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learning in pre-primary ELT
teacher training**
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literatura infantil: Aprendizaje
invertido en la formación del
profesorado de inglés de Infantil

Laura Torres Zúñiga
Universidad Autónoma de Madrid
España

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**“Flipping” the pages of Children’s Literature:
Flipped learning in pre-primary ELT teacher training**

“Girando” las páginas de la literatura infantil:

Aprendizaje invertido en la formación del profesorado de inglés de Infantil

Laura Torres Zúñiga

laura.torres@uam.es

Universidad Autónoma de Madrid. España

RESUMEN

Este artículo expone el proceso y resultados de la implantación del aprendizaje invertido (*flipped learning*) en una asignatura de Literatura Infantil en Lengua Inglesa para futuras/os docentes de inglés de Educación Infantil en una universidad española. Aunque la adopción de esta metodología híbrida fue provocada por las restricciones impuestas durante los años de la pandemia, un análisis y comparación más profundos sobre las ventajas del aprendizaje invertido y las necesidades detectadas en el curso reveló el potencial de dicho enfoque para mejorar la experiencia y los resultados de nuestro estudiantado también a largo plazo. Tras dos cursos académicos, la revisión de las calificaciones y los resultados de una encuesta de satisfacción demuestran que el rendimiento académico ha mejorado y el método ha sido recibido positivamente por el estudiantado, aunque ciertas necesidades específicas de aprendizaje de los participantes requerirán de una consideración más atenta en futuras ediciones de la asignatura.

PALABRAS CLAVE

APRENDIZAJE INVERTIDO, APRENDIZAJE SEMIPRESENCIAL, FORMACIÓN DE DOCENTES, ENSEÑANZA DE IDIOMAS, MATERIAL DE AUTOAPRENDIZAJE

ABSTRACT

This article exposes the process and results of the implementation of flipped learning in a course of Children’s Literature in English for future English teachers of pre-primary education at a Spanish university. Although the adoption of this blended methodology was initially forced by the restrictions during the pandemic years, further analysis and comparison of the affordances of flipped learning and of the students’ needs in the course revealed the potential of flipped learning to improve the learners’ experience and results also in the long term. After two academic years, the examination of academic results and a student satisfaction survey show that academic performance has improved and the method has been positively received by the students, although some specific learning needs of the participants still need to be more precisely addressed in future iterations of the flipped course.

KEYWORDS

FLIPPED LEARNING, BLENDED LEARNING, TEACHER EDUCATION, LANGUAGE TEACHING, LEARNING PACKAGES

INTRODUCTION

Innovation in higher education may be driven by exogenous or endogenous forces (Hasanefendic et al., 2017). Exogenous global and institutional forces such as the evolution of the job market, the development of technological systems, or governmental cuts in funding demand innovative responses from universities (Tierney & Lanford, 2016). An extreme case of an exogenous force took place in 2020 when the worldwide restrictions enforced by the COVID-19 pandemic caused “the great online-learning experiment” (Zimmerman, 2020, n. p.). Teachers had to rush to adapt their instruction to online or blended environments to guarantee that students had access to course contents, tasks and assessment via videoconferencing and learning management systems. As “the COVID-19 pandemic tested educators’ flexibility and willingness to change” (Quezada et al., 2020), some of those tertiary educators may have been better equipped to face up to the challenge thanks to their own endogenous, internal motivations to initiate and implement teaching innovation with the aims not merely of adjusting to emergency remote learning (Fryling, 2020), but also of “enhancing autonomy for the educators themselves, or for their students, [...] developing relatedness between students, between themselves and students” or fostering “personal or student wellbeing” (Averill & Major, 2020, p. 146).

This paper describes the rationale, methodology and results of one such teaching innovations that originated from understanding the pandemic context as “an opportunity to test online pedagogy centric approaches” (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020, p. iii) in a course on *Children’s Literature in English* from the bachelor’s degree in pre-primary education in a Spanish university (taught in the 4th year of the degree as part of a specialization in ELT). The adoption of a technology-enhanced pedagogy was not just a temporary solution and, after its first year of implementation (2020/21), it promoted a deep reconsideration of the methodological principles and teaching methods that could respond to the long-term needs of the course and its students. In the search for such a methodologically-sound though adaptable formula, flipped learning was the selected approach. Once the pandemic restrictions were lifted in 2021, the mentioned course continued in its blended, flipped format; this study focuses on that academic year, 2021/22.

FLIPPED LEARNING: LITERATURE REVIEW AND INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN

Not only was the flipped approach viewed as the most suitable method to be applied during the pandemic for its adaptability to virtual modalities of teaching and its fostering of student autonomy (Campillo-Ferrer & Miralles-Martinez, 2021; Perdomo, 2022), but a comprehensive literature review on online pedagogies and the teaching of foreign languages and literatures revealed that flipped learning already had a long trajectory and validity in our specific context of language learning (Bauer-Ramazani et al., 2016; Hsieh et al., 2017; Kerr, 2020; Loucky & Ware, 2017), with more recent applications to literature teaching (Chambers, 2016; Ripamonti, 2017; Wang & Ying, 2019) and teacher training (Boubih et al., 2020; Gómez Carrasco et al., 2020; Jeong et al., 2018).

Flipped learning is a constructivist approach that reverses the traditional learning paradigm in which the teacher introduces theoretical contents during the face-to-face sessions (usually by means of lecturing) and students use those contents to do some practical homework on their own. In the flipped approach, students access the theoretical contents outside the classroom by means of carefully prepared and/or

curated materials (readings, recorded lectures, videos, digital resources), and in-class time is devoted to active learning opportunities, collaborative tasks and discussions through which they put into practice and expand on what they have previously learned at home with the support and feedback of the instructor.

Thus, the four pillars of flipped learning that teachers must incorporate into their practice are:

1. a Flexible environment that allows students to interact and learn content in different ways and at different times, while the teacher observes and makes adjustments as appropriate;
2. a Learning culture that is learner-centered and in which students engage in meaningful activities that are scaffolded by the teacher, who provides differentiation and feedback;
3. Intentional content, curated or created specifically by the teacher, in which concepts used in direct instruction are prioritized for learners to access on their own, and
4. Professional educators that take responsibility for transforming their practice and carry out ongoing formative assessments to evaluate the effectiveness of their instruction.

(Flipped Learning Network, 2014)

Numerous studies have shown that academic performance in higher education increases in groups using flipped learning in contrast to those following a traditional method (Hinojo Lucena et al., 2019). There are also improvements in terms of student satisfaction and engagement (de Haro Rodríguez & Ayala de la Peña, 2019). Previous flipped experiences in teacher training in Spain have proved satisfactory both in fully online contexts (Sacristán San Cristóbal et al., 2017) and face-to-face contexts (Cid Cid et al., 2018; Parra-González et al., 2020). For example, in the subject of (Spanish) language and literature it has had positive results such as an enhancement of the students' skills, engagement and motivation, and of the instructors' digital competence and attention to student needs (Domínguez Pelegrín et al., 2017). Also when applied to the teaching of foreign languages for (pre-service) teachers, numerous case studies exemplify the effectiveness of the approach (Han & Røkenes, 2020; Köroğlu & Çakır, 2017; Lee & Davis, 2018; Lee & Martin, 2020; Tohei, 2018), which can be used both to improve language and motivation (Heredia Ponce et al., 2022) and to learn about ELT pedagogies (Angelini & García-Carbonell, 2015).

Difficulties of the approach that must be accounted for are the complexities of collaborative groupwork (e.g. lack of engagement or of enough time), the students' insistence on receiving theoretical lectures (García Hernández et al., 2019), the investment in time required of students, and the quality of the technological resources used (Espada et al. 2020), which exacerbates the already heavy demands of time and effort on the instructor's part (Bates et al., 2017). Such demands can prove worthwhile, however, if the resources can be reused in future iterations of the course (Hew et al., 2021).

Flipped instructional design

For the flipped instructional design, we followed a series of steps that fall in line with those proposed by research in the area, such as the ADDIE model (Quinde-Herrera et al., 2022): Analysis of needs, Design, Development, Implementation and Evaluation. An analysis of students’ surveys in previous iterations of the course revealed the need for improvement in two main areas: the lack of in-class time for guided practice and feedback,¹ and the students’ difficulties to follow lectures and materials due to low proficiency in English.² The implementation of flipped learning could solve both issues, because “a flipped approach allows English language learners to learn material at their own pace and allows the instructor to differentiate instruction for individual learners, increasing the likelihood that students will comprehend class material” (Kostka & Lockwood, 2015, p. 3), and offering more opportunities for practice and feedback thanks to the in-class hands-on activities.

The flipped design required a selection of those theoretical contents from the syllabus that would be reserved for autonomous access in the pre-class stage. Since the main aim of this course is to prepare pre-primary teachers to use literary works for children as didactic resources to teach English, some of these theoretical contents included the multimodal analysis of picturebooks (visual aspects, literary devices), the definition and varieties of nursery rhymes, and the basics of storytelling and picturebook mediation, among others. After new theoretical materials and resources had to be found, selected and/or created to compensate for the absence of lectures, these contents were distributed into a series of digital, self-access interactive workbooks that students had available on the Moodle LMS in advance of each class (see below).

The lesson planning of the in-class or synchronous sessions –both in online and face-to-face formats– was inspired by the Synchronous Online Flipped Learning Approach, or SOFLA (Marshall & Kostka, 2020). After the pre-work step, where students asynchronously engage with contents on their own, the in-class sessions start with the revision and feedback on pre-class contents. The core of the lesson is devoted to collaborative work in which students solve a task or activity putting into use the pre-work contents, whose results they share with the whole group afterwards. In the last part of the session the teacher prepares students for subsequent sessions and gives students the next pre-work instructions (Table 1).

Table 1. Lesson planning of in-class sessions. Source: Own elaboration.

STAGES	STUDENT’S ROLE	TEACHER’S ROLE	TIMING
Warm-up	- Shares notes and questions gathered during the revision of the pre-class workbook	- Gives feedback - Clarifies doubts - Offers more examples	30’
Main activity	- Individually, in groups or pairs, applies contents of workbook to analyze or produce literary pieces or didactic resources - Shares their ideas/creations with the whole group - Provides peer feedback	- Organizes individual / pair / group tasks - Guides students during the tasks - Gives feedback and corrections	50’

¹ “Se ha echado de menos mayor tiempo para las actividades/proyectos finales con explicaciones escritas sobre los criterios.”

² “Seguir la asignatura en inglés ha sido un poco difícil.”

Wrap-up	- Reflects on the content of the lesson and ask any doubts	- Clarifies any doubts about the lesson’s contents - Presents next workbook and gives any necessary instructions for its revision	10’
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For the development of the pre-work workbooks the chosen tool was Genially (González del Hierro, 2019), an online app for the creation of multilayered, multimodal presentations with videos, activities, links, etc. that appeal to the students’ curiosity and participation more than traditional video lectures. Besides the theoretical contents included through the embedded texts, documents, and videos (from YouTube or self-created), formative assessment was offered throughout the workbooks by means of interactive activities created with LearningApps.org. Through such self-correcting activities of matching, grouping, multiple-choice questions, etc. (demanding low-order skills on Bloom’s scale), students could check their understanding of the materials and gather doubts before the in-class session, when high-order skills would be put into practice.³ The variety and multimodality of input was also intended to offer differentiated learning options, because, as Ripamonti affirms, “flipping the classroom helps educators cater for different learning styles since various digitalized inputs and stimuli are more likely to appeal and make sense to learners rather than frontload information at the beginning of each unit” (2017, p. 2).

The implementation of the course during the winter semester of 2020/21 was fully online, with synchronous sessions through videoconference on Microsoft Teams, whereas in 2021/22 it returned to its usual in-person format. There were two 90’ sessions per week during a period of approximately 12 weeks (four sessions per unit, 5 units, for a total of 24 sessions). The rest of the semester weeks were devoted to one non-flipped project-based unit, and to revision and assessment sessions.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Usual factors considered for the comparison of the educational outcomes of the flipped classroom are final examination scores, student satisfaction and attendance rate (Yeung & Wan, 2020), although not many studies combine several of them. For example, in Fernández-Carballo’s experience with flipped learning in ELT at university, the focus was “sobre actitudes, no se contabilizaron los resultados académicos” (Fernández-Carballo, 2022, p. 57).⁴ In our case we combined quantitative and qualitative study of final scores and student satisfaction.

Quantitative analysis of students’ academic performance in the regular assessment or *convocatoria ordinaria* compared the prior (2018/19)⁵ and posterior (2020/21 and 2021/22) years to the implementation of the flipped approach in the different assessment tools of the course (year 2019/20 was excluded since only five students sat the regular assessment). Furthermore, in the second flipped year, 2021/22, an ad hoc Likert-scale survey was designed to collect the students’ perceptions and satisfaction with the flipped methodology. The survey contained 13 items and 5 degrees of (dis)agreement (from 1. Complete disagreement to 5. Complete agreement), and one open question for further comments about the course. Each of the 13 items was followed

³ A sample workbook can be accessed here: <https://view.genial.ly/656b6804f6fe2900144ed864>

⁴ “On attitudes, academic results were not computed”.

⁵ The course was inaugurated in the year 2018/19.

by a corresponding open question where students could justify their disagreement. This anonymous survey was distributed via Google Forms to the 2021/22 group of 23 students, from which 12 valid responses were gathered.

RESULTS

Academic performance

Academic results were based on the grades received by students in the different assessment tools of the course: theoretical written exam, storytelling practice, pack of story-based activities and adaptation task (Figure 1). The mean grade (over 10) of the whole group was calculated for each tool. Exam results show no relevant difference between the non-flipped (6.3) and flipped years (6.22, 6.44), whereas the grades of the adaptation task suffered a small drop in the first flipped year but returned to their previous level (from 7.96 to 6.74 and then 7.41).

The greatest difference is shown in the grades of the practical tasks of storytelling and story-based activities. The improvement during the first year of flipped learning is slight: 6.36 to 6.62 in the storytelling task and 6.36 to 6.81 in the activity pack. The second flipped year shows a boost in both grades: up to 8.23 for storytelling and 8 for the activity pack.

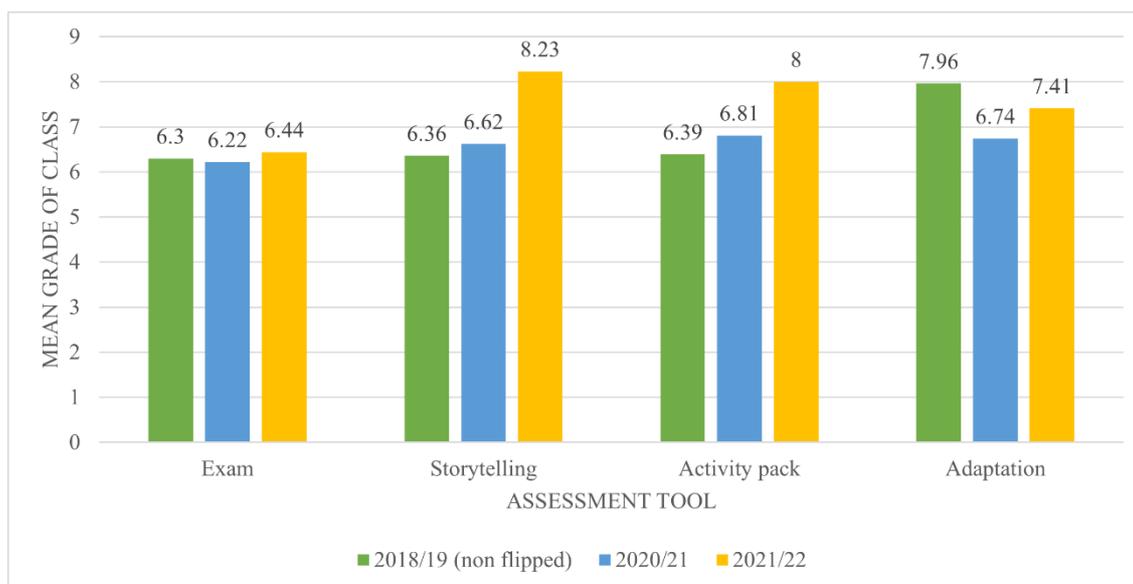


Figure 1. Mean grades of whole class in the non-flipped and flipped academic years. Source: Own elaboration.

Student satisfaction

The ad-hoc survey after the second flipped year, 2021/22, included items about the general development of the course, its contents and evaluation, and the flipped methodology (materials and workload of pre-work stage, in-class sessions, collaborative learning). The items on contents and evaluation have been excluded from this analysis since they were not affected by the teaching innovation.

Items about the development of the course revealed that student satisfaction was mostly high, with 75% of respondents agreeing quite a lot or a lot on its adequacy and 16.7% finding it somewhat appropriate (Fig. 2):

2. El desarrollo general de la asignatura me ha parecido adecuado.

12 respuestas

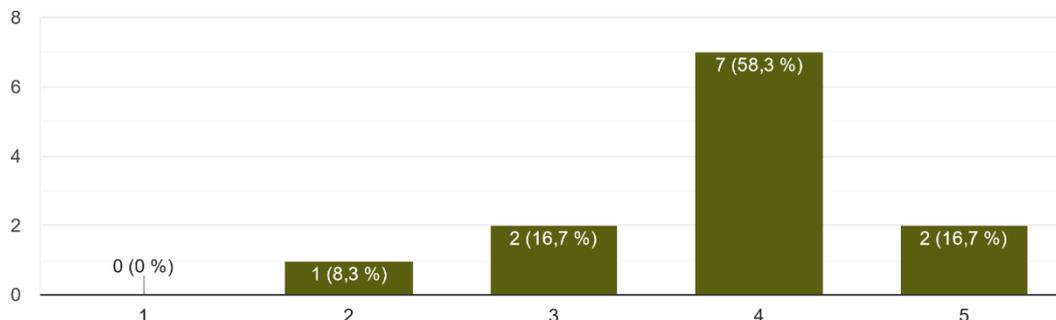


Figure 2. Item “The development of the course in general has been adequate”. Source: Own elaboration.

That satisfaction of 91.7% of respondents correlates with a perceived easiness in following the course of 83.3% of respondents (Fig. 3):

13. En general, no me he encontrado con dificultades a la hora de seguir la asignatura.

12 respuestas

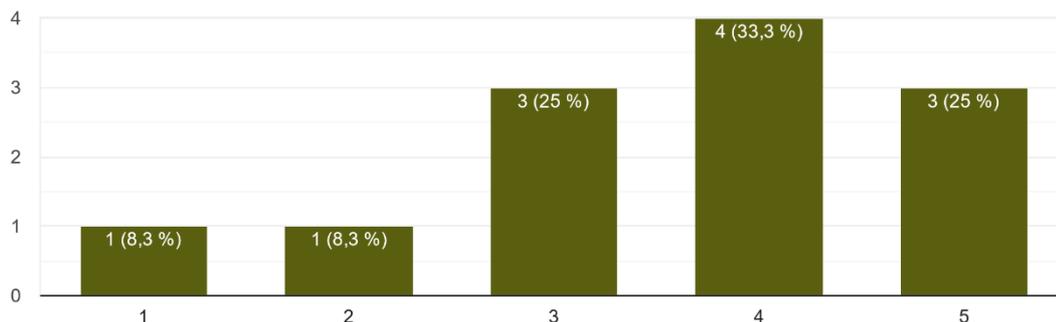


Figure 3. Item “In general, I have not encountered difficulties when following the course”. Source: Own elaboration.

Qualitative answers to the open questions after these items observed that the English level may have been one of the obstacles,⁶ and that some more tasks could have been done in groups.⁷ One respondent specifically mentioned the flipped approach as the main hindrance for their progress in the course.⁸

Opinions about the flipped methodology itself were more dispersed, with 66.6% of respondents agreeing quite a lot or a lot with its adequacy, 25% believing it was somewhat adequate and 8.3% (1 respondent) disagreeing (Fig. 4):

⁶ “Me esperaba un nivel más sencillo de inglés”; “al ser en otra lengua me ha resultado muy difícil.”

⁷ “Considero que alguno de los trabajos que se han solicitado a los alumnos se podría haber realizado en grupo.”

⁸ “Debido al flipped learning me resulta complicado seguir la asignatura, sin embargo el contenido no es demasiado difícil.”

5. La metodología que hemos seguido (flipped learning) ha sido adecuada.

12 respuestas

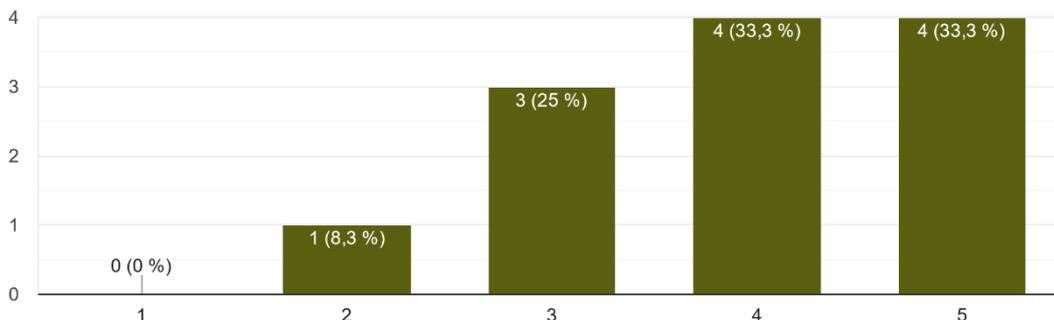


Figure 4. Item “The methodology of flipped learning has been adequate”. Source: Own elaboration.

That disagreement may be explained by the only open answer after that item, which comes from one student with special learning needs who struggled with keeping focused.⁹ This disagreeing respondent may be the same student that found the flipped approach a hindrance in the previous question.

On the other hand, all respondents agreed that the materials used for the course had been useful for learning (Fig. 5) and that the time investment involved in preparing the pre-work workbooks was adequate (Fig. 6):

4. Los materiales de la asignatura (cuadernos de trabajo/pre-work, lecturas, vídeos) me han resultado útiles para aprender.

12 respuestas

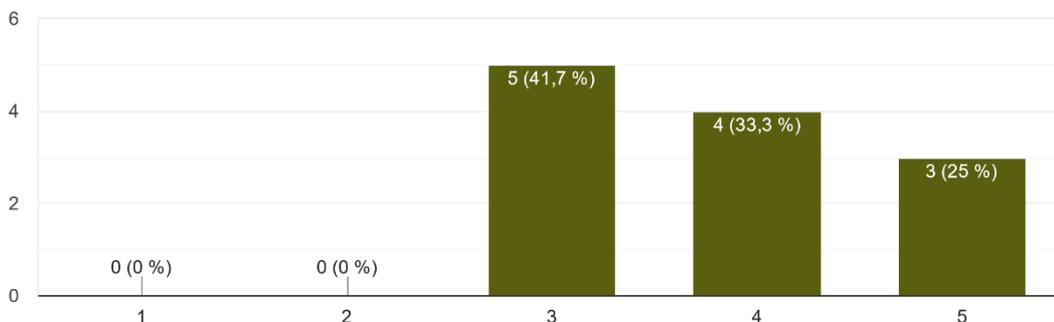


Figure 5. Item “Course materials (pre-work workbooks, readings, videos) have been useful for learning”. Source: Own elaboration.

⁹ “Como estudiante con NEE me resulta muy complicado mantener la concentración necesaria para poder seguir el desarrollo de una metodología de Flipped learning.”

8. El tiempo que he necesitado para preparar los cuadernos de trabajo (pre-work) ha sido adecuado.

12 respuestas

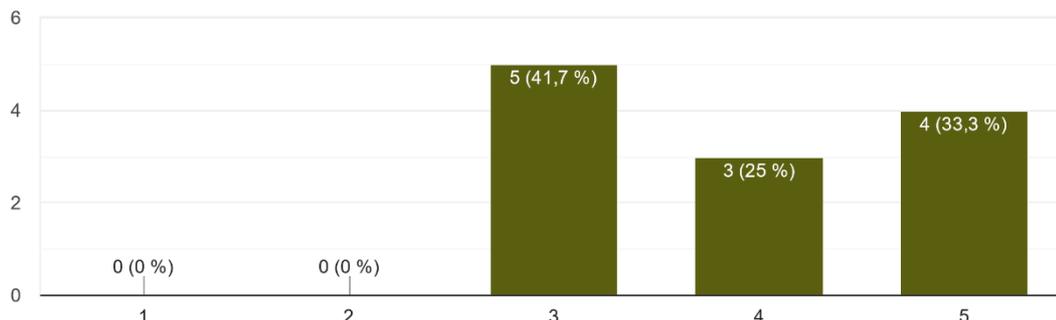


Figure 6. Item “The time I needed to prepare the workbooks (pre-work) has been adequate”. Source: Own elaboration.

Open answers to this last item point out as negative aspects that English was still an obstacle for that preparation,¹⁰ and that the workload was higher on some occasions.¹¹ Items about the in-class time devoted to theory and to practice show that 75% of respondents agree quite a lot or a lot that the time was sufficient in both cases (Fig. 7 and Fig. 8):

6. Hemos dedicado suficiente tiempo en clase a revisar la teoría.

12 respuestas

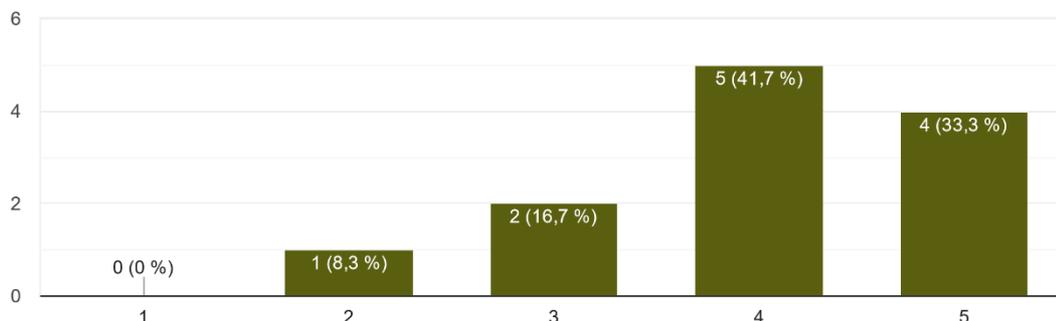


Figure 7. Item “We have devoted enough time to revise the theoretical contents in class”. Source: Own elaboration.

¹⁰ “Me ha costado mucho más tiempo porque no tengo un nivel tan alto de inglés.”

¹¹ “Dependiendo de la semanas, la carga de trabajo me ha parecido bastante alta.”

7. Hemos dedicado suficiente tiempo en clase a hacer prácticas.

12 respuestas

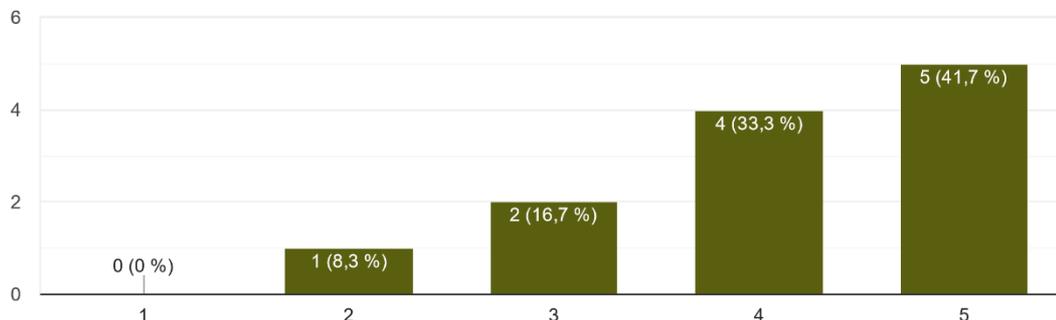


Figure 8. Item “We have devoted enough time to the practical contents in class”. Source: Own elaboration.

Open answers suggest revising the theoretical contents at the end of each unit,¹² as well as devoting more in-class time to the practical tasks.¹³

Finally, the practical focus applied in the in-class sessions is appreciated by all respondents as positively contributing to their learning (Fig. 9):

12. Las oportunidades de participación y las actividades en clase han contribuido a mi aprendizaje.

12 respuestas

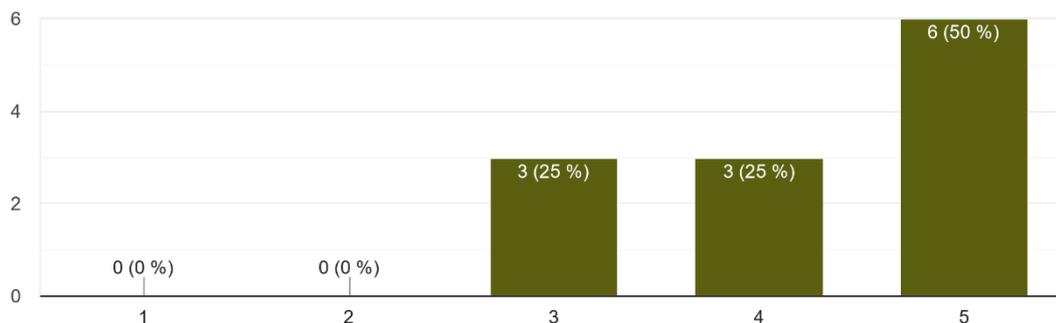


Figure 9. Item “The opportunities for participation and the in-class activities have contributed to my learning”. Source: Own elaboration.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Both the quantitative and qualitative results in terms of academic performance and student satisfaction point towards a positive evaluation of the teaching innovation of flipping the course *Children’s Literature in English* for pre-primary teachers, which coincides with the extensive literature on the favorable effect of flipped learning/classrooms on student knowledge, satisfaction, and engagement (Murillo-Zamorano et al., 2019). Mean student grades show a relevant rise in the practical tasks (storytelling and activity pack) devoted to train future teachers to use literary works in their classrooms –which is the key competence according to the syllabus: “To be

¹² “No habría estado mal haber aclarado más (y repasado al final de cada unidad) los conceptos teóricos más importantes de cada tema.”

¹³ “En ninguna fue suficiente [tiempo] para terminar la tarea.”

familiar with children’s literature in a foreign language and to use it as a pedagogic tool”. Such improvement was indeed one of the main objectives for applying the flipped approach. Other studies have also attested to similar higher average scores for students in flipped classrooms in contrast to non-flipped control groups (Lee & Wallace, 2018). It is worth noting that this improvement was not noticeable yet during the first academic year of the flipped method, 2020/21, when the modality was fully online. It is not possible to ascertain whether this may be due to problems with the novice implementation of the flipped method or with the also novice transposition to online learning, both for instructor and students –especially considering the latter’s generalized discontent with the online format (Tang et al., 2020).

While the acquisition of theoretical contents has not been so positively affected by the flipped approach, as the mean exam grades reflect, it does not seem to have been negatively affected either now that the students were responsible for its self-study in the pre-work phase. However, the qualitative comments do point to the students’ wish for reserving some more in-class time to the revision and reinforcement of theoretical contents. This insistence on a more direct theoretical instruction within the classroom may be caused by a certain resistance to flipped learning by some students (Wilson, 2023). It is to be expected, however, that as the approach becomes more familiar to students and faculty, and both collectives gain experience in its use, this opposition will decrease (Aronson & Arfstrom, 2013).

The students’ perceptions about the methodology, its materials and the involved workload show a widespread agreement on their adequacy and usefulness. Whereas one of the needs detected in student surveys, the lack of enough in-class time for practice, seems to have been satisfactorily addressed (Fig. 8), the other main problem from previous non-flipped years does not seem to have been so positively affected. Students with low English proficiency or learning difficulties did not seem to perceive the advantages of the flipped approach, such as self-pacing lessons, additional time interacting with the teacher, and immediate feedback (Altemueller & Lindquist, 2017). This will need to be addressed in future years by realizing the necessary pedagogical adjustments for more differentiated teaching, such as the inclusion of multilevel activities and the adoption of a universal design perspective (e.g. Andujar & Nadif, 2022).

Since the evaluation stage in the ADDIE model also includes it (Quinde-Herrera et al., 2022, p. 102), a personal reflection on the part of the instructor about the development of the teaching innovation needs to be carried out. The instructor’s perceptions, although not objectively quantified, point toward more frequent and fluent student participation in the flipped sessions than in previous formats. In addition, the process of research, adaptation, and implementation of the flipped course has contributed to the instructor’s own Continuous Professional Development (CPD), more evidently through the in-depth knowledge acquired about blended formats.

Moreover, as Domínguez Pelegrín et al. also conclude (2017), the use of technological tools has greatly contributed to an improvement of digital competence –in particular, in areas of the *European Framework for the Digital Competence of Educators* such as Area 2 on “sourcing, creating and sharing digital resources,” Area 3 on managing the use of digital technologies in teaching and learning, and Area 5 on “using digital technologies to enhance inclusion, personalisation and learners’ active engagement” (Punie & Redecker, 2017, p. 16). Such competences acquired can be easily transposable to other courses and contexts. Finally, the course *Children’s Literature in English* in its

flipped form was awarded in 2023 the Grand Award of the International Blended Learning Award (BLA) in its 2nd edition (Blended Learning Award, 2023, p. 18) as a recognition of excellence in quality content, pedagogical implementation, and curricular flexibility. For all these pedagogical and personal reasons, flipped learning has proven to be a sustainable, flexible, and methodologically-sound innovation worth continuing in the upcoming years.

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