Enhancing Foreign Language Reading Comprehension with a Peer Tutored Online Flipped Classroom Approach

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Original Research Article	

ABSTRACT

Aims: The focus of the study is to address the issue of reading difficulties among foreign language students. As peer tutors at the Writing Centre and as Bachelor of Arts students majoring in French language and translation, the researchers observed that most students faced some level of reading comprehension difficulties and are not able to truly benefit from the documents provided by their teachers. This research stems from the need to enhance reading comprehension for students of French as a foreign language.
Study Design: The researchers involved as peer tutors implemented a flipped classroom approach with their junior learners. Three junior students received one-to-one peer online inverted classroom tutoring twice weekly aiming to improve the students' reading comprehension skills The peer tutors implemented a flipped classroom pedagogy, introduced the students to skimming through reading strategies, provided personalized learning opportunities, and meaningful practice.
Methodology: A qualitative research design was selected to answer the research questions. The data was collected through online observations, discussions, and one-to-one semi-structured interviews. Thematic coding was used for the data analysis.
Results: Findings revealed that the flipped classroom approach contributed to develop the students'

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reading competence. Being able to deduct the context, and to identify the words which they needed to understand made the text accessible which in turn gave the students confidence and motivation. The flipped classroom became an enjoyable reading routine where students felt proficient because they were not solely reading to learn the language but to acquire knowledge and develop their interests. Moreover, learning French was no longer about passively attending lessons, but about actively reading, practicing.

Conclusion: In the current global educational context, traditional learning is challenged by different approaches better suited to respond to sudden shifts to online learning. It is anticipated that the findings of this study will benefit instructors and students in similar contexts facing reading issues.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of the Research

Foreign languages students encounter a variety of obstacles and difficulties while learning a new language. Once such issue relates to reading comprehension [1]. In the case of learning French as a foreign language, Korkut (2004) highlighted the complexity of the process of learning a language, the possible sources of misunderstanding and the difficulties of communicating, in occurrence in French as a foreign language. Based on these premises, it can be inferred that the acquisition of a foreign language creates complications and difficulties that affect communication with the language. The present study was conducted in an Omani private University to address the issues the students encountered in their foreign language classroom which were due to their poor reading comprehension skills. According to Dufour (2014), implementing a flipped learning method where students prepare lessons at home before returning to class to implement activities and discussions is a successful approach that could address some of the issues encountered by these foreign language learners. This approach offers numerous benefits as advocated by recent studies [2,3,4]. One of the main advantages of flipping the classroom is due to providing students with enough time to understand the lessons. Moreover, slower student will have the ability to progress at their own pace.

1.2 Objectives

The researchers aimed to enhance foreign language reading comprehension with the use of technology in a flipped classroom approach. To achieve this aim, three research objectives (R.O.) have been set. These were:

R.O. 1: To identify the students' reading comprehension difficulties.

R.O. 2: To investigate the effect of the flipped classroom approach on the students reading comprehension skill.

R.O. 3: To understand how the students made use of the flipped classroom approach to enhance their reading comprehension skill.

These three research objectives led to three research questions (R.Q.)

R.Q. 1: What are the students' reading comprehension difficulties?

R.Q. 2: What is the effect of the flipped classroom approach on the students reading comprehension skill?

R.Q. 3: How do students make use of the flipped classroom approach to enhance their reading comprehension skill?

1.3 Literature Review and Analysis of Related Work

The investigation covered three themes related to enhancing foreign language reading comprehension with a flipped classroom approach. These were reading difficulties, reading comprehension, and the flipped classroom approach. As can be seen in Fig. 1, reading comprehension difficulties stem from several issues including the lack of reading exposure, proficiency, reading strategy, and motivation. The flipped classroom approach is particularly suited to addressing these issues as it involves personalized tutoring, progressive reading, skimming, and meaningful practice. This approach results in an improved situation with

increased proficiency, enhanced reading skills, active in-class participation, and greater autonomy.

1.4 Reading Difficulties

Reading difficulties are common in one's first language, commonly known as L1, but are generally more widespread when a first foreign language is learned. By opposition to L1, the foreign language is referred to as L2. This issue may lead students to dropout from University due to their poor level in the L1 reading skill [5]. This could also be anticipated with French student major whose courses are mostly related to learning the L2. In some cases, such as the one presented by Kayabasi [6] additional classes or extra homework is a solution to overcome reading difficulties. The current study proposes to address this issue with additional classes offered at the Writing Centre at the University of Nizwa. These would be addressed with a flipped classroom approach. As advocated by Yılmaz and Kadan [7] using simpler texts is essential in reducing reading comprehension anxiety. This is something that could be readily addressed by the flipped classroom approach. However, before the flipped classroom approach is applied to enhance the students' reading comprehension, it is essential to properly evaluate the students' level of reading difficulties [8]. It has been demonstrated that reading comprehension difficulties are often related to a general low proficiency in language skills [9] or with foreign language anxiety [10]. A study with Jordanian students learning English revealed that the main issues to reading originated from ambiguous words, new vocabulary, and the lack of time [11]. It is anticipated that the similarity of the Omani context to the Jordanian one might yield similar findings. Another study in a different context revealed that phonemic awareness played a major role in enhancing the reading skill [12]. The researchers proposed a qualitative investigation of the main causes of reading difficulties of Omani foreign language learners in view of developing an online flipped peer tutoring approach appropriate to the institution and Omani context.

1.5 Reading Comprehension

As mentioned by Eppard, Baroudi and Rochdi [13] students from countries within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) often face issues with reading comprehension. Several strategies exist which can alleviate this issue. Some strategies have weathered the test of time [14], while others remain novel [15-16]. For Álvarez-Cañi et al. [17] prosody can enhance reading comprehension, especially with expository texts. Several effective reading strategies that enhance reading comprehension have been identified [18]. These include dictionary use, analyzing words, and parts of speech. Such strategies could be enhanced with the flipped classroom approach. The strategy of metacognitive reading awareness as explored by Dardjito [19] is another way that the flipped classroom approach could be utilized. Other techniques may be used, the Learning Together cooperative learning model evaluated by Ghaith [20] proved effective in solving the issue at hand in the proposed study. Similarly, the ECOLA (Extending Concept through Language Activities) technique put in place by Haerazi and Irawan [21] demonstrated similar positive results. As demonstrated by Fathi and Afzali [22], it is essential that a strategy instruction intervention is put in place to improve the students' reading comprehension. As such, a face-to-face induction to promote effective reading strategies should be put in place before the use of the flipped classroom approach. It is important to ensure that the text remains sufficiently challenging [23]. Finally, using technology may in some cases enhance the students' ability to read [24-25].

1.6 Flipped Classroom

Known as flipped classroom or sometimes inverted classroom [26] This approach seeks to provide students with the learning material before their face-to-face class. As such, with the flipped classroom approach, learning that occurs in the classroom is shifted to outside the classroom [27]. Flipping the classroom provides students with the ability to learn at their own pace and at their own type. This type of student-directed learning is adequate for the University of Nizwa's students who wish to use their free time to improve on their language skills. Moreover, past research has demonstrated that his approach when combined with YouTube videos is well suited to millennial learners [28]. Likewise, Arif and Omar [29] revealed that undergraduate students benefit most from a combination of need-based learning and technology. The advantages of this teaching method are evident from past research. In several experimental studies, the flipped classroom approach was superior to the traditional classroom [30,31]. This encourages us to select this approach to enhance the students' reading skills.
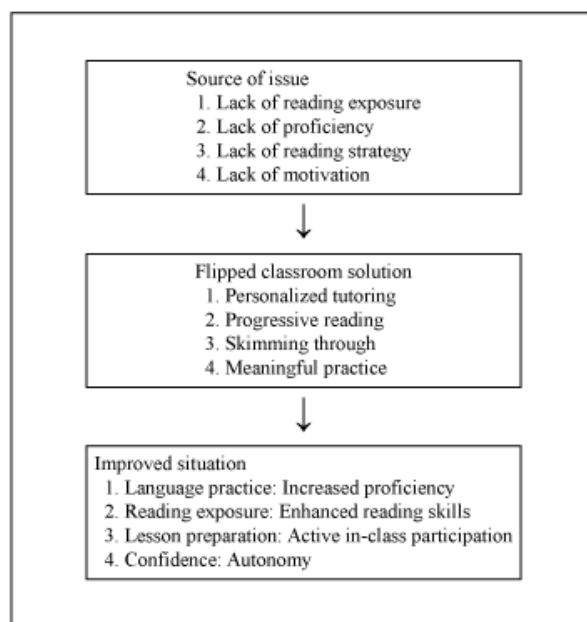
Fig. 1. Online flipped classroom to enhance reading comprehension in foreign languages

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Sample

In the present study, the sample was purposefully selected from junior students from a French as a foreign language Bachelor program to address the problem statement. Two students were selected to participate in the current research. The small sample was justified by the qualitative nature of the study and the explicit intention to investigate a specific situation [32]. As noted by Stenbacka [33] small samples are adequate in case studies as these fit the requirements of the qualitative paradigm. In reporting this study, all names were replaced with pseudonyms to preserve the anonymity of the participants. Single-student cohorts are not common in the institution of higher learning where the study was conducted. Nevertheless, in the year 2021 when the present study was conducted, Mona, an Omani young woman registered in the program. Mona entered the foreign language program as a true beginner with no prior knowledge of French. The flipped classroom tutoring prepared her for her French proficiency beginner courses (General French for beginner: 3 credit hours; and French communication for beginner: 3 credits). Fatima was a second-year student in a cohort of three students when she volunteered to join the flipped classroom project. Fatima attended the General French for intermediate (3 credit hours); and French communication for intermediate (3 credit hours).

2.2 Inverted Classroom Implementation

According to Le Jeune (2016), the inverted class approach enhances curiosity, and critical thinking. With the inverted pedagogy, students are exposed to selective reading before the texts are introduced in the course. With the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic and a switch to emergency remote teaching, the mode of instruction was transferred online through synchronous sessions using Google Meet, and asynchronous sessions using Moodle. Consequently, the flipped learning approach relied on these two technologies for the delivery of instruction. All activities were prepared prior to virtual meeting on Google Meet where the resources were discussed and explained. The flipped classroom sessions consisted of 70% asynchronous learning and 30% synchronous learning as illustrated in Fig. 2.

One day prior to the synchronous session, Mona and Fatima were sent activities, lessons, and exercises on WhatsApp. This included grammar, vocabulary, and reading activities. Mona and Fatima attended one-to-one 60-minute sessions twice weekly to focus on the reading comprehension of the documents planned in their general proficiency French twice weekly course.
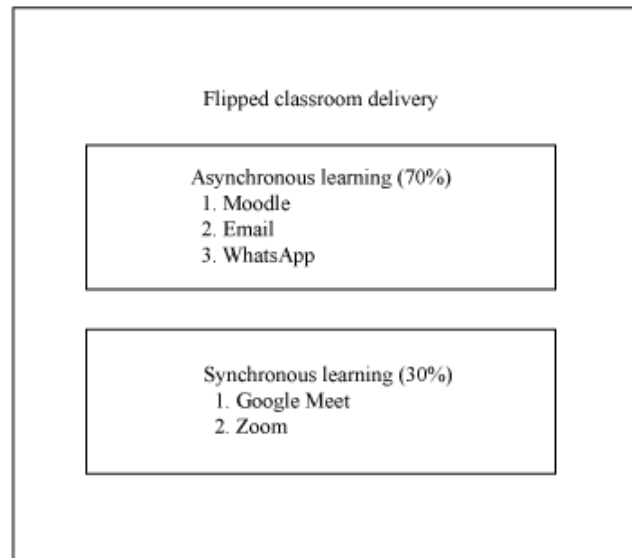
Fig. 2. Online peer flipped classroom delivery

2.3 Data Collection

Due to the distance learning setting, the data collection was fully conducted online. The instruments used in this qualitative research were semi-structured interview protocols and an open-ended questionnaire. These were designed to answer the research questions presented above.

2.4 Data Analysis

The main goal in this study was to identify the student's reading comprehension difficulties and to try to overcome these with the use of a flipped learning approach. The data collection and analysis were performed iteratively. The instructor-researcher delivered the flipped classroom lessons, observed events, behaviors, challenges, and progress during the lessons. The iterative delivery. Monitoring and analyzing processes kept the researchers close to the data generation. The qualitative instruments yielded quality data which were analyzed using a thematic coding approach. Recordings from semi-structured interviews were transcribed and coded for themes relevant to the research questions.

2.5 Quality Assurance

The constant comparative method was applied to ensure that similar codes were used across data collected from both instruments. Moreover, quality assurance was achieved through triangulation. This technique involves the use of more than one method to collect data on the same topic to validate the results. In the present study, interview and questionnaire data were triangulated to verify that they hinted at the same findings.

Triangulation involves the use of various data collection techniques to validate the results. Triangulation means using more than one method to collect data on the same topic. In this research, triangulation among multiple instruments included different types of samples as well as data collection methods. Triangulation is a mean to ensure that the research design and interpretations of findings is appropriate by using various methods to collect data on the same subject. The iterative data collection and analysis process, the inductive analysis and the constant comparative method of analysis provided a rigorous analytical frame which helped limit possible researchers' bias. Being constantly involved and immerged in the data made the researcher aware of multiple realities, and subjectivities which facilitated recollecting and interpreting events from multiple perspectives, remaining grounded and connected to the student's flipped classroom experience.

3. RESULTS

As described in the methodology section, the thematic coding technique was applied to the open-ended questionnaire. The analysis resulted in several open codes which are presented in

Fig. 3. These open codes were then reviewed with the constant comparative method. Three linear relationships emerged from the data. The first relationship stemmed from the use of the mobile technology for the inverted classroom which was perceived as nicer and useful. This relationship provided an overview of the perception of the flipped classroom approach. The second relationship initiated from the application of the social network to push the delivery of learning materials for reading, resulting in increased exposure, thus promoting reading comprehension. This was interpreted as the adoption of a technological process focused on delivery and resulting in a different approach to learning. The third relationship had its origin in the new lexical items that were introduced in the flipped learning classroom, with the selection of key words, the identification of difficulty words, and how these were tackled through context guessing, resulting in the ability to skim through new texts in the foreign language which resulted in improving the reading comprehension skill. This relationship is centered on the pedagogical aspects linked to the learning processes resulting from the flipped classroom approach.

The results are reported according to the research questions. First, the difficulties at the source of the reading comprehension issue are presented and interpreted. Second, the results of the flipped classroom implementation are detailed and contextually explained. Third, the beneficial flipped classroom techniques were identified, explained, and interpreted. Finally, the results are discussed, and triangulated with the literature, and contributions are presented.

3.1 RQ1. What are the Students' Reading Comprehension Difficulties?

Foreign language learners face numerous challenges on their path to learning a new language. Difficulties in reading comprehension are among these as was observed at the onset of this study.

"*The reading comprehension skill, is difficult in my opinion, because of not practicing continuously, not knowing and relying only on receiving lessons from the teacher and memorizing the lesson*" Mona

"*Students don't practice reading, so it is difficult for them to understand the texts*" Fatima.

The code which emerged during the data analysis is memorization. Traditional learning environments favor memorizing vocabulary and sentence structures over a global understanding. The data demonstrated that Mona readily relied on memorization whenever she tackled a new text.

The observed difficulties in reading comprehensions in a traditional classroom were organized in the diagram presented in Fig. 4. As can be seen, these include passively receiving knowledge, memorizing, and surface learning. Moreover, there was some dependence on the teacher, a lack of real practice, and disconnected learning which resulted in the perception of the process as meaningless.

The researchers noticed that Mona was experiencing difficulties when reading texts in the target. Although she could pronounce the texts she read with ease, understanding the content, depth and meaning of these were beyond her reach. The interviews that were conducted with Mona, revealed the nature of these difficulties, and their causes. First, insufficient vocabulary knowledge prevented Mona from grasping the meaning of individual sentences. Second, the lack of clarity of context hindered a general understanding of the text. This is understandable as Mona was a beginner student. Furthermore, Mona explained that she often resorted to mobile applications and social networking sites to help her understand and clarify ambiguous words, sentences, and contexts.

"*Before, I did not find any advantage in learning foreign languages, because without practice, it is useless. So, when I can practice, I know I can learn to speak. My perception is very important*" Mona.

The findings of this study support past research on difficulties encountered with foreign language reading. As noted by Saito, Garza and Horwitz [34] students reading in a language with a different writing system from their L1 experienced increased difficulties which could result in foreign language anxiety. Although the theme of foreign language reading anxiety did not emerge while analyzing the data, it remains present in the literature [7,10]. Further studies could investigate this theme as the participants in the present research were more familiar with the Arabic writing system than the roman one.

In addition, the data analysis revealed how the respondent, as a novice foreign language learner, systematically resorted to translation into

her mother tongue. Addressing reading comprehension through translation is not advisable. This approach to deciphering foreign language texts risks hindering the development of the other skills. As can be seen in Fig. 5, the reading comprehension difficulties can be divided along two axes. These were the learners and the foreign language context. The learners experienced lack of practice, of reading skills, and of proficiency. The foreign language context, as is often the case, was characterized by the

lack of daily exposure, uneven proficiency levels, and a lack of proficiency. Lack of exposure to the target language is a common theme in the foreign language classroom as noted by Littlewood and Yu [35]. Indeed, as opposed to a second language context, a foreign language is by definition a language that is not present and used in regular situations. To some extent, this situation may be alleviated by providing supplement material as was the case in the present study.
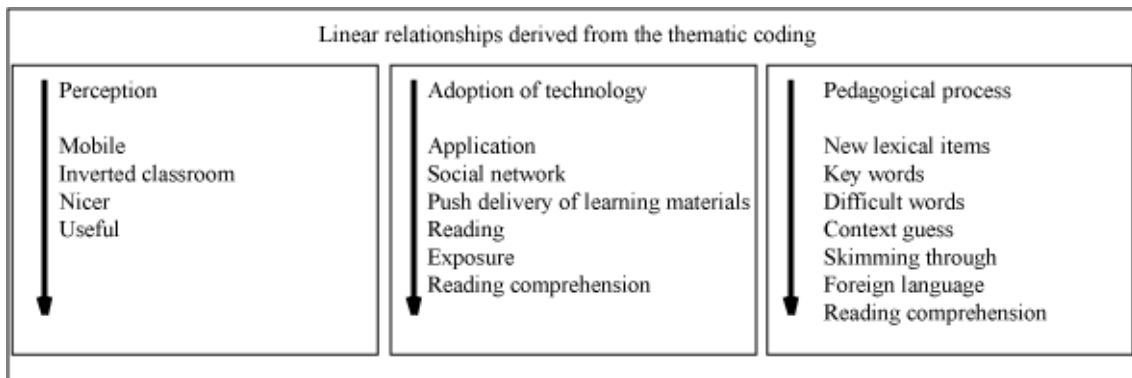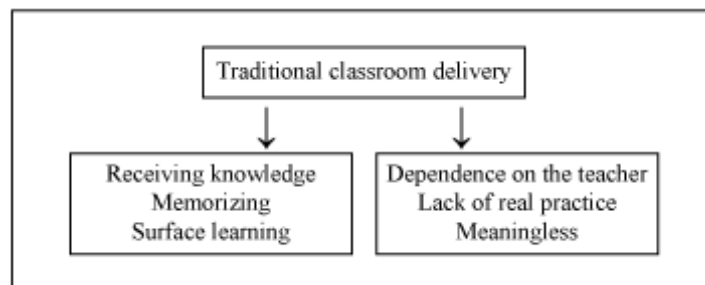

Fig. 3. Coding process

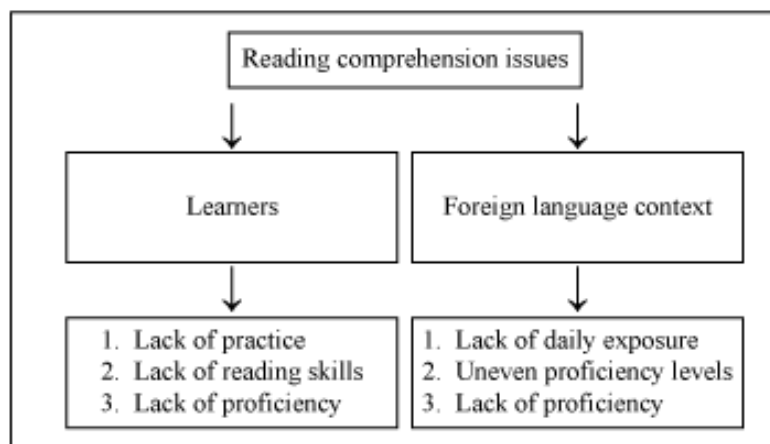**Fig. 4. Learners' perceptions of the traditional classroom delivery**

Fig. 5. Sources of reading comprehension difficulties

3.2 R.Q. 2: What is the Effect of the Flipped Classroom Approach on the Students Reading Comprehension Skill?

Flipped learning has many advantages as previously mentioned, and these advantages were confirmed in the implementation of the peer tutored flipped classroom with beginner French language students. Through flipped learning, the students prepared their lessons at home, asynchronously and synchronously supported by a peer tutor. The online peer tutored flipped lessons supported the students' lesson topic discovery, vocabulary knowledge and sentence building skills. As such, their participation in class became more active as they were able to discuss the topic. In addition, the lecturer only had to focus on explaining certain words which left more time for practice.

"*In my flipped classroom, I use modern techniques to prepare for lessons at home first, with you, then I attend class with my course teacher. Before, I sat in class, listening, now I want to discuss and answer questions because I can do it*" Mona.

From the analysis, the results of flipped learning on reading comprehension enhancement emerged as evident. The student used applications, social and educational sites, and resources to read about their lesson topic before attending class, which led to the development of their reading comprehension. The following two linear relationships emerged from the coding.

1. New topic → Complex → Flipped learning → Reading comprehension
2. Students → Flipped learning → Read more on the topic → Interest → Ideas and critical thinking

A new topic was perceived as complex, but the flipped learning approach facilitated the reading comprehension. Students were able to tackle more complex text as this approach enabled them to learn at their own pace. This differed from the traditional classroom setting where the instructors set the pace for the whole cohort. Moreover, as the second relationship highlights, students with flipped learning had the opportunity to read more on the topic presented by the text which increased their interest and provoked a reflexive process resulting in new ideas and critical thinking. With more autonomy and while learning online, students could more readily use

hypertext features and employ online search engines to support their learning process by enabling them to access additional resources. This benefit, which is primarily related to the online environments, can be viewed in light of research conducted on augmented texts [36]. This is a feature that would be challenging to offer in the traditional classroom.

The relationship between flipped reading comprehension learning and foreign language learning emerged as very strong in the development process of the learners' reading comprehension skills. Increased reading exposure not only contributed to enhances reading skills but also in enhanced vocabulary and sentence structure learning. The peer tutored asynchronous support as well synchronous sessions combined increased reading practice associated to skimming through questioning drills. The peer tutored flipped learning approach exposed the students to increased reading comprehension as well prompted written and spoken practice while the students manipulated newly learnt vocabulary and structures while providing answers.

"We look up new and difficult terms and you make me try to use them in sentences. The sentences are useful in our daily life or in a specific event. Because of that I make connections, place them in the context. I can remember them, and I learn" Mona.

The analysis yielded the emergence of enhanced learning among the results of the flipped learning approach. Notably, students referred to their experience as better, useful, and smoother learning than any other learning experience they had. Flipped learning is considered less boring because it is divided into two parts, of which half is home preparation and the other discussing with their tutors as well as among the students in the class. The students better organized their study time. Flipped learning was perceived as highly contributing to inculcate study routine and time management. The flipped classroom motivated the students to study more about the lessons' topics which resulted in a better and in depth understanding.

"*The flipped class is fun because it is not limited to a specific time to follow the lesson. I can study whenever I am comfortable. The freedom to study in different ways and different time makes learning more enjoyable and useful*" Mona.

After preparing the lessons at home, when in class with the teacher and other students, they discussed the lesson and exchanged experiences They could comment and discuss in class.

"*I read, study and attends classes at home, and if I make a mistake, I can ask my teacher to correct me. When I speak and discuss the text in class, I practice a lot with the teacher and the other students. We exchange information and resources and benefiting from each other*" Mona.

Another relationship showed that flipped learning makes learning more practical and effective because the students will ask questions to the teacher either related to vocabulary, grammar, or related to the topic. The students are better prepared and can better discuss the points the points they misunderstood. Feedback becomes opportunities for discussion and exchanges between the student and the teacher as well as between students.

"*The lesson is not about understanding the text, but about discussing the text, deepening lessons. This is not just superficial study*" Mona.

The flipped classroom approach being online, Internet access is crucial in delivering instruction before the lecture. Identifying the course applications and website and sending the list as well as tips to the students to cope with Internet access is very important. Before class all the students learn how to download and upload content from Moodle, or by email, as well as how to access Google Meet and Zoom. In full distance learning, Internet access is mainly an issue when it prevents videoconferencing because students find various access points when their home internet is limited to upload and download content, then they can study offline. However, videoconferencing requires privacy and instant performant access which is more difficult.

3.3 R.Q. 3: How do Students Make use of the Flipped Classroom Approach to Enhance their Reading Comprehension Skill?

The adopted pedagogical approach for the peer tutored online flipped classroom was implemented in a step-by-step fashion. Progressively, the students were taught to skim through, deduct the topic of discussion from observing the context, searching for keywords. Identifying keywords limited the need for the students to rely on automated translators and to resort to word by word translation. Instead, the pedagogy focused on training the students to read in the foreign language as they would in their mother tongue. Reading skills exercises guided the learners into understanding the text content, navigating through content to locate specific key information, and progressively introduced reading skills and text handling strategies. Reading comprehension questions invited the students to reuse the lexical items and structures from the text, and to practice the language by expression opinion, and ideas. The pedagogical approach leading to the development of reading skills, and its results on foreign language acquisition through reading is detailed in Fig. 7.
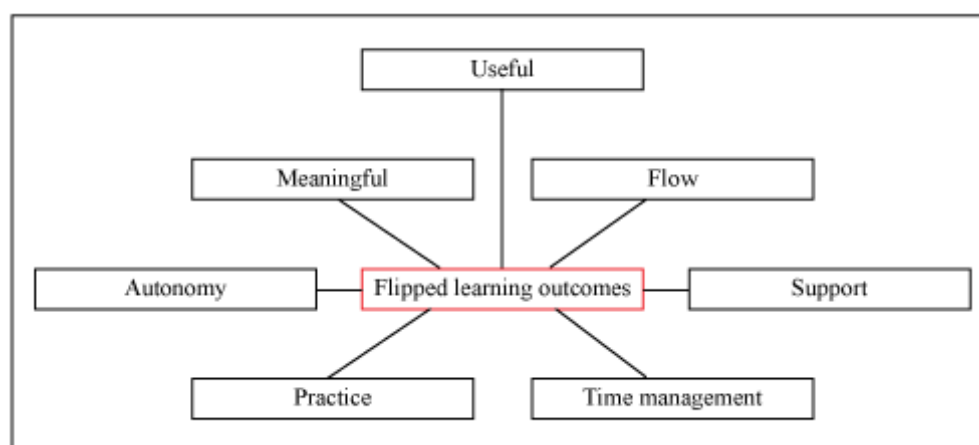

Fig. 6. Diagram of flipped learning outcomes

The flipped learning approach develops the reading skill because the students have different levels so when the teacher gives a text to the students, not all students can understand the text because they have different proficiency levels. The flipped classroom personalized the learning experience, giving the opportunity to the students to study the text at their own pace, with the help of a tutor. For example, Fatima stated that when the researchers worked with her, she preferred studying for the inverted class on her own.

"*Because I feel comfortable, so I ask a lot of questions, the whole thing focuses on one person, and I am not shy. Then, I try to do all things alone*" Fatima.

The flipped classroom pedagogy implemented involved helping the students skimming through the texts. Skimming techniques included using contextualization to understand the topic, syntax observation to split the text into accessible chunks, and to identify keywords and facts. Being able to deduct the context, and to identify the words which they needed to understand made the text accessible which in turn gave the students confidence and motivation.

The coding analysis clearly showed the importance of reading the text for a quick preview, like a scanner.

"*I don't know the meaning of the words, but if I don't understand some of the unimportant words, I will be able to understand the text. Otherwise, if I do not understand the main words if I am unable to understand the text. So first I learn to find the main words, so I can look for them in the dictionary and I can understand the text*" Fatima.

Then, the students were taught how to guess the meaning of difficult keywords from observing the sentence and hypothesizing the meaning from the context, such as by focusing on preceding and following words. Then the students were taught to use the questions to navigate through the text. Searching the text for answers helped them go deeper into the lesson or text to be able to find appropriate keywords to formulate their answers to the questions. Thus, the competence of reading comprehension shifting to writing and speaking practice where the students became more efficient and were not solely able to understand the text, but to reuse structures and vocabulary in formulating their answers.

These findings corroborate with Beheydt's [37] study and more recently with de la Garza and Harris's [34] study which investigate the importance of the context in vocabulary learning. As the students in the present study were able to discover new texts with a challenging level of vocabulary at their own pace, they were able to use the context to infer the meaning of words which they previously had not encountered. This ability resonates well with Krashen's [38] Input Hypothesis and particularly the Reading Hypothesis.

Skimming through trained the learners to dive into a foreign language text as if it was written in their mother tongue. Focusing on meaning and extracting what was interesting about the text. This led to enjoyment in reading, reading for a purpose larger than superficial translation. Reading became meaningful, and not only a linguistic task. Thus, students became able to respond to texts, relating reading to reading in Arabic, to being able to speak the foreign language, to be more and more efficient. The students felt the joy of becoming proficient in French.

"*The other side is grammar. When the sentence structure is simple and easy, I will be able to understand the text. On the contrary, when the sentence structure is complex, it is difficult to understand the text in addition to that. It is very important to always know the verbs because it also helps to understand the text in addition to knowing the use of the junction the tools in the sentences help to understand the text*" Fatima.

Repetition and practice are also among the most important strategies followed in foreign language learning for reading comprehension with upstream learning. Repetition of reading develops and develops reading skills, as well as comprehension and clear comprehension of the content of the text, as it does not focus on the first reading, but rather assimilates from the second and third and removes what is there. ambiguous.

The final relationship that is explained and analyzed, relates to distance learning or online learning. Currently, this technology is both popular and omnipresent due to health concerns caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. Like with flipped learning, both use modern techniques in learning, but the methods only differ, therefore flipped learning is divided into the two parts of home learning and classroom learning. As with distance learning, it results in learning away from face-to-face classes and being online. The two
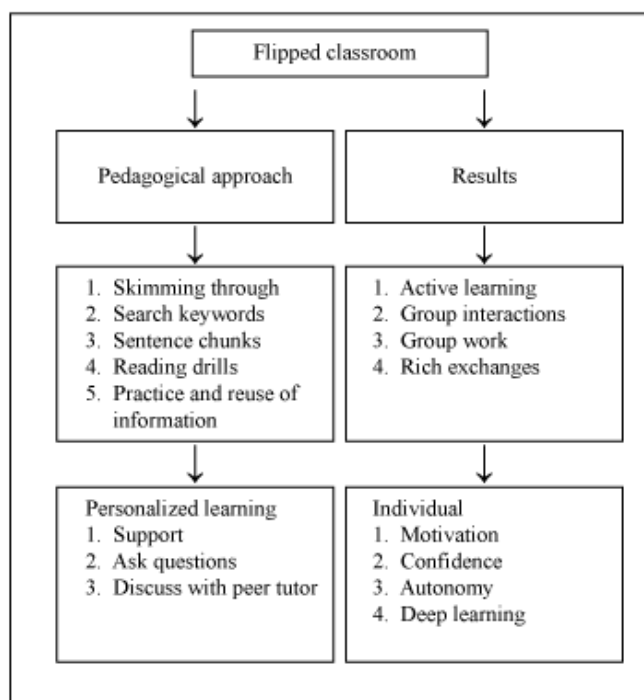
Fig. 7. Diagram of good flipped learning methods in the practice of reading comprehension

can be similar in learning methods and reading comprehension strategies, as flipped learning is organized on the mutuality of two parties and does not dependent entirely on the teacher alone. Distance learning, based on the findings of this study, is part of flipped learning. Flipped learning is complete and can be considered as a flipped learning strategies as the student can learn through the internet during the time they are preparing at home. and can communicate with other people who have experience in learning foreign languages and exchange conversations with them and give and take with them, which in turn helps the student to document their reading comprehension experiences from the point of view of reading and speech development, and on the other hand to understand and deepen the subject and content to understand it and resolve its questions.

The results were satisfactory, as they showed the effect of flipped learning in the development of the reading comprehension skills in foreign languages.

4. DISCUSSION

The results of flipped learning were reflected among the junior students learning French language, in particular the written comprehension had positive effects which contributed to the development of language skills through practice in a tangible way which led to the enrichment of general knowledge. This supports previous studies [39-41]. Highlighting how flipped learning and the current development of educational techniques have an important role to play in providing knowledge to students and acquiring foreign languages and helping them to learn and practice them smoothly. Although not all students might benefit equally from a flipped classroom approach [42]. It was evident that both students involved in the present study made the most of this approach in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and the shift to distance learning.

The results demonstrated the importance of using the peered flipped learning technique to develop the reading comprehension skills of foreign language learners, especially beginners. Flipped learning helps foreign language students develop their reading comprehension skills as they prepare the lessons in advance at home, discuss the text content and practice new words and structures with their tutor. The development of their reading skills increases their interest in searching more information related to the lessons' topic resulting in deeper learning as the students engage with the lesson. Therefore, when the students attend their course, they feel more confident and focus their questions on difficult words, grammar, or topic related aspects.

Students are more active, and interactions are more dynamic leading to rich discussions and meaningful practice. This finding is similar to what McCallum, Schultz, Sellke and Spartz's [43] discovered. Indeed, in a flipped classroom learning scenario, peer learning is of the utmost importance and contributes extensively to meaningful engagement through relationship building. In the present study, the peer tutors paved the way for the peer students to follow in their footsteps in foreign language learning.

With peer tutors in a flipped classroom, the students can overcome their reading comprehension difficulties by reading, with immersion, through searching additional references, as well as with applications to help with understanding vocabulary, grammar, and topics. Flipped learning makes learning fluid and motivating helping students inferring meaning from the context, confirming their knowledge and ideas when answering reading comprehension exercise drills. Although studies such as the one published by Yilmaz [44] note that student motivation can be strained by the flipped learning approach, others highlight how this technique may have a moderate effect [45] or may even result in an increased level of motivation [46]. In the present study, the students reported being more motivated because of this novel approach. It would be interesting to further this research with the same participants to investigate if the novelty wears off with time.

According to Dufour (2014) "the notion of inverted class however covers a multitude of realities with a large gradation in the autonomy vested in the pupils, up to cases where the pupils themselves determine (but in agreement and with the 'teacher's help) how they will achieve the learning objectives" (p. 47). From this concept, it can be concluded that flipped learning is useful in making learning effective and smoother. As mentioned earlier, with this technique the students become more independent and learn on their own, but with the help and the organization of the teachers, which in turn stimulates the students to know and love to learn. The role of the students here is to check the skills and try to develop them as they prepare at home.

Moreover, among these results, flipped learning also plays a role in improving group learning, working and cooperation with each other which is positive as group learning plays an important in the development of learning. [47] noted that inverted classroom models that emphasize collaborative learning, teamwork, and accessibility can enable and support learning-based learning.

5. CONCLUSION

This study contributes in highlighting the peer tutor roles in provided personalized support to junior learners with the online flipped classroom model. The tutor acts as a role model for the student imparting support in a fluid, clear and easy way to help the student overcome their reading comprehension difficulties. Developing the students' reading skills contribute to increase exposure to the target language as they become more confident readers and more proficient learners. The students' attitude shifted from being afraid by the complexity of the foreign language content to being motivated and positively challenged. Reading comprehension exercises served to develop the students' language skills as they reuse new words, structures and expressed themselves in the target language. Mobile learning contributed to the development of learning improving flipped classroom delivery both asynchronously and synchronously. The flipped classroom was perceived as meaningful, and enjoyable.

In foreign languages in particular, difficulties in reading comprehension impedes the students' acquisition process. This study implemented a peer online flipped classroom model to help the students with overcoming their reading difficulties. The results were congruent with the findings from previous researchers. Flipped learning plays a role in the development of reading comprehension skills by self-studying ahead of class, and in cooperating with other students in class. The flipped classroom taught the students how to better manage their study time and inculcated a study routine which is important in foreign language learning since the students cannot practice daily outside the classroom.

Confident learners became independent learners, interested in searching for deeper knowledge related to the topics of discussions, able to comprehend textual and audiovisual materials. Thus, the students became less dependent from the teacher or the student, and participated in class, exchanging ideas between students.

In conclusion, the flipped learning technique is an excellent technique to develop foreign language

learning skills. Developing the students reading skills is paramount at the beginning of foreign language programs. Reading strategies help the students overcome barriers related to handling texts in a foreign language. Information seeking skills taught the students how to find more sources of information. Greater reading exposure led to language acquisition and confident students able to practice the language.

The authors see the flipped classroom as useful, tidy, organized, enhancing reading comprehension and expanding knowledge through regular exposure, and critical thinking. Students improve by pulling knowledge, organizing their study time, becoming responsible. Therefore, they no longer rely entirely on passively receiving knowledge, instead they become in charge and through practicing, they learn the motivation and skills while diving into the lessons.

The first author, in her future French instructor career, will apply the flipped classroom approach with her students. She observed and noticed over the lessons and over the months how much the student had grown and progressed. She suggests that this technology be adopted in the future, given the current situation with distance learning, and how students need to take part in their learning. Students are adept in using online technology which makes it easier to implement flipped learning. Flipped learning is a personalized learning experience which helps students manage their study load and develop their study skills. This research was limited to a single student participant. Therefore, future research should investigate the implementation of flipped learning among peers as in collaborative flipped learning.

CONSENT AND ETHICAL APPROVAL

An information sheet and a consent form were distributed to all participants. It was clearly explained that participants may retract from the study at any time without any penalty. All participants' names were hidden with the use of pseudonyms. This research received the Human ethical approval from the University of Nizwa.

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COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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