



FLIPPED LEARNING APPROACH TO FOSTER BENINESE EFL ADVANCED STUDENTS' ORAL COMMUNICATION CASE STUDY OF CEG VAKON

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Abstract

This paper investigates the flipped learning approach to foster Beninese EFL Advanced students' oral communication. This research work also has as objective to solve some challenges faced by learners in flipping learning approach. To reach this goal, ten (10) EFL teachers and one hundred (100) beginners are sampled purposively in CEG Vakon. Firstly, to collect data some questionnaires have been addressed to the selected students to understand the difficulties they generally face to speak English. Classroom observations and interview have also been carried out. The second stage deals with the experimental process. It has involved forty (40) students randomly split into two groups of twenty (20): an experimental group received the treatment (Flipped Classroom to teaching) and a control group without treatment. Both groups have been submitted to a pre-test and post-test after a period. The results of the study show that most of the learners have difficulties in oral communication because their level in grammar is low and they lack vocabulary. This research shows that flipped learning can be of great use to foster EFL students' oral communication performance.

Keywords: Oral Communication, Flipped Learning, Skills, Performance

1. Introduction

The traditional approach to education, where teachers are the sole providers of information and students passively receive knowledge, has long been the prevailing model. However, the advent of technology and the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic

have necessitated a reevaluation of teaching methods. In this context, the flipped learning approach has gained prominence as an innovative pedagogical strategy that promotes active student engagement and fosters oral communication skills.

This research paper focuses on the application of the flipped learning approach to enhance oral communication with students of Collège d'Enseignement Général (CEG) Vakon. The flipped learning approach is a flipped learning model that involves the inversion of traditional classroom activities. In this approach, students are exposed to instructional materials, such as videos and readings, outside of the classroom, while class time is dedicated to interactive discussions, collaborative activities, and practical application of the learned content.

The specific case study of CEG Vakon aims to examine the effectiveness of implementing the flipped learning approach to foster oral communication skills among students. This research paper seeks to address the following research questions:

1. What are oral communication challenges faced by EFL students?
2. How does the flipped learning approach impact student engagement and motivation towards learning English as a foreign language?
3. To what extent can flipped classrooms be successfully implemented despite challenges related to Beninese EFL context?

By investigating the flipped learning approach's potential to promote oral communication skills, this research aims to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on effective language teaching methodologies. The findings of this study will not only inform educational practitioners and policymakers in Benin but also offer insights to educators worldwide seeking innovative approaches to enhance oral communication in language learning contexts.

This paper will help EFL teachers be aware of how to take full advantage of a flipped learning classroom to make their students more proficient in the English language. This paper

has been structured into four sections. Back to the introductory part, the theoretical keystones is provided, it deals with the report of some researchers who have got to deal with the topic. The third section is about the target population and the sampling, the research instruments, the data collection procedures and the methods of data analysis. The fourth section hinges on the presentation and interpretation of the results, the discussions with the conclusion.

2. Theoretical Keystones

In language teaching and learning, the shift from the "passive student" to today's "active student" raises many questions about language teaching. Therefore, in the quest for more effective ways to teach EFL, researchers came up with different teaching approaches and methods like flipped learning approach where many scholars and authors have undergone researches on the subject.

2.1 Oral Communication Skills

Oral Communication is the ability to use the language orally and appropriately in any circumstances as well as shared sociocultural or pragmatic suppositions. It comprises of knowledge or competence and the capacity for implementing that competence in appropriate or contextualized communicative language use (Bailey, 2005: 8); Hedge, (2000:11). Based on several educators Bailey, (2005:15); Brown (2007:20); Hedge (2000:18), students English oral communication ability in the English classroom can be enhanced by using direct approach such as applying a systematic analysis to elements of speaking competence and classroom practice or indirect approach that involves students in conversation through role-play, simulation and problem-solving tasks, and provides more opportunities to practice in classroom activities. In addition, meaningful contextualized practice and fluency-based activities such as free discussion, role-play, and simulations. Showing the clear link between linguistic form and communicative function, personalizing

language by having students express their own ideas, feelings, preferences, and opinions, building awareness of the social use of language, and building learners confidence would help students to expose and produce the language in complete the learning tasks. Importantly, managing classroom interaction is another key to help students enhance their English oral communication ability. Producing language in front of other students can generate high levels of anxiety especially those students who have negative experiences in activities. Therefore, creating a reassuring and more supportive classroom environment in which students are prepared to experience in the language activities would definitely help students to improve their English oral communication ability (Bailey, 2005:19; Hedge, 2000:24; Nunan, 2015:44)

2.2 Engagement and Motivation in English Language Learning

When it comes to engagement, the underlying basis is that students are meaningfully involved in their learning through participation in interactive and worthwhile tasks (Wiliam, 2011). Wiliam highlights how collaborative learning and teamwork can enhance students' engagement in their learning process. Accordingly, an L2 language learner's willingness to identify and communicate with others in the target language (the language being learned) is important for language learning since L2 acquisition "presupposes active engagement in social practices mediated by the L2" (Henry, 2012:25). In this regard, a combination of a desire or choice, an effort, as well as a positive attitude and persistence or engagement shown by a learner in striving for the goal of learning a language (motivation (Dörnyei, 2001a) is hence futile without engagement and vice versa. Because on the one hand, with a lack of enough motivation, learners cannot accomplish long-term goals even with good quality teaching, appropriate curricula, or remarkable (language) learning skills.

Motivation is considered as one of the very crucial affective variables to a language learners' achievement. It is referred to the psychological feature causing from internal and external factors which arouse learners to behave or act towards their desired goal in learning English (Brown, 2007; Dörnyei, 2014). In early studies, there were instrumental and integrative orientations that refer only the context of learning, individual learner, cultural milieu, teaching methodology, and social interaction (Gardner & Lambert, 1972 cited in Brown, 2007). Later, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation were also mentioned in English language learning. They are defined as a continuum of possibilities of intensity or feeling or dive, ranging from deeply internal to external (Bernaus & Gardner, 2008; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2013). Motivation is an affective factor that helps students become successful English language learners. It is important that students should be driven by both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Cohen & Dörnyei, 2002; Dörnyei, 2014; Loima & Vibulphol, 2014; Ushioda, 2008).

2.3 Flipped Classroom in a Learner-centered Environment

Flipped Learning is a pedagogical approach in which direct instruction moves from the classroom to the individual learning space, and the resulting group space is transformed into a dynamic, interactive learning environment where the educator guides students as they apply concepts and engage creatively in the subject matter. According to Bergmann and Sams (2012:13), a flipped classroom can be described as a setting where that "*which is traditionally done in class is now done at home, and that which is traditionally done as homework is now completed in class*". In other words, the sequence is inverted. According to Lage, Platt, and Treglia (2000:32), "*Inverting the classroom means events that have traditionally taken place inside the classroom now take place outside the classroom and vice versa*". However, this definition is incomplete. The flipped classroom

is mainly perceived as students receiving video lectures for instruction, but that is only the tip of the proverbial iceberg. A successfully flipped classroom involves more than just recording didactic content and sending it to students before a lesson: the time spent in class should be more important than the videos. In this model, classroom time can be used for engaging in activities, discussing concepts, clarifying hard-to-understand information, and investigating questions related to content. The videos allow time in class for problem solving and hands-on activities, converting the classroom into a place where active learning occurs. The traditional classrooms are mostly teacher centered which is in conflict with the constructivist approaches to learning and teaching (Brooks, 2002). The flipped classroom is pedagogically sound because it serves the principles of personalized-differentiated learning, student-centered instruction, and constructivism. It is personalized because each student learns at his or her own pace. It is student-centered because class time can be used to participate in engaging activities, while the role of the teacher changes to facilitator and observer, allowing students to be more active. It applies the constructivist approach in which students take responsibility for their own learning; class time is free from didactic lecturing, allowing for a variety of activities, group work, and interactive discussion. In other words, students have a great variety of hands-on activities, promoting more meaningful learning Rajesh (2015:80). A flipped classroom frees up class time for teachers and presents learning choices to students rather than just informing them in a sit-and-listen format. With this model, teachers “can deliver this instruction by recording and narrating screencasts of work they do on their computers, creating videos of themselves teaching, or curating video lessons from trusted Internet sites” (Hamdan et al., 2013:85). In other words, teachers can record videos, add interactive elements, and share previously recorded segments from other teachers. Students should watch these videos before

coming to the classroom so that they can be active in the classroom activities. With internet access becoming more omnipresent, sources of language teachers to reach more videos for using in their language teaching classes have been on the increase.

2.4 Flipped Classroom Implementation

Goodwin & Miller (2013) create a coherent online lesson for students to access in preparation for the in-class activity. Layout and sequence:

- introduction to the topic;
- lesson map;
- lesson expectations & directions;
- learning objectives & outcomes;
- new Instructional Material & Resources;
- incentive activity that prepares students for in-class activity.

Review student work prior to class

The pre-class incentive activities provide the instructor with information about how to work in-class activities to focus on the elements that students struggle with the most. For Hattie (2005:40), if you use the discussion tool in classes to engage students in a pre-class discussion review the threads for depth of discussion and wrong ideas.

Establish your role before you head into the classroom

Think about transitioning your role from leading the discussion or lecturer to letting your students take responsibility for their learning and you become the guide, coach, and expert tutor. Here are some ways to become more of a guide Razak & Zainuddin (2014):

- walk around the classroom and observe the discussions
- ask questions to confirm student understanding and draw out more discussion

- answer questions that students bring to the class or raise during the class
- moderate a debate or facilitate a group discussion
- challenge students individually or challenge students to challenge each other

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This research uses a mixed method (quantitative + qualitative method) and quasi-experimental design to collect data about the use of flipped learning to foster Beninese EFL advanced students' oral communication. Quantitative data are collected through questionnaires addressed to EFL teachers and EFL learners while qualitative data are collected

through interviews addressed to EFL teachers and the classroom observation that was carried out by the researcher.

3.2 Sample Description

Ten (10) EFL teachers and one hundred (100) learners were chosen as sample to get reliable information. The average age of these learners ranges from 16 to 19 years' old. The target populations involved in this research work are EFL teachers and learners of "CEG Vakon". Indeed, to know exactly what happens during the teaching and learning of English and the difficulties faced, teachers and students are undoubtedly in the right position to be questioned and to be observed at work. The table below shows the school, the number of selected teachers and learners.

Table 1: sample

<i>Secondary schools</i>	<i>Status</i>	<i>Teachers' number</i>	<i>Students' number</i>
<i>CEG Vakon</i>	Public	10	100

3.3 Instruments

The main instruments used for this research are six (06) in number:

- questionnaires to both EFL teachers and students
- interviews with EFL teachers
- classroom observations
- experimentation

These instruments are worth describing for clear understanding.

3.3.1 Questionnaires for EFL Teachers and Students

Questionnaires provide a prompt and efficient way of getting large quantity of information from a large sample of a population. Here both quantitative and qualitative data are collected as it respectively contains closed-ended and open-ended

questions. Teachers' questionnaire is composed of ten (10) questions.

Addressing questions to learners is important because it enables the researcher to access the degree of credibility of the information provided by their teachers. In this section, five (05) questions are addressed to advanced learners divided into two sections.

3.3.2 Interviews with EFL Teachers

An interview is important for a research work because the qualitative data collected through opened questions allow the respondents to express their whole opinions about the topic. At these stage three questions are addressed to five (05) EFL teachers.

3.3.3 Classroom Observation

Qualitative data are collected through classroom observation and it is important for the

researcher because it allows crosschecking the data collected in the other instruments and also allowing witnessing the teaching and learning process to have accurate information, with the objective to witness the difficulties EFL teachers dealt with during the learning process. Negotiations were made with some teachers who have accepted to be visited during their lessons.

3.3.4 Experimentation

The experiment consists in applying flipped classroom teaching/learning process in two states for a period to an experimental group and comparing their overall oral communication skills improvement to a control group.

3.4 Procedures of Data Collection and Methods of Data Analysis

The population is CEG "Vakon" where ten (10) teachers and one hundred (100) learners are sampled. It was not easy to assess the teachers, though they helped me answer the different questions according to the instructions. Firstly, questionnaires were addressed to EFL teachers and the learners. Secondly, two teachers were met for the interview and finally the two teachers were observed in their classes. The quantitative and qualitative data are

computerized in Excel 2019 and SPSS 26. The quantitative data are collected first, followed by the qualitative one. The information collected with all those instruments are organized, analyzed, described and classified. Therefore, tables and figures were drawn for the score of questions addressed to EFL teachers and learners. Percentage method was used to analyze the collected data. Comments have been given to explain the responses under tables and figures.

4. Results

4.1 Oral Communication Challenges

Figure 1 reveals that the challenges related to speaking skills are in thirty percent (30%) of the cases due to the interference of the first language (French), in sixty-five percent (65%) to the unavailability of authentic materials. Ninety percent (90%) of the respondents' mention students' Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) as a challenge related to speaking skills teaching while fifty percent (50%) point out students' lack of vocabulary and eighty percent (80%) encounter students' lack of interest and motivation. These results show that the most recurrent challenge encountered while teaching speaking skills is Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA).

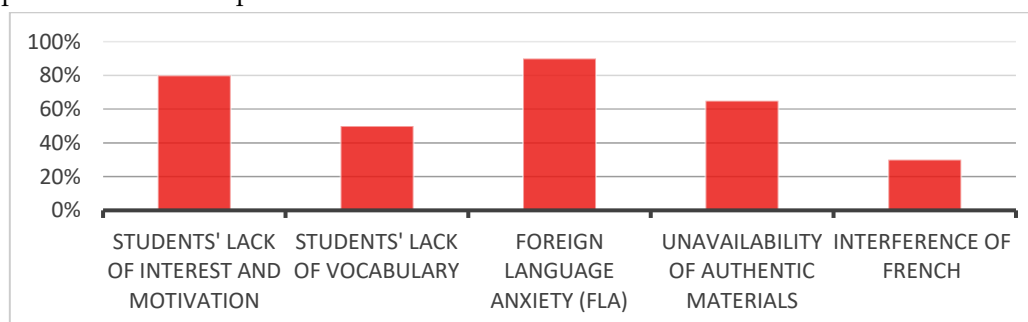


Figure 1: Challenges related to Speaking Skills Teaching

4.2 Activities Used for Flipped Classroom Implementation

From the results of figure 2, fifty percent (50%) of the teachers said that the whole class

discussion and collaborative active learning are used to promote development of students', twenty-five percent (25%) for quizzes and songs whereas twenty-five percent (25%) for poems and games. It can be concluded that teachers

make use of whole class discussion and collaborative than quizzes, song, games, poems activities in flipped classrooms.

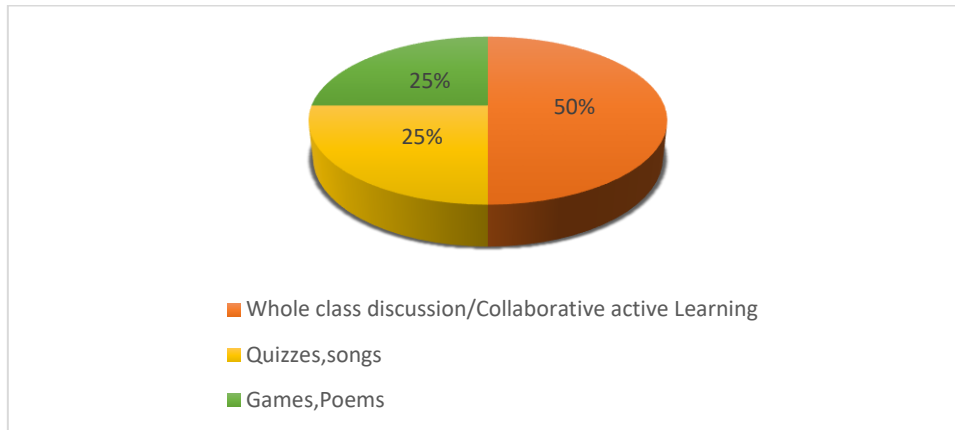


Figure 2: Activities used for flipped classroom implementation

4.3 Classroom Observation Reports

Classroom observation is the most effective way to get information as far as teaching and learning are concerned. Regarding the classroom observation, it is obvious to say that before coming in the classroom, teachers prepare the lessons which help him or her to provide clear instruction to learners so that they could understand.

Therefore, some teachers have been visited in classes to witness how they teach speaking to learners. Some strategies can be applied by English teacher in teaching and learning process in the classroom. There is direct instruction, discussion, small, group work, cooperative learning, problem solving, research, role play, case study, and writing. The Flipped classroom is a teaching approach where your students get their first exposure to course content before coming to class through readings and lectures. They, then spend in-class time engaging in activities that you have designed to promote a deeper understanding of a concept. Classroom materials are anything a student need to view or read. It could be a syllabus, a weekly article, or a document communicating classroom rules. These materials are not graded by the teachers. The goal of all activities is to

enhance student's understanding, skill or effectiveness in a specific area by engaging multiple styles of learning. School activities also serve to infuse fun into learning as well as boost students' confidence and the ability to learn more and think critically.

4.4 Interview Reports

Five (05) experienced EFL teachers were interviewed to investigate the impact of the flipped learning approach on students' oral communication skills. They emphasized its benefits in deepening understanding and retention due to increased engagement and ownership over learning, particularly during speaking lessons. While some teachers were unfamiliar with the flipped classroom concept, they recognized its compatibility with EFL teaching practices and its potential to foster exploration, practice, and critical thinking. Challenges of class size and implementation strategies were acknowledged, with solutions proposed including extended class time, smaller classrooms, and teacher training in creating conducive learning environments for English courses.

4.5 The Experimentation Report (the effect of flipped classroom on students' performance)

For the experimentation, two groups have been taken into account: Experimental group where flipped learning is implemented and Control Group where flipped classroom is not taken into account. Before the experimentation, a speaking test has been administered using the Babbel platform to ensure that all students from both groups have almost the same oral proficiency level. The analysis is based on the student's scores representing their average overall oral proficiency performance for the speaking test. The data have been analyzed using SPSS 26 with the following conditions:

1. A null hypothesis H_0 and a hypothesis H_1 are formulated:
 - H_0 : There is no statistical significance between the effect of flipped classroom teaching and students' oral performance.
 - H_1 : There is a statistical significance between the effect of flipped classroom teaching and students' oral performance.

2. The statistical significance (Sig) is established for a P-value noted $\alpha < 0.05$. The level of statistical **significance** is expressed as a **p-value** between 0 and 1. A **p-value** less than 0.05 (typically ≤ 0.05) is statistically **significant**. It indicates strong evidence against the null hypothesis, as there is less than a 5% probability.

3. If H_0 is rejected, then H_1 is proved.

4. **The practical significance** (the real-life significance) expressing the strength of the correlation between our variables is assessed through the *Effect size* expressed in ETA squared value.

The objective here is to reject this null (H_0) hypothesis using the analysis of variance ANOVA test for statistical significance. Two values are expected **p-value** $\alpha < 0.05$ indicating statistical significance and the ETA squared value expressing the Measure of Association assessing the effect size between the independent variable (the treatment) and the dependent variable (student performance/score). The ETA square helps to measure the impact of the use of flipped classroom within the sample chosen.

Table 3: Speaking test Report

Report			
Group			
Overall Score	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
5	2.00	1	.
6	2.00	3	.000
7	2.00	4	.000
8	2.00	7	.000
9	1.73	11	.467
10	1.40	5	.548
11	1.00	7	.000
12	1.00	5	.000
13	1.00	2	.000
14	1.00	2	.000
16	1.00	3	.000
Total	1.50	50	.505

Table 3 presenting the speaking test report, shows a total mean of 1.5 and a standard deviation of .505 for the 50 participants.

Table 4: One-way ANOVA control group*experimental group

ANOVA Table							
			Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Overall Score	Group *	Between Groups (Combined)	9.118	10	.912	10.515	.000
		Within Groups	3.382	39	.087		
		Total	12.500	49			

In table 4 the analysis of variance (ANOVA) shows that there is a statistical significance between both groups as $Sig = .000$ or p-value noted $p=2.8039e^{-13} < \alpha=0.05$ (the significance level). This value allows rejecting the Null Hypothesis (there is no statistical

significance between the effect of flipped classroom teaching and students' oral performance). The practical level of correlation/association between treatment and groups is assessed by the measure of association summarized in the following table (table 5).

Table 5: Measure of association of Overall Score * Group

Measures of Association		
	Eta	Eta Squared
Group * Overall Score	.854	.729

The measure of association in table 5 reveals that, the Eta squared value expressing the Effect size is $ES = .729$. This indicates a strong correlation between the dependent variable and the independent variable. This means that 72.9 % of the variability of students' oral performance is explained by the use of the flipped classroom model. These data are interesting since they confirm the predicted positive impact of flipped classroom on students' oral proficiency development.

5. Discussion

Teaching English to students in an EFL context is not an easy job for the teachers. The actual challenges related to the effective teaching in our language classes are the outdated official activities, the lack of equipment, the lack of authentic teaching materials and the inefficient teaching methods. The results show that most teachers do not use flipped learning approach in classroom.

According to the results of the analysis, the present study found that students' performance in flipped classrooms was better than in traditional classrooms. It proved the flipped classroom instructional strategy can effectively improve students' learning performance. So, one can say that flipped classroom carry out a positive effect on students' performance. Primarily, it is fundamental to understand the purpose of flipped learning activities in the English classroom. To this aim, four ideas are proposed by Littlewood (1981:16) that are the flipped learning activities' contributions in the English classroom. Here, the aim is to enable learners to interact with others in any situation and to apply what they learn in real and everyday situations with a high proficiency. First, the flipped learning activities provide the "whole-class discussion", it means those activities should be structured allowing students to practice their performance in all the skills and they suit to the learners' level. The

second contribution mentioned by the author is that “they improve motivation” since the students perceive the language” as a means of communication rather than as a structural system”. Therefore, if the activities proposed enrich this perception, students might want to take part in the communication with their peers. The third idea is that the flipped learning activities “allow natural learning”, because when the learner is involved in a classroom environment where he needs to use the target language, the learning process is becoming in a natural process. A final contribution flipped learning activities in the classroom is that “they can create a context which supports learning”, since they allow to strengthen relationships among partners and teacher that “can help to ‘humanize’ the classroom and to create an environment that supports the individual in his effort to learn” (Littlewood, 2012:18). In addition, Harmer (2001: 228) mentioned that: *“listening as a fundamental language skill, provides the perfect opportunity to hear voices other than the teacher’s, enable students to acquire good speaking habits as a result of spoken English they absorb, and helps to improve their own pronunciation”*.

Now, another important aspect to take into account the flipped learning activities is the teacher’s role. According to Littlewood (1981:45) sometimes the teacher intervention in group activities is unnecessary in order not to interrupt students’ process and to hinder the development of students’ communicative skills. Nonetheless, even when the teacher wants students to be more independent, his role in the classroom should be less dominant but not very passive, so that students know that he is available when they need him. Thus, the teacher is available as a guide and help for students; he should be a monitor of students’ weaknesses and strengths in their performance to identify learning necessities.

Flipped learning could benefit all. Active and meaningful learning is achievable through flipped learning. Thus, teachers are

satisfied and excited to use it. Teachers are informed that by having flipped learning, they have better insight into their students’ level of understanding. They have better interaction with the students too (Roehl, Reddy & Shannon, 2013). Flipping the classroom makes a pedagogical shift from conventional and static content delivery to an active, collaborative classroom between students and teachers while having the application of content and reflection on learning experiences. By pushing out content materials outside the classroom, class is totally freed up to engage students in problem solving, active communication between teachers and peers, and teachers can assess learners’ understanding and give immediate feedbacks. Flipping the classroom could challenge both learners and teachers’ roles in the classroom.

Flipped Learning activities can be used in various teaching aspects of the language skills such as listening, speaking, writing and reading. It is essential to consider some aspects in order to take maximum advantage of the classroom environment as a social context to foster the use of the foreign language, such as using the foreign language for classroom management, using the foreign language as a medium teaching, conversation or discussion sessions, basing dialogues and role-plays on school experience. Having in mind the previous aspects to use of the target language in the classroom as a social context, there is a kind of activities that may increase the possibilities for social communication and interaction in the classroom. These activities are simulation and roleplaying. This kind of activities aims at promoting more creative and varied moments in the learning process.

Now, there are some activities that help to balance teacher-control and students’ creativity: role-playing controlled through cued dialogues, role-playing controlled through cues and information, role-playing controlled through situations and goals, and roleplaying in the form of debate or discussion. Taking into

account the activities previously described, it has to be considered that for this project's purpose, it is important to work on the functional aspect of the language, but even more important is to develop the social aspect of it. Therefore, in the pedagogical proposal of this project both kinds of activities are going to be included to reach its objective. Such activities include collaborative activities (group and pair), communicative activities that enable students to use the target language to accomplish the goal; as well as activities that demand collaboration and communication among students.

6. Conclusion

English is a worldwide language learned all over the world. In Benin where it is learnt as a foreign language, the challenge of using this language as an instrument that opens doors to the world and to many opportunities has given a new thrive to its teaching and learning. After many years of English study, EFL students still find it difficult to form correct and meaningful sentences in English and some do not even understand what is said orally to them despite the efforts that have been made to make the teaching and learning of the language relevant to the needs of the country and meet up with the actual challenges; and that is because many things remain to be done at the classroom level.

Hence, flipped classrooms is a very flexible approach that can be used in our context. The existing conventional teaching pedagogy should be shifted to ensure that our education system is able to produce better generations. Nonetheless, not many studies have been reported on the long-term effects of the integration of flipped learning approach. Thus, longitudinal studies of flipped learning should be done to see whether it is good to implement it in the long-term process. Aside from the lack of adequate materials such as text books and others, most of the teachers are not qualified for the teaching of English and they

lack strategies and techniques that can be used to help students to develop oral communication skills, most especially in the way they teach grammar.

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