Catherine Nickerson*

Zayed University, United Arab Emirates
catherine.nickerson@zu.ac.ae

MOBILE AND MULTIDIMENSIONAL: FLIPPING THE BUSINESS ENGLISH CLASSROOM

Abstract

An increasing number of researchers and practitioners with an interest in ESP have begun to consider the role that information communication technologies can play in the classroom. In addition, recent work in English for Specific Business Purposes has emphasized the importance of introducing more computer-mediated communication into the curriculum, in an effort to help learners to develop the skills they will need in the workplace. In this article I discuss a business English course for undergraduate students in the Gulf Region with three areas of focus, that addresses this concern: (i) it combines a flipped classroom approach and a project-based learning approach, (ii) it presents students with a series of mobile learning tasks that centre on a set of three interdependent instructional goals, i.e. interaction, production and reflection, and (iii) it allows students to develop their skills in two specific areas related to computer-mediated communication in the workplace, i.e. dealing with different audiences and selecting appropriate media. My aim is to give an account of a real classroom experience of relevance for the teaching of English for Specific Business Purposes at tertiary level.

Key words

mobile learning, flipped classroom, project-based learning, multi-media, audience.

* Corresponding address: Catherine Nickerson, College of Business, Zayed University, Dubai 19282, United Arab Emirates.

65

Sažetak

Sve više istraživača i predavača zainteresovanih za engleski jezik nauke i struke razmatra ulogu informaciono-komunikacionih tehnologija u učionici. Pored toga, novija istraživanja u oblasti engleskog poslovnog jezika ističu značaj uvođenja komunikacije putem računara u nastavni program, kako bi se učenicima pomoglo da razviju veštine potrebne na radnom mestu. U ovom radu bavim se kursom engleskog poslovnog jezika namenjenom studentima u Zalivskoj regiji i njegovim trima glavnim komponentama: (i) na kursu se kombinuje pristup preokrenute učionice sa pristupom učenja putem projekata, (ii) studenti dobijaju niz zadataka u okviru mobilnog učenja sa tri međusobno zavisna nastavna cilja, interakcijom, produkcijom i refleksijom, i (iii) kurs omogućava studentima da razviju veštine iz dve konkretne oblasti koje se tiču komunikacije putem računara na radnom mestu, i to komuniciranja sa različitim publikama i izbora odgovarajućeg medija komunikacije. Cilj mi je da opišem realno iskustvo u učionici od značaja za nastavu engleskog poslovnog jezika na univerzitetskom nivou.

Ključne reči

mobilno učenje, preokrenuta učionica, učenje putem projekata, multimediji, publika.

1. INTRODUCTION

The *flipped classroom* is a relatively recent, but very influential, development in education. Described in detail by Bergmann and Sams (2012), flipping the classroom has been introduced and used successfully across a wide range of different disciplines. For example, Papadopoulos and Roman (2010) discuss its use in electrical engineering, Missildine, Fountain, Summers, and Gosselin (2013) show a positive effect on the performance of nursing students, and Đorđević and Radić-Bojanić (2014) show how a non-traditional approach was beneficial for their students following a legal English course. As flipping the classroom is often combined with the use of information communication technologies (ICT), many academic institutions are understandably keen to introduce it as a pedagogical approach in order to tap into their students' familiarity with new media. In addition, flipping the classroom and introducing more ICT at the same time, means that instructors may also capitalize on the positive motivating factors that many learners report that they experience in working with on-line tasks, many of which are not constrained by the classroom walls (Liu, 2006; Nicholas, Rowlands, & Jamali, 2010; Rapanta, Nickerson, & Goby, 2014; Strouse, 2004). For the ESP classroom in general, the use of ICT has been increasingly influential on pedagogy

and course design over the past decade (see, for example, Woodrow, 2018 for a detailed account). At the same time, recent work in ESP that has looked at the consequences of using ICT in combination with flipping the classroom, has shown that this can have a positive influence on student learning outcomes, as well as on student satisfaction (Lee, 2017; Liu, 2016). Finally, while flipping the classroom has been a focus within the cognate discipline of business communication (e.g. Lam & Hannah, 2015; Sherrow, Lang, & Corbett, 2015; Sydow Campbell, 2015), it has yet to be explored with specific reference to the teaching of English for Specific Business Purposes (ESBP).

A number of researchers with an interest in ESP have begun to consider the role played by computer-mediated communication (CMC) in professional settings (e.g. Crawford Camiciottoli & Bonsignori, 2015; Darics, 2015). In addition, studies of ESBP in particular have shown that being effective in CMC is now one of the most important skills that business people need (Gimenez, 2014; Lockwood, 2017). This research suggests that for learners of business English in particular, flipping the classroom and simultaneously introducing CMC into the curriculum through the use of ICT, may not only provide learners with a motivating and effective way of learning (Laborda & Litzler, 2017; Nickerson, Rapanta, & Goby, 2016; Rapanta et al., 2014), it may also provide them with an opportunity to develop a set of crucial communication skills. As Zhang (2007, 2016) has suggested, focused language practise like this makes an important contribution to business English teaching as it allows students to combine their language skills and their knowledge of the business world. My intention in the discussion that follows is to give an account of how this can best be achieved in a real classroom setting.

In flipping the classroom, instructors have to change the way they approach their students because their role shifts from that of the teacher to that of a facilitator; at the same time, students have to get used to preparing materials before their class and then working on other tasks immediately in class, often under much closer supervision than they would normally expect to be case (Sherrow et al., 2015). As part of this process, familiar static genres such as the formal lecture, Powerpoint presentation or textbook chapter, are replaced or modified to accommodate a flipped approach, and other genres enter the classroom in their place, including on-line ways of communicating that are much more difficult for an instructor to oversee, such as discussion boards, Youtube videos and other web-based materials. Moreover, flipping the classroom means that on-line tasks can also become mobile, such that students may choose to work with them outside of the classroom walls at a different time and in a different place. As Park (2011) notes, "[m]obile learning refers to the use of mobile or wireless devices for the purpose of learning while on the move", but it "is not just about the use of portable devices but also about learning across contexts" (Park, 2011: 79). In other words, mobile learning means that learners are unconstrained by both time and place, but also that they can choose to access multiple sources of

information taken from a variety of different contexts in order to complete a given task.

In this article, I will discuss the design of an ESBP course for senior business students at a government university in the Gulf Region, that included three areas of focus in an effort to provide a meaningful learning experience: (i) it integrates a flipped classroom approach into an existing project-based learning (PBL) approach, (ii) it presents students with a series of mobile learning tasks, that were structured around interaction, production and reflection (Nickerson et al., 2016), and (iii) it allows students to develop their understanding of how to deal with different audiences as well as selecting the appropriate media for a message, as media choice and dealing with different audiences have been shown to be important contributors to the CMC skills needed for business (Gimenez, 2014). Figure 1 shows how these three foci can be combined in a structured, multidimensional approach to teaching ESBP.
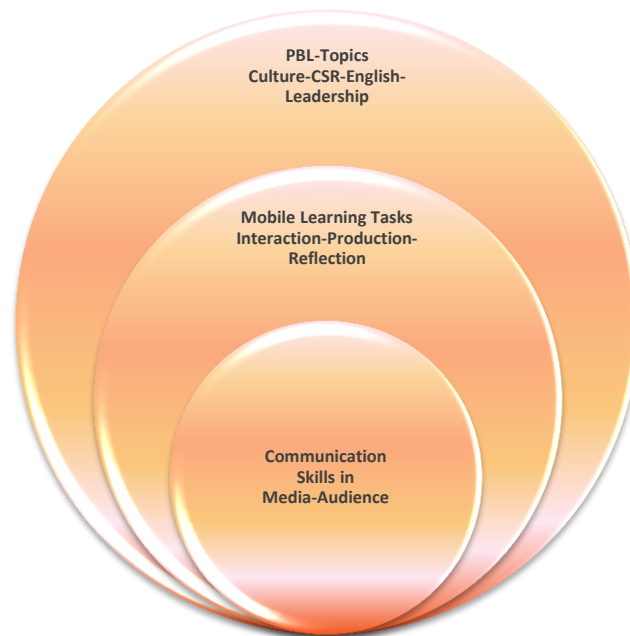

Figure 1. Flipping the classroom: Topics, tasks and skills

In the discussion that follows I will first outline the development of the course, the challenges that I identified, and the solutions I found in order to address these. I consider my experience as an instructor in moving away from a traditional approach incorporating PBL towards a flipped PBL approach reliant on mobile learning, as well as my students' experience during the course, as captured in a post-course survey in the last week of the semester. My aim will be to reflect on the usefulness of a flipped classroom approach combined with mobile learning for the teaching of ESBP at tertiary level, through reference to a real classroom experience.

2. THE ACADEMIC CONTEXT

The students involved in the flipped classroom course I am describing here, Course 407 given in Fall 2016 (407), were all business seniors at a prominent government university in the Gulf Region (Zayed University). They were all Emirati nationals, they were all female with Arabic as their first language, and they had all taken a more junior (200-level) course in ESBP skills about 18 months prior to 407 which drew on a standard textbook on business communication in use in many different parts of the world (Guffey & Loewey, 2013). It could therefore be assumed that they were already familiar with many common forms of communication for business such as email, meetings and business reports. Like the majority of the courses that are taught at Zayed University, 407 is an English-medium course, although students are free to use Arabic or English in their classroom discussions with each other while they are preparing their assignments. All the on-line tasks that were part of the flipped version of 407 were completed in English, as were any additional tasks such as formal presentations and written reports.

Many of the students at Zayed University have completed all of their formal education through the medium of English, i.e. from kindergarten onwards, while others attended government schools and only began to use English regularly for educational purposes from the age of 18 onwards. There were therefore varying levels of proficiency within the class for 407, ranging from an intermediate level of English language proficiency through to a near-native and in some cases native speaker competence (Nickerson, 2015). This was an important consideration in planning the mobile learning activities, as I needed to ensure that the tasks would provide a learning opportunity for all of the students regardless of their different levels of proficiency. Having said that, however, all students at the university must achieve an IELTS score of 6 or a TOEFL IBT of 80+ before beginning the liberal arts programme prior to their business major, which means that they have already achieved above a level B2 in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), i.e. they can be assumed to have "the capacity to achieve most goals and express oneself on a range of topics" (Cambridge, 2017). In other words, most of the students on 407 were able to communicate well in English despite their varying experiences with the language before joining the university (see also Nickerson, 2015).

Course 407 was well-established and had been taught by various instructors twice a year for about seven years prior to the flipped classroom intervention (see Nickerson, 2015 for details). The course had also been the focus of a singular previous mobile learning intervention in a traditional classroom setting, that centered on one of the major topics covered during the course, i.e. intercultural communication (as discussed in Rapanta et al., 2014). As a result of this study, I knew that students from the United Arab Emirates react positively to mobile learning, particularly to visual mobile learning, and that they find it highly motivating (Rapanta et al., 2014). Moreover, in other previous research with our

69

business students, my colleagues and I had also looked at mobile learning and learning outcomes in the junior ESBP course at the 200 level, and had established that mobile learning is likely to impact student performance in a positive way (Nickerson et al., 2016). I was able to build on the findings of both of these studies of mobile learning for pedagogical context at Zayed University, and consider how mobile learning could be more fully integrated in a flipped approach to teaching business English in a meaningful way for senior undergraduates.

The level of technological adoption in the United Arab Emirates is among the highest in the world (Ahmed, 2011; Rapanta et al., 2014; Schwab, 2014; Swan, 2012). In addition, Zayed University is a highly mobile environment; students are required to purchase a laptop when they join the university and they routinely carry laptops, iPads or Smartphones to class. The university has also actively supported the introduction of mobile learning into the classroom in recognition of the fact that this may help students to develop the skills they need to enter the workforce; in short, all of the students on 407 would have had some prior experience of using on-line resources such as discussion boards, video material and other web-based information. In addition, both the United Arab Emirates in general, and Zayed University in particular, have widespread Internet coverage (Schwab, 2014), and there is a reliable WiFi system available to all students and faculty across the Zayed University campus. As flipping the classroom and introducing more mobile learning means that students need to be able to work both inside and outside of the classroom, Internet access and a reliable system is an important consideration in running this type of course.

A total of 60 students attended class twice a week for a sixteen-week period, where each class was a ninety-minute session, with two weekdays or a weekend between each class. This schedule made an important contribution to the success of the initiative, as it gave all of us the preparation time we needed to either create or complete the tasks that were required to flip the classroom in advance. We also had a relatively long period of time in class that we could use for additional material and discussion. Furthermore, I taught the same course twice a week to two different classes, which again allowed me to experiment with the first set of students that I saw and make any adjustments I thought were necessary with the second. Finally, each class was comprised of around 30 students, 27 and 33 respectively, which meant that, for practical reasons, many of the tasks I designed depended on pair or group work; I also drew on the collective nature of people in the Gulf Region, as I knew that Emirati nationals generally prefer to work with other people, particularly in teams, rather than working on their own (Goby, Nickerson, & Rapanta, 2016; Hofstede, 2001). I set up an account in the Learning Management System (LMS) Schoology (www. schoology.com) as I had worked with this LMS in previous mobile learning projects and I knew that it is an accessible user-friendly system that also captures whether students have completed each task. Schoology therefore allowed me to monitor my students' progress easily so that if I needed to, I could adjust my classroom activities.

70

3. PROJECT-BASED LEARNING AND FLIPPING THE CLASSROOM

As Nickerson and Planken (2016) observe in their discussion on different approaches to teaching, PBL "aims to promote learning by doing and is an alternative to teacher-led classroom learning" (2016: 133). In using a PBL approach, students typically complete a set of larger projects by applying their knowledge of a disciplinary subject in a series of practical tasks that are related as closely as possible to authentic situations (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989). As a result, students develop their individual and collaborative skills, they learn how to apply the disciplinary knowledge that they are acquiring in the context of the projects they need to complete, and they learn how to reflect on their experience; particularly for those who speak and use English as an additional language like the students at Zayed University, they also learn how to integrate language and content (Nickerson & Planken, 2016; Stoller, 2006; Zhang, 2016). Because of the reliance on practical tasks that are necessary in order to complete a set of large-scale projects, PBL lends itself to a flipped classroom approach focused on mobile learning.

There were four projects that were already part of 407 that had been taught in previous semesters using a PBL approach; these focused on (i) intercultural communication, (ii) corporate social responsibility (CSR) communication, (iii) communication in English as a lingua franca, and (iv) women and leadership communication. These were all topics that had been identified as being relevant for the business context in the United Arab Emirates and for the workplace that my students were likely to join. I therefore kept these four topics as the basis for the overarching projects that defined the content of the course, and I developed different sets of relevant on-line tasks with a focus on each of these four areas.

In order to flip the classroom while retaining a PBL approach, I decided on the tasks that I wanted the students to have completed by the end of each of the four larger projects. In a traditional approach, for instance, I would have first presented the material in a Powerpoint presentation, and then asked the students to follow up by reading a set of associated materials, such as a textbook chapter, a report or an academic article, generally as a homework assignment. Finally, I would have asked the students to complete a project, e.g. the design of a CSR campaign, and to present their ideas as a formal presentation and a business report. In using a flipped approach, on the other hand, I asked students to look in advance at how key topics have been defined, e.g. CSR and stakeholder engagement, using on-line sources, and I then asked them to start analyzing how CSR policy is presented on corporate web-sites (and to post both responses as part of an on-line discussion board). I recreated the Powerpoint presentation using Youtube that I would have presented in class and circulated this to students at the beginning of the project, and I also gave them access to the other conventional reading materials, if they chose to refer to them. Students were free to choose if they watched or read these supporting materials in their own time at home, or if

71

they used their class time to access the materials in conjunction with the completion of other (compulsory) tasks. The time that I would have otherwise spent lecturing and discussing the reading materials in one or more plenary sessions, allowed me to spend time with smaller groups of students in our class time to discuss their ideas with them directly. I also spent time before class in moderating their discussion board and making suggestions for additional sources of information.

4. STRUCTURING MOBILE LEARNING: INTERACTION, PRODUCTION AND REFLECTION

Working with on-line materials and allowing mobile learning to replace conventional learning can be very seductive, as the majority of students enjoy the freedom it allows and their motivation tends to remain high (Laborda & Litzler 2017; Nicholas et al., 2010; Rapanta et al., 2014). While research also suggests that learning outcomes can be influenced positively through the introduction of mobile learning, (e.g. Nickerson et al., 2016), much work still remains to be done to establish why this is the case. Research shows, for instance, that while a mobile approach can be both ludic and motivating, real learning can only take place if the on-line tasks that allow learners to go mobile are also systematically focused (Dicks & Ives, 2008). As a result, the instructional design associated with any mobile learning task also needs to clearly define the pedagogical purpose of that task.

Nickerson et al. (2016) identify three different forms of engagement for learners that can occur when they are working with mobile learning tasks, namely, interaction, production and reflection. These different forms of engagement ask the students to work with the material in different ways in order to complete the task. They may be asked to interact with on-line media, they may be asked to produce a task using CMC, or they may be asked to reflect on the use of CMC by themselves or by others. The tasks I designed for 407, each had a primary focus on one or more of interaction, production and reflection, as shown in the first 6 mobile learning tasks presented in Figure 2. For example, Task 3: What makes a good Powerpoint presentation? (interaction), asked students to access an on-line stimulus and leave a comment on the Discussion Board explaining 3 things that they think a speaker needs to make a good Powerpoint presentation; they were therefore learning to collate information from on-line sources and then interact with their peers to evaluate it. Following on from this, Task 4: Create your own video on giving a good Powerpoint presentation (production) asked students to Record a short video (in English) in which they produced their own explanation on how they thought someone could give a good Powerpoint presentation. And finally, Task 6, which came at the end of a series of tasks focusing on giving presentations, Analysing a Presentation (reflection), required students to watch the award

72

winning presentation given by Mohammed Qahtani, who was the 2015 World Champion of Public Speaking, to think about how he interacted with his audience and to reflect on why they thought he was an effective presenter by referring back to their experience in completing the other related tasks.

Task 1: *Discussion board comment on informal versus formal writing*
Leave a comment on the Discussion Board and explain three things that you think are different between formal and informal writing. ***Interaction/Audience***

Task 2*: Writing reports and improving your writing*
Watch the following short video (Youtube source) and select three ideas that you think are most important in writing an effective report. Why did you choose these three? Write a short report for one of your fellow students and post your response. ***Production***
Now watch this presentation (Youtube source) and then complete the Quiz that follows at the end. ***Reflection***

Task 3*: What makes a good Powerpoint presentation?*
Leave a comment on the Discussion Board explaining 3 things that you think you need to make a good Powerpoint presentation. ***Interaction/Media Choice***

Task 4*: Create your own video on giving a good Powerpoint presentation*
Record a short video (in English) in which you explain how you think someone could give a good Powerpoint presentation. What would they need to think about? You can work on your own or with another student. ***Production/Media Choice***
Peer group feedback on Task 4 video. ***Interaction/Reflection***

Task 5*: Presenting for different audiences*
Watch the presentations by Indra Nooij & Tom Peters (Youtube sources), and write a short description of each one explaining who you think the audience is in each case and how you think that would change the way the speaker presents his or her information. ***Interaction/Production/Audience***

Task 6*: Analysing a presentation*
Watch the award winning presentation given my M. Qahtani the 2015 World Champion of Public Speaking (Youtube source). Think about how he interacts with his audience and decide why you think he is an effective presenter. Post your answer in the comment box. ***Reflection/Audience***

Figure 2. Mobile learning tasks for 407: Interaction, Production and Reflection

5. DEVELOPING COMMUNICATION SKILLS FOR BUSINESS

As discussed above, a number of researchers have discussed the fact that introducing CMC in the classroom is of particular interest in teaching ESBP, as it often involves the same type of communication skills that people need to master in the contemporary work place (Evans, 2012; Gimenez, 2014; Laborda & Litzler, 2017). Gimenez's 2014 study of the communication that takes place in UK workplaces, for instance, identifies media packaging, i.e. being able to select appropriate communication media for a given message, as one of the skills that business people need in order to be successful, as well as audience profiling, i.e.

developing the ability to evaluate and respond to different audiences (Gimenez, 2014). To try to ensure that the 407 students were also developing skills that could be useful to them in the workplace in the future, I therefore created different mobile learning tasks within the interaction, production and reflection framework that focused on how to select appropriate media in a message and/or on understanding and responding to different audiences. For example, Task 3 (What makes a good Powerpoint presentation?) and Task 4 (Create your own video on giving a good Powerpoint presentation), both focused on how best to use different media, whereas Task 5 (Presenting for different audiences), asked students to watch presentations by two prominent business leaders (Indra Nooij and Tom Peters), and then write a short description of each one explaining who they thought the audience was and how they thought that would change the way the speaker presents his or her information. Figure 2 also shows how the first six mobile learning tasks were focused on either media or audience. Figure 3 shows how the PBL project topics, mobile learning tasks, different forms of engagement and the development of specific business communication skills, related to audience and media selection, were used together to structure the project related to CSR communication.

PBL-Topic	**e-Learning tasks and engagement**	**Communication skills**
CSR Communication	**Task 15**: CSR introduction: Defining CSR **Interaction** **Task 16**: CSR & Stakeholders: Defining Stakeholder Engagement **Interaction** **Task 17**: Joyalukkas & Breast Cancer Awareness Campaigns: Analysing a set of corporate campaigns **Interaction & Production** **Task 18**: Cinepolis Sight is Born from Love in BPCQ; Reading about research on CSR communication **Interaction & Production** **Task 19**: Discussion Board on CSR; What did you learn about CSR during the project? **Reflection** Prepare Tasks 15-19 for discussion in class with your instructor; Provide a written comment for Tasks 17-19 on Schoology	Audience & Media *Differences in CSR content in campaigns indicates an understanding of* ***Audience*** *Differences in CSR form in campaigns indicates an understanding of* ***Audience and Media Selection***

Figure 3. Mobile learning, engagement and communication skills related to CSR communication

6. THE STUDENTS' EXPERIENCE

In the final week of the semester, the students completed an on-line survey to find out about their experiences during the course. The first part of the survey consisted of eight questions that asked them about their experience specifically with the on-line tasks, e.g. whether or not they enjoyed working with the tasks, and why, which tasks they enjoyed working on the most, what they felt they had learned, and which of the project topics they liked the best. Forty-one respondents completed the survey questions about the on-line tasks, which comprised 68% of the flipped classroom cohort. The second part of the survey consisted of twelve further statements and a Likert scale (ranging from Completely Disagree = 1 to Completely Agree = 5), that covered a number of different topics about 407 in general, such as whether or not they felt the course had improved their critical thinking, or their ability to view the world in a new way, or their problem solving skills. Figure 4 shows the twelve statements related to the students' learning experience that were included in this part of the survey, together with their ratings on each statement on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 was the least positive and 5 the most positive. All of the students who had taken 407 in the same semester at Zayed University were asked whether or not they agreed with these statements, which resulted in responses from a total of 202 students in 14 different classes including the 41 responses from students in my two classes who had followed the flipped version of 407. Figure 4 shows a comparison between the responses given by my flipped and mobile PBL group with the rest of the students who had followed a non-flipped traditional PBL approach.

SURVEY STATEMENTS	FLIPPED 407 GROUP (N=41)	TRADITIONAL 407 GROUP (N=161)
The course helped me to have a better understanding of the subject matter.	4.6	3.79
The assignments provided me with an opportunity to demonstrate my understanding of the course material.	4.6	3.72
The course assignments helped me to develop my skills.	4.6	3.76
The course stimulated new ways for me to think about the world.	4.6	3.8
The course helped me to evaluate the credibility of different sources.	4.5	3.85
The course improved my critical reflection skills.	4.55	3.8
The course improved my problem solving skills.	4.4	3.7
The course helped me to improve my writing skills.	4.6	3.86
I would recommend the course to others.	4.6	3.69

The overall quality of the learning experience was positive.	4.7	3.87
The course made effective use of educational technology.	4.75	3.94
The course improved my understanding of professional practices.	4.6	3.8

Figure 4. Survey topics at the end of 407 (1 = least positive, 5 = most positive)

All of the students in the flipped group who participated in the survey about the on-line tasks provided positive answers to the following questions: Did you enjoy working with the Schoology tasks?; Would you recommend using Schoology again for students in the future?; and What was your overall opinion of working with the Schoology tasks (Positive versus Negative)?. Although it may be the case that the same students that enjoyed completing the on-line tasks were also those students who completed the survey, it seems reasonable to conclude that the overall experience in working with the tasks was positive. They also reported that there were very few problems in accessing the tasks, confirming that Schoology is a reliable LMS for this type of activity and also that they had sufficient access to the Internet to work on the tasks both inside and outside the classroom; only one student reported that she had difficulty in accessing one of the URLs embedded in a task. The survey participants reported a preference for those tasks that combined Youtube clips with questions, those that provided them with questions for discussion, e.g. what makes a good presentation, and those that asked them to complete some form of analysis, e.g. analyse a presentation. They were less enthusiastic, however, about reading tasks, e.g. read an article and post a comment, or about tasks in which they were asked to watch a Powerpoint slide-pack in advance of a lesson. This would support previous studies that have found that Emirati students respond most positively to visual stimuli such as Youtube (e.g. Rapanta et al., 2014) as well as numerous reports in the press in the United Arab Emirates that Arab-speaking students are less likely to engage in reading activities when compared to their Western counterparts (e.g. "Lack of Reading," 2015).

Finally, when the students were asked to comment on whether they had learned anything new from completing the Schoology tasks, their answers confirmed the usefulness of engaging them in tasks that were related to the different processes of interaction, production and reflection. For example, the participants referred to their interaction with a task when they commented, "when I search for an information I don't forget it," and "I learned many new things and that each task let me gain more information that is interesting" (original sources). At the same time, the comments on the production of the tasks included "I believe it taught us more because we had to actually do the tasks and not just listen to what the teacher had to say so information stuck better" (original source). Finally, in terms of reflection on a task, one participant commented, "Reading other student feedback may help (in) developing your understanding of (a subject) and

76

when you compare it to your information (you) may add a little" (slightly adapted), implying that they were active participants in the Schoology discussion boards and not just passive commentators. These comments suggest that all three processes were meaningful and provided a useful contribution to the students' learning experience. In general, the students felt that the approach that I used was "a creative way of giving homework", they felt that they had "learned many new terms and learning methods", and they commented on the possibility of learning from others and completing the tasks in their own time and not according to a fixed deadline, which are two important aspects of mobile learning that have also been highlighted in previous studies (e.g. Kukulska-Hulme, Sharples, Milrad, Arnedillo-Sánchez, & Vavoula, 2009). All of the comments provided by the students were positive and indicative of a high level of motivation when they were engaged with the tasks.

In general, it was clear that the students had appreciated working with the mobile learning tasks at the beginning of each PBL topic, not only because of the flexibility that a flipped classroom approach affords, which meant that they could complete their work in their own time, but also because of the variety in the tasks available, the opportunity to learn from their peer group as part of the Discussion Board, and the fact that they considered it an enhanced environment through which to learn. They were also able to vocalize their experience in engaging in different ways with the material and they showed an understanding of how this had influenced their learning. Flipping the classroom and designing ways of familiarizing students with the material in combination with mobile learning appeared to have been both motivating and effective in terms of active student engagement.

Figure 4 shows the responses that the students gave to the statements about various aspects of 407, where the responses for the 41 flipped students have been compared with the 161 other students who were following 407 in a traditional way in the same semester (where 1 = least positive response to 5 = most positive response). In all cases, the flipped version of 407 was rated more positively than the traditional version. In several cases, there was a major difference between the flipped classes and the traditional classes. These included developing an understanding of the subject matter (4.6 for the flipped classes compared to 3.79 for the traditional classes), developing skills (4.6 compared to 3.76), developing new ways to think about the world (4.6 compared to 3.8), developing writing skills (4.6 compared to 3.86), understanding professional practices (4.6 compared to 3.8), the quality of the learning experience (4.7 compared to 3.87) and effective use of educational technology (4.75 compared to 3.94). The students in the flipped classes provided additional comments such as, "This course is helpful and teach(es) us some important points that will help us in how to communicate with others in the workplace" (slightly adapted) and "The content of the course could be applicable in the real world in terms of how to communicate with people". This was an indication that they were aware of how working with the on-line tasks had

77

allowed them to combine the development of their language and communication skills, as well as their knowledge of the business world.

7. THE INSTRUCTOR'S EXPERIENCE

Flipping 407 was a positive experience, most especially as it was apparent throughout the semester that the students responded well to the on-line tasks. However, although I knew in advance from previous research (e.g. Rapanta et al., 2014) that Emirati students are motivated by on-line activities in general, and by video stimuli in particular, it was still nerve-wracking at times; in flipping the classroom, I knew that I was also reliant on the students' willingness to complete their assigned tasks in advance of the classroom session. Clearly if some students are not prepared then the instructor needs to adapt the lesson plan quickly for them to allow them to participate, and he or she also needs to make sure that there are additional relevant assignments for those that have completed the tasks in advance. This is especially true in ESBP contexts, like 407, where the learners often have multiple levels of language proficiency, which means that they may work at different speeds. The vast majority of the students did prepare before class, however, and Schoology was extremely useful as it accurately logged all of the tasks that had been completed, so that I knew what to expect beforehand. At the beginning of the semester I routinely prepared "just in case" classroom tasks, but I generally found that these were not necessary. In addition, I also spent considerable time in planning how I would assign the tasks and the order in which I would introduce them, as I moved out of my own conventional comfort zone in which I would discuss the material first and then set homework, towards an unknown territory in which I would first set homework and then discuss the material. This was an adjustment that I felt became easier as the semester progressed as I developed new tasks and reworked my existing materials. In addition, it soon became apparent that students would not always complete the tasks in the order in which I presented them, and I eventually found that – like them – I was able to move outside of a linear mindset and accommodate a more flexible way of working.

From a pedagogical perspective, I found it extremely useful to understand that mobile learning only becomes real learning if the students are engaged in an appropriate way. The consequence of this was that I planned the tasks in advance with both a skills focus and a content focus, and in doing so I tried to improve the possibility that my students would be achieving more than just enjoying working with the technology. The responses in the survey at the end of the course would seem to indicate that some learning did take place including the development of different sets of skills and knowledge, and an awareness from the perspective of the students were that this was the case. Integrating specific work on media selection and how to respond to different audiences into the on-line tasks, in

78

particular, meant that I felt I had moved beyond simply introducing a flipped mobile approach – albeit with all the pedagogical advantages inherent in taking such an approach – towards an integrated and innovative approach to learning about different aspects of the business world at the same time as developing a new set of communication skills.

In reflecting on my experience in moving from a traditional classroom approach with conventional assignments towards a flipped approach reliant on mobile learning, I could pinpoint a number of things that I feel contributed to the success of the course. Firstly, as I had been teaching 407 for several years at the point when I decided to flip the classroom, I was already very familiar with the content of each of the projects and I had also collected an extensive range of supplementary materials, including traditional media, e.g. journal articles or newspaper articles, as well as materials that were already available on-line, such as blogs and Youtube presentations. This meant that I was able to focus on the best ways to flip the classroom, and to select some of my existing on-line sources that could underpin mobile learning, rather than needing to spend time either preparing the content or collecting additional materials from scratch. I also spent a month prior to teaching the course planning how I would adapt the existing tasks and thinking through how I would incorporate the new ones, so that once the course started I already had most of my mobile learning tasks ready to go. Like the students, I went through my own processes of interaction, production and reflection, as I flipped the course and then incorporated the mobile learning tasks into the existing PBL structure. In addition, the fact that I was already familiar with the content meant that I had more chance of being able to react on my feet in the in-class discussions with students, and I was also able to suggest additional resources to them in real time as they were completing the task.

Secondly, I knew from previous research at Zayed University (Rapanta et al., 2014) and from other previous studies (Ahmed, 2011; Schwab, 2014) that our students are tech-savvy and highly conversant with all forms of social media, and that Internet access is readily available to them; I knew that it was therefore unlikely that they would find on-line tasks difficult to access or use, as confirmed by the post-experience survey. In addition, as research with previous cohorts had shown that Emirati students particularly enjoy working with video stimuli (Rapanta et al., 2104), I could be confident that tasks that centered on Youtube presentations, or other similar materials, would be likely to be popular. This allowed me to plan a number of video-based tasks that would help the students to remain motivated during the semester and engaged in the learning process.

Finally, the fact that I had a relatively long period of time to work with the students over a sixteen week semester, as well as the fact that their classes were scheduled with one or two days between each session, meant that I also had the time to reflect and then adjust or replace any tasks that I didn't feel would be successful. I could also afford some flexibility in the course outline overall as I had time between the sessions to make changes. Had the course been of shorter

79

duration or had it been more intensive, this would have been much more difficult to manage the first time that the course was flipped; it would also have meant less time for the students to complete their on-line tasks between their classroom sessions. The Schoology log revealed that students worked with their tasks at all hours of the day and night, confirming the inherent advantage that there is in mobile learning in that it allows learners to decide for themselves when they want to work; whereas one individual may be happy to work at 10 am in the morning, others were clearly more likely to want to work at 10 pm at night. For Emirati students in general, and for female Emirati students in particular, the flexibility afforded by on-line tasks is an advantage, as they often live in extended families with numerous younger family members; if nothing else, mobile learning helps them to choose their location and a quiet time to work.

8. IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Flipping the classroom, and focusing on mobile learning, was a positive experience both for me and for my students. Because the students were already familiar with much of the business knowledge that I wanted to cover as a result of completing the mobile tasks before class, I was able to introduce more depth into the in-class discussions I held with them, as well as interacting more closely with individual students or with smaller groups. In future iterations of 407, therefore, I will be re-evaluating all of the mobile learning tasks that I developed and selecting those that I feel are most motivating for students and most likely to contribute to the process of learning.

As I work with the next cohort of 407 students, I also aim to identify new ways of working with other aspects of communication that go beyond the tasks related to audience and communication media that my students completed on 407. As Gimenez (2014) and Evans (2012) recommend, for instance, it would be useful for students to complete a set of tasks that simulate workplace CMC, and on-line tasks in a flipped teaching scenario would provide one possible way of doing this. In addition, researchers such as Rogerson-Revell (2010) and Charles and Marschan-Piekkari (2002) have underlined the need to develop teaching materials for business English that can be used simultaneously with intermediate levels of language proficiency as well as (near)-native speakers, and using a flipped approach helps to facilitate this process; while weaker students can take their time to familiarize themselves with the background materials that are needed to work on a given task, stronger students with better language skills can move at a faster pace without disrupting the lesson. This is a major advantage over a traditional pedagogical approach where the instructor generally needs to work at the pace of the weakest students.

For instructors who wish to follow the same approach, I would suggest flipping a course – or part of a course – that they have already taught in a traditional format, particularly if they also aim to incorporate mobile learning into their classes. Learning to select and use the technology as an instructor is an easier task in combination with familiar content, as is reversing the order in which the material is presented and being prepared to provide additional materials. At the same time, finding a reliable LMS that records student responses is a must, as is knowing that the students will be able to access the materials both on and off campus. Finally, it is crucial to identify the learning process associated with each task, together with the content or (business) knowledge focus in a specific task, e.g. audience, media, significance of colour etc., as well as knowing how the mobile learning tasks in general contribute to the broader themes that the course covers, e.g. intercultural communication, crisis communication, web-based communication etc. Pursuing a multidimensional approach in this way maintains the advantages associated with flipping the classroom and incorporating mobile learning, while at the same time preserving the integrity of a structured learning process. If we wish to move towards the type of integrated approach to ESBP that Zhang (2016) advocates, in which there is a focus both on business content and on language practice, my experience on 407 would suggest that mobile learning and flipping the classroom will prove to be effective pedagogical tools.

81

Acknowledgement

References

Ahmed, A. (2011, May 3). E-learning comes to 30 public schools. *The National*. Retrieved from http://www.thenational.ae/news/uae-news/education/e-learning-comes-to-30-public-schools

Bergmann, J., & Sams, A. (2012). *Flip your classroom: Reach every student in every class every day.* Eugene, OR: International Society for Technology in Education.

Brown, J. S., Collins, A., & Duguid, P. (1989). Situated cognition and the culture of learning. *Educational Researcher*, *18*(1), 32-42.

Cambridge English (2017). International language standards. *Cambridge English language assessment.* Retrieved from http://www.cambridgeenglish.org/exams/cefr/

Charles, M., & Marschan-Piekkari, R. (2002). Language training for enhanced horizontal communication: A challenge for MNCs. *Business Communication Quarterly*, *65*(2), 9-29.

Crawford Camiciottoli, B., & Bonsignori, V. (2015). The Pisa audio-visual corpus project: A multimodal approach to ESP research and teaching. *ESP Today*, *3*(2), 139-159.

Darics, E. (2015). *Digital business discourse*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Dicks, D., & Ives, C. (2008). Instructional designers at work: A study of how designers design. *Canadian Journal of Learning and Technology*, *34*(2). Retrieved from https://www.cjlt.ca/index.php/cjlt/article/view/26421/19603

Đorđević J., & Radić-Bojanić, B. (2014). Autonomy in the use of digital resources in a legal English course. *ESP Today*, *2*(1), 71-87.

Evans, S. (2012). Designing email tasks for the Business English classroom: Implications from a study of Hong Kong's key industries. *English for Specific Purposes*, *31*, 202-212. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.esp.2012.03.001

Gimenez, J. (2014). Multi-communication and the Business English class: Research meets pedagogy. *English for Specific Purposes*, *35*, 1-16. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.esp.2013.11.002

Goby, V. P., Nickerson, C., & Rapanta, C. (2016). *Managerial communication for the Arabian Gulf.* New York, NY: Business Expert Press.

Guffey, M. E., & Loewy, D. (2013). *Essentials of business communications*. Mason: South-Western CENGAGE Learning.

Hofstede, G. (2001). *Culture's consequences*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Kukulska-Hulme, A., Sharples, M., Milrad, M., Arnedillo-Sánchez, I., & Vavoula, G. (2009). Innovation in mobile learning: A European perspective. *International Journal of Mobile and Blended Learning*, *1*(1), 13-35.

Laborda, J., & Litzler, M. (2017). English for business: Student responses to language learning through social networking tools. *ESP Today*, *5*(1), 91-107. https://doi.org/10.18485/esptoday.2017.5.1.5

Lack of reading reflects in the Arab world: Mohammed. (2015, September 17). *Khaleej Times*. Retrieved from http://www.khaleejtimes.com/nation/education/lack-of-reading-reflects-in-the-arab-world-mohammed

Lam, C., & Hannah, M. (2015). Flipping the audience script. An activity that integrates research and audience analysis. *Business and Professional Communication Quarterly*, *79*, 28-53. https://doi.org/10.1177/2329490615593372

Lee, B. (2017). TELL us ESP in a flipped classroom. *Eurasia Journal of Mathematics, Science and Technology Education*, *13*(8), 4995-5007. https://doi.org/10.12973/eurasia.2017.00978a

Liu, D. (2016). The reform and innovation of English course: A coherent whole of MOOC, flipped classroom and ESP. *Procedia – Social and Behavioural Sciences*, *232*, 280-286.

Liu, Z. (2006). Print vs. electronic resources: A study of user perceptions, preferences, and use. *Information Processing & Management*, *42*, 583-592. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ipm.2004.12.002

Lockwood, J. (2017). An analysis of web-chat in an outsourced customer service account in the Philippines. *English for Specific Purposes*, *47*, 26-39.

Missildine, K., Fountain, R., Summers, L., & Gosselin, K. (2013). Flipping the classroom to improve student performance and satisfaction. *Journal of Nursing Education*, *52*, 597-599.

Nicholas, D., Rowlands, I., & Jamali, H. R. (2010). E-textbook use, information seeking behaviour and its impact: Case study business and management. *Journal of Information Science*, *36*, 263-280. doi:10.1177/0165551510363660

Nickerson, C. (2015). Unity in diversity: The view from the (UAE) classroom. *Language Teaching*, *48* (2), 235-249. doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0261444812000237

Nickerson, C., & Planken, B. (2016). *Business English.* London/New York: Routledge.

Nickerson, C., Rapanta, C., & Goby, V. P. (2016). Mobile or not? Assessing the instructional value of mobile learning. *Business Communication Quarterly*, *80*(2), 1-17. https://doi.org/10.1177/2329490616663707

82

Papadopoulos, C., & Roman, A. S. (2010, June). *Implementing an inverted classroom model in engineering statistics: Initial results*. Paper presented at the 2010 American Society for Engineering Education Annual Conference & Exposition, Louisville, KY. Retrieved from https://peer.asee.org/16768

Park, Y. (2011). A pedagogical framework for mobile learning: Categorizing educational applications of mobile technologies into four types. *The International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning*, *12*(2), 78-102.

Rapanta, C., Nickerson, C., & Goby, V. P. (2014). "Going mobile" in business communication at an Arabian Gulf university. *Business Communication Quarterly*, *77*(4), 357-375. https://doi.org/10.1177/2329490614545358

Rogerson-Revell, P. (2010). 'Can you spell that for us non-native speakers?': Accommodation strategies in international business meetings. *Journal of Business Communication*, *47*(2), 432-454.

Schwab, K. (2014). The *global competitiveness report 2014–2015: Full data edition*. Retrieved from http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GlobalCompetitivenessReport_2014-15.pdf

Sherrow, T., Lang, B., & Corbett, R. (2015). The flipped class: Experience in a university business communication course. *Business and Professional Communication Quarterly*, *79*, 207-216. https://doi.org/10.1177/2329490615614840

Stoller, F. (2006). Establishing a theoretical foundation for project-based learning in second and foreign language contexts. In G. H. Beckett, & P. C. Miller (Eds.), *Project-based second and foreign language education: Past, present, and future* (pp. 19-40). Greenwich, CT: Information Age.

Strouse, R. (2004). The changing face of content users and the impact on information providers. *Online*, *28*(5), 27-31.

Swan, M. (2012, September 24). HCT and UAE University students to learn using iPads. *The National*. Retrieved from http://www.thenational.ae/news/uae-news/education/hct-and-uae-university-students-to-learn-using-ipads

Sydow Campbell, K. (2015). Flipping to teach the conceptual foundations of successful workplace writing. *Business and Professional Communication Quarterly*, *79*, 54-67, https://doi.org/10.1177/2329490615608847

Woodrow, L. (2018). *Course design in English for specific purposes*. London/New York: Routledge.

Zhang, Z. (2007). Towards an integrated approach to teaching business English: A Chinese experience. *English for Specific Purposes*, *26*(4), 399-410.

Zhang, Z. (2016). "Somewhere in the middle is the optimal balance": A subject specialist negotiating business and language in teaching business writing. *ESP Today*, *4*(2), 145-164. https://doi.org/10.18485/esptoday.2016.4.2.1

CATHERINE NICKERSON is a professor in the College of Business at Zayed University in the United Arab Emirates. She has published widely on English for Specific Business Purposes, mostly recently the Routledge volume *Introducing Business English* (with Brigitte Planken, 2016). She is interested in the use of mobile technologies in the classroom and in the development of appropriate methods of assessment for learners of business English.