



## **Report of the Study into the Effects of Flipping a Vietnamese High School Classroom to Measure the Effects on Freedom of Choice in Vocabulary Learning and Motivational and Affective Factors**

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### **Introduction**

My interest in personalized vocabulary learning for students within a flipped classroom stemmed from my experience teaching in a high school in Vietnam with a class of B2 Upper-Intermediate learners. Demotivation appeared to be high among the learners as English to them was a school subject and not a “living language” as EFL environments appear to have less motivation than ESL ones (Choi & Ma, 2014). Furthermore, the teacher or textbook usually dictates which words are more important for the learners based on the frequency and range of the word and how easy the items are to teach and learn (McCarthy, 1990). However, the learners themselves were never given an opportunity to seek out vocabulary based around the topics they were studying (Koller, 2015). Learners were also stressed because of the pressure of other subjects taught increasing their learning load (Phan, 2017). I was also drawn towards recent studies of new classroom approaches “The flipped classroom” which some studies claimed raised motivation levels and allowed learners to have the freedom to study more autonomously and choose their own vocabulary.

The aim of this research was to flip a class and study the effects it had on the learners’ vocabulary learning and how it affected their feelings and motivation. The report will review the literature, how the study was conducted and the findings it produced with a discussion relating back to the previous research in the literature and implications for teaching and learning vocabulary in an EFL context.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Vocabulary Learning**

Vocabulary is an essential factor in learning any language “without vocabulary, nothing can be expressed” (Wilkins, 1978, p. 111). It is imperative that learners are taught enough vocabulary to aid their acquisition and understanding. Teachers and textbook writers are usually in charge of choosing which vocabulary learners need and they base this on certain criteria:



TABLE 1  
*Criteria for Choosing Vocabulary for Learners*

Frequency	How often a word is used: This can be high frequency, where the word appears often in written or spoken corpora or low frequency if it does not appear often. Based on the GSL (General Service List) and AWL (Academic Word List).
Range	How many times a word appears in different text-types. E.g. in fiction, non-fiction, studying a certain subject at university.
Learnability/ teachability	How easy or difficult a word is. For example, spelling or phonological differences such as clusters of sounds, close in meaning such as "make" or "do," false friends such as "attendre" in French does not mean the same as the English "attend." Also, culturally unrelated words.

(McCarthy, 1990)

According to Nation (1997), frequency lists are essential so learners get the best vocabulary, namely high frequency lexis, presented to them. This may be true, but it seems that this is decided by course book writers and teachers rather than the learners. Hancioglu and Eldridge (2007) warn that too much focus on high frequency teacher-led lexical items could hamper vocabulary acquisition rather than facilitate it. In the context of a B2 level IELTS/Academic class, low frequency items are what the learners need to achieve a high score in their final IELTS exam.

TABLE 2  
*IELTS Band Score Descriptors for Speaking/Writing*

Band Score 6 (Lexical Resource)	"attempts to use less common vocabulary but with some inaccuracy"
Band Score 7 (Lexical Resource)	"uses less common lexical items with some awareness of style and collocation"
Band Score 8 (Lexical Resource)	"Skillfully uses uncommon lexical items with occasional inaccuracies in word choice and collocation"

Source: British Council.org

## Learner Choice

It has been argued by Gairns and Redman (1986) and Allen (1983), Scharle and Szabo (2000) that if learners are given permission to take responsibility for their own learning then success usually follows. There are empirical studies that seem to support these claims (Choi & Ma, 2014; Kirmizi & Komec, 2019; Koller, 2015). The first two studies allowed learners to develop what they termed PVL (Personalized Vocabulary Learning) where in both cases, learners achieved greater success when they self-selected words for their academic needs and also achieved good retention rates of these items.

Nation (2001) and Krashen (1989) advocate the use of incidental vocabulary learning where learners can expand their vocabulary through contexts and an opportunistic focus on the lexical items as well as independent learning with strategic guidance in learner strategies for learning vocabulary (Tuan, 2011).

TABLE 3  
*Types of Learner Strategies (Part of Schmitt's (1977) Taxonomy on Learner Strategies as cited in Choi & Ma, 2014)*

Social	Used to retain the words with the assistance of others. E.g., use in conversation or writing the new item in a sentence
Memory/cognitive	Mental manipulation such as imaging (using pictures to associate to a word) or the Keyword Technique (personalizing words or parts of word to something the learners find amusing or connected to their lives)
Metacognitive	Making decisions on the best ways of studying (planning, monitoring and evaluating)

"Determination and social" are key elements (Schmitt, 1977, as cited in Choi & Ma, 2014, p.77) meaning that it is imperative to "discover a new word meaning for oneself and with others' assistance" (Choi & Ma, 2014, p. 77). Nation (2001) also emphasizes noticing as a key element which is drawing learners' attention to new vocabulary. Learner strategies can be key for student choice in the learning

process (Oxford, 1990) and becoming more independent, confident and motivated (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990).

## Motivation, Independence and Affective Factors

In Choi and Ma's study (2014), high school learners in Hong Kong considered English as a boring subject and the students had limited motivation. One way to increase motivation in vocabulary learning is through autonomous learning as it enhances learner motivation, leading to more effective vocabulary learning, caters to their needs and has a longer lasting effect (Tuan, 2011).

Krashen (1982) mentions that relaxed learners are more confident successful learners due to the lowering of what he termed the "affective filter" which stops learning due to stress and worry. However, this has been questioned due to a lack of empirical research (see Gregg, 1984; Zafar, 2010 for rebuttals).

## Traditional vs Flipped Instruction

The reason why learners in Vietnam may feel overwhelmed could partly be due to the traditional method. This sees the teaching of rote, memorized learning with the teacher as the mentor and giving homework gap fills to complete for homework (Kramsch & Sullivan, 1996) and productive skills are rarely practiced (Hoang, 2010). The flipped version, as seen in Figure 1, flips the learning so that new material is learnt autonomously at home freeing up the time for productive skills in the classroom and reducing the cognitive load (Karaca & Ocak, 2017) and the teacher to help as a facilitator (King, 1993).

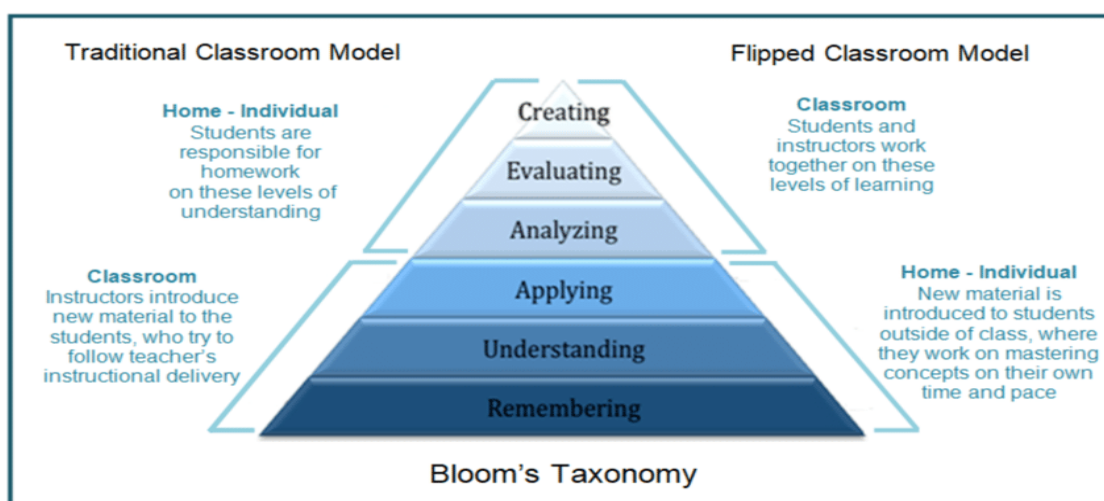


Figure 1. Bloom's taxonomy of traditional and flipped classroom models (Lopes & Soars, 2018).

The diagram in figure 1 seems to suggest that a flipped model is conducive, but not necessarily more effective than traditional classrooms, to learning in an EFL setting. It allows for independent study in a relaxed environment which may help to reduce affective factors. Research evidence also points to raised motivation levels in a flipped classroom (Altemueller & Lindquist, 2017; Winter, 2018) and positive gains in vocabulary acquisition (Alnuhayt, 2018; Ghanbari et al., 2015; Kirmizi & Komec, 2018; Todsapon, 2017). However, a study by Yough et al., (2017) found no evidence for increased motivation in a flipped classroom but found partial evidence in learning benefits.

## The Current Study

A number of the studies focused on learner choice in vocabulary and flipped classrooms separately. This study aims to bridge that gap and aims to find out if a flipped classroom really does help with vocabulary acquisition, provide more learner choice and if it raises motivation levels and learner autonomy while reducing affective factors. My research questions are:

1. What is the effect of flipping a classroom on the selected learners' attitudes and motivation for learning?
2. Is there a difference between their vocabulary in a pre-test writing task compared to a post-test one in how much vocabulary they learn and what type of vocabulary is used?
3. What is the effect of flipping a classroom on acquiring high level/low frequency vocabulary?

## Methods

### Participants

Research was carried out at Phan Dinh Phung High School in Hanoi, Vietnam with a class of 15 (15-16-year-old) learners (7 girls and 8 boys) and who were all part of the same English class and had been studying Academic/IELTS classes for 5 months of the first semester using a flipped class model. These learners were chosen as they were the top-level group of B2 Upper-Intermediate and a previous placement test had placed them together based on their mock IELTS test scores. Also, they were the only class experienced in both traditional ways of learning and the flipped model. The classes were held twice a week for 90 minutes each.

### Design

Data were collected through a focus group as this was a valuable way to get in-depth information (Bell, 2010). A questionnaire was considered but, due to the nature of the traditional way of learning, these learners are always inundated with forms that they do not care about and this may not gain sufficient levels of data. To validate the qualitative focus group with quantitative evidence, a quasi-experiment was conducted as participants were not chosen randomly (Dornyei, 2007) and they were given a pre-and post-test IELTS writing task essay. This was the best way to measure how effective studying vocabulary at home in a flipped environment was. The limitations on time, as we only had two weeks and five lessons, and a small group prevented me from conducting a full experiment with controlled and experimental groups (Dornyei, 2007).

### Instruments

The focus group questions were designed with four main questions on their vocabulary learning allowing for further in-depth questions to be asked to the participants and allow them to agree or disagree with each other (Bell, 2010).

1. What and how did you study before?
2. What and how do you study now?
3. What are the differences between how you learn now compared to how you learnt before?
4. Can you rate the effectiveness of a flipped classroom from 1-5 (1 being the lowest and 5 the highest)?

The pre-and post-test materials were an IELTS balanced argument essay question, a worksheet that promoted a noticing activity and a website link for home studies.

## Procedures and Data Analysis

The group was split into two focus groups (8 and 7) as Dornyei (2007) suggests no more than 10 participants in one group sitting. Both focus groups were conducted on different days and each one lasted 30 minutes. Each session was recorded and was held during the last 30 minutes of two of the lessons.

TABLE 4

*The Test-Teach-Test Procedure Following a Flipped Classroom Model*

Lesson 1	Pre-writing test	A discussion is set up in class to talk on an IELTS question for a Task 2 writing <i>"Some people say that violent video games cause children to be violent while others say they can be beneficial for children. Discuss both views and give your opinion"</i> No vocabulary input is given by the teacher. Under strict IELTS writing test conditions, learners are given 45 minutes to complete the writing task/Writing collected.
Outside Study	Research	Learners are given a worksheet to follow which helps them to notice key vocabulary from an authentic, non-educational website/ <a href="https://futureofworking.com/10-advantages-and-disadvantages-of-violent-video-games">https://futureofworking.com/10-advantages-and-disadvantages-of-violent-video-games</a> (Learners also found 3 other useful websites on the topic.
Lesson 2	In-class reflection on the research	Learners return to class and in groups of 3 teach each other 3 or 4 new lexical items they learnt from the worksheet/website. In those groups, they present their findings on the board and teach other students in the class who can ask questions. Teacher acts a facilitator.
Outside Study	Further Research	Learners were asked to review their chosen lexical choices to learn more about how they are used. Also, they could pick some newer words which they had learnt from the class reflection in lesson 2 and study them further
Lesson 3	Post-writing test	Full writing task on the exact same topic. Only this time, as soon as the class enters the classroom all their books, notes, bags and phones are left outside and the writing is conducted under strict IELTS test conditions. Learners only had test writing paper and a pen/pencil with a 45-minute time limit.

The recorded data from both focus group sessions were transcribed and coded. The data revealed similar comments on the seven topics in below:

1. Affective factors.
2. Effectiveness of learning vocabulary in a flipped classroom compared to the traditional way.
3. How a traditional class works versus a flipped approach
4. Feelings on a traditional approach versus feelings on a flipped approach.
5. Textbooks versus The Internet as a source of learning.
6. Learner autonomy and motivation
7. The benefits and disadvantages of a flipped approach.

To analyze the test-teach-test data, the vocabulary which was written on the board from lesson 2 was checked to see if any of the lexis appeared in their post-writing. Then, the 4 website texts were copied to a word document to check that the items the learners selected to learn came from those texts. All 44 items appeared. The texts were then entered into a word checker ([longmandictionariesusa.com](http://longmandictionariesusa.com)) to see which items were low frequency. All items were low frequency but collocations could not be checked.

Next, the number of times each item was used by how many students was recorded and checked to see if any of these items appeared in their pre-writing to make sure these were new to the learners. Finally, a

check of how many errors was also recorded. In both qualitative and quantitative; all were linked back to the points in the literature.

## Ethical Considerations and Limitations

Ethical approval was granted by Leeds Beckett University and consent forms were handed to the learners, the learners' parents, the headmistress of the school and the Director of Studies. All respondents received a copy of their own (Hart et al., 1995). Learners could refuse to take part, refuse to answer questions or leave at any time (Bell, 2010). Also, learners' real names were not used and replaced with letters (A, B, and etc...) (Sapsford & Abbott, 1996).

## Findings

The findings from the qualitative focus group study will be presented by focusing on the 7 coded learner comments from figure 3, giving brief comments and a further discussion relating to the literature with implications for language teaching in order to answer RQ 1.

Traditional Method of learning vocabulary vs a Flipped approach (2, 3, 4 and 5)

### Traditional Learning

*Student O – “Vocabulary is limited...and boring.”*

*Student E – “Teacher gives us paper full of vocabularies and we learn by heart.”*

*Student E - “They forced us to follow the learning method.”*

*Student L – “Teacher just wants us to do all the stuff in the textbook.”*

### Flipped Approach

*Student M – “Much more freedom.”*

*Student N – “We can in context how they use collocations.”*

*Student F – “Our freedom to search for anything we want, like vocab*

All of the learners seem to come to one conclusion that the flipped method was more rewarding for them when they were given the power to choose to learn their own vocabulary rather than the curriculum dictating what they should study. The highlighted parts reflect the freedom a flipped classroom has. Student L's comment reflected on the overreliance of textbooks was backed-up by student N's and F's comments about searching anything they like within certain contexts rather than word lists.

## Learner Autonomy and Motivation (6)

### Learner Autonomy

*Student C – “... search more freely and independent.”*

*Student L – “A chance to do things on our own and it doesn't matter where I am.”*

### Motivation

*Student O – “More interesting and more motivating.”*

*Student K – “... easy for us to acquire the new words because we really want to study it”*

The comments seem to indicate that the learners much preferred to have chances to study independently and appeared confident that this would lead to better vocabulary acquisition. The flipped instruction played a part in catering to the learners' needs of having the independence to fully learn more without direct teacher involvement. This autonomy did seem to affect their motivation as the learners

found the class more motivating and as student K stated learning became much easier because they had the freedom to study which helped them acquire more lexis and motivated them more.

### Affective Factors (1)

Student L – *(talking about the traditional class) “... don’t feel comfortable, not my best.”*

Student L – *“gain more knowledge when you are feeling comfortable. My comfort zone.”*

Many of the learners appeared to agree with student L’s comments as the stress of the school/study environment was not conducive to their learning. Many learners agreed because they felt more comfortable studying at home. Due to this, student L felt that their vocabulary knowledge improved and did not feel the same way in a traditional classroom. When probed further on this issue, student responses delved deeper.

Student N – *“home is the best environment for studying and to focus on their work because that’s their own place and they can do anything they want.”*

Student L – *“so the feeling that we have with a new website like I am the one who found it and I found it on my own I feel excited about it and when I am happy I will learn it a lot better.”*

Another comment also highlighted the reduced cognitive factors from Karaca & Ocak’s(2017) research on flipped classrooms.

Student M – *“It’s because you did the research at home. You have already armed yourself with the new vocabulary”*

### Experiment

This section will answer RQ 2 and 3.

TABLE 5  
*Lexis Used by the Learners in the Study*

Lexis	Type	Frequency in the Texts	Frequency in the Learners’ Writing (Each number represents the number of students)	Number of Errors
1.make a quick buck	Collocation with “make”	1	2	0
2.fit into	multi-word verb	3	2	0
3.team-based play	collocation	2	7	2
4.habit forming	compound noun	3	4	0
5.demonized	verb	1	3	0
6.adversely	adverb	2	5	3
7.tendonitis	noun	1	3	1
8.demographic	used as a noun	1	3	0
9.arthritis	noun	1	2	0
10.the bone of contention	fixed phrase collocation	1	2	2

Out of the 29 items used in the learners’ post-test writing, I chose these 10 to highlight as they were used more frequently by the learners. Lexis 4, 5 and 8 seemed to be popular choices among the learners. I followed this up at the end of the research and asked the selected students why they chose these words? It appeared that these learners had personal connections to these words.

Student L- (*habit forming*) “my friends always tells me I have bad habits so I remember this word.”  
 Student M- (*demonized*) “because it has the word "demon" in it and I like Marvel super-heroes.”  
 Student C - (*demographic*) “I like drawing and computer games and I saw the word "graphic(s).”

Lexis 1, 3 and 7 learners seemed to have noticed more lexis in connection with the website(s) and the activity worksheet.

Student A  
 Pre-writing – “make huge money”  
 Post-writing – “make a quick buck.”

Student D  
 Pre-writing – “allow people communicate directly which they are playing.”  
 Post-writing – “levels of team-based play.”

Student J  
 Pre-writing – “eye problems and body pain.”  
 Post-writing – “easily cause tendonitis.”

Item 2 never appeared on the board but was used 3 times in the texts and twice in the post-writing. Item 10 was attempted by two learners but had errors in using it. Item 6’s errors were high but this was due to word order than misuse of the word. Out of 29 items used, with some being used more than once by different learners, only 12 errors were recorded in 59 attempts (80% successful/20% errors).

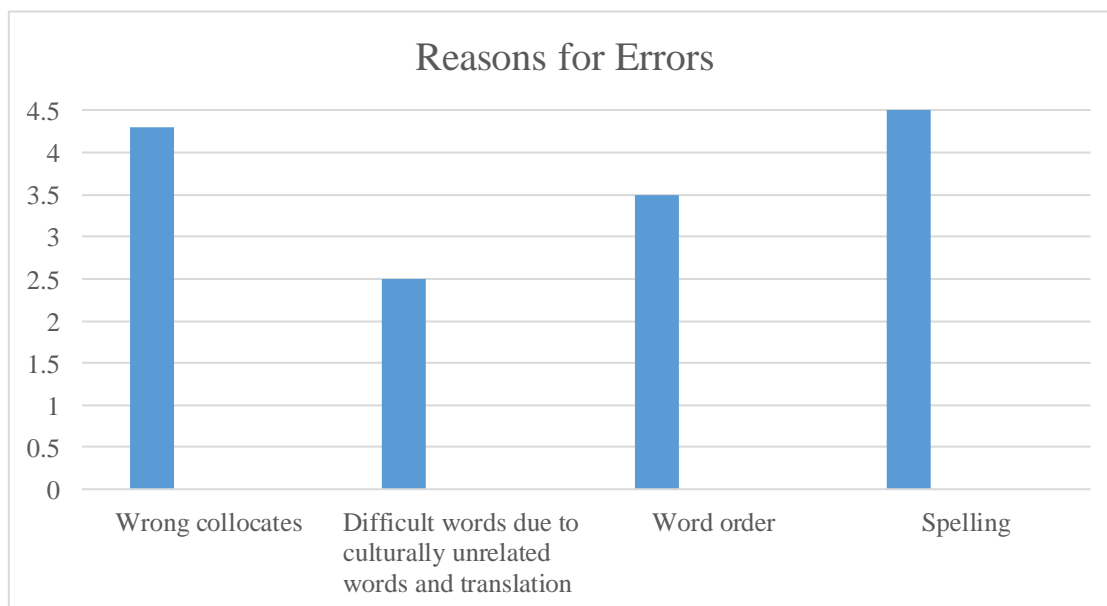


Figure 2. Reasons for errors.

### Discussion

These comments appear to agree with the earlier studies on learner choice that also saw positive learner comments on being allowed the freedom to choose and personalize their own vocabulary. Furthermore, as student O stated, freedom of choice made vocabulary learning more interesting and not boring. Having



vocabulary within a context (student N) seems to coincide with incidental vocabulary learning (Krashen, 1989; Nation, 2001).

As Tuan (2011) mentioned that autonomous learners become more motivated; leading to more effective vocabulary and longer lasting effects appears to have merit as the learners' comments seem to match Tuan's (2011) theories. However, this study was on a small-scale and there is no way of knowing if the learners will remember the lexis in the long term. The comments from this study seem to weigh more in favor of the research into increased motivation in a flipped classroom than the Yough et al.'s (2017) study.

In agreement with student L's comments, the learners appear to add weight to Krashen's (1982) theory of lowering the alleged affective filter and having a positive outlook on learning aids acquisition. Student L seems to make further links to a connection between affective factors "feeling" to learner autonomy "found on my own" and how this had a positive effect on their learning and motivation.

Some of the learners seemed to select lexical items based on personal connections. In some cases, even using cognitive strategies (keyword technique) to remember and use them correctly e.g., "demonized." These findings do not prove that personalized vocabulary learning is highly effective but it does appear to add weight to the previous studies on allowing learners to have personalized choices and there were no errors on these specific personalized items. This study may have been able to bolster this evidence if learners had been questioned on all the choices in the data but time was constrained. Some of the choices appeared to show what learners may have considered lower frequency words that they had noticed in the texts for a higher IELTS score compared to the word they had used in their pre-writing. This seemed to suggest a correlation with Nation's (2001) theories on noticing. However, without a follow up discussion with the learners themselves it is difficult to fully state that this was the case. Two of the learners used "fit into" and in one of the texts, this was used three times in close proximity and the learners may have noticed them unconsciously and maybe the reason they did not appear on the board but there can be no way of knowing if these learners had already acquired this item previously.

Only one fifth of the lexis used in the post-writing contained errors. A concrete connection cannot be made that due to the freedom of choosing their own lexis and studying at home, fewer errors were made but it seemed to add weight to the success of personalized vocabulary learning from previous studies on this in the literature. Regarding error type most were wrong collocations and learnability which appears to suggest that word associations and teachability/learnability are important factors when selecting words.

This study appears to have shown that by flipping a classroom seems to allow learners to choose their own vocabulary autonomously and raise motivation levels, help to reduce the cognitive load and reduce affective factors leading to more effective learning (RQ 1). The post-writing also appeared to show significant gains as 29 lower frequency items were learnt and used productively. None of the lexis appeared in their pre-writing and it seemed that many of these could be considered difficult to learn but learners seemed to have used them correctly with an 80% success rate (RQ 2). It appears that by flipping a classroom it can be effective in the learning of uncommon lexis (RQ 3). However, there were limitations as it cannot account for how effective a flipped classroom would be for learning new vocabulary with lower level learners. Also, there is no indication that the learners in this study will internalize all of this new lexis and will be able to use them productively in the long term. For this, more research, particularly longitudinal ones, are needed to measure the effects for vocabulary learning in a flipped class in the long term.

There were some limitations to the data. This was a small-scale study and it was not possible to generalize the findings "beyond the particular" (Dornyei, 2007, p. 34) and whether the findings can be applied in similar contexts. Also, since the learners were aware of the research, due to the ethical reasons, they could perform differently than they would usually. This is known as the 'Hawthorn effect' (Landsberger, 1958).

## Conclusion

The study has appeared to show that by flipping a classroom and promoting learner choice in vocabulary learning can have positive results in the learning, acquiring and production of new lexical items. Not only is it beneficial for their vocabulary learning but also increases motivation through learner choice and decreases the cognitive load of learners; allowing for a stress-free learning environment. However, this is only a small-scale study conducted with a B2 level class for a very short period. It remains to be seen whether flipping a classroom and encouraging learner choice in vocabulary learning can be effective with lower levels or if lexis can be recalled and used effectively indefinitely. To answer these questions, more research is needed in these areas before we can say for certain that a flipped, personalized approach for learners is the way forward.

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