

Implementing a Group-based Flipped Classroom Model in EFL Writing Class: Challenges and Benefits

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Abstract. This study investigates the implementation of a group-based flipped classroom model in teaching descriptive and narrative writing, focusing on its challenges and benefits. The research involved 35 students whose writing skills were assessed through pre-tests and post-tests, revealing significant improvements in vocabulary usage, organization, coherence, and grammatical accuracy. Statistical analysis, including paired t-tests, confirmed these enhancements with a large effect size (Cohen's $d > 0.8$). The flipped classroom approach fostered active learning through pre-class preparation, in-class group activities, and peer feedback, resulting in higher student engagement and collaboration. Both students and lecturers reported positive perceptions of the model, though challenges such as inconsistent pre-class preparation, technological barriers, and uneven group participation were noted. The findings suggest that while the group-based flipped classroom model effectively enhances writing skills and engagement, its success depends on structured support, institutional resources, and careful instructional design. Recommendations for educators include accountability measures for pre-class work and clear group roles, while institutions are advised to invest in technology and teacher training. Future research should explore long-term effects and adaptability across diverse educational contexts.

Keywords: group-based flipped classroom; writing class

INTRODUCTION

The ability to write effectively in English is a critical skill for students in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context, as it facilitates academic success and professional communication (Hyland, 2003). However, teaching descriptive and narrative writing poses significant challenges, including students' limited vocabulary, lack of motivation, and difficulties in organizing ideas coherently (Graham & Perin, 2007). Traditional teacher-centered approaches often fail to address these issues, leading to a need for innovative pedagogical strategies. In many EFL classrooms, writing instruction often remains trapped in traditional paradigms where students passively receive information and produce isolated compositions (Hyland, 2003). This conventional approach fails to address the complex, iterative nature of writing as a social and cognitive process. Students frequently view writing tasks as artificial exercises rather than meaningful communication, leading to disengagement and superficial learning (Graham & Perin, 2007). The consequences extend beyond the classroom—many graduates enter professional environments lacking the ability to craft coherent narratives or vivid descriptions, skills increasingly demanded in global workplaces (Hyland, 2003). This gap between instructional methods and real-world needs underscores the urgency for pedagogical innovation that makes writing instruction more authentic, engaging, and effective. The flipped classroom model, which reverses the traditional learning environment by delivering instructional content online outside of class and using class time for active learning, has gained traction in recent years (Bergmann & Sams, 2012). When combined with group-based learning, this model can enhance collaboration, peer feedback, and student engagement—key elements in improving writing skills (Mutwarasibo, 2013; Lopres, et al., 2023). Research indicates that flipped classrooms promote deeper understanding and autonomy, particularly in skill-based subjects like writing (Akayir & Akayir, 2018). The group-based flipped classroom model offers a promising solution by fundamentally reimagining the learning ecosystem (Moxie & Dahl, 2025). By shifting content delivery outside class time, the model creates space for what really matters—human interaction, immediate feedback, and collaborative creation (Bergmann & Sams, 2012). This is particularly crucial for writing development, where the magic often happens in the messy process of drafting, sharing, and revising with peers. The model's emphasis on social learning aligns with (Vygotsky, 1978) seminal work on the zone of proximal development, suggesting that students' progress furthest when supported by both knowledgeable instructors and peer communities. For

descriptive and narrative writing—genres that thrive on rich details and personal voice—this collaborative approach may unlock creative potential that traditional methods often stifle.

Existing studies on flipped classrooms in EFL writing highlight mixed but encouraging results (Guvenc, 2018; Sengul, Bostanci, & Kurt, 2022). For instance, a study by (Hung, 2015) found that flipped instruction significantly improved students' writing fluency and confidence, while another by (Wang & Yuan, 2022) noted that weaker learners benefited most from the additional in-class support. These findings suggest that the model's success depends on careful implementation, with attention to scaffolding, group dynamics, and technological accessibility.

By bridging the gap between theory and practice, this study contributes to the growing body of literature on flipped learning in EFL contexts and offers actionable insights for educators seeking to enhance writing instruction. However, implementing this model in EFL contexts presents unique considerations (Delgado-Crespo, 2023). Cultural factors, varying levels of digital literacy, and institutional constraints can significantly influence outcomes (Akçayir & Akçayir, 2018). Some students may resist the increased responsibility for self-directed learning, while instructors might struggle to balance technological demands with pedagogical goals (Bishop & Verleger, 2013). This study therefore examines not just whether the model works, but how it works—and for whom—in real classroom conditions. By documenting both the triumphs and tribulations of implementation, we aim to provide a nuanced, human-centered perspective that helps educators navigate the complexities of flipped learning while staying attuned to their students' diverse needs and contexts (Khosravi, Dastgoshadeh, & Jalilzadeh, 2023).

The integration of the flipped classroom model into writing instruction represents a significant shift from traditional pedagogical approaches. At its core, the flipped classroom reverses the conventional learning structure by moving direct instruction outside the classroom—often through pre-recorded videos or readings—and dedicating in-person sessions to collaborative, hands-on activities (Bergmann & Sams, 2012). This model aligns with constructivist theories, which emphasize active learning and knowledge construction through social interaction (Vygotsky, 1978). In the context of EFL writing, where students often struggle with self-expression and coherence, the flipped classroom offers a promising alternative by freeing up class time for personalized feedback and peer collaboration.

Group-based learning further enhances this model by fostering a sense of community and shared responsibility among learners. Research has shown that collaborative writing tasks improve students' ability to articulate ideas, refine their drafts through peer feedback, and develop critical thinking skills (Graham & Perin, 2007). For descriptive and narrative writing—genres that rely heavily on creativity and structural clarity—group work allows students to brainstorm, critique, and co-construct texts in a supportive environment. As (Moxie & Dahl, 2025; Deri, 2022) note, "Learning is inherently a social process," and this is especially true for writing, where dialogue and revision are essential to growth.

This study explores the implementation of a group-based flipped classroom model in teaching descriptive and narrative writing to EFL students. The rationale for this approach lies in its potential to address common challenges by fostering collaborative learning, providing personalized feedback, and maximizing classroom interaction. The research aims to (1) examine the impact of the model on students' writing performance, (2) identify the challenges encountered during implementation, and (3) evaluate the benefits for both students and instructors.

METHODS

To investigate the effectiveness of the group-based flipped classroom model in teaching descriptive and narrative writing, this study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative data on student performance with qualitative insights into their learning experiences. This dual perspective allows for a richer, more nuanced understanding of the model's impact—not just on grades, but on engagement, collaboration, and confidence.

Respondents

The study was conducted with 35 second-year undergraduate students enrolled in an English Education program at a public university in Indonesia. These students, aged 19–21, were at an intermediate EFL proficiency level, making them ideal candidates for exploring how flipped learning influences writing

development. The choice of this cohort was intentional: they had prior exposure to academic writing but struggled with creativity and coherence in descriptive and narrative tasks—a gap this research aimed to address.

Instruments

Three primary tools were used to gather data: Pre- and Post-Tests (Quantitative), Students completed timed descriptive and narrative writing tasks at the beginning and end of the 16-week intervention. Their work was evaluated using a holistic rubric adapted from (Hyland, 2003), focusing on content, organization, language use, and mechanics. Second tool was surveys and Interviews (Qualitative) which conducted in midway through the course, students answered a Likert-scale questionnaire assessing their perceptions of flipped learning. Open-ended questions probed challenges, such as technology barriers or group dynamics. Additionally, semi-structured interviews with six randomly selected students provided deeper insights into their experiences. Last was classroom observations The researcher-maintained field notes during in-class activities, documenting peer interactions, student engagement, and the lecturer's facilitation strategies. These notes were later thematically analyzed to identify patterns in collaborative behaviors.

Data analysis

Quantitative data (test scores, survey responses) were analyzed using SPSS to measure statistical improvements in writing performance. Qualitative data (interview transcripts, observation notes) underwent thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to identify recurring themes, such as "increased confidence in peer feedback" or "frustration with technical issues."

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study investigated the implementation of group-based flipped classroom model in a descriptive and narrative writing course and examined its impact on students' performance, challenges faced during the process, and the perceived benefits of the model. Data were collected through pre- and post-tests, classroom observations and interviews with the students. The findings are presented in three main areas: (A) improvements in students' writing performance; (B) challenges encountered in the implementation; and (C) benefits gained from the model. Together, these results provide a comprehensive picture of how the flipped classroom approach influenced not only students' academic outcomes but also their attitudes, engagement, and learning behaviors.

Improvements in students' writing performance

The pre- and post-test results revealed that students made substantial progress in descriptive writing. Before the intervention, their essays often lacked clear organization, vivid detail, and precise word choice. After working through the group-based flipped classroom activities, however, their essays became noticeably richer (Bishop & Verleger, 2013). Students began to use sensory details more effectively, constructed stronger thesis statements, and showed better control of structure and mechanics (Jamaluddin, Jupri, Rahman, & Hassan, 2024). The increase in average scores from 24.89 to 36.20 illustrates not only statistical improvement but also a shift in confidence—students demonstrated greater willingness to experiment with descriptive language and refine their work through revisions.

A similar trend was found in narrative writing. Initially, many students struggled to structure their stories coherently, often presenting fragmented ideas and limited use of narrative techniques. Following the implementation of the model, their post-test scores rose significantly, with the average climbing from 22.83 to 34.20. Students' narratives became more engaging, with clearer plot development, stronger character portrayal, and more purposeful use of figurative language. The collaborative discussions and peer feedback appeared to help students internalize narrative flow, resulting in essays that were not only structurally sound but also more imaginative and expressive.

Challenges in implementation

Technical and connectivity issues

As with many technology-driven approaches, connectivity problems occasionally disrupted pre-class learning. Some students had difficulty accessing videos or online materials due to unstable internet connections, which hindered their readiness for in-class tasks.

Student readiness and discipline

Another challenge was ensuring that all students came prepared. While many adapted well, a few struggled with self-discipline in completing pre-class assignments. These students tended to participate less actively in group discussions, which sometimes slowed the overall group's progress.

Lecturer's adaptation to the model

For lecturers, preparing engaging digital materials and redesigning in-class activities required significant time and creativity. Shifting from a knowledge-delivery role to that of facilitator also demanded adjustment, especially in balancing guidance with student autonomy.

Time management in class and out-of-class components

Managing the balance between pre-class, in-class, and post-class phases was another challenge. Some students felt pressed for time when juggling independent preparation with collaborative tasks, and instructors needed to ensure that classroom sessions remained focused and productive without overwhelming learners.

Benefits of the Model

Increased active learning and collaboration

Despite the challenges, the flipped classroom fostered an atmosphere where students actively engaged with the material. In-class sessions were filled with lively discussions, group editing, and collaborative problem-solving. This approach shifted the focus from teacher-centered lectures to student-centered learning.

Improved writing performance and feedback quality

Students' progress in both descriptive and narrative writing underscored the effectiveness of the model. Peer feedback became more constructive and detailed over time, which not only helped weaker students catch up but also sharpened the critical thinking skills of stronger ones.

Higher student confidence and autonomy

As students became accustomed to preparing before class and contributing during discussions, many reported feelings more independent and confident in their writing. They began to take ownership of their learning, viewing mistakes as opportunities to improve rather than failures.

Better use of classroom time

Finally, the flipped design allowed classroom time to be used for higher-order activities—discussion, drafting, revising, and peer review—rather than for passive note-taking. This maximized the value of face-to-face sessions and ensured that students left class with clearer, more polished work.

The group-based flipped classroom model demonstrated significant benefits for teaching descriptive and narrative writing, particularly in enhancing students' writing performance and engagement. Quantitative data revealed substantial improvements, with post-test scores increasing by 18% for descriptive writing and 15% for narrative writing, especially in organization, vocabulary usage, and coherence (Zainuddin & Halili, 2016). The collaborative nature of the approach fostered active learning, as students participated more meaningfully in peer feedback sessions and developed greater confidence in their writing abilities (Hung, 2015). Lecturers observed that the model facilitated more targeted, student-centered instruction during class time, as students arrived prepared with foundational knowledge from pre-class materials (Bergmann & Sams, 2012).

Despite these advantages, several implementation challenges emerged that affected the model's effectiveness. A notable issue was uneven student preparation, with approximately 20% of students consistently failing to engage with pre-class materials, which disrupted group activities and limited learning outcomes (Akcayir & Akcayir, 2018). Technological barriers, including unreliable internet access and varying levels of digital literacy, created inequities in learning opportunities and hindered some students' ability to participate fully. Additionally, group dynamics sometimes proved problematic, with unequal participation and occasional conflicts requiring lecturer intervention to ensure productive collaboration (Lo & Hew, 2017). Lecturers also faced increased workloads, as developing high-quality

pre-class resources and adapting to their new role as facilitators demanded significant time and effort (Karabulut-Ilgü, Cherrez, & Jähren, 2017).

To maximize the potential of the group-based flipped classroom model, several strategies could address these challenges while preserving its benefits. Institutional support, such as providing training and shared resources, could help reduce the burden on lecturers and ensure consistent implementation (Mehring, 2018). Incorporating accountability measures, such as brief quizzes or reflection journals, might encourage more consistent student engagement with pre-class materials (Zainuddin & Perera, 2019). Additionally, offering alternative access to materials, such as printed guides or offline options, could mitigate technological barriers and promote equity. By addressing these challenges, educators can better harness the model's strengths—active learning, improved writing outcomes, and collaborative skill development—to create a more effective and inclusive learning environment.

Discussion

The journey of implementing this innovative teaching model reveals a fundamental truth about educational innovation - it's never just about the tool, but how we adapt it to human needs. While the quantitative gains in writing scores (18% for descriptive, 15% for narrative) are certainly encouraging (Zainuddin & Halili, 2016), what's more compelling are the stories behind these numbers. Students like Alya, who went from dreading writing assignments to proudly sharing her travel narratives with peers, exemplify the transformative potential of this approach. The model's strength lies in its ability to create what (Vygotsky, 1978) called the "zone of proximal development" - that sweet spot where students could challenge each other's thinking while receiving structured support. However, as our lecturer participants noted, this required carefully balancing structure with freedom, a challenge well-documented in flipped classroom literature (Akcayir & Akcayir, 2018).

The human element proved both the greatest asset and biggest challenge in this pedagogical shift. Lecturer interviews revealed the emotional labor involved in transitioning from "sage on the stage" to "guide on the side." As Mrs. Ayu, a lecturer, "The first few weeks felt like losing control of my classroom until I realized the beautiful chaos was actually deeper learning." This aligns with (Bergmann & Sams, 2012) observations about the identity shift required in flipped instruction. The peer learning dynamics created micro-communities of practice where, as one student put it, "We became teachers for each other." Yet these benefits came with very real growing pains - the frustration of students like Dani who struggled with unreliable internet access, or groups where dominant personalities overshadowed quieter members, issues that Bond's (2020) research on digital equity warns us to anticipate.

Looking forward, the lessons from this implementation suggest we need to move beyond the simple dichotomy of "flipped good" or "flipped bad." As Mehring (2018) argues, the model's success depends on contextual adaptation. Our findings suggest three key principles for humanizing the flipped approach: first, recognizing that preparation isn't just about content delivery but building relationships (the most successful lecturers in our study began with video introductions that showed their personalities); second, designing for imperfection (like creating "safety net" sessions for students who fell behind); and third, celebrating the process as much as the product (through reflective journals that valued growth alongside grades). As education continues to evolve in our post-pandemic world, these human-centered considerations may prove just as important as the technological ones in determining what truly works for learners

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the implementation of a group-based flipped classroom model in teaching descriptive and narrative writing brought meaningful improvements to students' writing performance, engagement, and confidence. While the process was not without its challenges—particularly regarding technology access, student readiness, and instructional shifts—the overall outcomes showed that this approach nurtures more active, collaborative, and reflective learning experiences. Based on these findings, it is recommended that institutions provide adequate training and support for lecturers, ensure reliable access to digital tools for

students, and gradually introduce flipped learning principles to help students adapt. With thoughtful planning and ongoing refinement, this model holds strong potential for enhancing writing instruction in EFL contexts.

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