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A Case Study of the Descriptors Influencing Self-Regulated Learning in a Flipped EFL Academic writing Course

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ABSTRACT

The positive effect of flipped learning (FL) model on developing self-regulated learning (SRL) has been widely reported in academic research.

However, most previous research adopts quantitative approaches in reporting the efficacy of flipped classroom on self-regulated learning. There is also scarcity of research which investigates this impact in the context of academic writing programs in EFL settings. The present study, therefore, adopted a qualitative approach to explore the descriptors that impact self-regulated learning of EFL students enrolled in an academic writing course. The study used focus group discussions and open-ended individual interviews as data collection tools. The data was analyzed using selective coding and thematic analysis approaches. The results revealed student-related and course intensive impact on the self-regulated learning of the participants. Both groups of descriptors had further sub-descriptors which unfolded visible variations between students' perceptions and rating of the flipped classroom, and the differences in the degree to which they practiced self-regulated learning. The students found flipped class as facilitating autonomous learning, enhancing student participation, and allowing more flexibility in terms of time and content management. The results also indicated that students felt their self-regulated learning impeded because of the unavailability of adequate support, issues with the course delivery, and lack of peer interaction. The study may be useful for researchers interested in exploring the topic further as well as to those who are planning to teach a flipped class and improve the self-regulated learning of their students.

Keywords: Academic writing; case study; flipped learning; qualitative research; self-regulated learning.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Writing being a highly complex skill (Nunan, 2000) is considered crucial to academic success. For students of academic writing in EFL context and elsewhere, knowledge of the language system, language skills, rhetorical organization, text creation etc. is extremely essential for the development of discourse competence. Equally important is the knowledge of cognitive, metacognitive, and socio-cultural processes that are at work behind the creation of written discourse. In order to help students achieve writing proficiency appropriate to their discourse community, it is, therefore, important to prepare students to take responsibility of their own learning by transitioning from teacher-centered pedagogy to student-centered learning. In this context, Zimmerman (2006) expects students to harness an attitude of personal initiative, receptiveness, and practice. The role of the teacher thus transforms to that of a facilitator or moderator whose primary role is to create a learning environment whereby students start to work independently. In recent years, learner autonomy has been duly enhanced by the integration of technology in the learning processes, and as Wekerle et al. (2022) point out that by adherence to constructivist and student-centered approaches coupled with an effective feedback system, optimum level of learning outcomes can be achieved.

One of the most established frameworks for enhancing learner autonomy is embedding Self-regulated learning (SRL) in the flipped learning (FL) model which is deemed extremely relevant to creating a learning environment which facilitates student autonomy by promoting self-regulated strategies in the learning process. In this sense, flipped classroom approach is an option to create educational settings including more student-centered activities and active learning. FL model incorporates both in-class and out-of-class learning with express focus on independent learning. The traditional face-to-face and the online classes may become more interactive, collaborative, active, and autonomous for the students (Talbert, 2012).

FL is synonymous with the concept of SRL. Following Pintrich (2004), SRL can be conceptualized as students' endeavor to control the learning processes with minimum or no external support. This entails that students adhering to SRL approach develop a skillset for independent learning, whereby they are able to set their own learning objectives, identify suitable learning strategies, track their progress, and reflect upon the learning outcomes. For SRL to effectively progress, organizational skills, specifically involving time management and task management, assume greater significance as do the students' motivation and beliefs about the learning processes. From these perspectives, a study proposing to identify the descriptors which influence SRL in a Flipped Learning class seems a viable research initiative.

2. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Dilating upon the students' first-hand learning experience, the study is expected to provide useful information in regard to the understanding of descriptors that influence SRL in an FL program, especially academic writing in EFL contexts. The findings may suggest some valuable ways of designing FL course designs for academic writing from the perspective of teaching methods, and adaptation of instructional materials in

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a flipped learning environment aimed at developing the SRL strategies of the students. Equally significant is the fact that since most research on this topic adopts quantitative research paradigm, investigating students' perceptions qualitatively might unfold some further information on how the descriptors influencing SRL integrate with the FL in realizing students' learning expectations of an academic writing program. As such, the findings might interest other researchers and teachers of academic writing in EFL contexts to conduct further research on the topic and inform their teaching practices in an FL classroom.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1. Flipped learning model

With advances in the integration of technology in language teaching, the classroom dynamics have undergone substantial transformation, especially during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. The traditional classroom pedagogy has moved beyond the precincts of classroom practice to include FL which utilizes online resources for the delivery of the instructional paraphernalia. Several studies (e.g., Moos & Bonde, 2016) have reported the efficacy of FL model in terms of higher academic attainment and active learning experiences as compared with the traditional face-to-face learning systems. A logical outcome of the transition from the traditional to the FL classroom suggests a renewed focus on autonomous learning which according to Zimmerman (2000) establishes the concept of SRL. In SRL, students are set to take responsibility of their own learning. SRL and FL, therefore, intersect to ensure that the students develop adequate levels of skills required for learner autonomy, and over the time, are able to design, observe and evaluate their learning progress.

Hamdan et al. (2013) enumerate four dimensions of FL framework. First, it provides flexible learning environment so that the students can employ different self-regulation strategies according to their own pace. Secondly, there is a new learning culture where the role of the teacher is limited to that of a moderator, and the students assume responsibility of their own learning. Thirdly, the instructional content is designed to facilitate the creation of students' knowledge base through skill development and independent practice. Lastly, the teachers are expected to be adequately trained in delivering both the face-to-face and online course delivery effectively by creating a student-centered learning environment.

FL is premised on developing learner autonomy through the use of non-conventional instructional styles and resources outside of the domain of traditional classroom. As the term implies, FL is conducted both outside and inside the classroom. The out-of-class learning commonly referred to as online learning in a FL model is mostly delivered through an array of learning platforms such the Blackboard, Moodle, Google docs, YouTube, Wikis etc. (Elrayies, 2017). A variety of course content can be developed including but not restricted to videos, PowerPoint presentations, podcasts, mind-maps, reading materials etc. (Huang & Hong, 2016). On the other hand, in-class activities in the FL model are premised on the notion of active learning engagement of the students to enable them to construct knowledge and develop higher order thinking skills. Following DeLozier & Rhodes (2017), the teachers can engage

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students in attempting problem-solving tasks, completing group projects etc. Moreover, the work that is done online may also receive teacher and peer feedback in a face-to-face class. The feedback sessions may also prompt pair and group work which further enhances student autonomy by allowing them to monitor and evaluate their progress.

FL is, therefore, primed to prepare students to engage in autonomous learning. Bishop & Verleger (2013, p.5) consider a flipped class comprising of "interactive group learning activities inside the classroom, and direct computer-based individual instruction outside the classroom." This involves the use of cognitive, metacognitive and socio-constructivist perspectives on learning that engages students in peer work, collaborative effort while actively working in a problem-solving process. Cooperative learning then transforms the learning experience into a novel attempt aiming at the joint construction of knowledge and development of higher order thinking and creative skills.

Following Shih & Huang (2019), it is imperative for the students in a FL classroom to have adequate levels of SRL strategies. In a typical FL model, while online resources have been proclaimed to promote lower-level cognitive skills as enunciated in Bloom's taxonomy, the face-to-face class undertakes the development of higher-order skills based on analysis, evaluation, and critical thinking (Zainuddin and Halili, 2016). The creation of such a learning environment, especially in the context of academic writing course design, enhances self-regulation among students by raising their awareness of the efficacy of personal goal setting, personal initiative, and self-sustaining (Zimmerman & Kitsantas, 2007). Self-regulation in academic contexts implies an active use of "cognition, metacognition, motivation, and social behaviour" (Pamuk and Alagözlü, 2024 p.122). In Dornyei's (2005) terms, self-regulation is an eclectic term used by people in their effort to arbitrate their learning processes. Researchers (e.g., Dinsmore et al., 2012; Pintrich, 2004) interpret self-regulation from socio-cultural perspective highlighting the significance of the contextual specificity, and human behavior and interaction. The power pendulum in SRL thus shifts from the teacher in the traditional classroom to the student autonomy in the flipped classroom driven primarily by self-regulatory initiatives.

3.2. Self-regulated learning

The concept of SRL traces its origins in Bandura's (1991) work who understood human behavior in terms of "an interplay of self-generated and external sources of influence" (p. 249). He proposed that several other cognitive processes such as self-monitoring, goal setting, interpretive awareness, self-reaction, and emotional response synthesize to shape human belief system and behaviors, especially about the learning processes. Bandura's (1991) model later paved the way for other frameworks on SRL such as Pintrich's general framework for self-regulated learning (1991, 2000, 2004) and Zimmerman's socio-cognitive model of self-regulation (2000).

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Table 1: A few prominent SRL models (Çakıroğlu & Öztürk, 2020, p.27)

SRL Models	Phases in the model			
Winne and Hadwin (1998)	Defining the Task	Setting Goals and Planning	Enacting Tactics	Adapting Metacognition
Zimmerman (2000)	Forethought		Performance	Self-reflection
Pintrich (2000)	Forethought, Planning and Activation	Monitoring	Control	Reaction and Reflection

SRL aims at giving students the control whereby they can guide their affective makeup to shape their learning experiences (Järvelä & Järvenoja, 2011; Wolters, 2011). Zimmerman (2000) considers SRL a cyclical process involving first, a forethought stage which students use to evaluate the learning goals and objectives. The second stage, namely, the performance engages students to use self-regulation strategies in an effort to complete the tasks as well as apprise their motivation levels during this process. The third stage is based on self-reflection where students evaluate their performance in the context of the learning strategies they have applied. From their functioning mode, it can be assumed that the online sessions are mostly forethought oriented, whereas the face-to-face classes are predominantly based on performance and self-reflection stages.

The effective use of SRL strategies is an integral component of students' performance in the FL model. Both the modes are integrated and complement students' work alternatively. As referred to earlier, there are cognitive, metacognitive and behavioral facets to SRL. Cognitive aspect, as suggested by Ning and Downing (2015) requires students to specify, structure and elucidate the learning strategies. In the metacognitive stage, the students set the task, identify ways of self-evaluation in order to analyze their learning efforts. Academic study skills such as note taking, test taking and time organization are dealt with by the behavioral aspect of the SRL.

Researchers (e.g., Pintrich, 2004) have identified theoretical similarities between SRL and FL. Firstly, both emphasize autonomous learning with SRL focusing more on student motivation, learning strategies, task planning, time management, and FL involving task completion, management of learning resources etc. In addition, both require students to develop a proactive disposition for the learning processes so that they not only cope with the course pacing guide but also reflect on the efficacy of course content and their own progress. Besides, FL through its preference for formative feedback systems facilitates SRL objectives of preparing students to keep track of their progress and cogitate on the outcomes.

There are, however, certain impediments to effective harmony between SRL and FL. Both expect a certain threshold level skillset and linguistic competence from the students. Students who are new to the FL system, may have skill deficit of low levels of English language proficiency to successfully take control of their learning. Issues with time management, task comprehension, and assessment criteria may also result in low levels of student motivation and engagement and may impede the smooth processing of independent learning. Another formidable challenge may emerge from

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the course design and the associated support systems. For instance, any disparity between the course content and the allocated time may disrupt the learning outcomes expected from the FL environment. Similarly, in the absence of effective and prompt feedback systems, the students may feel disadvantaged to accurately reflect upon their progress. Equally important is the need for the students to fully understand the assessment design for the course, which otherwise may result in a learning consternation among the students. Studies such as that of Abe et al, (2018) establish the fact that student motivation is one of the most crucial variables of success in both SRL and FL oriented programs for it provides the students with a positive belief system that persuades them to take responsibility of their own learning and that too in a varied learning environment. Any component either from the SRL or FL paraphernalia such as conversancy with the online learning platforms, demanding or difficult tasks, time constraints, low levels of English language proficiency may have negative impact on students' motivation levels, and can, therefore, be detrimental to their academic achievement.

3.3. Studies on flipped and Self-regulated learning

Most of the studies report positively significant impact of FL model on the development of SRL, especially in EFL contexts. A recent study by Pamuk and Alagözlü, (2024) discovered significant variations in the writing product of students using self-regulated strategies with the experimental group showcasing a better writing quality than its counterpart – the controlled group. Another study by Samadi, Jafarigohar, Saeedi, Ganji, and Khodabandeh (2024) found flipped course instrumental in developing the self-regulation strategies of the students by positively triggering the cognitive faculty. Similarly, they observed significantly positive impact on the promotion of higher order thinking skills which aided students to make better use of the faculties of evaluation, analysis and creation. A quasi-experimental study by Öztürk and Çakıroğlu (2021) found significantly better performance in the reading, writing, speaking and writing scores of the EFL students in the experimental group taught in a flipped classroom with SRL strategies as compared with the EFL students in the controlled group who were taught in a traditional classroom environment. The study, however, did not report statistically significant variations in the listening test scores. Al-Samarraie, Shamsuddin, and Alzahrani (2019) analyzed 85 papers on the FL model and revealed that the most frequently investigated variables comprised of perceptions, motivation, learner autonomy, learning outcomes, and program efficacy; while the factors impeding FL were identified to be deficits in feedback systems, course design, time management, instructional materials, and self-discipline. Overall, the study found FL as being potentially effective approach to achieving optimum learning outcomes. In the context of EFL, Zhonggen and Guifang, (2016) observed positively significant impact on the learning achievement obtained through the flipped class work in a Business English Writing course.

There are, however, a few studies which report no or minimal impact of FL classroom on the enhancement of SRL. For instance, an experimental study by Cabi (2018) revealed that the FL model did not impact students' academic success as no significant variations were observed in the scores obtained through the control and the

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experimental group results. Another study by Caliskan (2020) also reported similar results where the post-test scores of the control and the experimental groups were not statistically significant. Similarly, Altas and Mede (2020) conducted a study on the writing course using self-regulated strategies and student motivation as a bi-scale for obtaining results and found that the flipped classroom did not statistically significantly affect SRL in the writing courses.

4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The researcher generated one main research question which was supplemented by two secondary questions.

4.1. Main research question

What are the descriptors that influence students' self-regulated learning in a flipped course on academic writing for Saudi EFL undergraduate students?

4.1.1. Secondary research questions

i. What are the student-centered descriptors that influence students' self-regulated learning in a flipped course on academic writing for Saudi EFL undergraduate students?

ii. What are the course-intensive descriptors that influence students' self-regulated learning in a flipped course on academic writing for Saudi EFL undergraduate students?

5. METHOD

The study adopted qualitative research approach in regard to designing the research plan, especially the data collection tools and data analysis procedures.

5.1. The learning context

The case study was conducted at the English Language Institute (ELI), University of Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. The ELI offers a mandatory Academic Writing Course (ELPR 220) to undergraduate students who have started the second year of their subject specialism. The FL model for this course was designed to include both face-to-face and online classes (via Blackboard) spread over 16 weeks with 3 hours weekly instruction. Face-to-face and online classes were held on alternate weeks. Although the participant students had previous experience of using Blackboard for online classes, students were given a comprehensive orientation about the FL model of this course including details about the use of Blackboard features, course outline, assessment tasks, and the course learning outcomes. The course uses a preset textbook called Effective Academic Writing (2nd edition) by Oxford University Press. Besides the hard copy, the publisher also provides students with online access to the course content as well as the supplementary materials that are designed to give additional practice. All relevant course materials were uploaded onto the relevant sections of the Blackboard. The face-to-face component was more focused on theoretical and conceptual aspects of the tasks and aimed at engaging students with the tasks critically so that they could continue both independently and collaboratively the following week on Blackboard. The course assessment design included three portfolio

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tasks (30%), a mid-term exam (30%), and the final exam (40%). Task 1 and 3 of the portfolios were essay writing assignments, while Task 2 was based on text analysis. The mid and the final examinations had Multiple-Choice Questions (MCQs) and an essay writing task.

5.2. The participants

Following Patton (2002), the selection of participants was based on the notion of purposive sampling, and more precisely homogeneous sampling. The choice for the sampling method was dictated by the fact that the participants are knowledgeable about the context and content related aspects of the study and, therefore, generate information which cannot be obtained from other sources (Maxwell, 2009). Hence, the participants for this study were 25 male all-Saudi undergraduate students aged 20-22 years enrolled in the Academic Writing (ELPR 220) course at the ELI, University of Jeddah. All students had completed 2 semesters of general English courses prior to being enrolled in this course, and all had experience of taking online classes via Blackboard. For the purpose of data collection, the students were informed that they would be invited to attend a semi-structured interview, participate in focus group discussion, and attend an individual interview. Participation was voluntary; however, all participants consented to attend the data collection events.

5.3. Data collection

The researcher used two tools for qualitative data collection (a) focus group discussions conducted before the mid-term examination; and (d) detailed individual interviews at the end of the term.

In case study research, focus groups are an effective way of eliciting information about how students perceive reality in regard to the learning experience (Stake, 2005), and in this context it entailed the effect of FL model on SRL. The focus group questions were designed to unfold how participants viewed the impact of self-regulated learning on the flipped learning framework. The questions mainly focused on Portfolio Task 1 and were based on their engagement with Unit 1, and 2 of the textbooks. The researcher was cautious in designing the questions so that all participants could voice their opinions without any inhibition. Five groups with 5 students in each were created. The discussions were completed in three sessions and were recorded with prior consent from the participants. Table 2 illustrates the focus of the questions:

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Table 2: Thematic orientation of the focus group questions.

Students' learning expectations	Applying self-regulated learning strategies	The role of the learner and the teacher
Engagement of self-regulated strategies with online content	Influences on self-regulated learning	Interaction of face-to-face and online learning

Following Yin (2011) that semi-structured interviews are one of the most effective tools of prompting participant perceptions, the researcher designed the tool.

The third data collection tool namely individual interviews premised on a) eliciting SRL strategies the students employed during the tasks, and b) exploring students' beliefs about the FL experience. The questions were loosely modelled on Pintrich (2004) framework of SRL, and the four phases (Table 3) of forethought, monitoring, control, and self-reflection guided the researcher to generate interview questions.

Table 3: Thematic orientation of the interview questions

Strategic orientation towards tasks	Resource management	Writing plan
Assuming the responsibility for learning	Commitment to self-regulated learning	Pros and cons of self-regulated learning experience
	Reflections on performance	

5.4. Data Analysis

The data collected from the research tools was put to systematic analysis integrating selective coding and thematic analysis approach. Following Yin (2011), the researcher

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premised his analysis of the results using inductive approach which employs theme-based understanding of the individual perceptions revealed in a specific context. This approach proved useful in comprehensively unfolding the extent to which student participants took FL as an effective personal learning experience, and the degree to which they felt FL facilitated the development of their SRL.

6. RESULTS

The results of the study discovered student-related and course-oriented factors that affected SRL in the FL framework.

6.1. Student-related factors

The findings revealed that variations in learning styles and attitudes, varied skill set, personal commitment and motivation, non-academic engagement, and conversancy with the FL system were the main descriptors which impacted students' SRL in the FL environment.

6.1.1. Variations in learning style and attitudes

The results revealed that there were visible differences among students' perceptions about the impact of FL models due to their learning styles and attitudes. 27% believed that FL model was more conducive to effective learning outcomes as compared with their experiences with face-to-face classes. They reported that working on their own schedule facilitated them to engage in the course content more comprehensively. 56% of students found the FL model less effective than the traditional classroom. Since they were more accustomed to face-to-face classes with frequent human interaction and teacher dependence, they found it challenging to adapt to the online mode. In addition, 12% mentioned that working with other classmates was essential to resolve any learning problems with peer support, whereas, they did not have this facility in the online learning classroom.

6.1.2. Varied skill-set

The results indicated that English being the second language for all students posed challenges in terms of task comprehension and engagement with the course content. 33% reported that they had to struggle with the task requirements while working independently. 41% found sampler texts difficult to comprehend, while 37% had difficulties in following the writing process which included developing an outline for the task, writing the first draft, and reviewing it for the final draft. However, majority of the students (77%) could not cope with the task completion as enunciated in the course pacing guide. Similarly, 34% reported distracted focus which inhibited smooth working for them.

6.1.3. Personal commitment and motivation

The findings unfolded the impact of students' personal commitment and motivation on their learning experiences. 47% of students felt less motivated in the absence of the support systems that came either from the teacher or the fellow students. 54% of students found the tasks repetitive. Comments such as "I've done narrative, descriptive and opinion writing in my previous terms. I've also done most of the grammar which is included in these units. There's nothing new except that I've to

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write longer" unveil that the course content was not positively engaging for the students. This suggests that low levels of motivation resulting from lack of challenging course content may adversely impact students' commitment to the tasks.

6.1.4. Non-academic engagement

38% of students referred to how non-academic pressures such as the travel time to campus, part-time job, and domestic issues hindered their performance, especially in relation to time management and task completion.

6.1.5. Conversancy with flipped learning

Conversancy with the FL system revealed varied patterns of effect on students' SRL. First, only 5% claimed of having a previous experience of the flipped classroom although all the participants had previously taken online classes. This meant that they had to acquire a new skillset in order to adapt to the new program. 27% of students responded negatively in regard to the learning of new skills to cope with the online mode, especially. They believed that they adhered to old learning styles while taking online classes. 35% of students, however, responded positively and referred to adapting several ways in order to perform better. These included developing time management skills, enhancing motivation, and taking responsibility of learning. 67% of students found themselves employing new strategies with online tasks, especially when doing research for the writing assignment.

6.2. Course-intensive impact on self- regulated learning

The results found course design, teacher input, instructional resources, course assessment criteria, and online learning resources as major course-intensive influences on SRL in the FL program.

6.2.1. Course design

The students also voiced their concerns about various aspects of the course design. 38% were satisfied with the course structure and felt that it was adequately designed to develop their academic writing skills. However, the majority (73%) felt disparity between the course content and the instructional time. "We only have three fifty-minute classes in a week and there's lot to complete," was a common concern. 33% argued that the assignment work was too demanding since it involved extensive independent input.

6.2.2. Teacher input

The students expressed mixed responses regarding the impact of teacher input. 52% believed that the teacher role was instrumental in enhancing the quality of learning; however, 48% found teaching ineffective, especially in providing a sound background to independent learning. Remarks such as "I failed to understand the connection between the instructions and the assignment" suggest that there were possible instructional lags, whereby students could not fully understand the task rubrics, and felt challenged while completing the writing assignment.

6.2.3. Instructional resources

Majority of the students (78%) found the instructional content challenging in terms of conceptual clarity and facilitating independent learning through online resources. They also pointed towards the English language deficit which caused problems of

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comprehension of the course content, especially when required to independently engage with the assignments. Only 12% found the course content effective for promoting independent learning. For 27% of students, the course content was more theoretical in its orientation, and they had to struggle to find alternative sources to complete the assignment.

6.2.4. Course assessment criteria

65% of students reported their inability to fully understand the assessment rubrics for the tasks, especially the writing assignments. They could not fully translate the association between the assessment descriptors and the different components of the tasks. 7% of students, however, considered the assessment standards fair and achievable. 24% raised their concerns about the marking quality of the writing tasks by the teacher, which they felt was unjustified.

6.2.5. Online learning resources

11% of students reported that they had problems accessing online resources of the publisher as well as the Blackboard. However, they felt that this did not adversely affect their work. 17% found it hard to use online resources because of the skill deficit since they were more comfortable with the traditional teaching methods.

7. DISCUSSION

Researchers like Zimmerman (1989) and Pintrich (2004) have referred to the interplay of both personal and external factors in the realization of effective SRL experience. The data analysis results for the present study revealed how student and course related factors impacted, both positively and negatively, SRL of academic writing students in a FL model. The data results were almost evenly balanced between students with adequate levels of SRL acumen and students with visible deficit in SRL abilities.

Among the student-related factors, variations in individual learning styles and attitudes were closely associated with SRL in an online environment as opposed to the face-to-face version which imposes certain restrictions on independent learning (Lage et al, 2000). The participants who claimed to be independent learners were almost half of those who expressed dependence on teacher input or peer support. This trend entails that those who are comfortable with independent learning are more motivated and self-driven in comparison with those who need constant external support. This impacts other aspects of the learning system such as engaging in reading texts, writing assignments, time management and assessment tasks. However, it cannot be assumed that the students with preference for face-to-face class are ineligible to perform better in a FL program. Controlling the variables that inhibit independent learning such as the familiarity with the Blackboard systems, English language proficiency, and task and time management skills can prepare these students to better take responsibility of their own learning.

The results refer to varied skillset of the participants that affect their SRL performance in a number of ways. The participants reported that lack of proficiency in English language impeded their learning either while attempting to understand the task requirements or reading the exemplar texts to model their writing assignment or understanding the assessment rubrics in preparation for the mid and final term

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examination. This situation calls for either a certain threshold level of language competence before being enrolled onto a course or providing additional language support which enables students with low proficiency levels to successfully cope with the course requirements. Alternatively, the course content and materials can be simplified to be aligned with the students' language proficiency levels.

Researchers report the ability to manage time as a crucial variable in SRL (Talbert, 2014). Students with poor time management skills coupled with commitments other than academics are likely to be adversely affected when set to work at their own pace. Consequently, they may show signs of demotivation. Earlier studies (e.g., Logan, Hughes, & Logan, 2015) have referred to the constraints that non-academic engagement puts on independent learning. However, frequent exposure to the FL model and some further training in time and task management can facilitate students developing a more rational and pragmatic approach to independent learning. Alternatively, course designers can make the FL program a little more flexible to allow students to make certain amendments to their study schedule in order to make it more compatible with the FL framework.

Similarly, there is the need to enhance students' conversancy with the FL model. This can be achieved by having a regular provision of the FL courses in the curriculum so that the students have frequent exposure to both the online and face-to-face modes of instruction. This will help them both internalize the different learning requirements of the flipped system, and consequently, help them better acculturate themselves in the flipped model.

Zimmerman (2000) points out to the influence of individual, attitudinal, and contextual factors in shaping SRL experiences of the students. The data analysis findings corroborate this view, and course intensive factors were also found to be impactful in their role in SRL of the academic writing students in a FL environment. Context specificity is crucial while examining these extraneous factors.

Majority of the students were critical of the course design, especially in terms of the disparity between the course content and time allocation. The situation is likely to create a gap between SRL and time and task management while students are in the online mode. On the other hand, there will be very restricted teacher and peer interaction in the face-to-face classes. As a result, one can expect ineffective feedback systems, low levels of motivation, and poor organizational skills among the students. Relevant literature on the topic recommends the presence of adequate SRL strategies and pedagogical support systems which can effectively enhance the acquisition of these strategies (Hao & Lee, 2016).

Similarly, teacher input is crucial to the successful implementation of SRL, especially in a flipped learning model. Although the basic role of the teacher in a flipped class is that of a moderator or facilitator, a large depends on how he sets up the class in terms of the instructional content, task allocation, time management, feedback provision, and assessment design. This entails that he possesses relevant experience and training in the conduct of FL and is, especially, well conversant with the integration of technology in class. Following McLaughlin et al. (2014), the teacher's role then extends beyond mere moderation to that of a resource for active learning. In this

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context, a teacher with an array of scaffolding techniques (Green, 2015) at his disposal can mitigate the program deficits such as had been referred to by the students.

Majority of the student participants voiced their dissatisfaction with the course content and materials which they considered challenging to comprehend and manage. At one level, this was due to the low levels of English language competence among most of the students; while on the other hand, content organization in terms of the tasks and assignments was more demanding than the students had actually expected, especially in the context of time allocation for task completion and submission, and mid and final exam standards. The results negate Kim et al (2014), whose study observed a much higher level of participant satisfaction with the FL model. A logical corollary of this situation may reflect in low levels of motivation among the students which may further translate as a formidable impediment to independent learning.

Students were also not satisfied with the assessment design of the course, which they believed was unclear in terms of the task requirements and assessment rubrics. Independent learning may be halted if the students do not fully understand the assessment criteria. Consequently, the students may misinterpret the task objectives and assessment criteria and may distort their task planning, learning strategies and time management at the cost grade achievement.

The use of integrated technology in a FL environment is an essential descriptor of successful independent learning. While some of the participants reported occasional breakdowns in access to the online learning platform, others referred to a more crucial aspect which may have a significant impact on independent learning, namely the skill deficit in terms of effectively using the Blackboard as a learning platform. FL courses such as in the present study should include a comprehensive orientation and training system for the students so that they can familiarize themselves with different aspects of the platform use. Besides, a vigilant monitoring system can ensure prompt support in case of any technological problem.

8. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study may be considered a successful attempt in recording and analyzing students' perceptions in regard to the development of their SRL in an FL course program on academic writing. However, the study is not without its limitations. First, the study was conducted in a specific context and studied one class participants as a research case. The findings, therefore, cannot be generalized to other contexts. Secondly, the study adapted Pintrich's (2004) framework for generating the research questions rather than forming the research questions exactly on Pintrich's MSLQ. The students' responses were matched to the framework in broader terms rather than providing a robust comparison. Thirdly, the sample was homogenous due to the contextual restrictions as male-only students could be recruited and that too from one class on the course. A study of the gender-mixed responses with a larger data set could have yielded varied results.

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9. CONCLUSION

Despite the fact that FL has been in use for over 25 years now, there is still scarcity of effort to evaluate the efficacy of this framework on the SRL. With the fast-evolving integration of technology in the educational landscape where institutions are offering more online-intensive programs, the need to restructure course design in alignment with the contemporaneous benchmarks is extremely vital for a successful FL system. Since most of the research work on FL and SRL has been quantitative in design, there is more scope for qualitative research findings which can be incorporated with the quantitative analysis to present a comprehensive overview of the current situation, and how future FL programs can be designed for achieving optimum levels of the learning outcomes. This aspect has been one of the key findings of the present study where students have reported discernible gaps between the FL model and the course design. An obvious outcome of this situation is the negative impact on the development of SRL, which if not addressed may impede effective functioning of the FL course program. For an FL course design to adequately promote SRL, it seems imperative to embed more scaffolding content in the mainstream course structure as well as train teachers so that they can effectively manage both the online and face-to-face course content. Similarly, a comprehensive orientation package on FL and SRL for the students can be included as a pre-requisite for enrolment on the course. Measures like these and more can effectively tap the rich potential of an FL environment that effectively promotes SRL of the students', especially in the higher education system.

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