

Flipped learning in Hong Kong, China higher education: perceptions from students

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Abstract. This study investigates university students' perceptions of flipped learning in English-language education in Hong Kong, China's higher education sector. Using a mixed-methods approach, the research combines survey data from 30 Hong Kong, China undergraduates majoring in English with semi-structured interviews to capture both general trends and personal experiences. Findings indicate that students generally perceive flipped learning as beneficial for enhancing engagement and communicative competence, particularly through interactive in-class activities. However, challenges such as limited self-regulation and technical barriers remain significant obstacles to its effectiveness. This study highlights the pedagogical potential of flipped learning to enhance critical thinking and autonomous learning, while also underscoring the need for contextual adaptation in Hong Kong, China's exam-driven environment. By situating students' perspectives within broader theoretical frameworks of constructivism and social learning, this research contributes to the literature on blended learning and second language acquisition, offering evidence-based recommendations for curriculum designers and instructors to implement flipped approaches in English-medium higher education.

Keywords: flipped learning, English language education, Hong Kong, China higher education

1. Introduction

Flipped learning is an innovative pedagogical approach in contemporary higher education. Over the past 15 years, flipped learning has transitioned from a niche innovation to a popular pedagogical approach that is reshaping traditional instructional models. This study focuses on flipped learning in English language education at universities in Hong Kong, China, and aims to explore students' perceptions. In the context of Hong Kong, China's higher education sector, English serves as an important medium of instruction and communication [1]; thus, it is vital to investigate the effectiveness and acceptance of flipped learning in English-language teaching and learning.

Importantly, flipped learning may be particularly beneficial in EMI environments because it reallocates classroom time toward active language production and peer interaction, while shifting input-heavy tasks (such as lecture comprehension) to pre-class video materials. This structure can reduce cognitive load during live sessions, allowing students to focus on practising English and clarifying misunderstandings with teacher support [2].

As a form of blended learning, flipped learning reverses traditional classroom arrangements. Students complete pre-class learning tasks independently, and in-class time is reserved for discussion and teacher-led support. Widely used university learning platforms and multimedia resources support its implementation to boost student engagement [3].

Therefore, it is essential to investigate English-major undergraduates' perspectives, as their experiences reveal specific strengths and drawbacks of flipped pedagogy. While international literature is extensive, few mixed-methods studies centre on this local student group. This study fills this gap and generates practical, evidence-informed pedagogical suggestions.

1.1. Research objectives

This study was guided by two primary research objectives. First, it sought to explore university students' perspectives on the application of the flipped classroom in English learning. This included understanding their perceptions of the pre-class and in-class components of flipped learning, their perceived benefits and drawbacks, and their overall satisfaction with this approach. Second, this paper aimed to assess the perceived effectiveness of the flipped classroom model in enhancing English language skills, such as listening, speaking, reading, writing, and critical thinking, compared to traditional teaching methods.

1.2. Research questions

To achieve the stated objectives, this study was guided by the following research questions:

- What are university students' current attitudes toward the flipped classroom in English learning?
- How do students perceive the effectiveness of the flipped classroom compared to traditional methods?
- What factors influence students' perspectives on the flipped classroom?

Together, these questions aim to comprehensively investigate the perspectives and perceived effectiveness of flipped learning in the context of this study.

1.3. Significance of the study

This study enhances the theoretical understanding of flipped learning in the Hong Kong, China university context by examining students' perceptions of it. It contributes to the literature on blended learning and second language acquisition and offers insights into the effectiveness of the flipped classroom in an international higher education setting. Recent regional scholarship underscores the need for such analysis; for example, Ha et al. highlighted how specific cultural and contextual factors in Hong Kong, China schools influence the reception of flipped instruction compared to Western models [4]. Additionally, broader studies on flipped learning in Hong Kong, China universities, such as Lam et al., suggest that Hong Kong, China teachers should be prepared for challenges, including students' limited autonomous learning abilities and an exam-oriented culture [5].

In practice, this study aimed to enhance understanding of the blended approach to higher education in Hong Kong, China. It provides curriculum designers with guidance on students' needs in course design and can also help teachers enhance students' engagement and autonomous learning, thereby improving their language skills.

1.4. Structure of the paper

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. Section 2 presents a comprehensive literature review, examining existing studies on flipped learning in higher education, particularly in English language teaching, and exploring the theoretical basis of the approach. Section 3 outlines the research methodology of this study,

including the research design, sampling strategy, data collection tools (e.g., surveys and interviews), and data analysis procedures. Section 4 reports the findings from the data analysis, addressing the research questions. In Section 5, this paper discusses the findings in relation to the existing literature and the study's objectives. Finally, Section 6 concludes the study, summarising the key insights, highlighting the limitations, and proposing recommendations for future research and practice.

2. Literature review

2.1. Flipped classroom model

The flipped classroom model is not only a rearrangement of instructional activities but is underpinned by established learning theories. Flipped learning aligns with constructivism, which holds that learners actively construct knowledge through experiences and reflection rather than passively receiving information [6]. Scholars such as Piaget [7] and Vygotsky [8] argued that knowledge is not simply transmitted from teacher to student but is actively constructed by the learner through experience and social interaction. Piaget emphasised the individual's cognitive development through interaction with the environment [7], while Vygotsky highlighted the vital role of social dialogue and guidance from more knowledgeable others in learning [9].

In the flipped model, students first engage with new content individually to gain a preliminary understanding. Subsequently, in-class activities are designed to deepen this understanding through interaction, collaboration, and problem-solving with classmates [10]. Bishop and Verleger describe the flipped classroom as a pedagogical approach that shifts direct instruction outside the classroom, allowing in-class time to be devoted to active learning activities [3]. The flipped classroom directly operationalises constructivist ideas, making learning an active rather than a passive process.

Furthermore, flipped learning aligns with Bandura's social learning theory [11]. Collaborative group-based activities create social interaction spaces for observation, peer exchange and knowledge building, supporting the development of communicative competence [12-14]. Integrating constructivist and social learning perspectives, flipped learning pedagogy fosters deep cognitive engagement and collaborative skills [15].

In the context of English language teaching, flipped learning has been widely adopted. Traditional Hong Kong, China English teaching tends to be teacher-centred with limited interactive practice [16, 17]. By shifting lectures to pre-class work and reserving in-class hours for group-based critical-thinking tasks, flipped learning matches second-language-acquisition theories that highlight meaningful interaction [18]. Asian-context research demonstrates its capacity to support learner motivation, higher-order thinking, and reduce learning-related anxiety [4, 19, 20].

2.2. Critical perspectives and challenges

Flipped classroom approaches have generated both enthusiasm and doubt in higher education research. While many studies highlight their potential to transform student learning experiences, others caution that practical and pedagogical barriers remain. This section critically examines the advantages and challenges of the flipped classroom, drawing on international and Hong Kong, China-based perspectives to provide a balanced view of its impact on English language education.

2.2.1. Theoretical and practical advantages

Flipped learning can boost student motivation, engagement, and higher-order thinking. Practical and gamified classroom activities are generally well-received by learners [19, 21]. In the Hong Kong, China education context, it supplies valuable peer-interaction opportunities missing from conventional teaching [5].

2.2.2. *Pedagogical and technical challenges*

Despite these advantages, several challenges hinder the effectiveness of the flipped classroom in English language education. A recurring issue is students' limited self-regulation and preparation habits. Zainuddin and Attaran noted that part-time students struggled with insufficient preparation time, which reduced the benefits of in-class activities [20]. Technical barriers are also significant issues: Aidoo et al. reported that limited ICT (information and communications technology) resources and high internet costs restricted students' access to pre-class materials, creating an unequal learning environment [22].

Furthermore, Awidi and Paynter found that students expressed lower levels of satisfaction with motivation and collaboration [23], suggesting that flipped learning requires careful facilitation or scaffolding to sustain engagement and help students develop self-directed learning skills. Teachers also face heavier workloads in designing pre-class materials and managing interactive sessions [24]. In English teaching, these challenges are compounded by linguistic and baseline knowledge diversity; students may struggle to comprehend pre-recorded lectures when their proficiency is lower, leading to frustration [25].

2.3. Students' perspectives on the flipped classroom

Understanding how students perceive flipped classroom practices is essential because their perceptions and engagement determine the success of these teaching methods. Although research has shown both enthusiasm and concerns, these views are shaped by context, technology, and culture. This section examines students' opinions on flipped classrooms, focusing on their attitudes, motivation, and engagement, and then discusses factors affecting acceptance, such as technology, self-regulation, and cultural traditions.

2.3.1. *Attitudes, motivation, and engagement*

Students' attitudes toward the flipped classroom are generally positive, although perspectives can vary based on context, discipline, or cultural background. Studies have shown that students' psychological engagement, including their attitudes, motivation, and willingness to continue, remains a key factor in evaluating the success of flipped classroom methods [23, 26].

2.3.2. *Determinants of acceptance: technology, self-regulation, and culture*

Multiple interrelated factors shape learner acceptance of flipped learning. Digital competence supports engagement in active learning activities [21]. Self-directed learning readiness strongly predicts preparedness for flipped learning [13, 27]. Cultural backgrounds, especially exam-oriented educational norms within Asian higher education, create different learner expectations compared with Western contexts [4, 20].

2.4. Flipped classroom in Hong Kong, China context

In Hong Kong, China, English-language education plays a central role in higher education; most university courses are taught in English, which makes the flipped classroom particularly relevant. Ha et al. evaluated the flipped classroom in Asian higher education, including Hong Kong, China, and found that it fulfilled students' needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness [4]. Lam et al. emphasised that Hong Kong, China teachers must prepare for challenges such as local students' limited capacity for autonomous learning and the exam-oriented culture [5]. Chan argued that traditional teacher-centred approaches still dominate English teaching in Hong Kong, China, thereby limiting interaction and practice opportunities for students [16].

Despite growing interest, research on the flipped classroom in Hong Kong, China remains limited, particularly in terms of mixed methods approaches. Most existing studies rely on surveys or case studies, with few integrating qualitative insights to capture nuanced experiences. For example, Lam and Chung discussed the transition from teacher-centred to creative teaching approaches but did not employ mixed methods [17].

The need for triangulated data is evident, as mixed-methods designs can reveal both general trends and deeper contextual challenges.

While the flipped classroom has been studied extensively in global contexts, few studies have focused on Hong Kong, China university students, especially among English majors. Shepard and Rose highlighted linguistic challenges faced by local and non-local students in Hong Kong, China, English-medium higher education, suggesting that a flipped classroom could address some of these issues by promoting active engagement [1]. However, their findings still require more empirical evidence. The present study aims to fill this gap by exploring English-major students' perspectives at a university in Hong Kong, China, using a mixed-methods approach, discussing their perspectives on flipped English teaching, thereby contributing to the literature on blended learning and second language acquisition in Hong Kong, China.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design

This study employed a mixed-methods research design, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches to gain a comprehensive understanding of students' perspectives on flipped learning at Hong Kong universities in China. Quantitative results revealed overall trends, and qualitative data unpacked nuanced learner experiences; triangulation strengthened the validity of the results.

The quantitative component of this study consisted of a structured survey administered to undergraduate students majoring in English at a university in Hong Kong, China, who had attended flipped-learning classes. The survey employed Likert-scale items to measure attitudes, motivation, engagement, and perceived language skill development. Open-ended questions were also included to allow students to share their experiences and suggestions.

The qualitative component comprised semi-structured interviews with a selected group of students, enabling deeper exploration of themes such as self-regulation, technological challenges, and pedagogical adaptation. This mixed-methods approach ensured that the breadth and depth of students' perspectives were covered.

3.2. Participants

Participants were drawn from a Hong Kong, China, university's Department of English, specifically students who had taken at least one course delivered using the flipped classroom model. The inclusion criteria were: (1) enrolment in undergraduate English courses during the academic year 2025–2026, (2) exposure to flipped learning practices, and (3) willingness to participate in surveys and/or interviews.

A purposive sampling technique was employed for the student survey to ensure representation across year levels (Year 1–Year 4). This method was intended to reduce sampling bias and allow for meaningful comparisons between subgroups. For the qualitative interviews, purposive sampling was used to select participants who could provide rich, relevant insights. For example, students in later years of study, such as Years 3 and 4, may have higher levels of technological proficiency and more experience with flipped learning; more senior students were deliberately included to capture diverse perspectives.

Demographic data collected included age, year of study, major, and exposure to flipped learning. These variables were important for contextualising findings and identifying potential factors influencing attitudes toward flipped learning.

3.3. Data collection instruments

The student survey was the primary quantitative instrument. The survey consisted of three sections: demographic information, attitudinal measures, and perceived effectiveness of flipped learning compared to traditional methods. To ensure content validity, the survey items were reviewed by an expert in the field prior to administration. In addition, the attitudinal measures were developed through a synthesis of existing literature and adapted from validated instruments used in previous studies on student perceptions of blended and flipped learning [28]. This approach ensured that the survey items were grounded in established research.

- Demographic Information: 4 items covering demographic details and prior experience with flipped or blended learning.
- Attitudinal Measures: 28 Likert-scale items assessing motivation, engagement, the teacher's role, pre-class and in-class activities, and perceived effectiveness of flipped learning compared to traditional methods.
- Open-ended Questions: 3 items providing opportunities for students to describe challenges, benefits, and suggestions for improvement.

The survey was distributed electronically via the Wix platform, ensuring accessibility and convenience. Participation was voluntary, and anonymity was guaranteed.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted using purposive sampling from the student participants. The interviews explored issues in greater depth, including self-regulation, workload management, and the perceived effectiveness of active learning. The interview protocol consisted of four core questions addressing four aspects of the flipped classroom: pre-class, in-class, motivation, and teachers' roles. By introducing the core questions, interviewees knew what to expect and what would be asked next. The semi-structured format allowed flexibility to explore emerging themes while maintaining consistency across interviews [29].

Each interview lasted approximately 30–40 minutes and was conducted either face-to-face or via secure online platforms (e.g., Zoom), depending on the participants' preferences. The interviews were conducted in English or Mandarin, depending on the participants' preferences. Interviews were audio-recorded with consent and transcribed verbatim for analysis. For interviews conducted in Mandarin, a translation tool was used to translate the transcripts into English before analysis to ensure consistency.

3.4. Procedure

Participants were recruited through announcements on social media platforms such as WeChat and Instagram, as well as via email. Interested students were provided with detailed information sheets outlining the study's purpose, procedures, and ethical safeguards. Informed consent was obtained before participation.

Surveys were administered online over two weeks. Interviews were scheduled at times convenient for the interviewees to accommodate participants' academic workload. In practice, two interviews were conducted in English and eight in Mandarin, with occasional instances of code-switching between the two languages. Mandarin transcripts were translated into English to ensure consistency in analysis.

3.5. Data analysis procedure

Survey data were analysed using descriptive statistics to summarise general trends.

In the qualitative data analysis, interview transcripts were examined using thematic analysis and Corbin and Strauss's framework of open-to-axial coding to identify recurring patterns and meanings [30]. The process began with familiarisation, in which transcripts were read multiple times to develop a comprehensive understanding of the content and context. During the open coding phase, various codes related to participants' attitudes, challenges, and perceived benefits of flipped learning were identified. These open codes were then systematically grouped into broader categories through axial coding, resulting in five main themes: a)

perceived pedagogical benefits, b) key challenges and barriers, c) facilitating factors for success, d) evolving student and teacher roles, and e) recommendations for improvement.

This coding process was documented in a Master Coding Table, which contained the sub-themes, open codes, and supporting evidence from participants. The use of axial coding ensured that recurring patterns and relationships across the data were identified, thereby enhancing the rigour of the analysis. The emerging codes and themes were checked for accuracy by a second rater, and complete agreement between the raters was reached. Finally, the themes were interpreted in relation to the research questions and situated within the wider literature on flipped learning in Hong Kong, China higher education.

The mixed-methods design culminated in the integration of findings. Quantitative results provided generalisable findings, while qualitative insights helped explain the reasons behind them. For example, survey data showed high engagement levels in a flipped classroom, while interviews revealed that engagement was influenced more by peer collaboration than by technological improvements. This integration strengthened the study's conclusions and provided actionable recommendations.

3.6. Ethical considerations

All participants were provided with a detailed information sheet outlining the purpose of the research, the procedures involved, and their rights as participants. Each participant provided informed consent before completing the survey, ensuring that they voluntarily agreed to take part in the study with full awareness of its scope. Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained. Audio recordings, transcripts, and survey data were stored securely and were used solely for academic purposes. Participants were reminded that they could withdraw from the study at any stage without penalty, and their data would be withdrawn upon request. These measures collectively ensured that the research adhered to the highest ethical standards, safeguarding participants' rights, privacy, and well-being throughout the study.

4. Findings

4.1. Quantitative findings

This section presents a descriptive analysis of the questionnaire data collected from 30 students majoring in English in Hong Kong, China's higher education system. The questionnaire included four parts: the consent form, the five-point Likert-scale items, multiple-choice questions on challenges (Section F, Table 5) and benefits (Section G, Table 6), and questions regarding further suggestions. All students had prior experience with flipped learning courses, with 13.33% in Year 1, 20% in Year 2, 23.33% in Year 3, and 43.33% in Year 4 or above. The Likert-scale items contained four sections, focusing respectively on Pre-class Learning Materials and Activities (Section B, Table 1), In-class Activities and Engagement (Section C, Table 2), Teacher's Role and Teaching Effectiveness (Section D, Table 3), and Learning Motivation and Outcomes (Section E, Table 4).

4.1.1. Pre-class learning materials & activities (Section B)

In Section B (Table 1), the overall mean score was 3.57, indicating a generally moderate level of satisfaction. The first item, comparing video lectures to traditional ones, stood out with a relatively low mean of 3.03. Four participants (13.33%) strongly disagreed, and five (16.67%) disagreed, which is notable compared to other items where disagreement was less common.

Table 1. Data of Section B: pre-class learning materials & activities

Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Average Score
1. Video lectures were more useful than traditional classroom lectures.	4 (13.33%)	5 (16.67%)	8 (26.67%)	12 (40%)	1 (3.33%)	3.03
2. The length of pre-class video lectures was appropriate.	2 (6.67%)	1 (3.33%)	8 (26.67%)	14 (46.67%)	5 (16.67%)	3.63
3. I was given sufficient time to prepare before flipped classroom sessions.	1 (3.33%)	1 (3.33%)	3 (10%)	18 (60%)	7 (23.33%)	3.97
4. Supplementary materials prepared by my teachers (e.g., YouTube videos, articles) enhanced my understanding.	0 (0%)	4 (13.33%)	11 (36.67%)	10 (33.33%)	5 (16.67%)	3.53
5. Online reading materials were relevant and helpful.	2 (6.67%)	0 (0%)	8 (26.67%)	14 (46.67%)	6 (20%)	3.73
6. Pre-class activities were engaging and useful.	3 (10%)	2 (6.67%)	6 (20%)	14 (46.67%)	5 (16.67%)	3.53
7. I felt prepared for in-class activities after completing pre-class tasks.	1 (3.33%)	3 (10%)	8 (26.67%)	14 (46.67%)	4 (13.33%)	3.57
Subtotal	13 (6.19%)	16 (7.62%)	52 (24.76%)	96 (45.71%)	33 (15.71%)	3.57

In contrast, the third item, the statement concerning sufficient preparation time before flipped sessions, received the highest mean (3.97), with 60% agreeing and 23.33% strongly agreeing, indicating that students generally felt well prepared. Fourteen students agreed with the second item concerning the appropriate length of video lectures, with an average score of 3.63. Supplementary materials scored 3.53, but 36.67% of respondents chose "neutral". Online reading materials were better received, with no participants selecting "disagree" and a mean of 3.73. Pre-class activities scored 3.53, but three participants strongly disagreed, which is notable given the overall positive trend. Finally, preparedness for in-class activities scored 3.57, though 26.67% selected "neutral", suggesting that not all students felt confident after completing pre-class tasks.

4.1.2. In-class activities & engagement (Section C)

Section C (Table 2) averaged 3.75, indicating stronger approval than Section B (Table 1). The highest mean (4.0) was recorded for the application of pre-class knowledge during in-class activities, with 63.33% agreeing and 20% strongly agreeing.

Table 2. Data of Section C: in-class activities & engagement

Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Average Score
8. I had more opportunities to share ideas in flipped classroom than in traditional ones.	0 (0%)	3 (10%)	3 (10%)	18 (60%)	6 (20%)	3.9
9. In-class problem-solving activities deepened my understanding.	1 (3.33%)	0 (0%)	3 (10%)	21 (70%)	5 (16.67%)	3.97
10. Group discussions during class were productive.	3 (10%)	4 (13.33%)	4 (13.33%)	13 (43.33%)	6 (20%)	3.5
11. I felt more motivated to participate in flipped classroom activities.	2 (6.67%)	5 (16.67%)	7 (23.33%)	12 (40%)	4 (13.33%)	3.37
12. The flipped classroom encouraged me to think critically and creatively.	1 (3.33%)	2 (6.67%)	5 (16.67%)	18 (60%)	4 (13.33%)	3.73
13. I was able to apply pre-class knowledge during in-class activities.	0 (0%)	1 (3.33%)	4 (13.33%)	19 (63.33%)	6 (20%)	4
14. I interacted more with peers in flipped classrooms.	0 (0%)	3 (10%)	7 (23.33%)	12 (40%)	8 (26.67%)	3.83
15. I felt more confident contributing in flipped classroom settings.	0 (0%)	3 (10%)	7 (23.33%)	16 (53.33%)	4 (13.33%)	3.7
Subtotal	7 (2.92%)	21 (8.75%)	40 (16.67%)	129 (53.75%)	43 (17.92%)	3.75

Problem-solving activities also scored highly (3.97), with 70% choosing "agree" and 17% choosing "strongly agree". However, motivation to participate was weaker, with a mean of 3.37 and 16.67% selecting "disagree", which is the most negative distribution in this section. Group discussions were also comparatively low, with 13.33% selecting "disagree" and another 13.33% selecting "neutral", with a mean of 3.5. Peer interaction was relatively strong (3.83), with 26.67% strongly agreeing. Confidence in contributing scored 3.7, but 23.33% remained neutral. Additionally, 60% of the students agreed that the flipped classroom improved their critical thinking skills.

4.1.3. Teacher's role & teaching effectiveness (Section D)

Section D (Table 3) had the highest average score ($M = 4.06$) across all the Likert-scale questions. The highest-scoring item was teacher preparedness, with a mean of 4.33 and 43.33% strongly agreeing, with no participants disagreeing or selecting "neutral".

Clear guidance also scored high (4.23), with no participants selecting "neutral". Technology use was also positively rated (4.0), with 30% strongly agreeing. Timely feedback was relatively weaker (3.73), with 10% strongly disagreeing, contrasting with other responses. The first item about teacher interactivity scored 3.9, with 26.67% selecting "neutral". The last item related to teachers' facilitation of discussions scored 4.13, with 40% strongly agreeing.

Table 3. Data of Section D: teacher's role and teaching effectiveness

Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Average Score
16. My teacher was more interactive in flipped classrooms.	0 (0%)	1 (3.33%)	8 (26.67%)	14 (46.67%)	7 (23.33%)	3.9
17. My teacher provided clear guidance for both pre-class and in-class activities.	0 (0%)	2 (6.67%)	0 (0%)	17 (56.67%)	11 (36.67%)	4.23
18. My teacher was well-prepared for flipped classroom sessions.	1 (3.33%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	16 (53.33%)	13 (43.33%)	4.33
19. I received timely feedback from my teacher in flipped classrooms.	3 (10%)	1 (3.33%)	4 (13.33%)	15 (50%)	7 (23.33%)	3.73
20. My teacher's use of technology enhanced my learning experience.	0 (0%)	1 (3.33%)	7 (23.33%)	13 (43.33%)	9 (30%)	4
21. My teacher effectively facilitated in-class discussions and activities.	0 (0%)	3 (10%)	2 (6.67%)	13 (43.33%)	12 (40%)	4.13
Subtotal	4 (2.22%)	8 (4.44%)	21 (11.67%)	88 (48.89%)	59 (32.78%)	4.06

4.1.4. Learning motivation & outcomes (Section E)

Table 4. Data of Section E: learning motivation & outcomes

Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Average Score
22. Flipped learning increased my interest in the subject.	1 (3.33%)	2 (6.67%)	10 (33.33%)	13 (43.33%)	4 (13.33%)	3.57
23. I felt more engaged throughout the flipped learning process.	1 (3.33%)	1 (3.33%)	5 (16.67%)	19 (63.33%)	4 (13.33%)	3.8
24. I gained a deeper understanding of course content through flipped learning.	0 (0%)	2 (6.67%)	4 (13.33%)	18 (60%)	6 (20%)	3.93
25. Flipped learning improved my self-directed learning skills.	0 (0%)	2 (6.67%)	5 (16.67%)	14 (46.67%)	9 (30%)	4
26. I felt better prepared for assessments in flipped courses.	0 (0%)	4 (13.33%)	6 (20%)	12 (40%)	8 (26.67%)	3.8
27. I would recommend flipped learning to other students.	0 (0%)	2 (6.67%)	5 (16.67%)	15 (50%)	8 (26.67%)	3.97
28. I would choose a flipped classroom over a traditional one if given the choice.	0 (0%)	4 (13.33%)	7 (23.33%)	12 (40%)	7 (23.33%)	3.73
Subtotal	2 (0.95%)	17 (8.1%)	42 (20%)	103 (49.05%)	46 (21.9%)	3.83

In Section E (Table 4), the average score was 3.83. Item No. 25, concerning self-directed learning skills, had the highest mean in this section (4.0), with 30% strongly agreeing. No. 24, which concerned a deeper

understanding of content, also scored well (3.93), with 20% strongly agreeing. Interestingly, interest in the subject was less pronounced (3.57), with 33.33% of students selecting "neutral", suggesting that flipped learning did not universally increase enthusiasm.

Engagement throughout the process scored 3.8, with 63.33% agreeing. Preparedness for assessments scored 3.8, but 13.33% disagreed, which is relatively high compared to other items. Recommendations to peers (Item No. 27) were strong (3.97), with 26.67% strongly agreeing, whereas preference for flipped classrooms over traditional ones was weaker (3.73), with 13.33% disagreeing.

4.1.5. Challenges (Section F)

The most common challenges mentioned by participants were staying motivated to complete pre-class work (53.33%) and understanding materials independently (40%) in Section F (Table 5). Time management (36.67%) and adjusting to interactive activities (43.33%) were also significant concerns. Access to resources was less frequently reported (26.67%).

Table 5. Data of Section F: challenges

What did you find MOST challenging about flipped learning?		
Option	Subtotal	Percentage
Time management for pre-class tasks	11	36.67%
Understanding pre-class materials independently	12	40%
Staying motivated to complete pre-class work	16	53.33%
Adjusting to in-class interactive activities	13	43.33%
Access to online resources	8	26.67%
Valid Count Per Participant	30	—

4.1.6. Benefits (Section G)

In Section G (Table 6), on the positive side, students reported benefiting most from the flexibility of the learning pace (53.33%) and from improved collaboration with peers (40%) in the flipped classroom. More autonomy and personal time (40%) and deeper understanding through application (36.67%) were also commonly chosen in the questionnaire. Interactive class time (36.67%) and engaging content (33.33%) were appreciated, while better exam preparation (30%) was a moderate benefit.

Table 6. Data of Section G: benefits

What aspects of flipped learning did you find MOST beneficial?		
Option	Subtotal	Percentage
Flexible learning pace	16	53.33%
More interactive class time	11	36.67%
Deeper understanding through application	11	36.67%
Improved collaboration with peers	12	40%
Better preparation for exams	9	30%
More autonomy and personal time	12	40%
More engaging content	10	33.33%
Other: [Details]	0	0%
Valid Count Per Participant	30	—

4.2. Qualitative findings

This section presents the qualitative findings from 10 semi-structured interviews with undergraduate students in the Department of English at one of the universities in Hong Kong, China. Using open and axial coding techniques, five main themes were identified: (1) perceived pedagogical benefits, (2) key challenges and barriers, (3) facilitating factors for success, (4) evolving student and teacher roles, and (5) recommendations for improvement. Each theme is illustrated with representative quotations from participants to demonstrate the depth of the analysis.

4.2.1. *Perceived pedagogical benefits*

4.2.1.1. *Cognitive and academic growth*

In the interviews, interviewees consistently emphasised the cognitive benefits they gained from flipped learning, particularly the opportunity to preview concepts before class. They mentioned that this preparation enhanced their ability to apply their knowledge to course content. Nicky explained that pre-class modules provided "background information" through Crash Course and TED Talks, which helped her grasp European history more effectively. Similarly, Owl mentioned that the preview activity helped her better understand the content, underscoring the role of pre-class materials in scaffolding comprehension.

"For example, the teacher will provide us with some videos from a crash course...Yeah, sometimes my teacher also provides some uh, TED talks of videos" (*Nicky*).

"Then the second is the form of video, which helps you complete the relevant content input before class, instead of waiting for class to understand. So one more preview action will help you better understand the content of the course" (*Owl*).

The development of critical thinking was also extensively discussed in the interviews. For example, Rannie described how group discussions have helped her focus more closely on specific aspects of the course content and engage in critical discussion, demonstrating how flipped learning fostered analytical engagement. Zhang expressed a similar view, stating that combining her own preparation with her classmates' perspectives helped her learn more and develop a clearer understanding.

"Yes, because in our discussion, everyone will make different comments, that is, there are many opinions that I can hardly generate by myself" (*Rannie*).

"Then each group listen and discuss the answers made by different groups, which will produce different cognition and different knowledge" (*Zhang*).

Language skill development was another theme in the academic-growth aspect. Gloria recalled that flipped learning improved her oral presentation skills through sharing her opinions with teammates and making presentations. Additionally, Melly mentioned that her text analysis ability and reading skills had improved through flipped learning.

"Because it increases the duration of oral practice more than ordinary classes. I feel that in the middle of constant practice, I will certainly improve this part a lot" (*Gloria*).

"My text analysis ability has been significantly improved, and I have also improved my reading ability from the task of classifying a large number of books" (*Melly*).

4.2.1.2. *Social and interactive learning*

The flipped model also encouraged positive classroom dynamics. Tina and Aria recalled that group exercises and presentations motivated them to discuss more in class and enhance teamwork, while also enabling them to listen to their teammates' opinions.

"So, uh, I think this motivates us to discuss proactively and encourages us to watch the video lecture every week and the discussion among the groups" (*Tina*).

"I think there are more sessions for group interaction...It deepens my understanding of knowledge and enhances teamwork" (*Aria*).

4.2.1.3. Learning autonomy

Several participants valued the autonomy afforded by flipped learning. Aria emphasised the flexibility of watching videos independently, such as adjusting the speed themselves and watching them at any time. Similarly, Melly preferred the ability to divide tasks into smaller segments at her convenience in a flipped classroom; she could use her spare time to finish them whenever she wanted.

"I can adjust the speed myself and watch it at any time. Then I think this is really helpful to the management of my study time" (*Aria*).

"If I want to complete a task, I can divide it into many sections. That is to say, I can use a lot of spare time and fragmented time to finish this thing. I don't need to absorb so much knowledge at once" (*Melly*).

4.2.2. Key challenges & barriers

4.2.2.1. Individual & cognitive barriers

Despite the benefits, students reported significant challenges when participating in flipped learning classes. Zhang described the pre-class videos as "very difficult to understand" due to excessive jargon. Similarly, Rannie admitted struggling with "complicated grammatical knowledge and difficult literary knowledge".

"If you explain something like history to me and do not use an easy-to-understand way to explain, I can't understand it at all. I don't know them at all. There are too many names of people, many place names, and many events" (*Zhang*).

"Sometimes, I think it is difficult for some complicated grammatical knowledge and those difficult literary knowledge. I need to spend more time on them" (*Rannie*).

4.2.2.2. Technical & instructional issues

Technical barriers also emerged in several of the interviews. Winnie criticised the "boring, not particularly interesting" nature of some videos and their low quality, while Nicky complained that "some of the videos don't really have English captions. So you need to understand... all by yourself". These issues suggest that the quality and accessibility of instructional materials directly affect comprehension.

"This is because the video they are looking for is a bit boring, not particularly interesting. It is the kind of video that is purely academic concepts and requires you to remember some knowledge" (*Winnie*).

"I think maybe process yeah because a lot of the videos they don't really have English captions. So uh, you need spend more time understanding" (*Nicky*).

4.2.2.3. Structural misalignment

Students also expressed frustration with some misalignment between learning activities and assessments. Tina mentioned that despite investing significant effort, she did not achieve a good final result in that class. She attributed this to an "imperfect scoring system" that did not account for the effort involved in pre-class preparation. Aria similarly observed that her preparation before class and the actual assessment were not particularly well aligned, leading some students to neglect pre-class tasks, as these tasks had less influence.

"I spend the most time among all of the courses I took that semester... but I get a not good result" (*Tina*).

"The preparation before class and the actual operation are not particularly well connected. Therefore, many students are lazy and do not do things before class, which seems to have little influence" (*Aria*).

4.2.3. Facilitating factors for success

4.2.3.1. Instructional design

In the interviews, participants shared specific design elements of the flipped classroom that contributed to its success. Short, concise videos were generally preferred by students. Gloria emphasised that 15–20 minutes

was very suitable for college students. Melly explicitly requested shorter videos, noting that a total length of 20 minutes is appropriate; videos longer than half an hour would be too much. Short videos were associated with a manageable workload for students.

"I think it's a very appropriate length of time. The current 15 to 20 minutes is very suitable for our college students to study" (*Gloria*).

"20 minutes, 30 minutes is appropriate, not half an hour to 1 hour. Sometimes it may really take an hour to learn, but it is still a little too much for me" (*Melly*).

Pre-class exercises and clear structure were also valued by interviewees. Tina explained that exercises "help us understand the video lecture deeply", while Gloria appreciated tasks that clarified learning objectives: "the course materials... will write down the learning objectives of this class, which will also help you to better summarise whether you have achieved the teaching objectives".

"The professor will ask us to ... do some pre-class exercises to better understand the video lecture, and during class time, the professor will ... give us several exercises" (*Tina*).

"It let me know the teacher's purpose, and I have something I hope to learn in this class, and I have a sense of expectation in advance" (*Gloria*).

4.2.3.2. *Motivational incentives*

Students also shared their positive views about extrinsic motivation in the interviews. Winnie described how participation marks encouraged students to engage more in discussions, while Li noted that participation accounted for around 20% to 30%, which was "a lot compared to traditional classes".

"If you answer a question, one question may be 0.5 marks, and then the full score is five points. Therefore, the students... were really very active in answering questions" (*Winnie*).

"For example, it will indeed be reflected in the higher proportion of participation. Yes. The participation part it was 20 or 30 percents" (*Li*).

Additionally, students mentioned the timely oral feedback they received from their teacher as a source of extrinsic motivation. They noted that, compared to traditional classes, their teacher engaged in group discussions more and provided more timely feedback, thereby enhancing students' overall engagement.

"So if you are wrong, he will tell you where you started wrong or what needs improvement directly in class" (*Shi*).

"Then the teacher will tell me at this time that you can learn more about their views from other students, which will be more helpful to your overall control" (*Gloria*).

4.2.4. *Evolving student & teacher roles*

4.2.4.1. *Teacher as facilitator*

Across the interviews, students described a shift in teachers' roles from lecturers to facilitators. Tina explained that professors "participate in our discussion... and if he finds some groups' direction is wrong, he will give us immediate guidance". Similarly, Gloria noted that rather than delivering one-way instruction through monologue-based teaching, teachers now spend more time participating in group discussions and making personalised suggestions.

"He will participate in each group to listen to their opinions or solutions. And if he finds that some group's direction is wrong, he will give us immediate guidance" (*Tina*).

"Compared with traditional classrooms, teachers will spend more energy answering questions, participating in group discussions, and making personalised suggestions, making my classroom more interactive" (*Gloria*).

4.2.4.2. Active student role

Students also described how they had become more active learners through their flipped-learning experiences. Rannie described how flipped classrooms have changed her learning habits because of the difficulties of participating in class discussions without previewing the materials. Similarly, Winnie emphasised in her interview that flipped learning helped her develop the habit of previewing. Participants had transitioned from passive recipients to active participants in knowledge construction in the flipped classroom.

"Because I seldom preview before.....But if you don't preview now, it may be difficult to have a class discussion in class" (*Rannie*).

"One aspect is that it teaches us to preview before class. In fact, it is a good learning habit: you can keep up with the teacher's thinking more quickly" (*Winnie*).

4.2.5. Recommendations for improvement

Students suggested practical improvements to support comprehension. Winnie recommended providing more interesting examples in pre-class materials and higher-quality materials to improve comprehension. Aria suggested splitting tasks into smaller assignments, while Zhang requested more support with difficult content and clearer explanations from teachers. Nicky highlighted the importance of accurate English captions, stating that the absence of captions was a barrier to understanding the teacher's voice.

"If want to improve the autonomy..... he can find some more interesting teaching materials" (*Winnie*).

"It's necessary to break the tasks into smaller parts, that is, to divide a large task into several smaller ones" (*Aria*).

"Because I personally think the teacher should lead everyone more" (*Zhang*).

"There are no English captions in most of the videos, so you need to listen to all by yourself" (*Nicky*).

5. Discussion

One noteworthy finding from the quantitative data is that students reported a relatively low mean score (3.03) when asked whether they preferred video lectures to traditional classroom lectures. This indicates that while students value the interactive and collaborative aspects of flipped classroom activities, they still appreciate the immediacy and structure of live lectures. In essence, the strength of the flipped model lies not in replacing traditional lectures altogether but in supplementing them by reallocating classroom time for active learning. The preference for live lectures may reflect students' desire for real-time clarification, direct interaction with instructors, and the motivating effect of a structured classroom environment.

This finding highlights an important nuance: students' positive views of flipped learning do not necessarily mean they reject traditional teaching entirely. Instead, their responses suggest that a hybrid approach might be most effective, using pre-class materials for flexibility and preparation, with live lectures remaining essential for scaffolding, guidance, and reassurance. This aligns with previous studies that reported mixed levels of student satisfaction, emphasising that course design must carefully combine both methods [23, 26]. In English-language education in Hong Kong, China, this balance is especially important, as live lectures can offer linguistic modelling and immediate feedback, while flipped activities create space for practice and peer communication.

Despite its pedagogical potential, several interrelated barriers constrain flipped-learning effectiveness. Excessively technical or poorly-scaffolded pre-class materials may raise students' cognitive load. In Hong Kong, China's exam-oriented environment, competing assessment deadlines can reduce learners' willingness to complete pre-work [4, 5]. Technical hurdles, such as missing captions and low-quality resources, create comprehension difficulties for linguistically diverse student groups [1]. Furthermore, misalignment between

pre-class assignments and formal assessments weakens student motivation, consistent with earlier observations by Awidi and Paynter [23].

Several enabling conditions support successful flipped-learning implementation in the local context. Concise pre-class videos and clear learning objectives help manage student workload [21]. Weighting pre-class preparation in grading can provide crucial extrinsic motivation given local exam-driven priorities [20]. Thoughtfully selected educational technology, together with active teacher facilitation and timely feedback, further boosts learner engagement [15]. Implementation can be understood at the micro-, meso- and macro-levels: task and video design at the micro-level, assessment-workload alignment at the meso-level, and institutional support and teacher training at the macro-level [31, 32].

Based on these findings, course designers should adopt concise captioned multimedia materials, align assessment with pre-class tasks, offer targeted support for difficult content, and break large assignments into smaller segments to mitigate cognitive load. Such adjustments address key barriers to realising flipped learning's pedagogical benefits in Hong Kong, China EMI education.

6. Conclusion

This study investigated Hong Kong, China university students' perceptions of flipped learning in English-medium higher education using a mixed-methods design, capturing both broad trends and individual learners' experiences.

Overall, students held positive attitudes toward flipped learning, appreciating its flexible learning mode, pre-class preparation opportunities and benefits for language skill development. The findings supported constructivist and social-learning theories, showing improvements in critical thinking and collaboration. Nevertheless, cognitive load, technical obstacles and misalignment between pre-class tasks and assessments hindered its effectiveness. Successful implementation relies on concise video resources, appropriate extrinsic motivational incentives, effective technology integration and teacher facilitation. Given Hong Kong, China's exam-driven educational culture and linguistic diversity, contextual adaptation is essential for flipped-learning practice.

Theoretically, this mixed-methods study fills a research gap in local blended-learning and second-language-acquisition literature. Practically, it delivers evidence-based guidance for educators and curriculum designers regarding material scaffolding and instructional support.

This research has several limitations. It draws only on student perspectives without teachers' input, restricting cross-institutional generalisability. Self-reported survey responses may contain subjective bias, as perceptions can diverge from real learning behaviours. Some interviews were conducted in Mandarin; despite careful translation, subtle meaning loss cannot be fully ruled out. Even so, mixed-methods triangulation strengthens the credibility of the present findings.

For future research, multi-institutional sampling and teacher perspectives are recommended to improve generalisability. Larger and more diverse participant groups are needed. Further research should also examine longitudinal changes in learner attitudes and explore links between flipped-learning experience and objective language proficiency outcomes, beyond subjective self-reported perceptions.

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