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Flipping an IELTS Writing Course: Investigating its Impacts on Students' Performance and Attitudes

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Abstract

The technology-enhanced instructional approach has been proven to stimulate active learning and advance the teaching-learning process. The flipped classroom (FC) instructional method, an instructional technology part of blended learning, has gained remarkable popularity in recent years due to its promising and positive impacts on different aspects of students' learning process (motivation, engagement, academic performance, independent learning). In the current study, an explanatory mixed-method approach was employed to investigate the implementation of the flipped pedagogical approach in a government-funded IELTS preparation course in Indonesia, particularly in the writing section of the course. It examined the impacts of this instructional technology method on learners' writing performance and explored their learning attitudes and experiences. A number of 25 participants from various professional backgrounds aspiring to pursue master's and doctoral degrees who were recruited based on their previous TOEFL or IELTS scores participated in this study. The findings of this study showed that the learners had a positive attitude toward the flipped instruction method, and their writing test achievement significantly improved as reflected in the official IELTS test scores. Method flexibility, independent learning, and collaborative and active learning were factors

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that emerged in the interviews that were considered the important determinants of the participants' IELTS writing improvements.

Keywords: Asynchronous learning, flipped classroom, IELTS writing skills, students' performance, synchronous learning, technology-enhanced instructional approach.

1. INTRODUCTION

The International English Language Testing System (IELTS) has been one of the most widely used English language testing systems in the world. Administered in more than 140 countries, it is considered a standardized language proficiency test for those who want to pursue their graduate studies. Like IBT TOEFL, IELTS is also a language testing system “assessing speaking and writing as a compulsory part of a full test system” (O’Sullivan, 2018, p. 1). One distinct feature of the IELTS writing section is that the writing task is designed to test students’ ability to provide arguments and reason (Task 2) and to examine and identify data in the form of graphics, processes, charts, or tables (Task 1). Moreover, of the four English language skills, writing is perhaps the most difficult one to master, particularly in the context of academic writing required by the IELTS. Empirical research has indicated how academic writing is perceived as a much more daunting and difficult task for EFL learners (Xu & Qi, 2017) of the four language skills. In teaching writing, “a common underlying objective is to make sure that students recognize that they write to accomplish certain deliberate functions” (Cheung, 2016, p. 2). Thus, writing requires the higher-level skills of planning and organizing in addition to the lower-level skills of spelling, punctuation, and the word. Understandably, the failure to strategically allocate cognitive resources adversely impacts writing performance (Ferretti & Fan, 2016).

To motivate and improve EFL learners’ writing skills and performance, instructional methods used in teaching writing must aim at triggering learners’ cognitive domain by delivering interactive, challenging, and motivating activities. Traditional teacher-centered instruction in writing has indicated the ineffectiveness in sustaining students’ interests in learning (Buitrago & Diaz, 2018). In the teacher-centered learning process, learners are often spooned-fed about constructing ideas into sentences and paragraphs, where teachers instruct learners to follow examples. In this traditional teacher-centered writing class, students have limited time to exercise or work with their peers as the teacher often presents a lengthy material presentation, resulting in a loss of focus and interest on the part of the students (Buitrago & Diaz, 2018). This is to say that pedagogy is one of the determinants of the instructional process that define the quality of the teaching-learning process. One of the contemporary innovative pedagogical models in language teaching designed to improve students’ learning achievement is flipped learning (Yang et al., 2018). On this note, Wang and Qi (2018) argued that “the flipped classroom model particularly suits competency-based learning, such as language learning” (p. 50). This is because the reverse mode of learning where students are required to review course materials enables students to adjust their pace of study, utilizing the most suitable learning strategies in their own time. Numerous studies have shown the positive impacts of this

instructional approach on students' performance (Araujo et al., 2017; Blau & Shamir-Inbal, 2017; Chang & Hwang, 2018; Landrum, 2020).

In a flipped classroom (FC), class time is allocated to activities triggering learners' higher cognitive skills such as group discussions, presentations, and question and answer sessions. In the context of today's learners who "grow up immersed as digital natives and familiar with a wide range of digital devices" (Zainuddin et al., 2019, p. 678), adopting technology as an instructional strategy is the second nature. Clearly, "this innovative pedagogy has gained prominence in higher education institutions as an alternative pedagogical model reversing what traditionally occurs in and out of the class activities" (Zainuddin et al., 2019, p. 679). However, despite growing studies on the impacts of the FC on learners' academic performance, the paucity of empirical evidence on learners' IELTS writing experience and how FC affects learners' performance (IELTS writing result) remains one of the pressing issues. Owing to this fact, two research questions are put forward:

- (1) What are the learners' attitudes and experiences of a flipped classroom in teaching IELTS writing?
- (2) What impact does the flipped classroom method have on learners' IELTS writing performance?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 IELTS Writing Task

Wu et al. (2020) stated that "in globalization, there is a consensus that great proficiency in English is an essential primary benchmark of competitiveness in modern society" (p. 2). Universities around the world have emphasized the importance of English proficiency as one of the requirements for students to pursue their graduate studies. One of the standardized English proficiency tests used to benchmark students' language competence is the IELTS test. O'Sullivan (2018, p. 1) argued that "IELTS is a high-stakes test, used to measure the English-language proficiency of people who wish to study or work in countries or institutions where English is the language used".

One of the language skills tested in the IELTS test, writing skills, has two types of writing tasks, Task 1 and Task 2, scored based on several criteria. In writing Task 1, test takers are required to address the question given in the form of a particular graph, table, chart, or process, and they have to write at least 150 words within 20 minutes. While in writing Task 2, test takers must respond to a question by writing an essay of at least 250 words within 40 minutes. There are five types of questions commonly asked in writing Task 2 (opinion essays, discussion essay, advantage/disadvantage essays, solution essay, and direct question essays) which is randomly assigned to test takers. Topics of IELTS writing tasks range from a wide area of issues such as education, technology, environment, sustainable energy, etc. In addition, there are several different criteria as shown in Table 1 that learners have to meet in the IELTS writing test in responding to Task 1 and Task 2 questions (O'Sullivan, 2018). Within the context of this research, the researchers focused on the academic stream of IELTS writing.

Table 1. Score criteria in Writing Task 1 and Task 2 (adopted from O'Sullivan, 2018).

Score criteria	Task 1	Task 2
Task achievement	Response relevancy to the question.	Response relevancy to the question.
Lexical resource	Development of arguments (e.g. thesis statement development), organization, and clarification of ideas.	Development of arguments (e.g. thesis statement development), organization, and clarification of ideas.
Coherence and cohesion	Logics or consistency (ideas make sense as a whole).	Logics or consistency (ideas make sense as a whole).
Grammatical range and accuracy	The variety of sentence structure and error-free sentences.	The variety of sentence structure and error-free sentences.

Writing is difficult enough as it is. In a test condition, the level of difficulty and the intensity of the situation that test takers have to face intensify tremendously. What this means is that the pressure that test-takers face in executing Writing Task 1 and Task 2 within the required time allocation usually increases during the test as the topic given in Task 1 and Task 2 may not be familiar issues for them, contributing to the increased anxiety intensifying the situation face by test takers.

Besides lower-level writing skills (spelling, tenses, word choice), writing also requires higher-level skills such as planning, organizing, developing ideas, putting ideas into language, reviewing (evaluating and revising text), and monitoring (deciding when to move from process to process) (van der Loo et al., 2018) which often triggers anxiety and concern in the part of language learners (Richards & Renandya, 2002).

2.2 Flipped Classroom Instructional Method

Flipped classroom (FC) is one of the student-centered instructional methods consisting of two distinct learning phases (O'Flaherty & Phillips, 2015), where students have synchronous active and collaborative learning in the classroom and the pre-class technology-assisted individual learning. This pedagogical method allows students to watch instructional videos using technology as a part of knowledge transfer and optimize the class time for active learning (Hung, 2015). In a similar vein, Abeysekera and Dawson (2015) elucidated that the pre-class activities are intended to transmit information or knowledge to prepare students with needed cognitive knowledge and practical skills so that they are ready to contribute positively in the synchronous classroom activities.

Its unique feature lies in the fact that the teaching-learning process is divided into two learning stages, out-of-class and in-class settings. By integrating technology, during the out of the class setting, students are required to carry out preparatory activities by accessing, watching, and reviewing instructional content shared by the teacher, commonly in the form of videos (Hung, 2017). In the context of traditional pedagogy, these activities take place in a brick-and-mortar classroom. FC allows students more time outside the classroom for additional practice and material preparation that can be accessed at students' ease, allowing more class time for discussion (Arnold-Garza, 2014), which is important in the effort to encourage students to use higher-order reasoning. Class time and activities can be devoted to promoting students' higher thinking and knowledge construction, which under the guidance of the teachers, can be done through group discussions, debates, presentations, and take-and-give conversations (Adnan, 2017; Dooly & Sadler, 2020).

According to Ekmekçi (2016, p. 194), “flipping covers a technology-driven and systematic approach to learning and it is also in line with the objectives of modern educational policies demanding more engaged, autonomous, active, and self-confident learners”. Webb & Doman (2019) suggested that “the flipped method to teaching and learning is one way to ensure that technology is a key component to learning in an inquiry-based classroom and to support civic online reasoning” (p. 3). One positive feature of this instructional technology lies in learners’ flexibility in accessing learning materials provided through online applications, outside the classroom (Howitt & Pegrum, 2015; Zaka et al., 2019). Transmission of knowledge via individual technology-enhanced asynchronous learning frees up class time for active learning activities in advancing students’ language learning experiences, which has been acknowledged as one of its positive characteristics.

This instructional technology has been considered one of the innovative pedagogical approaches to amending outdated instruction, promoting active learning (Lee, 2018; Shih & Tsai, 2017; Sletten, 2017), and increasing learners’ motivation (Chuang, et al., 2018; Long et al., 2017; Yilmaz & Baydas, 2017), enhancing learners’ higher-order thinking (Kim et al., 2017), and fostering classroom engagement (Elmaadaway, 2017), as well as leading to better academic performance (Lo & Hew, 2017; Shyr & Chen, 2018). Within the context of foreign language learning, evidence has shown that FC instruction contributes to the implementation of a student-centered learning environment, leading to positive results. The impacts of the use of FC in teaching have been recorded by many researchers. One of the positive effects of FC is that it promotes self-directed and collaborative learning (Tseng et al., 2018). The study experimented by Lee (2018), for example, shows considerable improvement in classroom engagement and active classroom learning as a result of FC implementation. Positive results are also reported in the study conducted by Chang and Hwang (2018) highlighting the improvement in the students’ test scores in the experimental class compared to that of the control class.

3. METHODS

To answer the research questions, the researcher applied a mixed-method study aimed to examine the effects of the flipped classroom (FC) on the learners’ IELTS writing performance, as well as explore their attitudes and experiences toward FC.

3.1 Research Design

This study compared the result of the IELTS writing section of the FC of the 2019/2020 cohort with the non-flipped class of the 2018/2019 cohort. Both cohorts were given the same IELTS writing materials by the same instructor. To benefit from both quantitative and qualitative methods, questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were utilized.

Qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured interviews to enable the researchers to investigate the participants’ learning experiences comprehensively. Face-to-face interviews with the students who agreed to be interviewed were conducted after the IELTS program finished. The quantitative data were gained through a survey questionnaire and pre-test and post-test results to get

the illustration of the participants' performance in the IELTS writing section, and their attitudes towards FC. The data were collected after a three-month FC intervention which lasted for 16 meetings. To look at how FC affected the students' writing performance, an official IELTS test carried out by the official IELTS test center was conducted. The scores of students' simulation IELTS test were then compared to the scores of their official IELTS test.

3.2 Course Design

To look at whether they benefitted from FC instructional method, the students, before attending the class, were encouraged to access and watch the previously-prepared videos on IELTS writing taken from YouTube Education online learning resource. The links to the website of the learning sources given to the learners are included in the Appendix. A total of 13 instructional videos (see Appendix), ranging from 3:03 to 30:13 minutes, related to various components of IELTS writing were shared in the WhatsApp group (WAG) and Google Classroom before synchronous classroom time. The selected YouTube videos posted by the IELTS practitioners online were aimed at addressing the IELTS writing four scoring criteria and developing writing strategies for the writing tasks.

These videos were accessed by the students outside the class prior to the classroom meetings. In total, 80 meetings were scheduled for the IELTS speaking, listening, reading, and writing sections. Sixteen 110-minute sessions out of 80 meetings were allocated for the IELTS writing section, scheduled twice a week. The rest were apportioned to speaking, reading, and listening sections of the IELTS. Outlines of the IELTS writing weekly course structure are provided in the Appendix. The meetings took place twice a week for three months.

Two tests were administered to analyze participants' progress in the IELTS writing section, one of which was a simulation test (week 8), and the other was an official IELTS test administered by an IELTS certified test center (week 16).

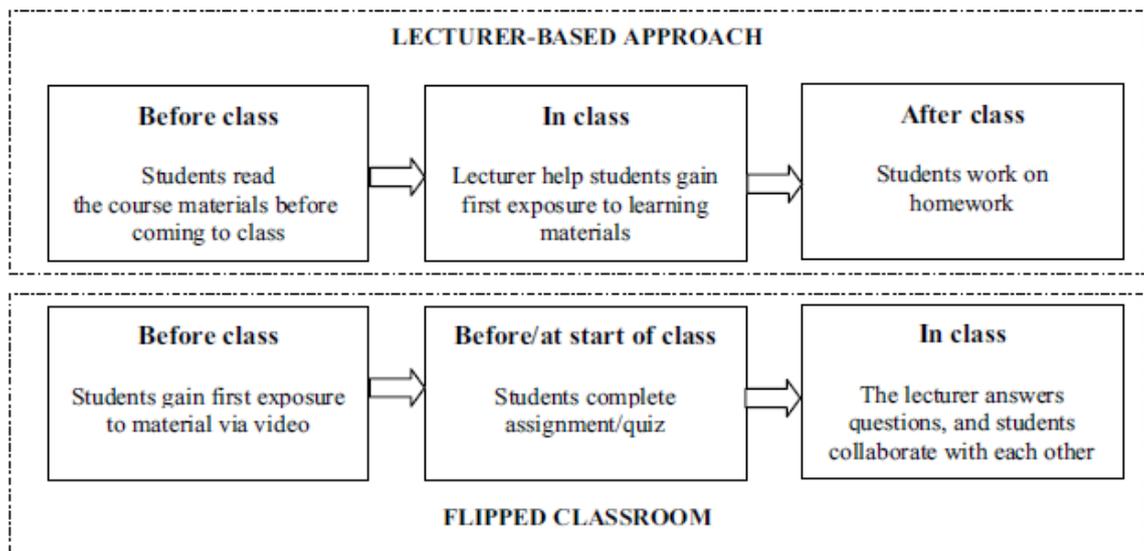


Figure 1. A comparison of the traditional classroom and the flipped classroom methods (source: Al-Samarraie et al., 2019, p. 1019).

In the asynchronous pre-class learning activities, participants were able to access and discuss the IELTS writing materials shared through WAG and Google Classroom at their own time and pace. They were encouraged to post questions and answer some of the questions posted by their peers. As a part of the summative test, summary tasks and quizzes accompanying the instructional videos were given by the lecturer. Lo and Hew (2017) highlighted the importance of low-stakes formative assessments, commonly in the form of quizzes and note taking which can be posted in WAG and Google Classroom in the effort to accomplish the pre-class work. Classroom time was then allocated for practicing their writing and discussion whether in pairs or a small group.

3.3 Participants

In this study, a total of 25 students (8 males and 17 females), with the age span of 24 to 37 served as a control class who took part in a three-month government-funded IELTS preparation program. Meanwhile, the other 25 participants (7 males and 18 females) serving as an experimental class, with the age span of 20 to 45, were admitted to the same program and participated in the study. Unlike the experimental class, the control class was not treated with the FC method. Therefore, they were taught by using the conventional method of teaching where mentors gave the materials in the classroom. This method, commonly referred to as the lecturing method, did not provide learners with materials before the classroom took place.

The selection criterion for the program was based on participants' previous IELTS scores set at a range of 4.5 to 5, or TOEFL score of 450 to 500, either official or non-official test. Thus, the program participants in both control and experimental classes had relatively the same level of English skills. Fourteen participants (56%) in the experimental class intended to pursue their doctoral degree, while the rest planned to undertake master's degree qualifications in universities overseas. The participants' backgrounds varied from lecturers (11), researchers (3), government officials (8), and the self-employed (3), representing different disciplines. The majority of them were full-time government employees accounting for 88% (22 participants) of the total participants, and the rest 12% (3 participants) were self-employed. Approximately 18 out of 25 participants had taken the IELTS preparation course before, while the rest 7 participants had not had any IELTS preparation course prior to this government-funded program. Of them, 17 had sat in the IELTS official test once; six had taken the test twice and 2 did not take an IELTS test before this program that they attended (see Table 3). Meanwhile, of these participants, six of them consented to be interviewed.

3.4 Data Collection

In the current study, three types of research methods were employed; quantitative data in the form of the survey questionnaire and participants' IELTS test scores (both simulation and official writing section test scores), and qualitative data from semi-structured interviews with duration ranging from 30-60 minutes. The researchers, with participants' consent, audiotaped all interviews which were later transcribed to discover themes related to the issues under investigation. In doing so, "the general issues that are of interest are determined before the analysis, but the

specific nature of the categories and themes to be explored are not predetermined” (Ezzy, 2002, p. 80).

To investigate learners’ attitudes and experiences toward FC and its impacts on their TOEFL performance, the researcher adopted a questionnaire designed by Barua et al. (2014), with changes to suit the context of the current study. Twenty questionnaires, piloted and tested before disseminated to learners, were conducted to facilitate the researcher’s research design. The questionnaire was developed by adopting that of Barua et al. (2014) and was tested on 10 students before dissemination. A five-point Likert scale that ranges from ‘strongly agree’ (5) to ‘strongly disagree’ (1) was employed to get the learners’ attitudes and experiences toward the FC. The learners’ IELTS scores were also used to compare their initial IELTS scores with their latest scores taken after flipped learning intervention.

3.5 Data Analysis

Since the assumptions of the normal distribution of the data in the IELTS tests were not satisfied, a Mann-Whitney U-test test was operated (instead of a t-test). This analysis aimed to determine if there were any differences between the control and treatment groups in terms of IELTS test scores. For the students’ positive attitudes and experiences of the FC, the data were considered normally distributed, and therefore, a parametric test was employed (one-sample t-test).

Table 2. The result of Cronbach’s Alpha (perceived positive the FC).

Type of Scale	Number of items	α
Perceived positive the FC with Google Meet application	20	.796

Table 3. Demographic information of the treatment group.

Gender	F (%)
Male	7 (28.00)
Female	18 (72.00)
Age	
20-25	9 (36.00)
26-30	4 (16.00)
31-35	4 (16.00)
36-40	5 (20.00)
41-45	3 (12.00)
Having technological devices used in the learning process	25 (100)
Types of technological devices used in the learning process	
Smartphone	25 (100)
Laptop	25 (100)
Desktop	3 (12.00)
iPad	5 (20.00)
Web 2.0 applications used in the learning process	
WhatsApp	25 (100)
Google Classroom	25 (100)
Facebook	25 (100)
Google meet	24 (96.00)
Zoom	20 (80.00)
Number of IELTS tests taken previously	
None	2 (8.00)

Table 3 continued...

1	17 (68.00)
2	6 (24.00)
IELTS preparation class taken previously	
Yes	13 (52.00)
No	12 (48.00)
Time studying IELTS writing outside the classroom (experimental class)	
2-3 hours	2 (8.00)
3-4 hours	21 (84.00)
More than 5 hours	2 (8.00)
Qualification to pursue	
Master's degree	14 (56.00)
Doctoral degree	11 (44.00)

Table 4. Demographic information of the control group.

Gender	F (%)
Male	8 (32.00)
Female	17 (68.00)
Age	
20-25	10 (40.00)
26-30	6 (24.00)
31-35	4 (16.00)
36-40	5 (20.00)
Having technological devices used in the learning process	
Types of technological devices used in the learning process	
Smartphone	25 (100)
Laptop	25 (100)
Desktop	4 (16.00)
Web 2.0 applications used in the learning process	
WhatsApp	25 (100)
Google Classroom	25 (100)
Facebook	25 (100)
Google meet	22 (88.00)
Zoom	18 (72.00)
Number of IELTS tests taken previously	
None	5 (20.00)
1	15 (60.00)
2	5 (20.00)
IELTS preparation class taken previously	
Yes	15 (60.00)
No	10 (40.00)
Time studying IELTS writing outside the classroom (control class)	
0-1 hours	21 (84.00)
1-2 hours	4 (16.00)
Qualification to pursue	
Master's degree	17 (68.00)
Doctoral degree	8 (32.00)

The interview data gained in this research were scrutinized by using a thematic analysis approach by adopting Creswell's (2012) six steps data coding process involving "disassembling and reassembling the data" (p. 94), enabling the researchers to get the themes of the issue. The coded data was used to produce a conceptual

framework, which included the process of classifying the data into specific group categories (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Within the context of this study, preparing and organizing data were done by transcribing interview data which was crucial to get the data in a similar format ready for analysis. Once this stage was done, the researchers started to read the data and look for common themes based on the research questions which were then coded and categorized accordingly. This allowed the researcher to describe and present the data narratively. The last step was to interpret the findings and discussed the results.

4. FINDINGS

4.1 Quantitative Results on Learning Performance

The data of the students' IELTS test scores were reported as being not normally distributed as the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk test results were statistically significant at the 0.05 level ($df = 50, p > 0.05$) (see Table 5). Figure 2 also shows and supports that the histogram is not bell-shaped, indicating that the distribution is not normal. Therefore, a non-parametric test (Mann-Whitney U-test) was applied in analyzing the data or comparing students' performance between flipped (experimental class) and non-flipped instruction (control class).

Table 5. Normality test of Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk test – indicating the data were not normally distributed.

Tests of Normality						
	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
IELTS_SCORES	.198	50	.000	.930	50	.006

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

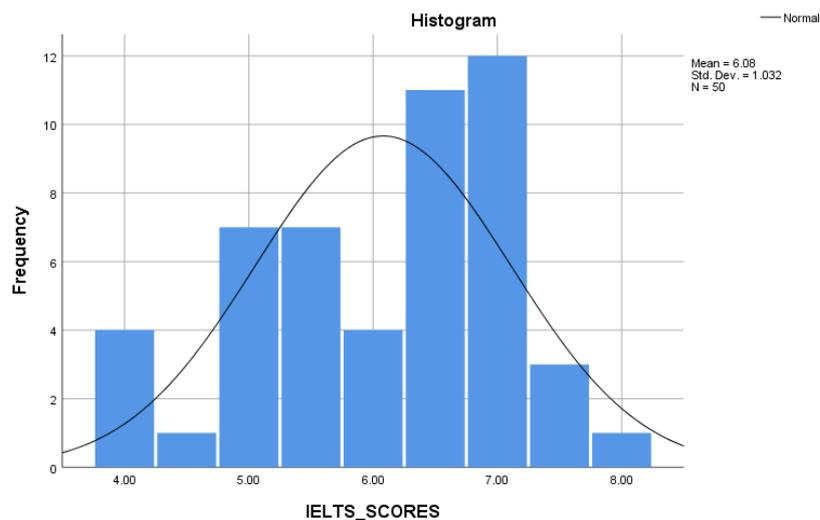


Figure 2. Histogram of Normality Test – not normally distributed.

Although descriptive statistics show that the mean scores of both instructions were 6.92, the Mann-Whitney U test revealed that there was a significant difference between the two intervention groups, $U = 9$, $p < 0.05$ (Table 6). The Independent Sample Mann-Whitney U test in figure 3 also illustrates that the M-Rank of the flipped model was higher than that of the non-flipped instruction.

Table 6. Mann-Whitney U Test results to compare students' IELTS test scores between two intervention groups.

IELST Tests	Intervention Groups	n	Descriptive Statistics	Mann-Whitney U test			
			Mean (SD)	M-rank	Z	U	p
Scores	Flip	25	6.92 (0.4)	37.64	-5.982	9	.000*
	Non-Flip	25	6.92 (0.4)	13.36			

* $p < .05$

Note: Scores from speaking, listening, writing, and reading skills.

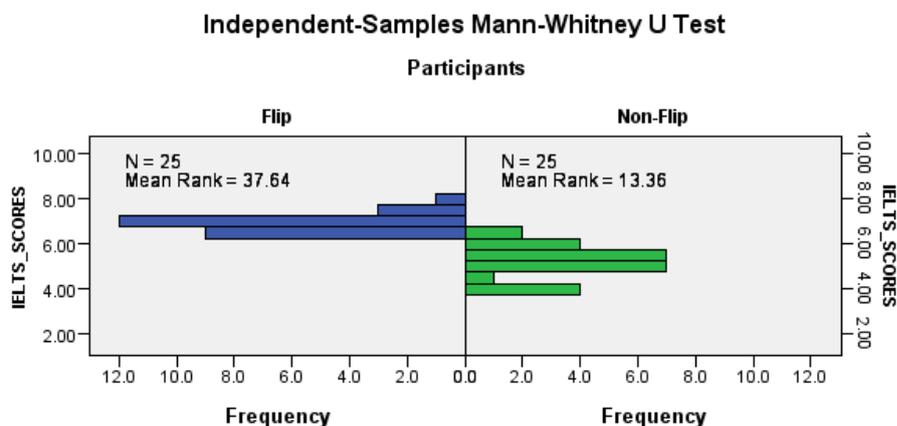


Figure 3. Independent sample Mann-Whitney U Test.

This positive result can imply that the participants in the FC had better IELTS writing preparation leading to the final official test compared to the non-FC. The ability to access learning materials before the classroom interactions seemed to have positive effects on participants' writing skills which were reflected in their final scores at the end of the program.

4.2 Students' Attitudes

A parametric test (one-sample t-test) was employed since the data were normally distributed. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk test results were not statistically significant at the 0.05 level ($df = 25$, $p > 0.05$) (See Table 7).

Table 7. Normality test of Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk Test.

Tests of Normality						
	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	Df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Average	.161	25	.096	.938	25	.133

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

The one-sample t-test was employed to determine how much variance in the students' perceived learning with the FC reflected toward their attitude. The results in Table 8 show that all items were positively responded to by learners. In all these cases, the learners' responses were significantly higher than 3 (neutral); therefore, we can summarize that the learners on average had a positive attitude about the FC in the IELTS preparation course. Since the p-value is significantly higher than the neutral response (Tables 8 and 9), it can be summed up that all questionnaire items were positively responded to by the learners. Compared to the control class, this finding reinforces the results of the learners' assessments that confirm positive mean scores in which the final official IELTS test scores significantly increased compared to the simulation exam in the eighth week of the program. This was not the case with the control class, in which the results of the final official IELTS test were not improved significantly as required by the program.

Table 8. One sample t-test (n=25) determining learners' positive responses to the questionnaire items (test value=3) was administered after the writing course was completed.

No.	Items	M	Std. dev.	t	p
1.	Pre-class materials were available on Google Classroom before the flipped classroom activities.	4.92	0.28	34.671	0.000*
2.	Adequate time was provided to spend on the pre-class materials before the flipped classroom activities.	4.92	0.28	34.671	0.000*
3.	Pre-class materials were relevant for the flipped classroom activities.	4.8	0.41	22.045	0.000*
4.	The classroom arrangements (positioning of the chairs for a group activity, audio-visual facilities, etc.) were conducive for the flipped classroom activities.	4.08	0.28	19.503	0.000*
5.	The activities during the flipped classroom session improved my understanding of the key concepts.	4.2	0.41	14.697	0.000*
6.	The instructor was able to engage me in the flipped classroom activities.	4.2	0.41	14.697	0.000*
7.	The instructor was able to provide clarification and examples on difficult concepts during the flipped classroom activities.	4	0	14.807	0.000*
8.	The instructor was able to expand writing pre-class materials during the flipped classroom activities.	4.04	0.35	13.266	0.000*
9.	More lectures should be conducted in the flipped classroom model.	3.88	0.33	13.966	0.000*
10.	I feel more confident to ask for clarifications and contribute to the discussion after watching the pre-class materials.	4.28	0.46	14.905	0.000*
11.	I feel more confident about my learning due to the flipped instruction.	4.52	0.51	26.000	0.000*
12.	With the Flipped instructional method, I find it easier to understand the process of writing.	4.04	0.2	12.736	0.000*
13.	The flipped classroom instruction helped me improve my writing skills.	4.12	0.44	14.905	0.000*
14.	The flipped instruction allows me to apply my own learning style.	4.52	0.51	19.503	0.000*
15.	I made more effort than usual when it came to flipped classroom learning activities.	4	0	10.007	0.000*

Table 8 continued...

16.	I spent time looking for more materials similar to the pre-class learning materials shared by the instructor.	4.08	0.28	24.000	0.000*
17.	The flipped classroom is more engaging than conventional classroom instruction.	3.88	0.44	26.000	0.000*
18.	I have no problems and I am satisfied with the format and structure of the learning materials presented.	3.96	0.2	13.863	0.000*
19.	The structure and the format of the flipped classroom motivated me to take the program seriously.	4.04	0.2	34.671	0.000*
20.	The use of the flipped classroom reduces a feeling of fear and tension, because of the prior preparation.	4.32	0.48	34.671	0.000*

*p < 0.01

Table 8 indicates students' attitudes towards the implementation of flipped learning in relation to the IELTS writing section. The questionnaires administered after 16 meetings of the IELTS writing classes showed the learners' positive attitudes toward flipped learning (Table 9).

Table 9. Overall scores of 20 questionnaire items – one-sample t-test.

One-Sample Test						
	Test Value = 3 (Neutral)					
	<i>t</i>	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Average	39.050	25	.000*	1.24000	1.1745	1.3055

* p < 0.01

4.3 Qualitative Findings

In the current study, the interviews were conducted to get the participants' in-depth insights into their IELTS writing learning experiences by using the FC. Several themes came up during the interview such as method flexibility, independent learning, collaborative and active learning, and better writing result.

4.3.1 Method flexibility

During the interview, when asked what makes FC different from other methods that they experienced, RP1 and RP3 informed about the flexible time for learning since both were still working while taking the program.

- (1) This method of teaching allowed me to fit my learning within my hectic schedule. Better yet, the materials needed have been selected and shared for us to be accessed anytime and anywhere.

RP3 reiterated that:

- (2) As a government employee, most of my time is occupied with official work. I really found this method useful as it fits in my works.

4.3.2 Independent learning

One of the themes that appeared in the interview related to the opportunity to learn independently. On this note, RP2 said that:

- (3) I think, more than anything else, I became a more independent learner now than I used to be. The videos helped provide examples and direction. But I still have to allocate time to find other relevant materials that helped me in my writings.

In a similar vein, RP4 suggests that:

- (4) Once I accessed the link to the online videos, I could find tons of materials on the same topics. Thus, I spent more time online researching similar materials when I needed them.

4.3.3 Collaborative and active learning

With regard to the features of FC experienced by the program participants, another theme that appeared is collaborative and active learning. RP1 reiterated that:

- (5) With this method, I was able to work with other participants in the class, by providing feedback on their writings and vice versa. We created a WhatsApp group for the class so that we could keep discussing outside the classroom. We were able to have meaningful discussions that improved our writing.

The same kind of response was articulated by RP6:

- (6) I was able to connect with other participants and ask questions if I had writing issues to resolve.

To investigate the influences of FC on their learning experience, the findings suggested that FC affected students' learning strategy. The fact that they were able to discuss the materials provided before classroom meetings enabled them to work collaboratively in their spare time. RP5 reiterated:

- (11) I was able to work with my classmates inside and outside of the classroom. They can provide feedback on my initial writings before classroom discussion.

In a similar vein, RP2 stated:

- (12) I spent more time researching materials online and discussed with my friends the particular elements of Task 1 and Task 2. I often got valuable advice from my colleagues which helped me in my writing.

4.3.4 Better writing results

Research participants in the experimental class also mentioned the impacts of FC on the result of their IELTS writing task which improved. RP4 said:

- (7) I had attended an IELTS course before and the writing section has always been my biggest hurdle until now. I was able to exceed a minimum band of 6.0 during this program, which I think is due to the method implemented by the instructor.

In a similar vein, RP5 stated:

- (8) The method used by the instructor has given me a scholarship ticket. My previous TOEFL score was 6.5, but I did not get a scholarship because my writing band was less than 6.

When asked what impacts does FC have on their writings, RP1, for example, expressed that:

- (9) I have enrolled in the preparation program previously, but I did not get the intended result. I did not spend time preparing myself outside of the classroom. This method (FC) was brilliant as I was able to review the materials in my spare time, and the instructors shared relevant resources for us to access.

In a similar vein, RP4 detailed that:

- (10) Before admission to this program, I had taken IELTS preparation classes twice. However, I was not able to get an LOA from the university in Australia because my writing band was less than 6. I managed to get a score of 6.5 this time around. I personally benefited from this innovative method which triggered me to set aside time to review the materials in my spare time.

When asked how they regarded FC in relation to their learning, the students expressed positive attitudes towards the FC method for achieving better writing results, as articulated by RP4:

- (13) I found this method interesting and stimulating. To achieve better writing results, I spent more time watching shared videos and when I needed to clarify writing issues, I could ask my instructor and friends online. This was wonderful as I could ask and answer questions anytime in my spare time.

On the same note, RP6 stated:

- (14) I personally loved having the opportunity to review the materials (videos) before classroom meetings. It allowed me to prepare myself and I had the chance to ask for feedback on my writing.

5. DISCUSSION

This mixed-method study examined the impacts of FC on students' IELTS writing and explored learners' attitudes and experiences of its implementation. With regard to the learning performance, quantitative data indicate that the result of learners' IELTS writing scores after the implementation of FC improved considerably compared to that of the conventional method (Table 6). This finding is in line with the previous studies conducted by [Farah \(2014\)](#). In her experimental study, [Farah \(2014\)](#) examined the effects of FC intervention on students' IELTS writing performance at an Emirati high school in Abu Dhabi. The results of her study indicated that this innovative pedagogical approach was able to achieve instructional goals (improving the students' writing achievement) compared to the conventional pedagogical method. In the current study, the findings also confirmed that the participants' IELTS writing performance improved significantly as reflected in their final official writing IELTS scores.

It can be assumed that one of the reasons behind the participants' improved writing performance was the flexibility of the method which allowed them to access

learning resources during their spare time. As the majority of the participants were government employees (88%), time was an important issue for them. To be able to arrange their study without neglecting their work responsibility seemed to be a high priority for the majority of them. Because the nature of the FC instructional method enabled the participants to learn independently outside the classroom, they were able to keep up and contribute actively during classroom interactions. The majority of participants (84%) spent at least three to four hours outside the classroom each week, 8% of 2 to 3 hours and the rest of the participants allocated more than 5 hours to review materials outside the class (Table 3). In comparison, the majority of students in the control class spent far less time outside the classroom (Table 3). This phenomenon has undoubtedly influenced their writing achievement as they had less exposure to IELTS writing materials outside the classroom. This is in line with the study carried out by [Amiryousefi \(2017\)](#) who stated that FC pedagogical approach facilitates flexible instructional time, allowing the students to access the materials at the time and place that suit them. This characteristic is especially important considering the participants' work commitment and time limitations. With this instructional technology, this issue was addressed by the use of Web 2.0 technology that enabled them to learn and immerse in active and collaborative learning. [Lee and Wallace \(2017\)](#) also elucidated the influence of the flipped learning environment in triggering students' engagement and positive learning processes. As a result, the improvement in the participants' IELTS writing achievement in the FC was significantly higher than that of the non-FC cohort of 2018/2019.

In the interview, the participants also reiterated that they were not able to focus on the IELTS preparation program that they attended previously prior to this program. This was due to their office workload and hectic schedules. In the current FC IELTS writing class, however, they managed to make time to go through the materials before attending the class. Moreover, the materials selected by the instructors were tailored to address their writing issues. The inverted delivery method also allowed them to work collaboratively by using Web 2.0 applications such as WhatsApp and Google Classroom. This is another significant finding that helps the participants' writing improvement, that is the opportunities that allowed them to be actively involved in pre-class peer review activities. The participants were able to ask or respond to questions if they needed to ask or clarify issues in their writings. Peer review, as one of the pre-class asynchronous learning activities, was of great importance in their preparation for the synchronous classroom activities. The importance and positive effects of online writing peer review by using Web 2.0 were suggested by [Ebadi and Rahimi \(2017\)](#). Their study showed how the Web 2.0 application in the form of Google Form helped improve students writing skills. According to [Elmaadaway \(2017\)](#), the students' pre-class learning activities (collaborative learning) played an important role in increasing classroom engagement and involvement in problem-solving activities with their peers. Gaining immediate feedback from instructors was also one of the strengths of the FC method as it enabled the students to constantly review and check their writings for mistakes, improving the chances of avoiding the same errors in real exams.

Interview results also revealed participants' positive attitudes towards the FC, particularly because the method allowed them to be independent learners. On this note, [McNally et al. \(2017\)](#) suggested that the FC method prompted students' positive attitudes which are often reflected in students' active classroom involvement and

content engagement. It can be summarized that increased classroom engagement was the result of students' willingness to better prepare themselves prior to in-class activities, which allowed them to collaborate with their peers in the learning process. As such, the participants became more responsible and autonomous in their learning. This finding corroborates previous studies carried out by [Chang and Wei \(2016\)](#) and [Wang \(2017\)](#) that showed the contribution of the FC in encouraging and stimulating peer interaction in the students' learning.

6. CONCLUSION

This mixed-method study was aimed at investigating the impacts of FC on learners' IELTS writing performance and exploring their attitudes and experiences towards this instructional technology approach. To address the research questions, both qualitative and quantitative data were collected using semi-structured interviews and survey questionnaires, and two writing tests. The study focused on adult learners.

The result of the current study showed that the learners' IELTS writing performance improved significantly after the intervention of the FC method. Compared to the control class, the areas of IELTS writing components (task assignment, coherence and cohesion, lexical resource, and grammatical accuracy) that were often considered major hurdles in achieving required IELTS scores were successfully addressed in the experimental class by using this method. This was evident in the learners' IELTS writing scores at the end of the program.

Interviews with research participants confirmed that method flexibility, independent learning, as well as collaborative and active learning as a result of the implementation of FC helped them achieve better writing results. Learners' positive responses can also be observed from the result of questionnaires reiterating positive attitudes and experiences towards the implementation of FC in the IELTS writing class. Among positive attitudes and experiences included improved class engagement, independent learning, improved self-confidence, reduced feelings of fear and tension, and satisfaction with the format and structure of learning.

The findings of the current study also reaffirmed previous studies on the benefits of the FC pedagogical approach. However, unlike other research on FC instructional method, this study focused on how the FC method affects the learners' IELTS writing performance. As discovered during the interview sessions, the flexibility of course delivery, being able to be independent learners, and involvement in collaborative and active learning which helped the participants to get and give feedback was cited as factors that influenced participants' positive attitudes. The above-mentioned flipped learning features also contributed to learners' better achievement as reflected in their final official IELTS test results. This innovative pedagogical approach, making the best use of Web 2.0 technology, was able to trigger participants' active learning, and help them address their writing problems. As this study was confined only to the IELTS writing section, and the FC intervention was given to a specific group of students, further study can be conducted to examine whether FC also has positive effects on other areas of English skills in different groups of the level of students.

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APPENDIX

Table A1. IELTS writing course structure (16 meetings).

Week	Topics	Pre-class activities	In-class activities
1 & 2	Band predictors: Task assignment (TA), coherence & cohesion (CC), lexical resource (LR) & grammar accuracy (GA) What is scored in T1 & T2	Watching videos on IELTS writing band predictors Summarizing the content of videos https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=43AlGwz1Aq0 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x1E2wLW9pn8 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i2Zbcf0ixM	In groups of 5, listing strategies to answer T1 and T2 questions In pairs, reviewing band predictors and scoring criteria. Presenting a summary of the discussion Q & A (teacher feedback)
3 & 4	T1 essay structure Types of T1 questions	Watching YouTube videos on T1 essay structure. Preparing summary of videos for each type of T1 question. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TzLyARGcTEA https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fDfFRAm1ye0 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qywjKFDmhcM&t=118s https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XU5sMqd2eP0	Presenting videos summary Discussing the topic In pairs, reviewing the T1 essay structure In groups of 5, discuss how to answer T1-type questions. Group practice Individual writing practice Q & A session Peer and teacher feedback

Table A1 continued...

5, 6, 7	T2 essay structure Types of T2 questions	Watching YouTube videos on T2 essay structure & type of Q Summarizing videos Answering quizzes Researching similar materials online https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WsDvaf1KQvk https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FiP4VAyEw28 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QjdPaYn-f40&t=150s https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7l8Q_t4mUwI&t=569s https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YngqHl_BLOU&t=61s https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9nrTXOdiiI&t=891s	In pairs, reviewing the T2 essay structure In groups of 5, discussing how to answer different types of T2 Q Group practice to create a good intro paragraph, BP, and conclusion. Individual writing practice Peer discussion & feedback Q & A session Teacher feedback
8	Simulation Test	Review all previous materials Asynchronous discussion	Attending a test
9 & 10	Review of simulation test results	Review all previous materials Asynchronous discussion Researching online resources	Group discussion Presenting online resources to the class In pair, identifying writing problems Proposing solutions Q & A session Teacher feedback
11 & 12	Lexical resource & coherence & cohesion	Watching videos Research for online resources https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UbjzVPoWnx0 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=43AlGwz1Aq0&t=1s	In pair, identifying lexical resource and CC problems in writing. In group, proposing solutions Individual writing practice Q & A session Peer & teacher feedback
13 & 14	Review of T1 & T2 Sample answers	Summarizing previous learning materials Research for IELTS writing sample answers	Presenting online resource Group writing practice Q & A session Peer & teacher feedback
15	Review of T1 & T2 Sample answers	Researching learning materials (videos and reading materials)	Presenting online resources to the class Group discussion Q & A session Peer & teacher feedback
16	Final official IELTS test	Review all previous materials	End of program