flipped teaching methodology. However, indifference might also be deriving from the fact that some of these students only engaged in some parts of the Flipped Classroom learning path, thus not being able to assess whether they liked it more or less than traditional instruction. Such hypothesis was confirmed by the English language teacher during an interview: “Some of the struggling students who are generally characterized as being disinterested and disengaged confirmed these characteristics also during the implementation of the Flipped Classroom. They would probably need a longer time of implementation in order to start feeling more interested or engaged”.

Struggling students expressed disagreement towards the category “Traditional Instruction”. These results might derive from the students’ perception of lessons as boring, or from their difficulties in focussing their attention on the lesson for long periods of time. Students expressed the following opinions:

Student 1: “I have difficulties in following the entire lesson, I get tired of listening at some point”.

Student 2: “Sometimes it’s difficult to follow the lesson and write down all the notes when the teacher explains”.

Student 3: “For me, it’s quite difficult listening to the teacher for an entire hour. It feels like time goes by so slowly. The teacher talks too fast, I have difficulties grasping all the concepts”.

However, the subgroup of struggling students expressed agreement towards the categories “Engagement and Motivation” and “Use and Availability of Resources”.

Regarding the former category, the result could be deriving from the fact that students did not mind doing exercises or activities during class-time, also because of the
facilitating aspect represented by pair work, that was allowed for many classroom activities. Students expressed the following opinions:
Student 1: “I like working in pairs rather than working alone, because if you don’t know something you can ask your peers”
Student 2: “Flipped lessons are a lot easier and engaging and make use of pair-work which gives you the chance to collaborate with your peers”.
Student 4: “I liked working in pairs, it’s better because I can ask my peers and I don’t feel left out if I don’t understand something”.

With regard to the availability of the resources, the teacher walking through the desks was enlisted as a resource, and students seemed to appreciate this and the fact that all the resources used during the instructional path were uploaded on the LMS. They expressed the following opinions:
Student 1: “As in the flipped classroom we do exercises in class and the teacher walks through the desks, I can always ask the teacher if I don’t understand something”.
Student 2: “With the flipped classroom I could ask directly to the teacher while doing the activities”. “Having an LMS in which correct versions are uploaded it’s good because in this way I can do exercises at home and then compare my answers with the correction, I can reflect on what I did right or wrong. Correcting all homework in class it’s boring. Having all materials uploaded gives us the chance to consult them whenever we need. So we don’t have to print them or wait for the teacher to print them.
Student 4: “I like having the materials uploaded because I can go back and check them when I want”.

Overall, in this classroom, the flipped classroom had a positive impact on struggling students. Despite the short time of implementation, and the difficulties related to the classroom context, struggling students expressed positive opinions regarding the Flipped Classroom teaching methodology, and in some cases, they recognized that the flipped classroom played a part in helping them to overcome some of the difficulties they sometimes encountered in traditional instruction:
Student 1: “I didn’t have difficulties with this methodology. I usually have difficulties remembering concepts, but doing exercises in class is useful so I can repeat concepts and memorize them for the test”.
Student 2: “With the flipped classroom I had fewer difficulties because I could apply at home what we did in class. I liked watching videos at home. Because in this way I had
enough time to take notes because you can stop the video. When I am in class sometimes I feel like the teacher goes too fast”.

2 - Third Year Classroom B – Agriculture and Rural Development

Total students = 12    Non Struggling Students = 9    Struggling Students = 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3B</th>
<th>NON STRUGGLING STUDENTS (9 Students)</th>
<th>STRUGGLING STUDENTS (3 students)</th>
<th>WHOLE CLASSROOM (12 students)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CATEGORY</td>
<td>DO NOT AGREE</td>
<td>INDIFFERENT</td>
<td>AGREE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In advance preparation</td>
<td>18,51%</td>
<td>29,62%</td>
<td>51,85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flipped classroom</td>
<td>19,44%</td>
<td>13,89%</td>
<td>66,67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional instruction</td>
<td>51,11%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>28,89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engage ment and motivation</td>
<td>11,11%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>63,89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use and availability of resources</td>
<td>11,11%</td>
<td>24,07%</td>
<td>64,81%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.1 Classroom as a whole

Percentages related to the whole classroom indicated that the majority of students considered the flipped classroom positively in the different aspects reported by the questionnaire’s categories:
- 55,56% of students’ answers regarded positively the possibilities given by video lectures, such as preparing in advance for classes, having enough time to acquire concepts and having the chance to use class time to apply concepts learned by mean of the video lectures watched at home;
- 64,58% of students’ answers showed appreciation towards the Flipped classroom for its use of interactive and multimedia resources, its video lectures and the frequent chances of working in pairs and in groups;
- 43,33% of students’ answers indicated they did not prefer traditional instruction over the Flipped Classroom and that traditional instruction was not considered more effective than the flipped classroom in order to acquire and understand concepts.
- 58.33% of students’ answers indicated that they felt more engaged and motivated by the use of the Flipped Classroom methodology and if they could choose they would like to keep learning in a Flipped Classroom.

- 66.67% of students’ answers expressed the usefulness of the multimedia materials and resources in helping their learning.

2.2 “Struggling” Versus “Non-Struggling”

By comparing the percentages of the two subgroups, some differences were observed. In particular, percentages’ patterns of the two subgroups differed in the following categories:

- Traditional Instruction: in this category, the 46.67% majority of struggling students’ answers showed this subgroup seemed to prefer traditional instruction over the “Flipped Classroom”, unlike their non-struggling peers whose answers’ percentage was 51.11% in the “Do not agree” category.

- Engagement and motivation: while the 63.89% of the “Non-Struggling” subgroup’s answers were included in the “Agree” category, “Struggling students” answers for this category showed equality of percentages (41.67%) in the categories “Indifferent” and “Agree”. The majority of struggling students’ answers were divided between indifference, as they did not feel more motivated and engaged by the flipped classroom, but neither less motivated and engaged and agreement as the Flipped Classroom made them feel more motivated and engaged.

2.3 Discussion of Results

Regarding the first question of the research related to the general perception of the flipped classroom by the participants, results for the third year classroom B suggest that overall the students perceived the implementation of the Flipped Classroom in a positive way. Results are positive for all categories except for the category “Traditional Instruction”, in which the majority of answers indicated disagreement. Looking at the results from the subgroup non-struggling students, answers follow the same pattern as that of the whole classroom. Therefore results indicate agreement towards all categories except for the category “Traditional Instruction”. 
With regards to the results of the subgroup of struggling students some differences were observed. These students expressed agreement towards statements related to the category “Traditional Instruction”. Such result might be deriving from difficulties expressed by some of these students in adjusting to the new methodology.

Using a new teaching methodology for the first time might be confusing for students who have always been used to traditional instruction. Therefore students might have perceived traditional instruction as more effective than the flipped classroom, even though results indicate that despite some initial difficulties, students liked using this new methodology:

Student 1: “In the beginning, it was a bit difficult to get used to how the methodology works, But in the end, it was more useful and interesting compared to other methodologies”.

Student 3: “Getting used to the methodology was a bit difficult in the beginning, but then it was more fun doing exercises in pairs because you can confront with your peers”.

Answers from this subgroup related to the category “Engagement and Motivation” expressed a division in the opinions between “indifferent” and “agree”. This result seems to indicate that students had contrasting feelings towards statements included in this category:

- one student felt more engaged and would like to keep studying by using this methodology, but did not really feel more motivated;
- another student felt more motivated but did not feel more engaged and expressed indifference towards using this methodology in his future studying career;
- another student expressed indifference towards engagement and motivation but would like to keep studying by using this methodology.

Such different answers might be deriving from the initial difficulties students expressed having with this teaching methodology, and from the short time of implementation which probably did not help them in formulating clear positive or negative ideas about the methodology, also considering their difficulties.

In this classroom, the flipped classroom had a positive impact on struggling students. Despite the initial difficulties and the short time of implementation, struggling students expressed positive opinions regarding such teaching methodology, and in some cases recognized that the flipped classroom played a part in helping them to overcome some of the difficulties they sometimes encountered in traditional instruction:
Student 1: “It’s more difficult to complete homework in traditional instruction, because if you don’t understand something then you are unable to complete exercises at home. It’s more useful working in pairs. And by doing exercises in class you can memorize concepts day by day. It was less difficult to study for the test because we had memorized the concepts by doing the exercises”.
Student 2: “I liked this methodology. I liked the study method better because the video gives you a first impression/idea of the topic”.
Student 3: Lessons with this methodology were more fun. The studying was also less difficult”.

3 - Second Year Classroom - Social and Health Care Services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2^</th>
<th>NON STRUGGLING STUDENTS (15 Students)</th>
<th>STRUGGLING STUDENTS (5 students)</th>
<th>WHOLE CLASSROOM (20 students)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CATEGORY</td>
<td>DO NOT AGREE</td>
<td>INDIFFERENT</td>
<td>AGREE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.67%</td>
<td>27,78%</td>
<td>65,55%</td>
<td>16,67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flipped classroom</td>
<td>3,33%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>71,67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional instruction</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement and motivation</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use and availability of resources</td>
<td>5,55%</td>
<td>16,67%</td>
<td>77,78%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.1 Classroom as a whole

Percentages related to the whole classroom indicated that the majority of students considered positively the flipped classroom in its different aspects:
- 64,17% of students’ answers regarded positively the possibilities given by video lectures, such as preparing in advance for classes, having enough time to acquire concepts and having the chance to use class time to apply concepts learned by mean of the video lectures watched at home;
- 72.50% of students’ answers showed appreciation towards the Flipped classroom for its use of interactive and multimedia resources, its video lectures and the frequent chances of working in pairs and in groups;
- 39% of students’ answers indicated they did not prefer traditional instruction over the Flipped Classroom and that traditional instruction was not considered more effective than the flipped classroom in order to acquire and understand concepts.
- 55% of students’ answers indicated that they felt more engaged and motivated by the use of the Flipped Classroom methodology and if they could choose they would like to keep learning in a Flipped Classroom.
- 75% of students’ answers expressed the usefulness of the interactive and multimedia materials and resources in helping their learning.

3.2 “Struggling” Versus “Non-Struggling”

By comparing the percentages of the two subgroups, some differences were observed. In particular, percentages’ patterns of the two subgroups differed in the category “Traditional Instruction”. In this category, the 40% of struggling students’ answers indicated “Indifference”, unlike their non-struggling peers who seemed to prefer the flipped classroom over traditional instruction (44%).

3.3 Discussion of Results

Regarding the general perception of the flipped classroom by the participants, results for the second year classroom suggest that overall, students perceived the implementation of the Flipped Classroom in a positive way. Results obtained from the questionnaires showed high percentages of agreement for all categories except for the category “Traditional Instruction”, in which the majority of answers indicated disagreement towards statements included in such category, meaning that students did not consider traditional instruction better than the flipped classroom. Looking at the results from the subgroup of non-struggling students, answers follow a pattern identical to that of the whole classroom. Therefore results indicate agreement towards all categories except for the category “Traditional Instruction”.

With regards to the results of the subgroup of struggling students, some differences were observed. These students’ answers were slightly divided between “Indifference”
and “Agreement” towards statements related to the category “Traditional Instruction”. Such results indicate that these students do not dislike traditional instruction, in fact, from my observation emerged that the classroom usually looked interested and engaged in traditional lessons and students generally showed appreciation towards the teacher’s teaching methodologies. What is more, lessons were generally characterized by different activities, sometimes also completed in pairs, which made lessons more interactive and for some aspects similar to the flipped classroom. For these reasons students probably felt indifferent with regard to traditional instruction compared to the flipped classroom. According to their teacher, students belonging to the struggling subgroup are generally not very flexible in adapting to new instructional methodologies, therefore they might have experienced a sense of disorientation with the new teaching methodology, and probably felt more at ease with traditional instruction, as being a methodology of which they had already acquired the functioning. However, results clearly showed that struggling students liked the flipped classroom. Results that were also confirmed by their answers during an interview:

Student 1: “I liked working with this methodology because there is more pair-work, and there is more interaction with your peers”.

Student 2: “I liked it because there is more pair-work, which makes the lesson less heavy to follow. It is more active and less boring”. “I liked when the teacher walked through the desks so if I didn’t understand I could always ask again”. “I sometimes struggle to understand, because the teacher speaks in English, so when she does I only understand until a certain point because then I grow tired. By using this methodology I could watch videos in the quiet of my home, and then when you go to class there’s another correction, so if you made any mistake you can correct them, it’s a double help”.

Student 3: “I liked it very much, we could confront with each other in groups. I liked the videos, I could understand the rules better”. “In my opinion videos are better. Sometimes the book is hard to understand. Explanations aren’t very clear. The videos were more clear in this sense. And then sometimes is hard to follow the teacher’s explanations because English hours are always at the end of the day (5th hour) and we are tired”.

Student 4: “I had fewer difficulties in doing homework with this methodology. The videos helped me in doing homework”.

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Such appreciation towards the flipped classroom was also perceived from the teacher: “Students liked working with this methodology, because of its interactivity and the presence of videos, which I think is the part they liked most”, “the classroom as a whole worked well, and in particular struggling students felt more motivated and engaged with respect to traditional lessons”.

4 - Difficulties Experienced During the Implementation

Difficulties experienced during the implementation of the Flipped Classroom teaching methodology can be divided into 2 subgroups:
- difficulties experienced during the planning of the instructional path;
- difficulties experienced during the practical stage of implementation in the classrooms object of the research.

Regarding the first category, difficulties were mainly related to the large amount of time required to search the web in order to find the adequate resources to match the kind of activities designed for each lesson.

A lot of time is required also when deciding to produce your own resources. Before producing any resource such as videos or online vocabulary games, it took a large amount of time in trying different websites in order to test their functioning and decide which one provided adequate functions with relation to the aims of the different instructional activities.

With regard to difficulties encountered during the actual implementation of the Flipped Classroom with the students, a general difficulty encountered in all the classrooms was that of finding the right platform on which to upload the learning materials. Considering that many students did not have an email address, together with the classrooms’ teachers we decided to not use any learning platform (many of these require students to register with their e-mail address), other than the “Registro Elettronico”, the LMS already in use in the school, and that students were familiar with.

Unluckily, this kind of LMS had its limits and students sometimes reported of encountering difficulties in accessing links uploaded on such LMS. For this reason, in the second year classroom, whose learning unit included several videos and links to websites, we decided to use the What’s App mobile application in order to share videos and links, as students were familiar with opening videos or links to websites from such mobile phone application.
Another difficulty encountered was related to the students’ lack of engagement and interest, especially in the two classrooms of the third year. Students often came to school unprepared, without watching videos or completing preparatory activities at home. Additionally, in these classrooms, there was a general slowness in starting and proceeding through the day’s activities. Often times students had to be reminded to actually take out their books and notebooks in order to complete the activities, or needed to be reminded to actually write their answers in order to complete the required exercises or activities.

In the second year classroom, difficulties were mainly related to the actual management of the classroom, as it was a vivacious group of students, who often during lessons had difficulties in maintaining silence. Sometimes a few students came to class without watching videos and adducing problems with the internet connection as a reason for their being unprepared.

5 - Conclusion

The research aimed at:
- obtaining information on the participants’ feelings and perceptions related to the implementation of the Flipped Classroom teaching methodology;
- comparing struggling students’ perceptions with those of their non-struggling peers in order to assess whether such teaching practice could represent a way of helping students facing difficulties in the foreign language classroom.

With reference to results obtained by the whole classrooms, in all classrooms object of the study, the implementation of the Flipped Classroom obtained positive results in almost all the categories included in the questionnaire, meaning that students generally appreciated working with such teaching methodology.

Regarding the perceptions of struggling students, despite some initial difficulties expressed by some students in adjusting to the new methodology, this subgroups’ perceptions were also for the most part positive, except some feelings of indifference, the causes of which were explored in the previous paragraphs.

Overall, when interviewed, students reported appreciation towards the characteristics of this methodology, also stating that in some cases the flipped classroom helped them to overcome some of their difficulties. Among the most appreciated aspects of such
methodology were the more directness of videos in explaining contents and rules, and the possibility of stopping videos in order to grasp important information.

Students appreciated working in pairs and retained the increased chances to collaborate with their peers as an important facilitating aspect of this teaching methodology.

The majority of struggling students felt at least a little more engaged and motivated by the use of the Flipped Classroom, and the remaining part of students did not feel less motivated by this methodology with a comparison to traditional instruction.

An interesting aspect is represented by the fact that nobody among the students, expressed having any difficulties in learning with the Flipped Classroom, apart from some initial difficulties in adjusting to a new methodology, or some practical difficulties related to problems with the internet connection.

Many students also appreciated the methodology for using interactive resources that were then uploaded on the LMS and thus made available for their individual and repeated use.

In the light of the results obtained, there is reason to believe that in the classrooms object of the research, the flipped classroom had a positive impact on struggling students, and played a role in supporting such students in the foreign language classroom.
APPENDIX A
Extracts from observations

1 - 3rd year – Agriculture, Rural Development and Livestock - Classroom A

- Extract from observation of 7/02/2017: “Durante il compito in classe, molti degli studenti non si concentrano sul completare il test, ma parlano tra loro, scherzano, ridono o chiedono le risposte ad alcuni dei compagni e diversi si lamentano del fatto che non riescono a ricordare le regole grammaticali richieste per completare correttamente l’esercizio.”

- Extract from observation of 14/02/2017: “L’insegnante presenta agli studenti un’attività da completare a gruppi. Gli studenti si dividono in 2 gruppi e i membri devono collaborare al fine di comporre delle frasi complete assemblando i vari pezzi di frasi forniti in disordine su dei cartoncini. In entrambi i gruppi, solo alcuni membri effettivamente portano avanti l’attività mentre gli altri parlano, scherzano tra loro, e non dimostrano alcun interesse nei riguardi dell’attività proposta o di ciò che gli altri membri del gruppo stanno facendo.”

- Extract from observation of 21/02/2017: “Durante la correzione dei compiti per casa, l’insegnante chiede ad uno studente di dare la sua risposta ad una delle frasi dell’esercizio, ma lo studente in questione non risponde in quanto non ha svolto i compiti. L’insegnante chiama un altro studente, ma è distratto e non sa a che pagina sia l’esercizio. Un altro studente ancora dice che non ha svolto i compiti perché non li aveva scritti sul diario. L’insegnante chiama altri studenti che hanno svolto i compiti e riescono quindi a fornire una risposta. Gli studenti menzionati che non avevano svolto i compiti però non completano gli esercizi con le risposte fornite dai loro compagni e dall’insegnante attraverso le sue spiegazioni.”

- Extract from observation of 07/04/2017: “L’insegnante scrive sulla LIM (Lavagna interattiva multimediale) alcune frasi relative all’argomento “Safety measures in the workplace” e spiega il significato e la struttura grammaticale di ogni frase, ma pochi studenti prendono appunti. L’insegnante necessita di riprendere gli studenti e dirgli di prendere il quaderno dallo zaino e scrivere.”
- Extract from observation of 02/05/2017: “L’insegnante corregge i compiti per casa relativi all’argomento della prossima verifica. Molti studenti sono distratti, non fanno attenzione alle spiegazioni dell’insegnante ne prendono appunti.”

2 - Classroom B

- Extract from observation of 21/02/2017: “La correzione di 3 esercizi dati come compiti per casa richiede 10 minuti circa. Gli studenti che hanno svolto i compiti hanno risposto correttamente. Molti studenti non hanno però svolto i compiti per casa e non hanno il libro di testo. Durante le spiegazioni dell’insegnante gli studenti fanno silenzio, ma in molti non prendono appunti.”

- Extract from observation of 23/02/2017: “La correzione dei compiti per casa e le spiegazioni dell’insegnante si svolgono senza problemi. Gli studenti fanno silenzio e sembrano attenti sebbene solo pochi prendano appunti.”

- Extract from observation of 27/04/2017: “Come compiti per casa gli studenti dovevano tradurre una breve parte (metà pagina divisa su due colonne) del testo “Conventional Farming”. Nonostante l’esigua quantità di compiti, molti studenti non li hanno svolti. L’insegnante legge e traduce tale parte del testo, ma pochi prendono appunti.”

3 - 2nd year, Social and health care services

- Extract from observation of 08/03/2017: “A causa del brusio presente durante la lezione l’insegnante inizia a fare alcune domande agli studenti che si dimostrano più distratti. Tali studenti dimostrano di sapere di cosa stesse parlando l’insegnante e rispondono correttamente.”

- Extract from observation of 11/02/2017: “Durante il compito in classe gli studenti fanno silenzio e si impegnano nel completare gli esercizi. Durante l’ora alcuni studenti alzano la mano per avere alcuni chiarimenti. Dopo la spiegazione dell’insegnante essi ritornano al loro compito e si concentrano nel completarlo.”

- Extract from observation of 22/02: “L’insegnante inizia a correggere i compiti per casa oralmente. Durante la correzione il brusio diventa tale che l’insegnante necessita di fermare la lezione per riprendere gli studenti e ricordare loro di mantenere un comportamento corretto”.

- Extract from observation of 14/03/2017: “L’insegnante inizia a spiegare un nuovo argomento. Ad un certo punto durante la lezione il brusio è tale che l’insegnante ferma la lezione per chiedere qual è il problema.”
Here is a list of the materials used in the Flipped instructional paths designed for the three classrooms.
Both 3rd year classrooms followed the same instructional path and thus were provided the same materials:
- instructional video on “Organic Farming” created by means of the website Powtoon.com (see Appendix B, point 1, for sample);
- Italian translation of the text “Organic Farming (see Appendix B, point 2, for sample);
- mp3 voice recording of the book’s text and of the translation;
- power point presentations for the correction of true-false and open-ended questions (see Appendix B, point 3 and 4, for sample);
- photocopies for the sentences completion activity (see Appendix B, point 5, for sample), and word file for their correction;
- on-line dictionary;
- on-line vocabulary exercises (see Appendix B, point 6, for sample).
Alternative simplified activities;
- conceptual map on organic farming;
- list of simplified sentences to be completed;
- list of simplified true-false sentences;
- list of vocabulary items to match with their Italian equivalent.
1. Instructional video: Organic farming

**Organic Farming**

Alternative to conventional farming.

Organic Farming started in 1930/1940 as a reaction to the use of synthetic fertilizers.

**IFOAM**

International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements

BUT in 1972 IFOAM defined the international standards of organic farming

**CONCERN!**

Even if GMOs are excluded, IT IS PROBABLY IMPOSSIBLE TO HAVE 100% ORGANIC FARMING

**BECAUSE:**

POLLEN FROM GMO CROPS CAN CONTAMINATE ORGANIC SEED STOCKS
2. Extract from the translation

**TRADUZIONE ORGANIC FARMING**

Un’alternativa all’agricoltura convenzionale ed a quella che fa uso di bio-tecnologie è l’agricoltura biologica.

Il movimento biologico iniziò tra gli anni 1930-1940 come reazione alla crescente dipendenza dell’agricoltura dai fertilizzanti sintetici.

Ma fu l’IFOAM (Federazione Internazionale Movimento Agricoltura Biologica) – un’associazione internazionale di istituzioni fondata nel 1972 – a stabilire la definizione e gli standard della coltivazione biologica e dell’allevamento di animali, che saranno poi disciplinati e messi in vigore da molte nazioni negli anni successivi.

“L’agricoltura biologica è un sistema di produzione che sostiene la salute di suoli, ecosistemi, e persone. Esso fa affidamento su processi ecologici, biodiversità e cicli adattati alle condizioni locali, piuttosto che sull’uso di input con effetti sfavorevoli.

L’agricoltura biologica combina tradizione, innovazione e scienza per apportare benefici all’ambiente condiviso e promuovere relazioni eque ed una buona qualità di vita per tutti coloro coinvolti.”
3. Power point correction: True or False?

1. Plant farmers use Chemicals, herbicides, pesticides to increase the growth and harvest potential of their crops.

2. Poultry and dairy farming use natural medicine to protect the health of animals.

They use Antibiotics

4. Power point correction: open ended questions

What is the main aim of Organic Farming??

- The main aim is to exclude the use of animal and green manure;
- The main aim is to sustain the health of soils, people, animals and provide fresh and tasty food;
- Make use of GMOs and growth regulators.

What did IFOAM establish??

- IFOAM established the traditions and innovations in farming;
- IFOAM established the use of GMOs;
- IFOAM established the definition and standards of organic cultivation and livestock husbandry.
5. Classroom activity: complete the sentences

Complete the following sentences with the parts given in scrambled order:

The IFOAM Umbrella organization established...........
Organic agriculture is a production system that sustains............
Organic farming excludes or strictly limits...
Organic farming is an agricultural system that seeks........
In order to maintain soil fertility and control pests on a farm, organic farmers utilize........
Today many farmers are converting...
The organic movement began in the 1930 and 1940 as a reaction to...
Organically grown food is superior in.....
Organic farming has many goals, including preserving the fertility of the soil...

Answers:

...........the health of soil, ecosystems, and people...
...........the definition and standards of organic cultivation and livestock husbandry.
...........to provide the consumer with fresh, tasty and authentic food.

...... the use of manufactured fertilizers, pesticides...
............crops rotation, animal manure, green manure.............
............compost and biological pest control or the least toxic pesticides.
............as they begin to be aware of............

............the fragility of the earth’s environment
............agriculture’s growing reliance on synthetic fertilizers
............mineral content to that grown by conventional methods
............preserving the fertility of the soil
1. Online Vocabulary Exercises

6.1 Test

4 domande Vero/Falso

1. organizzazione di istituzioni
   - umbrella organization
   ○ Vero
   ○ Falso

2. essere consapevole
   ○ to share
   ○ to enforce
   ○ to ensure
   ○ to be aware

6.2 Matching Exercise

6.3 Word Learning Exercise

mettere in pericolo

INSERISCI LA RISPOSTA IN INGLESE

Risposta
2nd year – Materials

For the 2nd year classroom, the following materials were used:
- learning unit from the students’ English language and functions textbook;
- on-line vocabulary exercises;
- instructional video “How to Ask and Give your Opinion”, (see Appendix C, point 1, for sample);
- instructional video “Text Cohesion Strategies” (see Appendix C, point 2, for sample);
- instructional video “Form and Use of Future Simple” (see Appendix C, point 3.1, for sample);
- instructional video “Form and Use of First Conditional” (see Appendix C, point 3.2, for sample);
- photocopy for “gapped text” classroom activity (see Appendix C, point 4, for sample);
- photocopy of grammar rules chart to complete as homework;
- lyric videos of songs presenting grammar elements object of study (future form will, first conditional) (see Appendix C, point 5, for sample).
- google forms to complete the survey “School in the future” (see Appendix C, point 6, for sample);
- photocopies of songs’ lyrics to complete as homework.

In all classrooms, some of the videos were created on purpose by the researcher using the website Powtoon.com, which enables to create animated videos, while some others were taken from the web.

All resources and materials were uploaded on the classroom’s learning management system so that students could easily retrieve them and re-use them whenever they felt the need to.
1. Instructional Video: How to ask and give your opinion

- How to ask and give your opinion
- What do you think of my dress?? It's beautiful, do you agree??
- Uhmm..... Let me think..... I'm not sure....
- Oh, Why is that ?? I think it's lovely
- Well... I disagree... I think it's horrible !!
2. Instructional video: Text cohesion strategies

**1. Prima di iniziare:**
leggila testo e i paragrafi mancanti per avere una visione globale del loro significato

**2. Durante la lettura:**
sottolinea nel testo e nelle parti mancanti le parole che ti aiutano a fare collegamenti
3. Instructional videos on grammar rules

3.1 Future form “Will”

**WE FORM FUTURE SIMPLE - WILL LIKE THIS ...**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>+</th>
<th>-</th>
<th>?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CARS WILL FLY,</td>
<td>CARS WILL NOT FLY, CARS WON’T FLY,</td>
<td>WILL CARS FLY?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NO "S" FOR 3RD PERSON SINGULAR!**

**WE USE FUTURE SIMPLE - WILL FOR ...**

- PREDICTIONS (OPINION)
- SPONTANEOUS DECISIONS
- PROMISES

3.2 First Conditional

**Possible situations AND THEIR CONSEQUENCES → in the FUTURE.**

**IF + PRESENT SIMPLE, WILL + VERB.**

If the phone rings, I will answer it.
Dear Linda,
How are things with you? It was great talking to you yesterday by phone.

I can’t wait to arrive in Athens to see all that history. Let me tell you something about where we have visited so far. I know you want to come here on vacation too one day! We started in England and we spent two days in London and another day in Canterbury. We saw a lot of great history and the only bad thing was the weather - it rained for the whole time we were there. Can you believe it?

Well, I have to say I prefer the American Disneyland. But we met some nice people from Canada and spent two great days with them. One of them, Clive, is going to your university next year. How’s that for a coincidence!

After that, we went south into Switzerland. It was very expensive and we couldn’t stay as long as we wanted to, so that’s why we’re in Italy now!

See you soon,
Mike

1. Clive and his wife left us once we got to Germany by train. They went up into Denmark but we continued to Munich. Wow - what a great city. I bought you a surprise gift there. I hope you like it.
2. As I told you yesterday, I am in Rome today. Tomorrow we are getting the train down into the south of the country and then the ship across to Greece.
3. I paid nearly $200 for it but it looks magnificent and is made of real leather.
4. OK, that’s enough from me for now. I want to post this letter now so you get it by the weekend.
5. At least when we got to Paris, the sun was shining! We only stayed for one afternoon in the French capital because my friends really wanted to visit Euro Disney which is to the east of Paris.
6. I sent her a postcard last night. It had the Eiffel Tower on it, which she has always wanted to visit. Now she can look at it on a postcard every day!
5. Lyric videos of songs

5.1 It will rain – Bruno Mars

5.2 Cold Water - Justin Bieber feat. Major Lazer
6. Extract from Google form and results

Will students have tests in the future school?
- No, they will not have any test.
- Yes, they will have written and oral tests.
- Yes, they will, but they will do it with their tablets.

Will students have computers in their classrooms in the future?
- No, they will only have books.
- Yes, everybody will have a personal computer in class.
- Students will not have computers but tablets.
APPENDIX C

At the end of the Flipped learning path, students in every classroom were asked to complete a questionnaire in order to provide information about their perception of the “Flipped Classroom”. The questionnaire was composed of 25 statements regarding both the flipped classroom and the traditional lessons, to which students had to answer choosing a number from 1 (don’t agree) to 5 (fully agree), according to how they felt throughout the implementation of the flipped classroom. Questions were divided into 5 categories:

1. preparazione in anticipo come aiuto per lo svolgimento delle attività in classe (advance preparation helps to carry out classroom activities), questions 1 to 6;
2. cosa pensi delle lezioni tradizionali? (what do you think of traditional lessons?), questions 7 to 11:
3. cosa pensi della flipped classroom? (what do you think of the flipped classroom?), questions 12 to 15:
4. coinvolgimento e motivazione (engagement and motivation), questions 16 to 19:
5. uso e disponibilità delle risorse, ed insegnante come risorsa (use and availability of resources, teacher as a resource), questions 20 to 25.

In the questionnaires provided to the students, the distinction among categories was deleted thus to avoid the risk of categories’ titles influencing students’ answers.

Answers provided in each category were counted and included into 3 sub-categories:
- answers 1 and 2 were included in the sub-category “Do not agree”;
- answer 3 was included in the sub-category “Indifferent”;
- answers 4 and 5 were included in the category “Agree”.
1. Questionnaire of students’ perception

1= per niente d’accordo  2= non d’accordo  3= neutro (non sono ne d’accordo ne in disaccordo)  
4= d’accordo  5= molto d’accordo

1- La “Flipped Classroom” mi permette di prepararmi in anticipo per le lezioni.
Per niente d’accordo  1  2  3  4  5 Molto D’accordo

2- Attraverso i video/power point ho abbastanza tempo per acquisire le informazioni di cui avrò bisogno in classe.
Per niente d’accordo  1  2  3  4  5 Molto D’accordo

3- Mi sento più sicuro/a a chiedere chiarimenti in classe dopo aver visto il video/power point o aver svolto le attività per casa.
Per niente d’accordo  1  2  3  4  5 Molto D’accordo

4- Le “Flipped Classroom” mi ha reso più facile completare le attività in classe e per casa.
Per niente d’accordo  1  2  3  4  5 Molto D’accordo

5- Il mio apprendimento è migliore perché ho più tempo di applicare tale apprendimento in classe.
Per niente d’accordo  1  2  3  4  5 Molto D’accordo

6- Mi sento più responsabile del mio apprendimento attraverso la “Flipped Classroom”.
Per niente d’accordo  1  2  3  4  5 Molto D’accordo

7- Mi sento che le lezioni tradizionali mi aiutano di più rispetto a quelle in modalità “Flipped Classroom”.
Per niente d’accordo  1  2  3  4  5 Molto D’accordo

8- Capisco di più quando l’insegnante spiega in classe.
Per niente d’accordo  1  2  3  4  5 Molto D’accordo

9- Il modo migliore di imparare i concetti è attraverso le lezioni tradizionali dell’insegnante.
Per niente d’accordo  1  2  3  4  5 Molto D’accordo

10- Preferisco le lezioni tradizionali in cui l’insegnante spiega perché c’è meno da fare in classe.
Per niente d’accordo  1  2  3  4  5 Molto D’accordo

11- Preferisco le lezioni tradizionali perché sono meno interattive, ci sono meno video e risorse multimedia.
Per niente d’accordo  1  2  3  4  5 Molto D’accordo

12- Mi piace la “Flipped classroom” perché usa molte risorse interattive che rendono le lezioni più interessanti e stimolanti.
Per niente d’accordo  1  2  3  4  5 Molto D’accordo
13- Mi piace la “Flipped classroom” perché fa uso di lavoro di coppia e a gruppi.
Per niente d’accordo 1 2 3 4 5 Molto D’accordo

14- Mi piace lavorare a coppie o a gruppi perché rende più facile assimilare i concetti.
Per niente d’accordo 1 2 3 4 5 Molto D’accordo

15- Preferisco guardare le video-lezioni a casa rispetto che ascoltare le lezioni dell’insegnante in classe.
Per niente d’accordo 1 2 3 4 5 Molto D’accordo

16- Mi sono sentito più coinvolto in questo tipo di lezione rispetto ad altre.
Per niente d’accordo 1 2 3 4 5 Molto D’accordo

17- Grazie alla “Flipped Classroom” mi sono sentito/a più coinvolto/a e quindi ho usato il tempo della lezione in modo proficuo.
Per niente d’accordo 1 2 3 4 5 Molto D’accordo

18- Grazie alla “Flipped Classroom” mi sono sentito/a più motivato/a.
Per niente d’accordo 1 2 3 4 5 Molto D’accordo

19- Se potessi scegliere continuerei a studiare/imparare l’inglese in modalità “Flipped Classroom”.
Per niente d’accordo 1 2 3 4 5 Molto D’accordo

20- Le risorse interattive (video, power point, e materiali caricati in didattica) sono state d’aiuto per imparare l’inglese.
Per niente d’accordo 1 2 3 4 5 Molto D’accordo

21- Mi piace che le risorse interattive (video, power point, e materiali caricati in didattica) siano sempre disponibili perché così posso usarle più volte per rivedere le spiegazioni e per esercitarmi prima della verifica.
Per niente d’accordo 1 2 3 4 5 Molto D’accordo

22- Penso che i video e materiali on-line usati durante le lezioni di inglese sono stati efficaci nell’aiutarmi ad apprendere.
Per niente d’accordo 1 2 3 4 5 Molto D’accordo

23- Le lezioni di inglese in modalità Flipped mi permettono di avere più possibilità di comunicare con i miei compagni rispetto alle altre lezioni.
Per niente d’accordo 1 2 3 4 5 Molto D’accordo

24- Mi piace la “Flipped Classroom” perché posso completare le consegne in classe e ricevere riscontro immediato dall’insegnante.
Per niente d’accordo 1 2 3 4 5 Molto D’accordo

25- Trovo utile che durante le attività in classe l’insegnante giri tra i banchi per chiarire i miei dubbi e rispondere alle mie domande.
Per niente d’accordo 1 2 3 4 5 Molto D’accordo
2. **Questions from students’ interview**

- Did you like working with this methodology?
- Did you experience any difficulty with this methodology that you usually don’t have with traditional instruction?
- In traditional lessons, do you have any difficulties that you didn’t experience with this methodology?
- What about homework and studying? Did you experience any difficulty with this methodology that you usually don’t have with traditional instruction?
- What about materials uploaded on the LMS? What do you think of the materials uploaded? Did you like or find it useful to have them uploaded on the LMS ready to be used when needed?

3. **Questions from teachers’ interview**

- How was the classroom’s attitude during the implementation of the methodology?
- How was struggling students’ attitude during the implementation of the methodology?
- Did struggling students engage more or less, with respect to traditional lessons?
- What kind of difficulties do you think struggling students had with this methodology?
- In your opinion, did this methodology favour or penalize struggling students?
### APPENDIX D

1 - Individual results from classroom 3 A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Traditional Instruction</th>
<th>Non Struggling Students</th>
<th>Use and Availability of Resources</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(tot. 6 items - 48 answers)</td>
<td>(tot. 5 items - 40 answers)</td>
<td>(tot. 4 items - 32 answers)</td>
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<tr>
<td>3A</td>
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<td>AGREE</td>
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</table>

Totals:
- Traditional Instruction: 3A (tot. 6 items - 48 answers)
- Non Struggling Students: (tot. 5 items - 40 answers)
- Use and Availability of Resources: (tot. 4 items - 32 answers)

Percentage:
- Traditional Instruction: 3A - 35.42%
- Non Struggling Students - 37.50%
- Use and Availability of Resources: 33.33%
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<th>STRUGGLING STUDENTS</th>
<th>IN ADVANCE PREPARATION</th>
<th>FLIPPED CLASSROOM</th>
<th>TRADITIONAL INSTRUCTION</th>
<th>ENGAGEMENT AND MOTIVATION</th>
<th>USE AND AVAILABILITY OF RESOURCES</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>(tot. 4 items - 20 answers)</td>
<td>(tot. 5 items - 25 answers)</td>
<td>(tot. 4 items - 20 answers)</td>
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<th>ENGAGEMENT AND MOTIVATION</th>
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<tr>
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<td>tot 29/78</td>
<td>tot 12/52</td>
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<tr>
<td>28,21%</td>
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## Individual results from classroom 3B

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<th>NON STRUGGLING STUDENTS</th>
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**Categories**

- Total 4 items - 36 answers
- Total 5 items - 45 answers
- Total 6 items - 54 answers

**Totals**

- Tot. 4 items - 36 answers
- Tot. 5 items - 45 answers
- Tot. 6 items - 54 answers

- 10/54 = 18.52%
- 16/54 = 29.63%
- 28/54 = 51.85%
- 29/54 = 53.6%
- 35/54 = 65.11%
- 35/54 = 64.82%
- 51/54 = 94.44%
- 13/36 = 36.11%
- 23/36 = 63.89%
- 28/36 = 77.78%
- 29/36 = 80.56%
- 35/36 = 97.22%
- 66/36 = 100%

**18,52%** 29,63% 51,85% 53,6% 65,11% 64,82% 51,85% 19,44% 13,89% 66,67% 51,11% 20% 20% 28,89% 11,11% 25% 28,89% 11,11% 25% 63,89% 11,11% 24,07% 64,82%
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### 3 - Individual results from Classroom 2

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<th>Engagement and Motivation</th>
<th>Use and Availability of Resources</th>
<th>Non-Struggling Students (15 students)</th>
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</table>

**Totals:**
- Flipped Classroom: 6/90
- Traditional Instruction: 25/90
- Engagement and Motivation: 59/90
- Use and Availability of Resources: 70/90
- Non-Struggling Students (15 students): 71/75
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<th>USE AND AVAILABILITY OF RESOURCES</th>
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<tr>
<td>5/30</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/20</td>
<td>15/20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7/20</td>
<td>12/20</td>
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<td>4/20</td>
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<tr>
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</table>

Totals: (tot. 6 items - 120 answers) (tot. 4 items - 80 answers) (tot. 5 items - 100 answers) (tot. 4 items - 80 answers) (tot. 6 items - 120 answers)

- Whole Classroom:
  - Agree: 16/30
  - Not Agree: 14/30
  - Indifferent: 0/30

- Struggling Students:
  - Agree: 5/120
  - Not Agree: 7/120
  - Indifferent: 0/120

Percentages:
- Whole Classroom: 16.67% Agree, 26.67% Not Agree, 66.67% Indifferent
- Struggling Students: 4.17% Agree, 58.33% Not Agree, 37.5% Indifferent

Note: The table represents the distribution of responses among students regarding the effectiveness of different teaching methods and resource availability.
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