

A Blended Approach to Flipped Learning for Teaching Debate

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Abstract

Rikkyo University administrators have given instructors in the newly created department of Foreign Language Education and Research (FLER) more flexibility and control over how to implement their English as a Foreign Language (EFL) courses. Additionally, FLER has created a required debate course for first-year students, so an essential avenue of pedagogy and practice is required to explore approaches to teaching debate that can most effectively address the course aims. We describe how to implement one type of blended approach to flipped learning based on an instructional framework by Fries, Son, Givvin, and Stigler (2020), which is based on cognitive learning theory and follows a more sophisticated version of the Task-Teach-Task (TTT) approach. There are many ways to flip a classroom, and every instructor who chooses to flip their classroom does so differently (Bergmann & Sams, 2012). With that in mind, we encourage instructors to consider this type of blended approach for their future debate classes, or at least, we hope that by reading this paper, instructors contemplate ways to adapt and incorporate some of the approach's aspects into their debate courses.

Keywords: CALL, flipped learning, Practicing-Connections Hypothesis, debate

Introduction

Flipped learning has gained the attention of educators worldwide in many academic fields (Webb & Doman, 2016) and has become popular with English Language Teaching (ELT) researchers (Turan & Akdag-Cimen, 2020). It is an instructional approach that introduces course content outside of class time. Rather than listening to the instructor explain debate concepts in class, students use the additional class time to connect concepts, debate, and reflect. On the other hand, blended learning is a type of instructional approach which combines both face-to-face instruction and online materials. One of the most popular flipped learning approaches involves students watching online instructional videos outside of class time (Hockly, 2017). Flipped learning can therefore be considered a type of blended learning; however, it does not necessitate digital integration. For Rikkyo University's English Discussion Class (EDC), students review the textbook readings before class to activate their schemata on the topics in class. The content aspect of EDC is flipped, but not blended (i.e., the textbook is not online). For this reason, we include both terms "flipped" and "blended" to describe this approach as the flipped aspect of the approach utilizes online material.

Although the approach has gained popularity (Turan & Akdag-Cimen, 2020), the appropriateness of the approach for ELT contexts has been called into question (Johnson & Marsh, 2016). Kerr (2020) states that flipped learning assumes the presentation portion of the lesson consumes a significant amount of class time, which is why Johnson and Marsh (2016) write that flipped learning does not at first glance seem to provide much benefit to ELT as the explanations provided in ELT classes usually do not represent a large proportion of time (Kerr, 2020). Likewise, the explanation portion of debate should not constitute a significant amount of class time; however, early proponents of flipped learning, Bergmann and Sams (2012) state that flipped learning is more akin to a mindset rather than a single

method. Conceived in this way, flipped learning focuses attention away from the teacher and redirects it to students and their learning process (Bergmann & Sams, 2012). Focusing more attention on the students and their learning process can promote personalization, active learning, and engagement (Kerr, 2020). In the next section, we discuss Kerr's categorization in more detail.

Discussion

Benefits of Flipped Learning

Kerr (2020) categorizes the three main advantages of flipped learning to students and their learning process: personalization, active learning, and engagement. Kerr writes that flipped learning can increase personalization by (a) helping with students learning difficulties; (b) encouraging students to work at their own pace; (c) providing a wider range of study material choices; and (d) delivering individualized support. A blended approach to flipped learning can help students with disabilities. Technology such as video subtitles and text-to-speech software can usually meet the students' needs more easily than face-to-face classrooms (Kerr, 2020). As Young (2020) writes, instructors should espouse an interactional disability model, which adapts the environmental learning conditions to meet the needs of the language learners with disabilities. One example is to allow students to work at their own pace to learn the concepts via out-of-class self-study assignments.

A blended approach to flipped learning allows for more adaptable conditions in the learning environment; for example, if students do not understand the presentation, they can pause and re-watch the video, and instructors can also offer a variety of ways for students to learn material such as audio recordings, slideshow presentations, videos, the textbook, or ideally, a combination so that students have more choices regarding how they learn the course content. If instructors use a Learning Management System (LMS) such as Blackboard or Google Classroom, they can give students personalized feedback on their self-study assignments, and with different modalities of communication, students can choose how they want to communicate with instructors. In this way, instructors come to class already informed as to which students understand the concepts and which students need more support and can pair students to others to help them understand the concepts.

In addition to increased personalization, Kerr (2020) writes that flipped learning can increase active learning by (a) helping students with higher order thinking skills; (b) increasing student to student interaction; and (c) offering more chances for feedback. If lower-order skills such as remembering and understanding are accomplished before class, there is additional time for students to focus on higher-order skills such as analyzing, evaluating, and creating (Kostka & Marshall, 2017). Kostka and Marshall (2017) write that higher-order skills necessitate a more active role from students, and increasing student interaction also provides chances to receive feedback. Kerr states that flipped learning can provide a space for increase engagement by (a) facilitating students' ownership of their learning process; (b) mitigating any management issues in the classroom; and (c) assisting communication between the institution and students (or for younger students, their caregivers). The underlying belief is that students assume more ownership over their learning process compared to traditional classroom methods such as Present, Practice, and Produce (PPP) because they are able to choose "time, place, path, and/or pace" of their learning (Staker & Horn, 2012). Therefore, they might feel more accountable for their performance and contributions in class (Johnson & Marsh, 2016). If blended approaches to flipped learning make students feel more accountable for their own learning, instructors should introduce instructional guides on how to improve study habits (e.g., good time management practices) as some students might need

additional support with the increased expectation of independence and self-reliance.

We add two additional aspects of engagement to Kerr's (2020) list specifically for blended approaches to flipped learning in a Japanese EFL setting: (d) intercultural communication and (e) educational tech skills. If instructors blend the classroom, they can incorporate online programs to enhance learning; for instance, online virtual exchange programs such as the International Virtual Exchange (IVE) Project, offer students with the chance to communicate with university students from different countries and cultures potentially increasing students' intercultural understanding, or at least, virtual exchanges acclimatize students to other cultures (Hagley, 2016; Hagley & Cotter, 2019). MEXT (2011) states:

Foreign language proficiency required in a global society can be defined as capability of smooth communication with people of different countries and cultures using languages as a tool. The capability of smooth communication implies, for example, confident and active attitude toward communication with people of different countries and cultures as well as accurate understanding of partner's thoughts and intentions based on his/her cultural and social background, logical, and reasoned explanation of one's own views, and convincing partners in course of debates.

The IVE Project, funded by a Japanese *kaken* grant¹, provides a space for students to improve their communication with university students from different countries and other cultures by using English as a tool for communication to develop confidence and a positive attitude (Hagley & Thomson, 2017). Communicating with foreign students about topics can enhance in-class discussions and debates because students can incorporate the different perspectives of foreign university students in their discussions and debates.

Likewise, students might use their PCs and smartphones for entertainment purposes without fully tapping into their educational benefits, so we also add educational tech skills to the list of engagement for a blended approach to flipped learning. An example of educational tech skills is learning advanced online search techniques to do research. Another tech skill is utilizing educational programs to help students learn different aspects of debate. For instance, Kialo Edu is a free, online resource that facilitates collaboration by providing a space for structured and rational debate (Kialo, 2020). Students can research their position regarding a debate proposition, then add their research to their class's Kialo. In addition, they can add links to their source of information, support their claims with additional evidence, and provide a refutation and rebuttal. Students can rate individual claims according to their impact factor as well as from different viewpoints. If there is a claim that students do not understand, they can flag it as unclear to notify the writer of the claim. Kialo also has a chat box so debate teammates can coordinate directly on the webpage. With a blended approach to flipped learning, instructors can integrate these online programs to scaffold debates more effectively.

Drawbacks of Flipped Learning

We have discussed Kerr's (2020) three main benefits of flipped classrooms: potential increases in personalization, active learning, and engagement. Kerr (2020) also states four main challenges of flipped learning: students who (a) do not complete the self-study assignments, (b) have ineffective

¹ *Kaken* grants are funded to develop scientific research in Japan

study habits, (c) technology issues, and (d) prefer a traditional style lecture. Furthermore, Kerr (2020) notes that there has been more enthusiasm from instructors than statistical evidence for greater learning outcomes. For example, Kerr (2020) cites three meta-analyses: Cheng et al., (2019), Låg and Sæle (2019), and van Alten et al., (2019). These meta-analyses find only a small correlation between flipped learning and increased learning outcome (Kerr, 2020). In a study that more carefully controlled outside variables, the results also show that flipped learning benefits only some students' learning outcomes while not benefitting others (Setren et al., 2019). Setren et al. (2019) note that students' learning gains are only short-term, and that flipped learning can actually widen the learning outcome gap between stronger and weaker students.

In a recent meta-analysis of 61 second language learning studies, Vitta and Al-Hoorie (in press) find that flipped learning approaches outperform traditional style approaches with a near to average effect size compared to other reported research effect sizes in second language studies and accounting for publication bias. They also report only a slight decrease in flipped learning's effectiveness for long-term interventions with no difference between whether the flipped approach uses videos or more interactive approaches (Vitta & Al-Hoorie, in press). However, they state that low proficiency students might experience difficulty with flipped learning as they could struggle to engage with the target language material on their own for a sustained period of time (Milman, 2012; Vitta & Al-Hoorie, in press). In terms of Kerr's main challenges, struggling to maintain engagement might lead to incomplete self-study assignments and a preference for traditional style lectures. Vitta and Al-Hoorie (in press) recommend preparing materials that are engaging yet accessible to low proficiency students and perhaps integrating more of students' first language into instruction and additional support. Lastly, they reported that the greatest effect on learning outcomes are for skill-based and procedural knowledge and the lowest are for vocabulary, standardized tests, and reading (Vitta & Al-Hoorie, in press). Debate is skill-based, so these results suggest that flipped learning can be beneficial for this type of course.

Lawson, Davis, and Son (2019) state that research moving forward should not focus on whether to flip, but rather how to flip more effectively; namely, research on blended approaches to flipped learning should provide theoretical justifications to support the approach. The instructional design framework developed by Fries, Son, Givvin, and Stigler (2020) help students build an understanding of complex concepts in domains such as science and math. They used their framework to create a statistics course. The framework is based on the cognitive learning theory in educational psychology, which describes knowledge as mental representations and information processes. Expert knowledge differs from novice knowledge insofar as the organization of experts' knowledge is characterized as 'coherent, interconnected, and reflective of the relational structure of the domain' (Fries et al., 2020). Ideally, instruction should help students to build relationships between a few concepts that are at the core of understanding the domain (Fries et al., 2020). Consequently, experts can use their knowledge flexibly and creatively as they are able to apply their knowledge to other situations or contexts (Fries et al., 2020). Not all flipped classrooms are based on the same learning theory (Lawson, Davis, & Son, 2019). For instance, a simple blended flipped learning method entails instructors posting videos for students to watch before the lesson. Watching videos or reading a passage in a textbook can be an active learning process, but not necessarily. Students need to actively make connections between concepts to build understanding of the domain and transfer their understanding to novel situations. Fries et al. (2020) provide a clear and easy to follow framework that can be applied to other complex domains such as debate.

Practicing-Connections Hypothesis

Fries et al. (2020) tackle the question of how to create instructional learning experiences to help students understand and transfer their knowledge to novel situations. Transferability is a key aspect of understanding. Students who can transfer knowledge successfully use what they know “creatively, flexibly, fluently in different settings or problems” (Wiggins & McTighe, 2006). Expert knowledge differs from novice knowledge insofar as the organization of experts’ knowledge is characterized as “coherent, interconnected, and reflective of the relational structure of the domain” and consequently, experts can use their knowledge flexibly and creatively as they are able to apply their knowledge to other situations or contexts (Fries et al., 2020). Ideally, instruction should help students to build relationships between a few concepts that are at heart of understanding the domain (Fries et al., 2020). To develop students’ transferrable knowledge, they need to practice connections between three components: real-world contexts, core domain concepts, and important representations within the domain (Fries et al., 2020). Practicing-Connections Hypothesis states that students must be able to connect all three components for knowledge that they can use creatively and flexibly (Fries et al., 2020). As students connect core domain concepts to other ideas, situations, and representations, their understanding deepens and their knowledge “becomes more transferable” (Fries, et al., 2020).

Debate Course Aims

The debate course aims for students to understand debate concepts and develop critical thinking skills, research skills, subject-matter knowledge, and team-building skills (Debate Committee, 2020). Students learn debate concepts by learning how to create arguments, ask cross-examination questions, take notes, create propositions, and refute claims (Debate Committee, 2020). They improve critical thinking skills by examining and creating arguments on topics from various viewpoints, and they develop research skills by researching multiple and reliable sources to support their argument (Debate Committee, 2020). The committee also notes that the more sources of information that students can find, the better, and that these sources of information should highlight different viewpoints on the topic so that students can receive a ‘balanced knowledge of the subject’ (Debate Committee, 2020). Additionally, students can improve subject-matter knowledge by ‘preparing for and conducting a debate’ (Debate Committee, 2020).

In this section, we connect the three key concepts of core domain concepts, real-world concepts, and key domain representations to the debate course. Firstly, the core domain concepts of debate are research skills, critical thinking skills, and team-building skills. Subject-matter knowledge, which is technically considered to be a debate course aim, is a product of researching and critically thinking rather than a core domain concept. Secondly, the real-world contexts in which students benefit from strong research, critical thinking, and team-building skills encompass nearly every aspect of their lives. These contexts can be categorized into four spheres: personal, professional, societal, and global. Personal includes financial and relationship decisions as well as building friendships. Professional includes occupational responsibilities and choices. Societal and global issues can include voting on or taking a stand for or against political issues concerning Japan and other countries. Lastly, key domain representations of debate are the online program called Kialo Edu, and the debate organizational steps (i.e., argumentations, cross-examinations, refutation, rebuttal, summaries). These are key representations as each of the core debate concepts (e.g., critical thinking, research skills, team-building skills) can be connected to their structures for any debate.

Procedure

Application to Debate

Fries et al. (2020) create a three-step process for instructional design to: (a) create productive struggle, (b) make connections explicit, and (c) make opportunities for deliberate practice with variation and gradual increased complexity. This three-step process essentially matches the instructional approach Task-Teach-Task (TTT) with the added sophistication of eliciting connections between representations, core domain concepts, and real-world contexts. The first step in applying framework to debate is to simplify debate's organizational process. Fries et al. (2020) state that concepts usually need simplification for beginners; however, instructors should not oversimplify them to the extent that they introduce fallacies or misconceptions (Fries et al., 2020). The point of introducing a simplified version of debate is to get students debating (i.e., creating a productive struggle) and then introducing areas that they need help with retroactively.

At the instructional level, students choose a familiar topic (e.g., homework or school uniforms). When the primary author collected over 480 student-generated propositions, propositions concerning the topics of homework and school uniforms topped the list as most popular debate topics. Next, instructors tell students that the Affirmative Team (AFF) defends the statement (e.g., students should wear school uniforms) and the Negative Team (NEG) argues against the statement. Instructors group students into AFF and NEG, then instruct students to collectively think of three reasons to support their team's position and create one challenge question to ask the other team about their position. Instructors should hand a list of facts, data, and examples to each team explaining the pros and cons of school uniforms. After, instructors show the steps on the whiteboard (*figure 1*).

Figure 1

Simplified First Round of Debate (Steps 1 through 4)

1. AFF gives three reasons
2. NEG asks one question
3. NEG gives three reasons
4. AFF asks one question

While students are following the steps, instructors make notes on what students can improve (e.g., sub-skills of research skills, critical thinking skills, collaboration). When students finish the first round, students separate into their own teams, instructors ask students work as a team to (a) recall the three reasons the other team gave, (b) choose the weakest argument, and (c) explain why it is the weakest. After they finish, instructors ask teams to create a summary of their position's idea. Next, instructors show the steps on the whiteboard (*figure 2*).

Figure 2*Simplified Second Round of Debate (Steps 5 through 10)*

5. NEG explains one weakness of AFF reason
6. AFF replies
7. AFF explains one weakness of NEG reason
8. NEG replies
9. NEG summarizes
10. AFF summarizes

While teams participate in debate, instructors monitor and write feedback. After the teams finish, they can discuss which steps in the debate were easy and which were more difficult. Instructors can give students a short list of discussion and communication functions that the students learned in the previous semester's discussion course (e.g., asking for viewpoints, asking for repetition, providing sources of information, giving viewpoints) and ask students to circle the functions that they or their teammates used during the debate.

Then, instructors elicit Practicing-Connections Hypothesis' questions (*figure 3*) to help students connect representations, core domain concepts, and real-world contexts. This addition to TTT adds more complexity to the framework and more closely connects the method to cognitive learning theory.

Figure 3*Questions for Practicing Connections*

1. Which discussion skills might you use for each step during the debate? Why? (representation)
2. What are critical thinking skills? (core domain concept)
3. Why does using these discussion skills enhance critical thinking? (core domain concept)
4. What are some real-world situations that you use these discussion skills? (real-world contexts)
5. What are some real-world situations that you use critical thinking skills? (real-world contexts)

Some students who have lower English proficiency skills might not be able to answer these questions in English, but they can work as a team to answer these questions. They can also answer the questions in Japanese and instructors can help them translate their answers into English. Instructors should prepare answers to the questions in advance, but be open to students' own interpretations. At home, students watch a video presentation or slideshow presentation on an aspect of debate that they had difficulty with during the lesson. This instruction should be determined based on the debate performance and students' own feedback of their performance. In the next class, students debate again, but this time, they focus on incorporating more discussion and communication skills as well as what they learned at home from the instructional video to add layers of complexity to the debate organization. In the next section, we discuss a blended approach to flipped learning at the curricular unit level of instruction and connect it to Kialo Edu and the IVE Project.

Application to a Blended Approach to Flipped Learning

One way to help students transfer their knowledge to real-world contexts inside and outside of class is by flipping and blending. Doing so does not only to assist with transfer, but also helps students

with pre-task planning to prepare for in-class debate. Below is a curricular unit cycle:

Table 1
Curricular Unit Debate Cycle

Cycle	Step	Location	Stage
	1	During Lesson / Cont. from Step 8	Engage a productive struggle (e.g., simplified form of debate) or after a full debate unit cycle, engage in productive struggle of sub-skills (e.g., create a proposition, practice notetaking)
	2		Receive feedback on productive struggle (self, peer, instructor)
	3	(Cont. from Step 8)	Make connections between representations, core domain concepts, and real-world contexts via questions instructor creates (Practicing-Connections Hypothesis)
	4	Outside of Class	Receive instruction (relates directly to in-class feedback) and take a quiz on LMS
	5		Utilize online application (e.g., Kialo Edu and IVE Project)
	6	During Lesson	Discuss self-study assignments (ask any questions about them)
	7		Engage in slightly more complex debate practice (i.e., attempt to integrate instruction into debate)
	8		Receive feedback on complex debate practice (self, peer, instructor)

During this lesson (table 1), students engage in a simplified form of debate (step 1), reflect on the debate and receive feedback (step 2), and then based on the feedback, connect one sub-skill (e.g., discussion functions) to different concepts, contexts, and representations (step 3). At the beginning of the semester, instructors also need to help students understand how to access the LMS, submit assignments, use IVE Project and Kialo Edu. They can use pre-made videos and assign it as a self-study assignment. The primary author also gives students preparation time during class before the productive struggle and complex practice so that teams can divide roles, choose arguments, rehearse, or find their graphs or charts to present. Instruction (step 4) should include high quality videos and presentations that last five to seven minutes (Choe & Seong, 2016). One presentation should also cover only one skill, so that the duration remains short. To check whether students have completed the video or presentation, instructors can attach a short online quiz (e.g., usually only two or three questions) on students' LMS.

Students apply concepts on interactive applications such as IVE Project. There, they could discuss in-class debate topics with students from other universities to collect different viewpoints for their sources of information for debates (step 5). Instructors can request that students ask their professors for sources of information. They can use Kialo Edu to add their arguments for and against the proposition and link their sources of information to the site to share information with their classmates (step 5). Throughout the week, instructors grade their self-study assignments. Having instructors give personalized feedback can help students find ways to strengthen their argument. Students should be able to complete the weekly self-study assignments in roughly 30 to 40 minutes

once they become more familiar with the format. The length of what they write depends on their proficiency, but most importantly they incorporate the sub-skills that they learn from instruction. Vitta & Al-Hoorie (in press) recommend that instructors add more support for lower proficiency students. In addition, they can collaborate with their teammates to complete the assignments.

For the next lesson, students briefly discuss what they learned during their self-study assignments with their classmates including ideas on where or how to incorporate the instruction into debate (step 6). If they have any questions, they can ask them before or during debate preparation (step 6). Instructors assign students to the affirmative or negative positions, then they work with their teammates to plan for debate (step 7). Students receive either self-feedback, peer-feedback, or instructor feedback on their debate performance (step 8). After instructors have two options, either they can choose a sub-skill to focus on (e.g., creating a proposition) or they can go directly to making connections. If students struggle with the rebuttal stage, then instructors should ask students practicing connection questions that relate to rebuttals (e.g., why are rebuttals important for developing critical thinking skills? Why are they important for research skills? In what real-world situations do you use rebuttals? Where on Kialo Edu can you write rebuttals?). Alternatively, once students have practiced a simplified debate and roughly understand where each sub-skill fits within the organizational structure, for the productive struggle stage, instructors could focus on different aspects of the debate (e.g., practice note taking or creating propositions) with feedback in between each aspect (see dotted arrow to step 1).

Traditional Approaches

In contrast, a traditional approach to teaching debate is to compartmentalize each subskill or step, presenting it in isolation, without simplification, decontextualized from the holistic debate organization before students even participate in their first debate. The problem with this approach is that students might have difficulty connecting the isolated skill to the corresponding step in the debate because most likely, they have not formed a strong mental schema of debate organization without having first practiced it. Having students participate in debate, even a simplified form of it, as shown the example above, can foment a clearer and stronger mental schema of debate organization, which can help them to connect the core debate skills and sub-skills to that mental schema much more effectively than any table, video, or presentation about debate organization can do so on its own. Any later instruction that is provided should be building more complexity onto this key representation framework retroactively, according to students' needs (e.g., introducing terminology such as rebuttal and cross-examination along with different techniques to improve their skills as well as time limits so that students ask more than one cross-examination question).

Lastly, students using more traditional approaches such as PPP might find it difficult to identify the aspects of debate they need to improve. Identifying areas of weakness is difficult partly because traditional methods tend to predetermine the content that students review before testing their ability to do so. Even when students practice after presentation, they might feel a false sense of accomplishment because they might not be able to connect what they learned to the right stage in the debate. In addition, if instructors want students to take more ownership over their own learning, then they need to offer students more choices (e.g., control over the topic of the debate and control over the topic of instruction). Incorporating methods such as TTT and a blended approach to flipped learning can provide more flexibility and choice for students to become independent learners. For example, in the

first debate, even though it was simplified, students in the primary author's debate class reflected that doing research was an important aspect for debate because their personal experiences alone were not as persuasive as providing statistics.

Students who come to their own conclusions about core domain concepts in the first debate lesson means that they have more opportunities to transfer their learning between lessons as they have more classes to do so. More opportunities early transfer can allow students to focus on other aspects of debate such as how to formulate cross-examination questions, how to read graphs and charts, and how to avoid committing informal logical fallacies, which are presently not components of Rikkyo University's debate curriculum. Students are able to come to these conclusions even though they were using a simplified model. If students come to that conclusion themselves, then the idea is more memorable and hopefully more transferrable than if the idea originated from instructors. They also might be more willing to participate in self-study activities out of the classroom when the instruction matches their beliefs because they realize a need for it.

Conclusion

In this paper, we explained the terminology "flipped" and "blended" and then discussed some of the advantages and disadvantages. After, we explained the debate course's overall aims and lastly, described how to implement one type of blended approach to flipped learning based on a framework by Fries, Son, Givvin, and Stigler (2020). One of the main ideas of the approach is to start with a simplified version of a debate organizational list and then gradually introduce more complexity into the framework based on student needs. The second main idea is for students to use programs such as Kialo and IVE Project to transfer what they learned from instruction into other contexts. The last idea is for students to practice making connections between real-world contexts, core domain concepts, and key representations. We recognize that our field of ELT is in the post-methods and approaches era; however, sharing different methods and approaches to teaching courses can provide more guidance to instructors who would like it. We argue that this approach can maximize Kerr's (2020) categories of active learning, personalization, and engagement more effectively than traditional approaches. We encourage other instructors to use this approach and hope that instructors can find other ways of integrating the Practicing-Connections Hypothesis into their classes.

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