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A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF GRADUATE STUDIES ON FLIPPED CLASSROOMS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING IN TURKEY

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Abstract

In recent years, the flipped classroom approach has drawn attention from practitioners and researchers in English language teaching (ELT) with technological advances. However, there is no research systematically reviewing graduate studies conducted in Turkey. For this purpose, this systematic review aims to investigate graduate studies' main features and findings concerning the flipped classroom approach in the field of ELT, reveal possible benefits and challenges in the Turkish context, and make suggestions for practitioners and future research. The study examined all the master theses and doctoral dissertations (n= 32) on flipped classrooms in ELT based on Turkey's Council of Higher Education (CoHE) Theses database between 2013 and 2021. It adopted a systematic review, and qualitative content analysis was utilized as a research method. Findings revealed that there had been a growing interest in flipping English language classes in Turkey since 2014. Along with the advantages of the flipped classroom approach outnumbering the disadvantages, flipping classrooms has brought new challenges for teachers and learners. Therefore, there is still room for further research to investigate teachers' and learners' autonomy and readiness to flip at K-12 levels.

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Keywords: flipped classroom approach, English language teaching, systematic review, Turkish context

Introduction

Within the last two decades, technology has advanced over the most vital experiences of human life. Education has become one of these most critical experiences. Instruction has been enriched with technological tools in almost all educational fields, including foreign language education. Learners are supposed to aim to acquire knowledge through multi-faceted

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means by appealing to their different senses and intelligence. In this sense, blended learning as a recent approach is essential for integrating technology into education. For example, Staker and Horn (2012) define blended learning as “a formal education program with face-to-face instruction, in which a student learns at least in part through online delivery of content and instruction, with some element of student control over time, place, path and pace” (p. 3).

For the blended learning approach, flipped learning has become a critical method of applying technological instruments to in-class and out-of-class activities. Flipped learning is simply a model suggesting schoolwork at home and homework at school (Braiek & Onaiba, 2018; FLN, 2014), and it was coined by Bergman and Sams (2012), who emphasized that the teacher can allocate more time to communication in English inside and outside the classroom through the flipped model. Still, they were not the first practitioners who attempted to invert instruction. Prior to this phase, a group of teachers and researchers had applied a model in which conceptual knowledge and specific grammar points were delivered via videos and other supplementary materials before school (Long et al., 2016). However, learners and teachers need a certain level of technology integration in and out of the classroom to provide content and practice learned information.

In traditional teacher-centric instruction, students are expected to complete the activities requiring higher-order thinking skills at home. At the same time, content comprising factual and conceptual knowledge is delivered in the classroom, which requires a lower level of thinking skills (Nentl & Zietlow, 2008). In foreign language classes, this factual and conceptual knowledge delivery generally consists of grammar instruction and specific aspects of language skills which constitute the basis for comprehension and communication in the language. There are several benefits of the flipped classroom compared to a traditional classroom. For example, if out-of-class activities in a flipped classroom provide the knowledge and comprehension-based information, students might have more time for communicative activities (Temizyurek & Unlu, 2015). Moreover, flipped instruction has been reported to be more engaging and interactive among peers (Chuang et al., 2018), to have improved academic achievement (Karakurt, 2018), and to have developed positive attitudes toward self-efficacy beliefs in EFL (İyitoğlu, 2018).

The number of studies on flipped learning (named under flipped classroom and inverted classroom) is manifold. These studies have extensively been conducted on the effectiveness of flipped learning, its benefits and disadvantages, and the relationships between flipped learning and other constructs relevant to learner characteristics and classroom dynamics. Some of these concepts studied with flipped learning are learner autonomy (Kömeç, 2018), self-regulation

skills (Shyr & Chen, 2018; Tosun, 2020), attitudes and motivation towards foreign language, and flipped classroom (Girgin, 2020), foreign language anxiety (Gök, 2016). By conducting such studies, researchers aim to contribute to the efficiency of foreign language instruction. Though plenty of studies have already been present in the literature, there is still room for research on flipped learning and its effects on diverse dimensions of language learning. Significantly, the conditions in which inverted instruction takes place, and its impacts on instruction vary widely across age groups, levels of education, distinct cultures, and courses for which flipped learning is implemented.

Previous research needs to be investigated to determine which aspects of flipped methods, such as the learning process, teacher preparation, or its influence on learner motivation, should be focused on. Therefore, researchers working on flipped learning might need to review related literature to learn what exists and is missing in research. To this end, there are several review articles on flipped learning research. These articles are either systematic reviews or literature reviews recompiling studies conducted to seek explanations for the effect of flipped learning method in various fields such as math, engineering (Karabulut-Ilgü et al., 2018), nursing education (Presti, 2016), sciences (Sakar & Sagir, 2017), and on particular levels of education as in higher education (Brewer & Movahedazarhouli, 2018). As to the field of English language teaching (ELT), there is a limited number of review studies on flipped learning. For example, Zou et al. (2020) conducted a systematic review on flipped classrooms from the perspectives of theoretical foundations, learning tools and activities, and research topics and findings. In parallel with this study, Filiz and Benzet (2018) undertook a content analysis study sincerely inquiring to identify trends and patterns in flipped learning research in Turkey and abroad. With a particular focus, Tütüncü and Aksu (2018) systematically reviewed converted classroom studies in Turkish education. Studies revealed that students instructed with flipped learning are generally motivated, develop positive attitudes, and achieve more.

To the best of the authors' knowledge, there has been no detailed investigation of flipped classroom research in the Turkish context, which solely focuses on the field of ELT. In addition, considering the increasing number of graduate studies in the flipped classroom and the lack of research systematically reviewing graduate studies conducted in Turkey, this systematic review intends to investigate the main features and findings of graduate studies concerning the flipped classroom approach in the field of ELT, reveal possible benefits and challenges in the Turkish context, and make suggestions for practitioners and future research. In this paper, the answers to the following research questions will be sought:

- 1) What are the descriptive treats of graduate studies on flipped classrooms in the field of ELT in Turkey between 2013 and 2021 in terms of publication year, research type, university, research methodology, sample group, and focused language skills?
- 2) What are the main findings with regard to benefits and challenges in these graduate studies?

Methodology

This study adopted a systematic review method, "a detailed and comprehensive plan and search strategy derived a priori, intending to reduce bias by identifying, appraising, and synthesizing all relevant studies on a particular topic" (Uman, 2011, p.57). Moreover, systematic reviewing aspires "to have explicit, rigorous and accountable methods," according to Gough, Oliver, and Thomas (2017, p. 5). In addition, concerning the definition and aim of the systematic review method, this study aims to provide a detailed and allegedly unbiased review of literature in three steps by identifying relevant research, assessing them, and creating a holistic account of separate findings in the studies.

Data Collection

The first step in this process was to search for the related theses and dissertations with the terms 'flipped,' 'ELT/EFL/ESL,' 'inverted,' 'ters-yüz,' and 'ters-düz' in the database CoHE. Theses database preserves Turkey's validated and published theses and doctoral dissertations. A purposive sampling method was implemented by selecting only theses and dissertations, aiming to select "information-rich" samples (Patton, 2015, p. 546). In other words, the samples in which in-depth information can be obtained regarding the research purpose were included. The purpose of this inclusion criterion is that theses and dissertations adopt fully comprehensive approaches and aim to present a more profound understanding of a phenomenon or subject. The studies on flipped learning in English language classes in Turkey were set aside. As a result of searching and screening the database indicated above, 32 theses were identified. Furthermore, full texts of theses were reviewed for eligibility. Finally, after they were related to flipped classrooms, ELT, and the Turkish context, the studies (n=32) were included.

Data Analysis

The qualitative content analysis method was employed to analyze all the studies. The theses were meticulously examined, focusing on chosen constructs of meaning relevant to the research questions. A rigorous content analysis was performed, and each study's descriptive features and main findings were coded. The codes were categorized under themes and sub-themes in an Excel program. The codes were computed, and the frequency and percentages

were calculated. The two researchers coded 10% of the graduate study codes separately to ensure inter-rater reliability. The interrater agreement technique was calculated according to the formula “the number of agreements/ (the number of agreements + the number of disagreements) x 100” by Tawney and Gast (1984). It was .85 and demonstrated a high degree of reliability, which demonstrated that raters reached a consensus on the themes and codes of the data (Gwet, 2014). Finally, the revisions were made by either excluding some codes or assembling them with others.

Descriptive Features of Flipped Learning Studies

The first research question corresponded to the descriptive features of flipped learning/classroom studies conducted in Turkish education in ELT and the subcategories examined by publication year, study program, university, research methodology, sample group, and focused language skills. The subcategories will be handled under subtitles.

Publication Year

According to the publication year, Figure 1 shows the distribution of studies by year. As seen in Figure 1, there has been an increase in the number of flipped learning studies in the last three years in the Turkish context.

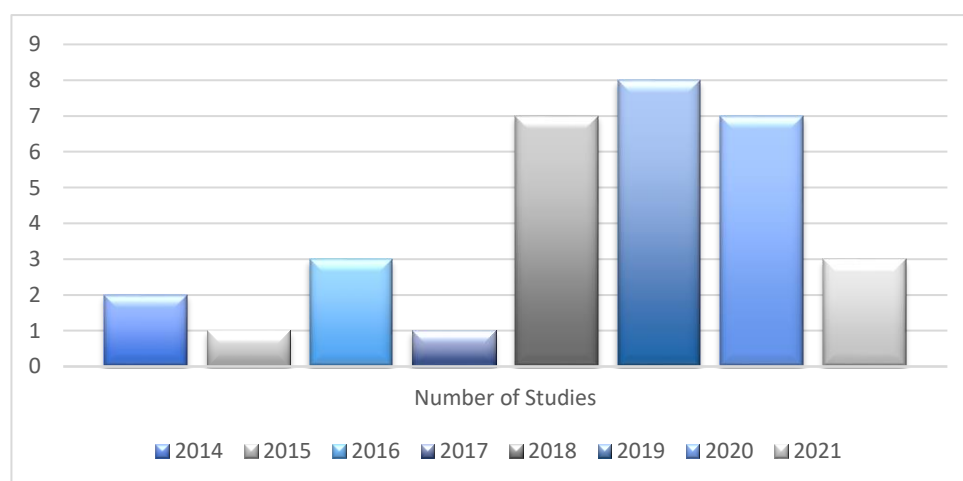


Figure 1. The distribution of studies by years

Research Type

The frequency distribution of the studies regarding their research type (thesis or doctoral dissertation) is displayed in Table 1. As seen in Table 1, the number of master's theses (78,12%) conducted in flipped classroom instruction in English language teaching is higher than the number of doctoral dissertations (21,88%).

Table 1

Frequency Distribution of The Studies According to the Study Program

Research Type	<i>f</i>	%
Master's Thesis	25	78,12
Doctoral Dissertation	7	21,88
Total	32	100

University

By the universities in which the studies were implemented, Table 2 shows that Gazi University (15,6%) was the university where the studies on flipped classroom instruction in English language teaching were most frequently conducted. It is followed by Çağ University (9,3%), Yıldız Technical University (6,2%), Middle East Technical University (6,2%), Bursa Uludağ University (6,2%), and Bahçeşehir University (6,2%). The rest of the universities publishing studies on flipped classroom research concerning English language teaching published one study at all.

Table 2

Distribution of studies regarding the institution publishing them

University	<i>f</i>	%
Gazi University	5	15,6
Çağ University	3	9,3
Bahçeşehir University	2	6,2
Bursa Uludağ University	2	6,2
Middle East Technical University	2	6,2
Yıldız Technical University	2	6,2
Abant İzzet Baysal University	1	3,5
Afyon Kocatepe University	1	3,1
Ataturk University	1	3,1
Balıkesir University	1	3,1
Bülent Ecevit University	1	3,1
Hacettepe University	1	3,1
İnönü University	1	3,1
İstanbul Sabahattin Zaim University	1	3,1
Kafkas University	1	3,1
Karabuk University	1	3,1
Kırşehir Ahi Evran University	1	3,1
Mersin University	1	3,1
Muğla Sıtkı Koçman University	1	3,1
Suleyman Demirel University	1	3,1
Ufuk University	1	3,1
Yeditepe University	1	3,1

Total	32	100
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Research Methodology

The research methodology of flipped classrooms in ELT is shown in Figure 2. The mixed-method research approach (84%) was employed most often in the studies, followed by the quantitative research approach (16%). On the other hand, the findings designated that no research preferred the qualitative approach.

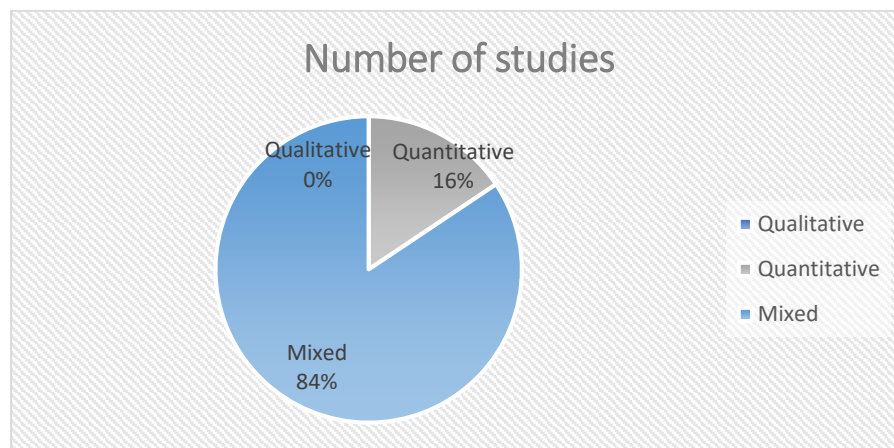


Figure 2. Types of research methods used in the studies

Sample Group

Concerning the sample groups embodied in the studies, Figure 3 presented that most of the studies were materialized with students in higher education. These participants encapsulated students at preparatory language schools and foreign language education departments. The higher education sample group is followed by the high school and middle school sample groups at lower levels. However, merely one study investigated flipped learning from English language teaching at the primary school level.

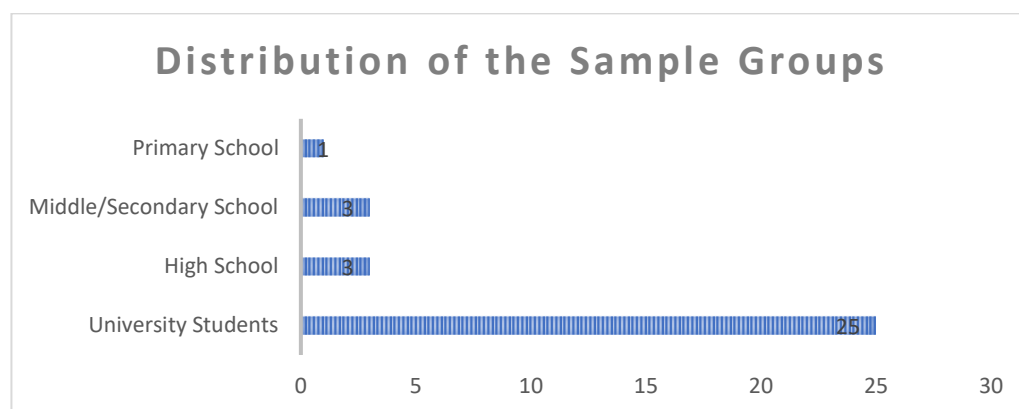


Figure 3. Distribution of the Sample Groups

Focused Language Skills

Among studies on flipped methods for English language teaching in Turkey, grammar (32%) was the most commonly explored language skill, whose effect in the flipped classroom was examined. As reflected in Figure 4, it is followed by writing skills (21%), reading skills (12%), speaking skills (16%), listening skills (9%), pronunciation (5%), and vocabulary (5%), respectively.

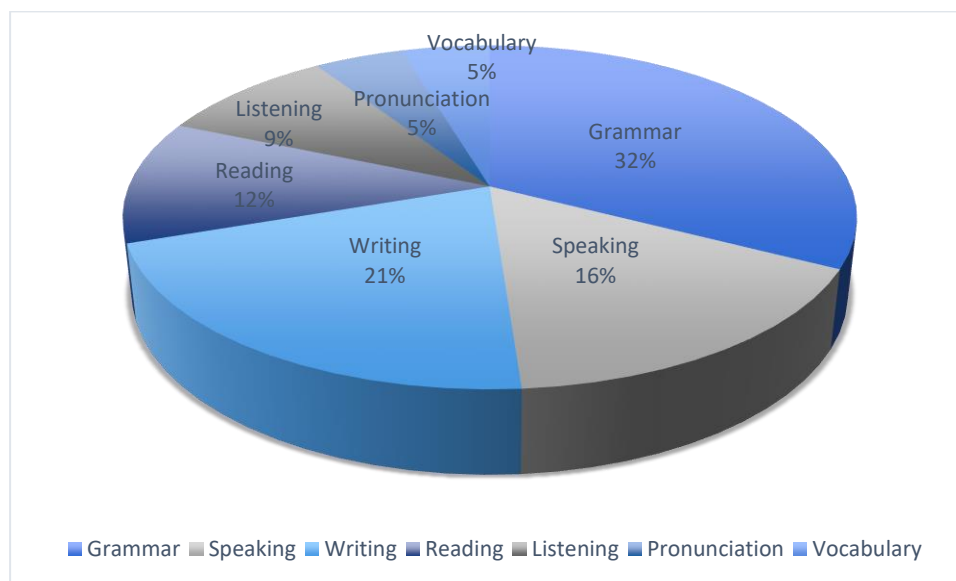


Figure 4. Most Commonly Explored Language Skills through Flipped Method

Major Findings of the Flipped Learning Studies

Benefits of Flipped Classroom

As exhibited in Table 3, the emergent codes for benefits of flipped learning method in studies were listed under eight themes: learner autonomy, fostering language skills, enhancements inside the classroom, learner perceptions, interaction, out-of-classroom, materials, and cognitive skills. According to the emerging themes, learner autonomy is essential with 40 codes. This theme is followed by fostering language skills with six codes encountered 39 times. The third most frequently discussed benefit of the flipped method is that it enhances language learners' flexible, enjoyable, and collaborative learning environment ($f=31$). What is more, in connection with the learners' point of view, the findings displayed that flipped method positively impacts learners' self-confidence, concentration, and attitudes towards English lessons ($f=29$). Additionally, the flipped approach may involve more instantaneous interaction between teachers and students ($f=24$). Therefore, it is surprising that

the benefits of flipped approach on outside activities (f=13), cognitive skills (f=11), and easy access to materials (f=10) were found at lower levels in the studies.

Table 3

Themes and Codes for Benefits of Flipped Learning

<i>Themes</i>	<i>Codes</i>	<i>f</i>
Learner autonomy (40)	self-paced learning	20
	active and autonomous learners	13
	learning by himself/herself	5
	taking one's responsibility for learning	2
Fostering language skills (39)	positive impact on grammar skills	13
	positive impact on speaking skills	8
	boosting lexical development	6
	positive impact on writing skills	5
	improvement in reading skills and strategies	4
Enhancements inside the classroom (31)	positive impact on listening skills	4
	flexible learning environment	11
	more enjoyable in-class activities	9
	positive classroom atmosphere	5
	positive views towards the course	4
Learner perceptions (29)	collaborative learning environment	2
	enhancing concentration	5
	enhancing self-confidence	12
Interaction (24)	positive attitudes towards learning English	12
	quicker interaction with the teacher	13
Out-of-Classroom (13)	increase in peer interaction	11
	having fun in out-class activities	11
	having more practice outside	2
Cognitive skills (11)	retention of knowledge/permanent learning	9
	positive impact on critical thinking skills	2
	positive impact on creativity	1
Materials (10)	ease of access to materials	10

Challenges of Flipped Classroom

Table 4 illustrates the main challenges in implementing flipped learning method. The number of challenges seemed to be lower than the benefits in general. The three themes and their codes might become real challenges to the flipped learning method; therefore, they must be handled in detail. Learner-centered problems (f=30) appeared as the first rigor in the flipped method. For example, some learners may be less proficient in using technology, get distracted by notifications and advertisements on mobile devices, ask subject-related questions to teachers immediately, and lack an appropriate place to study in dormitories. The following theme about challenges is technical problems (f=15). Applying flipped method requires an integration of technology. Although the procurement of high technology devices had been a problem by 2021, this seems to have been no longer a problem in studies generated after the Covid-19

pandemic, which obliged learners to own tablets and computers for distance education. The materials utilized by the teacher (f=14) were the last problem. Students may sometimes find before-class materials long and tedious; thus, they specified they were not interested in watching videos, which makes in-class practices difficult for them, and using discrete programs for flipped and non-flipped courses were complicated.

Table 4

The Challenges and Disadvantages of Flipped Learning Method

Themes	Codes	f
Problems with learners (30)	students' unfamiliarity with flipped learning	8
	students' having difficulty in in-class tasks when they do not watch videos	7
	increase in workload at home	6
	students' need to ask their Qs right away during lectures	4
	students' becoming distracted by other online stuff while watching videos	3
	some learners' being less technology-proficient	1
	students' not having a decent place to study	1
	students' having difficulty in reaching the materials (internet and/or device problems)	15
Technical problems (15)		
Problems with materials (14)	video lectures can be tedious and lengthy for SS	8
	problems with programs/websites	6

Discussion

The current study demonstrated that the number of studies on the flipped learning method in ELT has sharply increased in the last three years. However, it can be interpreted that the popularity and benefits of this method are blazed across the flipped research literature.

To begin with the first research question, among the descriptive features of graduate studies on flipped learning in ELT in the Turkish context, the findings of the present study displayed that the mixed research approach is the most frequently preferred one, followed by the quantitative method. This finding is in line with the studies of Turan and Akdag-Cimen (2020) and Tutuncu and Aksu (2018). By contrast, Filiz and Benzet (2018) found (detected) that most flipped learning studies in foreign language education were administered with quantitative methods, followed by mixed-method research and qualitative research, respectively.

Regarding the research type, the number of master's theses is higher than doctoral dissertations, which shows that the topic may not have been investigated thoroughly enough to

obtain a deeper understanding, and there are still many more aspects to inquire about. For instance, considering the findings of sample groups, it is clear that most flipped learning studies were implemented with students at the higher education level. Hence, plenty more studies can be conducted with K-12-level groups of English language learners. These findings reflected those of Filiz and Benzet (2018) and Akcayir and Akcayir (2018), who also reached a similar result that higher education level is the most commonly selected learner group for flipped learning research. The purpose of this preference might be attributed to the self-responsibility of the learner; in other words, the younger the sample group is, the more difficult conducting a study might be for researchers.

Another interesting finding was that grammar instruction is the most extensively investigated language instruction with the flipped learning method. With respect to this finding, grammar knowledge is delivered via online materials such as videos, podcasts, and audio recordings in the analyzed studies, while class time is utilized more for purposeful communicative activities. In contradiction with this finding, Filiz and Benzet (2018) concluded that more studies were conducted to gauge the flipped learning method's effect on teaching 'all skills' than on teaching grammar. On the other hand, Turan and Akdag-Cimen (2020) found (discovered) that speaking skill was more commonly studied than the other skills, including grammar, in the flipped learning method.

In correspondence with the second research question, the flipped learning method's benefits are manifold. The emergent themes extracted from codes are consistent with other review articles in the literature (e.g., Akcayir & Akcayir, 2018; Filiz & Benzet, 2018; Turan & Akdag-Cimen, 2020; Zou et al., 2020). The most outstanding findings of these studies in the Turkish context can be listed: fostering motivation, preparing learners for the lessons, having learners become autonomous, and having them control their learning at their own pace, enabling them to participate in and engage with the course and getting learners to have positive attitudes with the English language.

Lastly, the main challenges encountered within these studies while applying the flipped learning method were identified with ten principal codes, and these challenges are categorized under three themes. First, the initial significant problem during the implementation of this method was spotted to be related to students' having a lack of interest, autonomy, readiness, and motivation. To illustrate, they act irresponsibly by not watching videos or not studying out-of-class materials. Some researchers use Edmodo or Edpuzzle to monitor if students have done assignments. However, these learning management systems do not give sufficient data about how long students have watched the videos assigned. For example, Unsal's (2021) study used

the Academic Learning Management System (ALMS- Advancity) to check their out-of-class works and video-watching process.

Nevertheless, the fact that most of the challenges were experienced with learners suggests that more studies might focus on learners' perspectives, like learner autonomy, readiness, and motivation. In addition to learner perspectives, the findings indicated few studies on teachers' perspectives in the literature. For example, it could be more informative if further studies included teachers. Similarly, the researchers might investigate teacher autonomy, readiness, and motivation levels for the flipped method. This aspect was concluded as a research gap in flipped learning studies.

Another challenge is technical problems, comprising lack of internet access and electronic devices to study out-of-classroom. In contrast to earlier studies, however, the latest studies indicated that there had been a decrease in internet access problems. On the other hand, having electronic devices such as laptops remains a problem, which could partly be explained by the moderate economic conditions in Turkey. The last problem is with materials. Even though teachers seemed to prefer more user-friendly programs such as Edmodo, learners reported that some programs are complicated, not user-friendly, and it is difficult for them to alternate between Edmodo for a flipped course and another program for a non-flipped course. Also, they tended to find videos lengthy and tedious. Thus, all these findings suggest that more software programs can be developed to find common grounds among flipped and non-flipped courses, follow whether students have watched their videos and done their work, and produce more creative and abridged videos.

Conclusion

This paper systematically reviewed theses and dissertations focused on flipped learning research in the field of ELT in the Turkish context. The systematic review was conducted by the criteria defined in the methods section, and the studies found eligible were analyzed through content analysis. The results of this present review remarkably indicated: (1) there has been growing interest in the flipped language classrooms in Turkey recently, (2) the research method used in studies is mixed-method, (3) no single university dominates flipped method research, and (4) findings in reviewed studies are primarily in favor of flipped learning method from the perspective of both students and teachers.

This present study intended to give insight into graduate studies on flipped classroom methods in a given discipline and Turkish context. This study is critical because it is the first study systematically reviewing theses and doctoral dissertations examining flipped learning methods in the ELT context in the Turkish education system. As graduate studies aim to

produce extensive and comprehensive work, they are expected to reach enlightening results. In this sense, the findings of this review have brought to light the under-investigated areas in graduate studies and paved the way for further research.

The findings of this study possess several practical implications for ELT researchers and teachers of the English language. One of those for researchers is that there is a definite need for studies with primary and secondary school students as studies have been generated mostly with college students or high-school students. With regard to the graduate studies handled in the current review, findings are prone to be mostly student perceptions of learning language skills though they may lack tests that assess the language skills or areas taught with flipped classroom method. Results tend to rely primarily on perceptions; however, students' perceptions may differ from their actual learning, which requires further research in which meticulously designed assessment procedures are implemented to evaluate the actual effect of the flipped model. Second, studies are needed to investigate the development of students' cognitive skills such as creativity and critical thinking during language learning through flipped learning. Thus, further research should focus on these areas. Third, the flipped model might need to be investigated from both learners' and teachers' perspectives. Still, the studies seem to lack the extent to which learners and teachers are ready, competent, and motivated to implement and integrate this method into their instruction.

In sum, this review article informs readership about why flipped classroom methods can be preferred over others, what challenges the implementers can encounter, and which research topic can be combined with the flipped method in ELT. This method may grant promising results when applied in ELT as a relatively new pedagogical approach.

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