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Virtual Flipped Classroom Approach for English Language Teaching: English Instructors' Views on The Challenges

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ABSTRACT

The implementation of Virtual Flipped Classroom (VFC) approach has gained increasing attention in the field of English Language Teaching. This is due to its potential to enhance learners' engagement and language acquisition. The present research explores the English language instructors' perspectives regarding the challenges they face when adopting VFC approach in their teaching practices. Data was collected using a qualitative research design through a semi-structured interview with a purposive sample of four experienced English instructors from one of the public universities in Sepang, Malaysia. Thematic analysis was employed to identify and analyze the emerging themes from the interview transcripts. The findings indicate that English instructors encountered several challenges when implementing VFC approach. Instructors' responsibilities such as course material preparation and giving personalized feedbacks to learners hinder the seamless delivery of virtual English lessons. Secondly, the instructors faced difficulties in ensuring active engagement and interaction in the virtual environment, which requires innovative instructional strategies and attention to the design of learning materials. Future research should focus on the best practices and solutions to ensure VFC can be implemented in a more comprehensive manner. Also, exploring VFC pedagogical approaches for different English language skills: receptive and productive skills, and across different languages, is needed for the literature of Virtual Flipped Classroom, a new instructional approach for English Language Teaching and Learning.

Keywords: Virtual Flipped Classroom approach (VFC); English Language Teaching (ELT); Online Distance Learning; Educational Technology

INTRODUCTION

The global impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has led educational institutions to take a different turn in the delivery of knowledge. To maintain the continuity of education, almost all educational institutions around the world had resorted to Online Distance learning (ODL) as a means to ensure learners are kept in the teaching and learning momentum. Similarly, in Malaysia, Online Distance Learning (ODL) is used as a platform that offers flexible learning opportunities for learners in higher education institutions (HEIs) to access formal education from wherever they are. According to Razami and Ibrahim (2021), one of the characteristics of ODL is that the teaching and learning processes involve instructions assisted by two-way communication between the instructors and the learners in virtual classrooms. Online lectures, teleconferencing, digital open books, online examinations and interactions in virtual environments are some of the examples of new modalities of instructional implementations (Kumar, 2020; Strielkowski, 2020).

Background of Study

Due to the sudden shift in the Malaysian education system, some established traditional classroom approaches were practiced in virtual classes. Among the traditional approaches that successfully made its debut in ODL, is the Flipped Classroom approach. The ideal concept of Virtual Flipped Classrooms (VFC) is similar to the traditional Flipped Learning, where learners are expected to play an active role during the virtual classroom sessions. Instructors on the other hand, are responsible on the content knowledge as well as mentoring remote learners' in class participation. In a Virtual Flipped Classroom session, course materials are given prior to the



session. Learners are expected to read the materials before class for better engagement. Since VFC is a new approach emerged during the Covid-19 pandemic, many researches emphasized on the benefits of VFC approach to teach content knowledge. According to Gopalan et al. (2021), the approach emerged as a highly suitable option amidst the pandemic due to its emphasis on students independently engaging with course material online prior to lessons. However, there is little evidence on the implementation of VFC in English language teaching and learning. Due to the country's diverse linguistic landscapes and Malaysia's growing technology in education, this present study is significant and in line with the vision of the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE). Bernama (2023, para. 9) in New Straits Times reported that Minister Datuk Seri Mohamed Khaled Nordin said, "My aim is to see and prepare how we should manage the various changes and technological booms that greatly affect the country's plans for higher education,". Hence, the present study is aimed to explore Virtual Flipped Classroom approach on language teaching from the perspective of English language instructors, focusing on the challenges they have experienced while conducting VFC sessions.

Problem Statement

The drastic transition of traditional classroom to virtual classroom during Covid-19 pandemic has caused language instructors in higher education institutions (HEIs) to adapt to the demand of virtual teaching. There are many aspects language instructors have to consider in order to conduct virtual language learning sessions. Several studies have reported that virtual language teaching and learning was said to be monotonous, which then resulted to low motivation (Permana Putra, 2021) and engagement (Garcia-Ponce & Mora-Pablo, 2020) among remote learners during virtual classes. This shows that lack of variety in virtual language teaching hinders the progress of remote learners, as it fails to provide the necessary assistance for language learning. Due to the nature of virtual learning, remote learners encounter numerous distractions during synchronous learning which is the reason why they are prone to being diverted from their learning goals. Thus, a meaningful virtual language learning environment must be planned by instructors to help these remote learners. One effective method to capture the learners' attention in a virtual language learning environment is through active learning. (Awang et al., 2022).

In relation to virtual education, traditional Flipped Learning (FL) approach which is known to promote active learning (Rahman et al., 2020) has made its debut to virtual classrooms; Virtual Flipped Classroom Approach. Similar to the traditional flipped learning approach, learners are encouraged to prepare prior to class by reading shared lecture notes, watching lecture videos or completing quizzes (Othman & Rahman, 2023). Hence, the preparation of Virtual Flipped Classroom sessions for English instructors is a crucial stage to ensure remote learners achieve the learning outcomes during synchronous learning in VFC. Such teaching preparation is also demanded to be an important stage as mentioned in Biological Sciences Curriculum Study (BSCS) 5E Instructional Model (Hew et al., 2020). To add, Hew et al. (2020) further added that VFC also claimed that previous researches have shown the positive effects of the 5E framework on learners' achievements, of which makes it a reflection of an ideal virtual flipped classroom for learners to experience meaningful learning. Instructors have to be metacognitively aware that an ideal approach is to allow learners to critically brainstorm and create connections to their schemata based on the course content prepared, so learners are able to



construct their own understanding. However, although there are many theories and models on the pedagogical aspect virtual education, remote learners' engagement in virtual classes has become one of the challenges for language instructors during virtual classes. In view of the above scenario, there is gap in the body of knowledge to understand English language instructors' experiences, especially on the challenges of using Virtual Flipped Classroom approach. A study by Othman et al. (2021) pointed out that there are only few researches evaluated the different spectrum of virtual language education which support the relevance of this current study, exploring English Instructors' challenges in using Flipped Classroom Approach as a means to promote active learning among remote learners. It is hoped that this study will illuminate evidences to the effectiveness of Virtual Flipped Classroom approach in support of virtual education in Malaysia.

Research Objectives & Research Questions

The objectives of this study are:

1. to explore English language instructors' perception of instructors' responsibilities in using Virtual Flipped Classroom for language teaching.
2. to explore English language instructors' perception of remote learners' engagement in using Virtual Flipped Classroom for language teaching.

The above objectives mentioned will be achieved using research questions that would serve as guidelines for the study's progression. The research questions are as follows:

1. How do English instructors perceive the instructors' responsibilities in using Virtual Flipped Classroom approach for language teaching?
2. How do English instructors perceive remote learners' engagement using Virtual Flipped Classroom approach for language teaching?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Virtual Flipped Classroom Approach

A Virtual Flipped Classroom refers to an educational approach that combines the principles of the Flipped Classroom Model with online or virtual learning environments. This model aims to optimize student engagement, promote active learning, and leverage the benefits of both self-paced learning and real-time interactions in an online learning environment. Learners are encouraged to prepare prior to class which is a crucial stage as mentioned in BSCS 5E Instructional Model, a model developed based on various educational theories and models (Hew et al., 2020). According to Bybee et al. (2006), the 5E instructional model consists of five phases that guide the learning process. The first phase, Engage, aims to involve learners by presenting real-world scenarios or problems, encouraging critical thinking and drawing connections to their past experiences. In the Explore phase, learners are given time and opportunities to independently explore the content, constructing their own understanding of the topic. The Explain phase involves learners explaining aspects of their engagement and exploration experiences, while the instructor introduces relevant terminology to aid in concept building.



During the Elaborate phase, the instructor provides additional information through mini lectures or discussions, allowing learners to apply what they have learned and receive feedback. Lastly, the Evaluate phase includes formative assessments to assess learners' mastery throughout the process, with a summative assessment administered after the Elaborate phase. By following these phases, the 5E model facilitates a comprehensive and engaging learning experience. This statement is supported by a research by Adam (2022) on Student Perspectives of Engagement in a 5E Instructional Model Applied in a Virtual Learning Environment. His study with the Bachelor of Arts in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (BATEFL) learners showed that the implementation of the 5E model has the potential to enhance learners' learning experience within online learning environments.

Challenges in Language Teaching

Transactional Distance Theory (TDT), an educational framework that was developed in 1980 by Michael C. Moore proposed the idea of removing barriers to learning that occur due to the lack of simulation in virtual education (Özbey & Kayri, 2023). TDT considers the remoteness between the instructor and the learners not only as a physical distance, but relatively as an educational and psychological distance. Transactional Distance consist of two dimensions: distance (interaction) and autonomy (self-learning) (Horzum, 2011), which clearly reflect the nature of Virtual Flipped Classroom approach. In relation to the present study, while remote learners independently learning the target language, the challenges experienced by language instructors during virtual flipped classes, are the result of transactional distance mentioned in Transactional Distance Theory.

Hence, from the aforementioned theories above, it is clear that this study relied upon previous studies to build a perspective to explore the challenges experienced by instructors using Virtual Flipped Classroom approach to teach English.

Challenges of Virtual Flipped Classroom

The Virtual Flipped Classroom presents several unique challenges for instructors. Adapting traditional instructional methods to online platforms, maintaining student engagement, and addressing technical difficulties while ensuring effective learning are among the key obstacles faced in this educational approach. Vo (2022) employed a case study methodology, utilizing questionnaires, interviews, and observations to investigate instructors' perceptions of the Flipped Classroom (FC) in tertiary education. The questionnaire was initially distributed to forty instructors at a foreign language faculty, followed by in-depth interviews to gather more detailed insights into the advantages and disadvantages of the FC. Classroom observations were conducted to observe how the FC was implemented in actual teaching scenarios. The findings unequivocally demonstrated that the majority of instructors expressed a positive attitude towards the FC model, despite the presence of certain challenges. However, it was noted that the successful implementation of the FC relied on fulfilling certain prerequisites, including learners' preparation at home, allocating sufficient time for active practice, and instructors' significant effort in preparation.

Instructors' Responsibilities

In the Virtual Flipped Classroom, instructor's responsibilities and learners' engagement are the challenges they may encounter in distance learning. Instructor's responsibilities can be discussed



through time management in preparing materials and giving feedback.

Managing Time on Materials Preparation

Many studies have been conducted on the challenges faced by instructors especially in managing time on materials preparation. An autoethnographic study conducted by Al-Naabi (2022) aimed to explore the author's obstacles faced during the integration of Virtual Flipped Classroom approach in a higher education institution in Oman amidst remote learning. Through a thematic analysis of an autoethnographic account and interviews conducted with two university instructors, three key themes were identified: advantages of the virtual flipped classroom, difficulties encountered in implementing the virtual flipped classroom, and strategies for effectively adopting the virtual flipped classroom approach. The findings revealed that the process of preparing activities was time consuming due to the need for adapting course materials originally intended for offline delivery. To assist higher education instructors in the implementation of a virtual flipped classroom, a suggested framework is presented to provide guidance and structure for this teaching approach. In addition, Kebritchi et al. (2017) conducted a review of literature using Cooper's framework to identify issues in online courses. The analysis revealed three primary areas of discoveries: challenges concerning online learners, instructors, and the development of course content. The concerns of learners encompassed their expectations, preparedness, self-perception, and involvement in online courses. On the other hand, instructors faced challenges such as adapting to new roles, shifting from traditional to distance learning, managing their time effectively, and adjusting their teaching approaches. Regarding content-related matters, there were issues related to the involvement of instructors in developing content, the incorporation of multimedia elements, the impact of instructional strategies on content creation, and factors to be considered during content development. Higher education institutions should offer professional development opportunities for instructors, training instructors, and technical assistance for content development. In conclusion, numerous investigations have been carried out concerning the difficulties encountered by instructors, particularly in regards to effectively managing their time when it comes to preparing instructional materials.

Managing Time to Provide Feedback

Based on the study "The Role of Feedback in the Distance Learning Process" written by Jurs and Spehte (2021), one of the challenges in distance learning lies in devising methods to provide timely and meaningful feedback to learners, enabling them to enhance their performance, actively participate in the learning process, and maintain a strong student-instructor connection. In face-to-face instruction, information, concepts, and feedback can be conveyed verbally within a relatively short time frame. This study employed theoretical research methods, including analysis of scientific and methodological literature, to explore the concept and theoretical models of distance learning. It also discusses the prerequisites for effective feedback and emphasizes its significance in the teaching and learning process. By emphasizing the importance of feedback, the article puts forward suggestions for enhancing the distance learning experience. Another study by Musingafi et al. (2015) examined the difficulties encountered by learners enrolled in Open and Distance Learning (ODL) programs at the Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU). This study utilized a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches. The data was collected through questionnaires, structured interviews, and documentary review. The study revealed that ODL learners faced various challenges throughout their studies. The most commonly reported obstacles include insufficient study time, difficulties in accessing and utilizing information and



communication technology (ICT), inadequate feedback, and a lack of study materials. One of the findings revealed that delayed and inefficient feedback can further burden learners who already grapple with the feelings of isolation and the inherent remoteness associated with distance learning. In conclusion, giving feedback is crucial as it provides guidance to enhance learning, but it is challenging to be consistent in Virtual Flipped Classrooms due to time constraints.

Challenges on Learners' Engagement in Virtual Flipped Classroom

There have been many past studies on learners' engagement in Virtual Flipped Classrooms. A study by Uysal and Çağanağa (2022) on the "Opinions of Teachers on Distance Education Applications in English Language Teaching Policies in Northern Cyprus during the Covid-19 Pandemic" saw issues concerning distance learning. The study focuses on exploring the practices of instructors in distance learning, the challenges they face during the process, and their proposed solutions. A qualitative approach with a case study design involving thirteen English instructors, working at the secondary school level were selected as participants. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews designed specifically for this study and later analysed using descriptive analysis techniques. The researchers found that there are various issues which are technological infrastructure issues, learners' low engagement rate, disciplinary issues faced during online classes, and planning in English teaching within distance learning classrooms. In addition, a mixed-method study on Distance Learning During Covid-19: EFL Students' Engagement and Motivation from Teachers' Perspectives written by Aldossari and Altalhab (2022) investigated the perceptions of 114 female English teachers at the secondary level in public schools in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia regarding the effectiveness of distance learning, focusing on learners' motivation and engagement. A questionnaire was designed and distributed to collect quantitative data, while semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore the challenges faced by teachers in distance learning and their attitudes towards teacher-training programs during the pandemic. The findings indicated an overall positive perception of the effectiveness of distance education among the participants. However, due to familiarity, the interviewed instructors expressed a preference for a traditional classroom approach. As for engagement and motivation, learners showed improvement in these two aspects in online classes and during in-class activities. Not only that, the instructors identified various difficulties in distance learning, such as problems with internet connectivity, limited human interaction, technical issues, concerns regarding assessment reliability, increased workload, and learners' lack of enthusiasm. The study concluded by offering suggestions to enhance distance education, which encompassed offering teachers training in technology and pedagogy, ensuring adequate technical support, and providing learners with appropriate instruction on online learning approaches. Therefore, learners' engagement is apparent as a challenge in Virtual Flipped Classrooms.

Conceptual Framework

The emergence of Virtual Flipped Classrooms has transformed traditional education by combining online resources with active learning strategies. This conceptual framework (Figure 1) explores the challenges faced by instructors in virtual flipped classrooms and emphasizes on their responsibilities and engagement for effective teaching and learning. It comprises two circles: (i) the outer circle, which is the implementation of Virtual Flipped Classroom, and (ii) the inner circle, the challenges instructors face which consists of instructors' responsibilities and learners' engagement. This conceptual framework is based on the BSCS 5E Instructional Model,

a model developed based on various educational theories and models (Hew et al., 2020) and Transactional Distance Theory (TDT), an educational framework developed by Michael C. Moore in 1980.

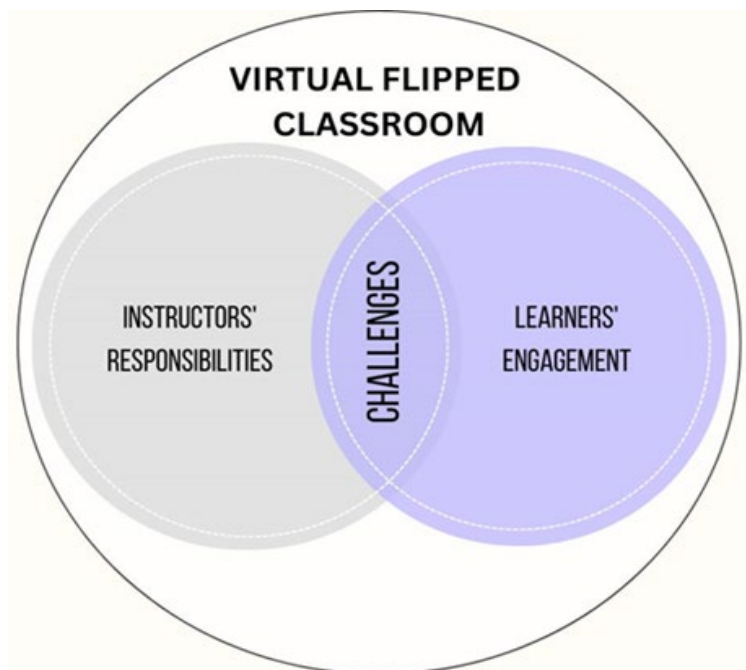


Figure 1: Proposed Conceptual Framework of the Present Study

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research approach using a semi-structured interview as an instrument to elicit the informants' recollections of the challenges they experienced while teaching English using Virtual Flipped Classroom approach. This design is used to gain a complete understanding to answer all research objectives, and it enables the researcher to understand the informants' standpoints and to focus on their concerns regarding the issue (Creswell, 2014). There are 10 interview questions designed to gather data for this current research to ensure transparency and accuracy throughout the process. The researchers requested input on the transcripts from the informants. The population of this study are English language instructors who have experienced online teaching for more than one (1) year. This study employed purposive sampling where informants who have certain criteria that is relevant to the research area, were selected. Bryman (2012) explained that purposive sampling prevents researchers from generalizing its findings to a population. Hence, due to the nature of this present study, which is not to be generalized to any groups involved in virtual learning, this sampling is appropriate for the current study. There were four (4) informants interviewed for this research. All of them have been using full Virtual Flipped Classroom approach in teaching English, an important inclusive criterion for this study. The research was carried out in a public university in Sepang District, Selangor. Initially, the researcher has identified common criteria



and eligibility of the selected informants. Informants selected have conducted full virtual learning classes for more than one (1) year. For qualitative studies, credibility and trustworthiness are two concepts that describe the validity and reliability of the results. For this present study, the researcher has used inter-rater reliability after transcribing and code the interview recordings. This process is crucial to ensure that the coded interviews are trustworthy. Creswell (2009) explained that inter-rater reliability process involves two or more people to assess an individual response or behaviour. Two inter-raters who are the subject matter expert were chosen and given a table of coding agreement from the data analysis. The table contains generated themes, verbal supports, and discourse units where themes were generated from. The average reliability responses from these two inter-raters were then calculated to evaluate trustworthiness of the coded interview transcription. Both inter-raters gave 100% scores for the codes and generated themes, which is greater than 80%. Therefore, the percentage shows that the codes and generated themes matches the inter-rater scores, reducing biasness during the analysis process. The qualitative data gathered was analyzed using thematic analysis as an analytic procedure. Braun and Clarke (2006) defined thematic analysis as ‘a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data’. This is the most common approach in analyzing qualitative data. The analysis started with line-by-line manual coding, after repeatedly listening to the audio recordings to ensure familiarity of the content and dividing the data into discourse units. A discourse unit can be a phrase, a sentence or even multiple sentences that convey an idea. Then, codes were assigned to these discourse units and each of the codes represented an idea or a theme about the data. Accordingly, these codes were then compared and revised, a process that allows creation of new codes when necessary. After the coding process is completed, themes were generated. According to Opler (1945, as cited in Gladwin, 1947), themes are closely related to the expressions in the data.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

In this study, researchers examined the challenges in the implementation of Virtual Flipped Classroom. The findings shed light on instructors’ responsibilities and learners’ engagement as challenges instructors may encounter. Based on the findings, it can be concluded that instructors’ responsibilities can be divided into two themes which are managing time to plan materials and managing time to provide feedback.

Table 1
Instructors’ Responsibilities by Informants

Informants	Informants’ Statement Regarding the Challenges	Occurrences
Instructors’ Responsibilities (Time consumption)		
(a) Material Preparation		
I1 (I1:48)	So, the time is actually spent a lot on choosing the correct and suitable resources	Suitability of course materials



I2 (12:8)	I have to couple that with a prepared instruction, written instruction not only given during my lecture; I also have to give it to them in the WhatsApp group...	Detailed Instructions
I3 (13:58)	I became more detailed and careful in planning the time for each of the activities so it will not exceed the the time because we have limited time with, I think with online learning time are more precious.	Planning for activities

(b) Feedbacks to learners

I1 (11:48)	One of the issues is, you keeping track with thestudents' progress.	Keeping track with students' progress
I2 (12:42)	will be coming in and I'll be monitoring. And I usually, talk to the one who is a bit shy or encourage them to...I hope to listen to you more when I enter. Sometimes even in the chat box, "Can I have this person to contribute...?" And "Yeah, yeah I will, I have already Madam..." OK, something like that.	In class encouragement
I3 (13:34)	not enough time to visit everyone and each and everyone had different opinions and I was also afraid that they cannot lead to one goal	In class feedbacks

The findings for Research Question 1 in Table 1 indicated that instructors had a hard time managing time to prepare materials for lessons conducted in a Virtual Flipped Classroom. This is in line with the study from Al-Naabi (2022) where the author mentioned that designing and gathering materials took a considerable amount of time because it required modifying educational resources initially designed for a traditional classroom setting. This is also supported by Kebritchi et al. (2017) in which the authors pointed out three prominent areas of challenges; challenges concerning online learners, instructors and the development of course content. According to the findings, instructors encountered difficulties in effectively managing their time and developing content. As for providing feedback, the findings indicated that instructors struggle in managing time to provide feedback to the learners. This is supported by Musungafi et al. (2015), which mentioned that one of the obstacles identified is inadequate feedback. It was also revealed that distance learners can be burdened by delayed and ineffective feedback.

Learners' Engagement		
I1 (I1:42)	they gave me reasons like their parents asked them to run some errands, in fact one student was actually shopping in a grocery shop while listening to me, talking about pronunciation skills.	Lack of parental support
I2 (I2:34)	There are still some students who are pretty shy, who did not contribute much, so that is a bit sad then.	Passive learners
I3 (I3:52)	Some students did not actually participate much. To have them escape from dependency but then, they don't have the effort.	Too dependent on instructors.
I4 (I4:32)	I'm concerned about internet stability, not from my end but from the students' end. Because if there's no stability they will not be able to join the discussion	Lack of virtual learning facilities

CONCLUSION

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Implications & Suggestions for future research.

This study has proven that English instructors in higher education institutions are facing challenges while implementing Virtual Flipped Classroom for English language teaching. Many efforts must be made to ensure that language learning can be maximized during the virtual teaching and learning process. To include virtual learning as part of the education system, it requires a huge shift in the conduct of all parties involved – language instructors, learners as well the higher education institutions. The findings from the present research could assist educational policy makers, curriculum designers in designing effective professional development courses that address specific needs of language instructors in adapting to the Virtual Flipped Classroom approach. It is hoped that this study will produce new Virtual Flipped Classroom modules suitable to the demographic of Malaysian ESL learners. This innovative instructional approach is still new in the Malaysian education system, where past studies focus more on the pedagogical aspects of VFC. To be able to expand the knowledge on a different perspective and produce modules to assist English language educators at tertiary level, would definitely maximize the learners' time spent learning the target language. This is also an effort to promote a more student-centered learning in virtual classrooms.

Therefore, future research in the Virtual Flipped Classroom approach must identify best practices and solutions to how the approach can be implemented in a more comprehensive manner. It is recommended for future research to explore various strategies employed in virtual flipped classes such as interactive activities, multimedia resources and collaborative projects that enhance learners' motivation in a Virtual Flipped Classroom setting. In addition, future research could also focus on exploring the pedagogical strategies for different English language skills, receptive and productive skills. A comparative study should also be conducted across different languages, and across institutions in Malaysia to identify factors that can contribute to the literature of Virtual Flipped Classroom for English Language Teaching and Learning,

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare there is no conflict of interest.

Authors' Contributions

Conceptualization, K.O., I.S.A, & N.H.M.; methodology, K.O.; validation, I.S.A & S.F.A.R., formal analysis, K.O & N.H.M.; investigation, K.O., I.S.A; resources, K.O., I.S.A.; data curation, K.O., I.S.A, & N.H.M writing original draft preparation, K.O., I.S.A, & N.H.M.; writing—review and editing, K.O & N.H.M.; visualization, K.O & N.H.M supervision, I.S.A.

All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.