

Flipping an IELTS writing class: Vietnamese learners' perception

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ABSTRACT

The paradox between limited class time and colossal course demand is common in short courses of IELTS writing component compared to other skills. That sometimes leads to the failure of teachers to accomplish their lesson objectives. Additionally, the fact that few studies about teaching IELTS writing have been conducted in language centers reveals a shortage of research about solutions to this paradox in language centers. To address this problem, this paper will introduce the flipped classroom in an Academic Module IELTS writing class of 20 learners at a language center in Vietnam to investigate their perceptions of the flipped IELTS writing classroom, the relationship between students' learning before class with their lesson objective completion as well as their lesson understanding, and problems in the transition from a traditional class to a flipped one. The research instruments comprised a post-course questionnaire, weekly meeting surveys, and a post-course interview. The results indicated that most learners felt optimistic about this teaching approach and advocated its efficiency in inverted time allotment for lectures and homework. However, they did not have much independence and active learning. Additionally, their exposure to lecture-like learning materials at different levels before class improved their rates of lesson objective completion and understanding of the day's content. However, introducing different perspectives in approaching the same writing question seemed counterproductive when it confused learners. Furthermore, nine learners' problems were identified, and pedagogical suggestions were made for the flipped IELTS writing class.

1. Introduction

IELTS tests assess candidates' English proficiency for non-academic (General Training Module) and academic environments (Academic Module), with scores often required for university admission worldwide. The test's practical application has driven its popularity, with over 03 million tests taken globally in 2016 (Ielts, 2023). In Vietnam, graduation requirements mandate B1 proficiency for non-English majors and B2 for English majors as per the Ministry of Education and Training (Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training, 2021), fostering demand for preparation courses in TOEIC and IELTS at schools and language centers nationwide. Despite its importance, global statistics from 2015 indicate writing scores are consistently the lowest among the test's sub-skills (Ielts, 2017), prompting heightened focus from instructors. However, maintaining consistent writing instruction proves challenging, often

disrupted by teacher rotations and varying instructional approaches, necessitating recurrent theoretical lessons for new classes.

An essential point is that while teachers may differ in their views on the foundational training for IELTS learners, they universally agree that practice is paramount. Yet, skill training is often unreliable in self-study due to limited learner autonomy. Increasing in-class practice time, where learners benefit from teacher supervision, is a viable solution to address this issue. This can be achieved by assigning more pre-class preparation, allowing learners to acquaint themselves with necessary concepts and theories at their own pace. This pre-learning phase enables students to independently explore resources and attempt parts of writing tasks, thus freeing up class time for practice. Consequently, adopting a flipped classroom approach, where lectures are reviewed before class, is an effective strategy for maximizing in-class practice time.

However, the setting for studies on this teaching approach focuses mainly on higher education or high school, where teachers have much more power due to their decisions on the learners' academic achievement than their counterparts at language centers. In addition, the relationship between learners' prior-to-class learning, their completion of lesson objectives, and their understanding of the lesson, to the best of our knowledge, has not been studied. In addition, very little has been mentioned regarding the challenges of learners in transitioning from a traditional writing classroom to a flipped writing class. Therefore, the need for more exploration of the flipped classroom for IELTS writing instruction in language centers is paramount to find the answers to the following research questions:

1. How do learners perceive different aspects of the flipped classroom in an IELTS writing course?
2. How much of the learners' prior-to-class learning affects their completion of lesson objectives and their understanding of the lesson?
3. What problems do learners have transitioning from a traditional to a flipped IELTS writing class?

Moreover, through the study, an example of the delivery for the IELTS writing flipped classroom can be demonstrated for ESL teachers interested in this teaching approach in their practice.

2. Background theories

The following section mainly focuses on aspects of the flipped classroom and the teaching of IELTS writing.

2.1. Traditional classroom

According to Saunders (2014, p. 27), traditional classrooms are envisioned as face-to-face meetings between teachers and learners. Lectures on key concepts are conducted, while note-taking, individual reading, and quiz-solving are the main learning activities. Fulton (2012) considered the traditional class to be teacher-centered. He confirmed the challenges of turning it into a flipped class, which requires teachers' skills to employ technological resources in designing their class materials.

2.2. Definition and principles of a flipped classroom

The flipped classroom concept may have been known for some decades, but it has gained popularity since 2007 (Huereca, 2015). Several studies mentioned the benefits of the flipped classroom (Bergmann & Sams, 2012; Fulton, 2012; Larcara, 2014) and the drawbacks of the teaching approach (Oblinger & Oblinger, 2005; Sierra, 2015). In terms of research on this

teaching approach in writing instruction, some findings were made in the link of learners' behavioral and emotional engagement with their cognitive engagement and agency (Gasmi & Thomas, 2017) or the motivation for active learning of the flipped writing classroom (Farah, 2014; Hung, 2015). In that trend, research into the application of flipped classrooms in teaching IELTS has also attracted attention. Especially in an IELTS preparation course, there is always a shortage of time and pressure on test results, which makes the teacher rush to meet the course objectives (Hayes & Read, 2004). This issue can be tackled well with the flipped classroom, which enables more material processing and improves satisfaction and performance in quizzes and exams (Mason et al., 2013).

The convergence in the literature of flipped classrooms was raised in the study of Clark (2013), confirming that flipping the classroom is the teaching approach that swaps the time for activities in the course so that lectures are given to learners at home, and homework is done in class. This teaching approach also coincides with the "inverted classroom" concept by Lage et al. (2000, p. 32).

There are four principles the flipped classroom should adopt: (1) providing materials of different forms (e.g., printed files, podcasts, or video clips) before class, (2) giving incentives for lesson preparation, (3) devising ways to check learners' understanding of the lecture, and (4) organizing activities which stimulate high order thinking in learners (Brame, 2013). However, generally speaking, learners' learning improvement or positive attitudes towards learning mainly take shape from active learning instruction, and in flipped classrooms, learners are usually responsible for learning new concepts before class meetings (Jensen et al., 2015). In other words, although learners' learning can be shifted out of class, quality face-to-face meetings are still a catalyst and a decisive factor for the success of the teaching approach because only then can motivational measures be realized and most questions or problems be thoroughly resolved.

2.3. Benefits of the flipped classroom

Brown (2015) carried out a flipped course in an undergraduate introductory biology class and found that most students preferred the flipped approach to the traditional one. They attributed their preference to the possibility of re-watching presentations, asking questions, and engaging in meaningful exchange with peers and the lecturer or teaching assistants, more explicit instruction, more discussion on some topics, and less time-consuming sessions, to name a few. Another study by Frydenberg (2013) clarified the interest, challenges, and contributions to learning that students enjoyed from the flipped classroom in an introductory Information Technology course. Similarly, a pharmaceutical flipped course studied by McLaughlin et al. (2013) found that most students appreciated it because it was believed to help improve students' engagement, empowerment, development, quality, and efficiency.

With more specific details of benefits of the flipped classroom, the qualitative approach, Fulton (2012) reflected learners' remarks stating that (1) learners can be individually catered for as regards their learning paces and personal issues of interest, (2) they are facilitated by teachers in doing homework, and (3) videos of lectures can be rewound at will for more understanding. Moreover, the flipped classroom was also claimed to be in line with the learners' technological fad, enabled flexible learning time, satisfied individual learning needs, and enhanced learners' two-way interactions with teachers and peers (Bergmann & Sams, 2012).

As regards the application of the flipped classroom in language education, learners advocated their interest and enjoyment in learning with this teaching approach, the improvement of learning efficiency thanks to the ability to review lessons many times in preparation for the class,

and the preference for collaborative learning in class compared to simply completing exercises in textbooks in traditional classrooms (Güvenç, 2018). Furthermore, Sukerti et al. (2020) reported that flipped classrooms could improve students' writing performance and allow more one-on-one interaction with teachers in and outside the classroom. Furthermore, Rad et al. (2021) looked at the discussion-oriented and role-reversal models of the flipped classroom in English language learning to recognize that the latter model was more effective than the former in improving students' writing performances and that positive evaluations were given to teacher support, peer assistance, personal perception, and activities in and outside the classroom in both models.

2.4. Potential problems of the flipped classroom

Although few studies have shown the risks of running a flipped classroom, a convergence of their findings is worth considering by practitioners of this teaching approach. First, as Larcara (2014) stated, the responsibility for reading materials and learning from videos mainly relies on the learners' self-discipline, so measures (e.g., quizzes for grade earning) should be taken to encourage exposure to lectures before classes (Brame, 2013), so it causes problems for teachers at language centers when scores there do not affect their grade point average at school and thus are of negligible importance for learners. Secondly, technical problems with portable devices and wireless connections can hinder learning in the flipped classroom (Sierra, 2015). Thirdly, a computer, with its many functions, is a device that embeds distractions that drive learners away from their focus on learning. It worsens when net-generation learners have short attention spans and require fast interactions when dealing with the lesson content (Oblinger & Oblinger, 2005). Fourthly, the short attention span will take effect if the video is kept too long, which challenges viewers' patience (Nematollahi et al., 2015). Fifthly, Caranfa (2004) asserted that silence is a favorable environment for logical, critical, and rational thinking and helps learners connect with separate pieces of information. Therefore, if teachers only offer videos with constant talks, these learners may find it harder to concentrate and process information.

2.5. The essential in teaching IELTS writing for the academic training module

In IELTS writing, the essays are marked according to band descriptors. Therefore, teachers should raise learners' awareness of marking criteria to improve their learning and test scores (Ameri-Golestan & Nezakat-Alhossaini, 2013). If students have a clear view of their weaknesses and goals for improvement to move up in the rubric of the band descriptor, their learning is expected to be more focused and motivated. Moreover, most IELTS courses are considered test preparation courses, after each of which some learners will take the real test for different purposes. Therefore, test-taking techniques and tips are much desired and appreciated by learners of IELTS (Chappell et al., 2015), as well as drills in four skills and language areas such as vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. However, the foundation of writing should also be constructed by the reading of English materials, among which model essays are learners' favorite reference to facilitate their learning of writing genres (Eschholz, 1980) or give them reference to both correct mistakes of forms and learn ideas (Abe, 2008). Besides, the theoretical lessons for writing different parts of an essay (i.e., general statement, thesis statement in the introduction, topic sentences, supporting sentences in the body, and the essay conclusion) must be given and practiced intensively (Marsaulina, 2016).

Explaining marking criteria, teaching writing techniques, tips, and writing theories, carrying out writing practice for essays' parts, and reading the model essays are very time-consuming and push teachers into the conundrum of having too little time for too much teaching load. This problem can be addressed with the flipped classroom when a part of the lesson is done

at home before classes to leave time for activities requiring more teacher-learner synchronous interactions like essay correction and outline correction.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research tools

Mixed methods were employed in an exploratory manner for this study. Research instruments were developed based on key principles of the flipped classroom, as identified in the literature review. These instruments included:

- Post-course questionnaire: Consisting of 12 questions rated on a 1-10 scale, evaluating learner satisfaction, preference for flipped vs. traditional classes, time spent in flipped classes, efficiency, teacher feedback, model answers, intellectual stimulation from before-class questions, personalization of learning, independent and active learning, and preference for video versus printed materials. It also included 03 open-ended questions exploring the impacts of traditional learning habits on flipped classroom experiences, explanations for flipped class efficiency, and suggestions for improvement.

- Weekly surveys: Administered after each lesson, with four questions: assessing the percentage of lesson objective completion, levels of preparation, and learner suggestions for future lessons.

- Post-course interview: Comprising nine questions focused on challenges faced by language learners and IELTS writing learners, specifically in the flipped classroom. Probing questions were included to uncover additional challenges not initially observed.

Data from weekly surveys were processed in Microsoft Excel, while final survey data were analyzed using SPSS 20 and Excel for creating tables. Interviews were transcribed, translated into English, and coded using NVivo to identify themes related to challenges transitioning from traditional to flipped classroom environments.

3.2. Participants

The study involved 20 learners enrolled in an IELTS class at level 3 in a five-level IELTS program, working with Complete IELTS bands 5.0 - 6.5 textbook at ABC, an English center in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. Participants ranged from secondary school students to university students. The teaching approach at ABC was predominantly traditional, involving lectures, in-class exercises, and homework. This setting provided an appropriate research site for investigating the challenges of transitioning from conventional to flipped classroom methods. Learners attended classes three times a week for ninety minutes, with one session dedicated to writing practice. However, participant numbers varied across data collection stages due to fluctuating attendance rates, ranging from 03 to 19 learners, depending on school workload and weather conditions. Thirteen learners participated in the final interview, and 14 out of 20 completed online and offline post-course surveys following the program's conclusion.

3.3. The implementation of the flipped classroom

The primary textbook used was Complete IELTS bands 5 - 6.5 by Brook-Hart and Jakeman (2012). Before each class, the teacher provided video presentations or printed materials to teach learners how to write various parts of essays. These resources followed the textbook sections or were created separately, such as for teaching essay introductions or task overviews not covered in the book. To promote critical thinking and expressive flexibility, learners evaluated writing samples, compared model answers, and suggested improvements in these

materials. Learners practiced writing and compared their work with textbook and teacher-provided model answers. The teacher assessed learners' understanding and preparation during class through discussions, explanations, and comparisons. Learners asked questions, discussed issues from their home study, completed timed essays for correction, and optionally submitted additional homework in subsequent classes.

4. Findings and discussion

4.1. Learners' perception of the flipped IELTS writing class

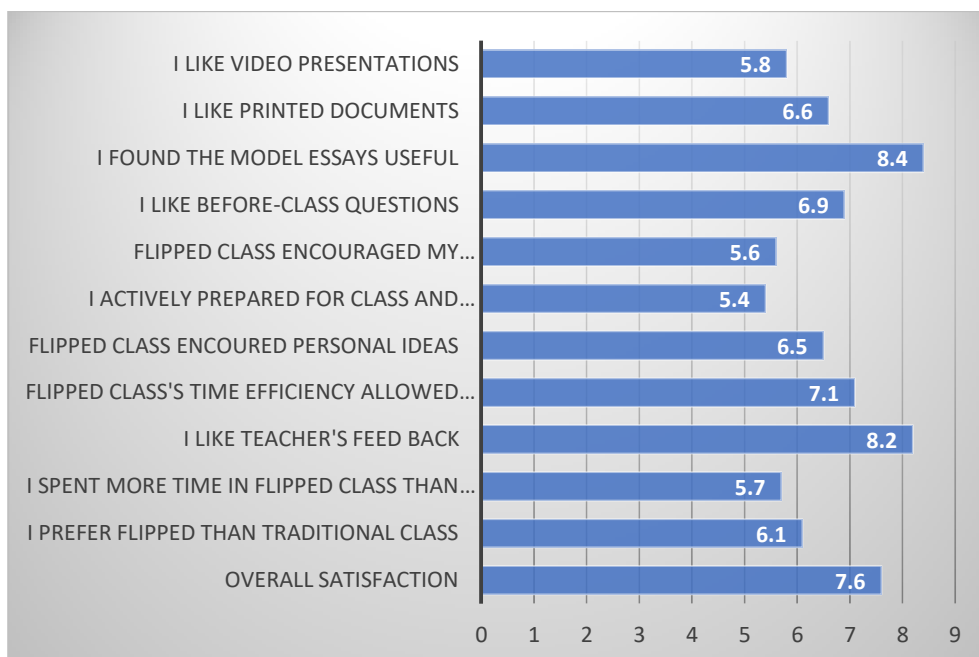
The answer to the research question about learners' perception of the flipped IELTS writing class is demonstrated through the analysis of the findings from 12 questions asking for the 10-level rating in the survey below.

According to Figure 1 below, the standout feature was the high ratings for the usefulness of teachers' model answers and their feedback on essays, averaging 8.4 and 8.2 out of 10, respectively. This aligns with Abe (2008), who highlights the importance of model essays and teacher feedback in IELTS learners' perspectives. Additionally, learners preferred teacher correction over peer correction, as found in Ur's (2012) survey on language teaching. To foster positive feedback reception, the teacher provided constructive, detailed advice for error correction resources for improvement and occasionally substituted poorly written expressions with improved examples. Criticism was avoided in favor of praise and corrective suggestions, which motivated learners.

However, learners rated the item (5.7 out of 10) as lower regarding increased time investment compared to traditional classes, echoing findings by Hung (2015). They were more optimistic (7.1 out of 10) about the efficiency of time used for more practice in the flipped class, facilitated by pre-class questions and writing practice. Learners appreciated these preparatory activities, as reflected in their 6.9 rating.

Figure 1

Learners' Rating of Different Aspects of the Flipped Classroom



Note. Data analysis result of the research

The materials issued before class were more extensive than textbook content, including writing theories, practice, and additional model answers to enhance writing flexibility. This enriched pre-class preparation and optimized classroom time efficiency (Brown, 2015; Mason et al., 2013).

Despite these advantages, active learning and independent study received average ratings of 5.4 and 5.6, respectively, contrasting with findings from studies involving more complex online resources (Lage et al., 2000; Marrs & Novak, 2004). Learners seemed less engaged with the video presentations and printed materials alone, impacting their active participation in the course.

Moreover, learners preferred printed materials (rating of 6.6) over video presentations (rating of 5.8) for before-class self-learning. Videos required integrated listening and reading skills and often contained dense information, challenging learners' patience (Oblinger & Oblinger, 2005; Nematollahi et al., 2015).

Overall, while learners valued model answers and teacher feedback highly, their enthusiasm for this teaching approach was tempered by concerns over time commitment and the quality of multimedia resources, indicating room for improvement in fostering independent and active learning.

4.2. The influence of learners' prior-to-class learning on their completion of lesson objectives and lesson understanding

The objectives of these lessons were to write a complete essay in class and receive teacher feedback on parts of the essay. This was reasonable for many writing classes but a significant challenge for 90-minute IELTS writing sessions. Learners struggled to meet the time limit for each writing task, making it challenging to correct sections in class and still have time for essay completion, especially with individualized feedback. Poor pre-class preparation was partly due to time-consuming question analysis and critical comparisons of different responses among learners. These comparisons were reflections on pre-class content. The teacher collected and provided feedback on timed writing outcomes and presented a complete answer for learners to base their work on. After each lesson, students rated their objective completion and understanding on a 10% to 100% scale. The researcher compared these ratings with the actual writing products and found no significant discrepancy. Learners' timed writing products often nearly completed the essay body but sometimes lacked the overview for task 1 and the conclusion for task 2.

Table 1

Students' Lesson Preparation Levels and the Average of their Self-rating of Lesson Objective Completion and Understanding of Lesson

Levels of preparation/Objective completion and lesson understanding	Lesson objective completion (%)	Understanding of lesson (%)
Level 1: No preparation	69	71
Level 2: Watch video/Read documents	72	78
Level 3: Watch video/Read documents + Practice writing	84	85
Level 4: Watch video/Read documents + Practice writing + Compare essays/ learn from other sources	80	80

Note. Data analysis result of the research

As illustrated in Table 1, students demonstrated clear progress in completing lesson objectives and understanding lessons as their pre-class preparation improved. Without watching video presentations or reading printed documents (level 1), students completed 69% of lesson objectives and understood 71% of the content. These figures increased to 72% and 78% for those who watched the videos or read the documents (level 2), peaking at 84% and 85% for learners who thoroughly reviewed the materials and completed the required writing practice before class (level 3). However, a decline to 80% in both areas was observed at level 4 of preparation. This drop may be attributed to lower proficiency among some highly prepared students, for whom 80% might still be a significant achievement. Additionally, requiring students to compare different approaches to the same questions may confuse them, as individual writing strategies vary. While the essay structure remained constant, differences in ideas could either consolidate or challenge students' viewpoints. This result suggests potential issues with introducing diverse perspectives in writing tasks, necessitating further research to substantiate these findings.

Table 2

The Comparison of the Objective Completion and Understanding of Lessons of Students Having Lesson Preparation of Levels 1 and 2 as well as 1 and 3

	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Completion level 1 - Completion level 3	-1.51888E1	14.52249	5.13448	-27.32986	-3.04764	-2.958	7	.021
Understand level 1 - Understand level3	-1.39787E1	12.65178	4.47308	-24.55590	-3.40160	-3.125	7	.017
Completion level 1 - Completion level 2	-2.61400	9.15678	2.89563	-9.16436	3.93636	-.903	9	.390
Understand level 1 - Understand level 2	-9.21500	7.02435	2.22129	-14.23992	-4.19008	-4.148	9	.002

Note. Data analysis result of the research

According to the results of the paired sample T-test in Table 2, students who watched video clips, read documents, and practiced writing as instructed demonstrated significantly higher rates of objective completion ($p = 0.021$) and understanding of the lesson ($p = 0.017$). Even students who only watched clips or read documents without engaging in writing practice (level 2 preparation) showed a notable improvement in lesson understanding ($p = 0.02$) despite no significant difference in objective completion ($p = 0.390$). The findings underscore the importance of requiring students to practice writing before class. This aligns with Güvenç's (2018) assertion regarding the significance of prior-to-class preparation and even further establishes a clear relationship between preparation levels and objective completion and lesson understanding.

4.3. Learners' problems of the IELTS writing flipped class and pedagogical recommendations

The answer to the research questions about learners' problems transitioning from a traditional to a flipped class is clarified with findings from the interview, post-course, and weekly surveys. As 18 out of 19 learners stated in the first weekly survey that it was the first

time they had learned with the flipped classroom, the challenges they faced in this first experience with the flipped course reflected the difficulties of the transition to the new teaching and learning approach from the traditional lecture-based instruction.

4.3.1. Technical problems

Aware of the technical issues related to connectivity, application restrictions, and the complexity of educational apps, as Sierra (2015) noted, the researcher utilized a Facebook closed group - a familiar platform for all participants who frequently watched videos on their phones. The teacher used Camtasia to compress file sizes to around 30 MB and verified video accessibility via cell phones before uploading them to the Facebook group. However, in the post-course interview, 08 out of 13 learners reported being unable to watch the clips on their mobile phones due to application incompatibility. Teachers often assume learners will seek help if they encounter problems, but this technical issue was not mentioned during the course. The key takeaway is that teachers should regularly inquire about any technical difficulties learners may face, regardless of the careful design of multimedia materials. This proactive approach can also uncover other issues, allowing for timely solutions.

4.3.2. Distraction from the online environment

Regarding whether learners were distracted when learning on Facebook, which usually notified new activities from friends, 08 out of 13 learners admitted this problem. Some of their specific answers were:

It affects my atmosphere, preventing me from having effective learning and concentration, and when on Facebook, some activities distract me (learner 9).

I will stop learning to check Facebook notifications depending on whether the activity is enjoyable and essential (learner 13).

The high frequency of Facebook use may increase the chances for learners to visit their class closed group. If the learners do not plan such activities, they will be notified by the teacher's reminders and friends' interactions on the content. However, the distraction of online social activities was unavoidable for many learners when they shifted their attention fast among different tasks (Oblinger & Oblinger, 2005) with a bias toward entertaining content rather than academic ones. Therefore, tips for concentration should be discussed in class to raise learners' awareness and minimize this problem.

4.3.3. Passiveness in dealing with technical problems

Technical problems did happen among participants in this study, as did the research by Sierra (2015), but the passiveness in dealing with such challenges was palpable. When having problems with viewing videos on mobile devices, learners can efficiently resolve application incompatibility by using Google search. However, most of them (08 out of 13 learners) did not take the initiative to solve this problem; instead, they let it prolong and cause discomfort until the end of the course. This showed a passive approach to learning in most participants, compared to traditional lecture-based classes, where learners are expected to be provided with almost everything when they come to class. Consequently, when online materials failed to approach them, they ignored them during the course without feeling regretful about losing the opportunity to learn.

4.3.4. Passiveness in lesson preparation

In the survey's open question, learners were asked to list the impacts of the learning style from the traditional class on the flipped classroom. Some selected answers are presented below.

The traditional way allows me to obtain all the class knowledge, but it is hard to be active in studying them all in advance (learner 2).

I think traditional classes make learners depend too much on the teacher and not discuss or exchange ideas much (learner 4).

The central concern in the learners' answers was the passiveness they believed to come from the traditional class. They might get too used to attending class unprepared and have mostly one-way communication in which the teacher tells them what to do. Therefore, when shifting to the flipped class, even though the teacher emphasized the importance of pre-class learning, saying that they would not teach what was in the prescribed videos and documents, a fraction of the learners still came to class unprepared. That problem was described in more detail in the summary of the weekly surveys below.

Table 3

Learners' Self-rating of their Preparation, Lesson Objective Completion, and Lesson Understanding

Item/Week	W2	W3	W4	W5	W6	W8	W10	W11	W13	W14	W15
Prepared learners (%)	53	58	76	71	100	57	53	63	73	73	73
Lesson objective completion (%)	75	55	66	69	67	82	79	79	79	66	74
Lesson understanding (%)	78	71	79	79	67	85	73	79	83	71	75

Note. Data analysis result of the research

Table 3 reveals that preparation levels varied among learners, ranging from 53% to 100%. The majority of students typically only watched videos or read materials without engaging in answering questions or practicing writing before class. Those who did prepare beforehand constituted between 53% and 76% of the class in most sessions. Surprisingly, around one-fourth to half of the students attended class without preparation, despite knowing they would miss the lecture content.

This influence from traditional teaching methods may be particularly impactful because the flipped class was only implemented for writing lessons, covering just one-third of the course duration. In contrast, different teachers still taught other skills using traditional methods. This setup suggests that a complete transition to the flipped approach for all skills could be more effective in changing learning habits.

4.3.5. Lack of self-discipline and autonomy

In the survey open question about the impacts of the learning style from the traditional class to the flipped class, the theme of self-discipline and autonomy was summarized with the following answers.

It depends on the subject and the learner's interest in that subject, the teacher's teaching (in face-to-face class), and whether exercises are reasonable because learner autonomy is limited (learner 3).

Perhaps the traditional way makes learners more passive in learning. It requires high self-discipline from learners and makes learners sleepy when attending class if they don't prepare for the lessons (learner 11).

Through the answers above, some learners showed their awareness of the importance, the shortage of self-discipline, as pointed out by Larcara (2014), and the lack of autonomy for their

success in the flipped class. The first part of every meeting was devoted to a Question-and-Answer session, but many learners still did not participate. This might be because most of the time, the teacher asked questions to the whole class and thus downplayed the necessary pressure put on individuals. However, oral questions and answers sessions could not check the understanding of each learner as effectively as quizzes did. Therefore, quizzes should have come before learners' discussion in unison.

4.3.6. *Lack of learning motivation*

In the interview, the learners were asked if they had too much freedom to be motivated to prepare for the lesson before class; their answers were grouped as follows.

I have the short video. I think it takes me only 05 or 10 minutes to watch it, so I am not motivated to watch it. It is like having no environment to learn (learner 9).

I must learn, so I actively carry out my learning. I think you are too easygoing. If we make the same mistakes, there should be punishments like paying a fine (learner 13).

Ten out of thirteen learners felt too relaxed and lacked motivation to learn. Motivation seemed practical only for those who prepared for class and actively engaged in resolving their issues during meetings, while the majority followed along with the teacher. Less motivated learners took personal responsibility for their lack of engagement and did not provide feedback in weekly discussions on how the teacher could improve the situation. It wasn't until the end of the course, during interviews, that their motivation issues surfaced. Moreover, one learner suggested that stricter rules and consequences should be implemented to encourage more significant effort. The underlying message is that teachers cannot rely solely on learners' autonomy or self-discipline; instead, proactive measures are necessary to create a motivating learning environment.

In addition, their motivation was also reduced by the video presentations, which were challenging for learners to follow.

When you present fast, the knowledge will pass you by, and not much stays. As for me, I see that rewinding the clip many times is like rewinding the movie again and again... Rewinding in that way is very dull for me (learner 11).

Due to the dense content of video presentations, learners were required to rigorously follow instructions by pausing, answering questions, or comparing writing samples. These instructions had specific objectives, but pausing to engage in activities was unfamiliar during video viewing. However, failure to follow these instructions hindered complete comprehension, necessitating frequent rewinding, which demotivated learners. The key takeaway is that instructional materials should be simplified to facilitate easier understanding without the need for frequent rewinds. Therefore, breaking lessons into shorter, 05 - 07 minute segments focusing on single topics can enhance focus and comprehension. This approach aligns with research on the limited attention span of the net generation (Oblinger & Oblinger, 2005), advocating for concise lesson clips. Additionally, teachers should summarize each clip and include simple comprehension questions at the end to encourage engagement.

4.3.7. *Weak self-learning skill*

During the interview, two learners admitted feeling uncomfortable about waiting to meet the teacher to discuss questions that arose during their home study. They either forgot about these issues or avoided addressing them, indicating weak self-learning skills. Rather than seeking explanations from teachers or peers, searching online, or jotting down class questions, they ignored the problems. This passive learning behavior was closely tied to their overall passivity in

learning. Moreover, in the interview, 07 out of 13 secondary and high school participants acknowledged that their inadequate self-learning skills hindered their course progress. To address this issue, alongside effective motivation strategies, learners should be encouraged to promptly post questions on their Facebook closed group when they encounter difficulties, ensuring timely resolution and allowing teachers more class time for practical exercises.

4.3.8. *Insufficient English listening skill*

The learners' responses were whether they had difficulties understanding the video presentations uploaded to their Facebook closed group.

Yes, maybe because of my poor vocabulary and the relatively high recording speed, etc. It is hard to follow the clip (learner 9).

Yes, it is challenging, but primarily because of the lack of time to read and listen to the video presentation again. I can follow the clips the first time, but it is a little fast (learner 8).

According to the learners, some found it challenging to keep up with the speed of the video presentations, though this was the normal speaking pace used by the teacher in class. The real issue seemed to be the dense amount of information conveyed quickly. Additionally, learners' weak listening skills contributed to their struggle to comprehend parts of the presentation and grasp its logical flow and overall messages. Ultimately, achieving a deep understanding of lectures requires strong listening abilities. This underscores the importance of teachers adjusting video speeds to accommodate learners of varying proficiency levels in heterogeneous classes.

4.3.9. *Preference for silent learning*

In the interview, 05 learners preferred learning with discussions, 05 others preferred learning in silence, while three said it depended on the situation. However, up to 08 among 13 learners advocated using paper books instead of online materials, and 10 out of 13 learners preferred PDF files over video presentations. The reason for strong support for the silent mode of learning materials is described below.

Sometimes, when watching the clip, I hear words that do not stay in my mind. PDF files are more effective than video presentations (learner 9).

Moreover, the preference for the silent learning mode and the "silent" materials of printed documents justified the benefits that silent learning can bring learners, as Caranfa (2004) advocated. Therefore, the issue of silent learning is worth considering in the flipped classroom, where both video presentations and PDF files should be provided to learners who like silent learning and interactive learning.

This preference for PDF files may also be due to the workplace rules of working learners, as asserted below.

For working people, books and printed documents are more convenient because when we go to work like I do in a bank, we cannot use Facebook from our computers and cell phones (learner 12).

She added,

The lesson is not too complicated and needs a lot of explanation before making videos. (She supported using PDF files).

Therefore, it can be summarized that most learners prefer to work with printed files, which allow them to retain information and are more suitable for office workers who sometimes learn English.

5. Conclusion

The study explored learners' perceptions of many aspects of the flipped IELTS writing class at ABC Language Center in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. It also emphasized the influence of learners' pre-class preparation on their lesson objective completion rates and understanding. It figured out the challenges of learners when shifting from traditional lectured-based to a flipped class. The results indicate that the advantages of model answers, the teacher's feedback, time efficiency, individualization for learning, and before-class questions for critical thinking were confirmed. However, learners did not promote independent and active learning, and video presentations were considered less helpful than printed documents. Additionally, the quality of the video or other materials played a central role in encouraging learners' engagement and active learning to promote the full effects of the flipped class. Moreover, writing practice before class was crucial for fostering understanding and completing the lesson objectives. As regards the transition from a traditional to a flipped class, the findings pointed out nine problems, namely: technical problems, distraction from the online environment, passiveness in dealing with technical issues, passiveness in lesson preparation, lack of self-discipline and autonomy, shortage of learning motivation and learning environment, weak self-learning skills, poor English listening skill, and the preference for silent learning.

6. Limitations and recommendations

The study has several limitations, including the small body of participants, the regular attrition of the researcher for weekly data collection, and the fluctuating attendance rates of learners throughout the course. Also, excluding 02 weeks for the midterm test and final test, in 14 weeks of teaching, only 11 weeks had flipped class, while three other weeks were conducted in the traditional approach for mid-term test error correction and actual test practice. To improve the study, the limitations above should be resolved. Moreover, the poor rates of before-class preparation, low motivation, and active learning may negatively impact the effectiveness of the flipped classroom. Besides, the flipped IELTS writing class outcomes at the center have not been measured.

From the limitation of this study, it is recommended that other studies be done in teaching IELTS at language centers utilizing better-designed videos and collaborative learning before and after class. Besides, more research should be carried out into the differences between the influences of teacher feedback and peer feedback of the flipped classroom on learners' learning engagement and performance. Besides, the low preparation rate in some lessons suggested the need for studies about effective motivational schemes in the flipped classroom to promote active and independent learning and learners' autonomy to overcome inertia about traditional classes. Finally, experimental research should be implemented to measure the effectiveness of delivering a flipped IELTS writing course at a language center.

NO CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

All authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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