

# The flipped classroom as a learning proposal in academic contexts

## An experience in an initial group of German as an additional language

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**Abstract:** Dieser Artikel diskutiert die Potenziale des Flipped Classroom-Ansatzes (FC) für Deutsch als Zusatzsprache im akademischen Kontext. Zu diesem Zweck präsentieren wir die Erfahrungen mit einer Anfängergruppe an der Universität von São Paulo, die einige Herausforderungen darstellen, wie die mangelnde Flexibilität des Lehrbuchs und die nachlassende Motivation. Der FC befürwortet didaktische Maßnahmen, bei denen die Studierenden eine verantwortungsbewusste Haltung zu ihrem Lernprozess einnehmen und eine effektive Nutzung der Unterrichtszeit ermöglichen (Debbağ & Yildiz 2021). Basierend auf der FC-Perspektive und unter Berücksichtigung der lokalen Bedürfnisse schlagen wir die folgenden Ziele vor: (i) Erhöhung des Einsatzes von authentischem Material; (ii) Förderung von Motivation; (iii) Integration von Sprache, Kultur zur Lehrerausbildung. Es wird erwartet, dass eine Veränderung der Perspektive zu kritischer Beteiligung führen kann (Aquino & Ferreira 2023).

**Schlagwörter:** Flipped Classroom, Deutsch als Fremdsprache, Akademische Bildung



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**Abstract:** This paper discusses the potential of the flipped classroom (FC) for German as an Additional Language in an academic context. To this end, we present the author's experience with a beginner's group at the University of São Paulo, which presented some challenges, such as the lack of flexibility of the textbook's progression and the groups decrease in motivation. The FC advocates for an inversion of the didactic actions, in which students take a more responsible attitude towards their learning process, permitting an effective use of classroom time (Debbağ & Yildiz 2021). Based on the FC perspective and considering the specific local needs, this study proposes the following objectives: (i) increase the use of authentic materials; (ii) encourage motivation and participation; (iii) integrate language, culture and teacher training. We argue that changing the perspective of how classes are conducted may result in an increase of critical participation (Aquino & Ferreira 2023).

**Keywords:** flipped classroom, German as an additional language, academic context

## 1 Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The Flipped Classroom (FC) presents a teaching approach in which foundational concepts are presented outside the classroom (asynchronously) – through materials developed or assigned by the teacher– allowing face-to-face encounters to deepen the learned content in a collaborative (socially shared regulation of learning) and reflective manner. This approach presents an alternative to the traditional teaching model, as a significant portion of the learning practices occurs outside the classroom and detached from the perspective of the teacher as the sole holder of knowledge. The FC format goes beyond the development of extra-class tasks, such as homework, introducing a model that enables the transformation of learning spaces, requiring more active and conscious student participation. Teaching contexts based on the FC strongly rely on digital materials such as videos, games, podcasts, quizzes, forums, and wikis, which are usually shared on teaching platforms like Moodle, Google Classroom, among others. With the support of virtual materials, the FC allows part of the didactic work to be carried out outside the classroom, prioritizing the critical reflection on the individual learning process in the face-to-face moments (Ofugi 2016). Thus, this approach can engender new ways of conducting language classes in an academic context, based on the student's autonomy employing virtual materials of teaching and learning languages.

In an FC classroom, students are expected to make use of cooperative learning strategies, such as discussions with classmates and teachers, answering questions, reviewing content, and developing their own activities. Thus, face-to-face time should be adapted to allow for active participation, where students can assume a more confident posture in the exchange of knowledge. Inverting the traditional learning process is anticipated to shift the role of teachers from sole sources of support, thereby encouraging students to abandon their previously passive roles. At the same time, it is expected that the interface between synchronous and asynchronous environments promotes a more individualized

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<sup>1</sup> Eine Zusammenfassung des Beitrags auf Deutsch finden Sie am Ende des Beitrags.

learning, allowing students to adjust their pace and interests, for example, in the viewing of a video (pause, advance, rewind) and in testing their progress in different activities, as well as determining which strategies are most relevant for specific tasks.

Particularly in the academic context of teacher training, the FC framework entails some benefits, which include the individualization of the teaching process, the scope for experiences, materials, and teaching approaches, as well as the use of materials that extend beyond the textbook. In Brazilian Universities, the teaching of German as an additional language (GAL) is essentially based on imported materials globally designed, i.e. without local awareness (Uphoff 2009). These materials tend to present language through highly didactic and artificial discourses. Cultural issues are dealt with in a very limited range, avoiding plural issues, such as poverty, homosexuality, racism, feminism etc. (Maijala 2007; Arantes 2018). The onus involved in preparing complementary material is not disregarded, however, in the FC approach materials can be adapted from posts in social media or blogs, among other sources in the internet, allowing greater flexibility and teaching autonomy. For future teachers, such an approach allows for greater access to didactic strategies and tools, providing means for a broader perspective on language and culture. Through critical experimentation, preservice teachers may pave their own paths and reflect on different language teaching possibilities.

This praxis report aims to discuss the potential of an FC approach in GAL in a Brazilian academic context. The challenges inherent to a beginner's GAL group presented an opportunity to develop a project that encouraged autonomy through participation with use of technologies and authentic materials. Supported by the FC approach and considering the groups specific needs, the didactic activities presented in this article aim to achieve the following goals: (i) to increase the use of authentic materials and digital materials; (ii) to encourage student's autonomy, participation and motivation; and (iii) to integrate language and culture with strategies for teacher training. The group in which this approach was implemented presented some specificities: students at night classes typically have less time for work outside the classroom; the number of students (30 in total); the learning challenges that resulted in demotivation; and the lack of autonomy in searching for strategies to assist their individual learning process. Even with such obstacles, we expected that changes in the didactic proposal could result in an increase of critical participation and directed autonomy (Aquino & Ferreira 2023).

Throughout the article we present a theoretical discussion on FC in language teaching, as well as the methodology for developing and implementing the didactic proposal with FC in a GAL class at the University of São Paulo (USP). We next discuss the possibilities and challenges of the FC based on the author's field observations. To conclude, we present some reflections on the experience of working with FC in the academic context.

## 2 The Flipped Classroom

For it to be successful, it is necessary to adapt the roles associated with both teachers and students, from the selection of materials to a greater responsibility through the learning process. Digital materials

enable part of the didactic work to be carried out asynchronously, prioritizing in face-to-face encounters the discussion of the learned content, feedback sessions and reflection on individual learning procedures (Ofugi 2016). Thus, the FC inverts the order of the traditional didactic actions to expand the opportunities for discussions and participation (Schneiders 2018).

Sota (2016) argues that the FC presents several benefits for language teaching, such as favoring a more personalized learning experience by optimizing face-to-face time for competency development (metacognitive, social and emotional). According to the author, the FC supports the sense of responsibility and motivation. Like any teaching proposal, the FC also presents some challenges, such as the effort required for material preparation, knowledge about the use of digital materials, internet access, and especially, the acceptance of these methods by the students.

As mentioned earlier, for the FC to be successful it is essential for teachers to rethink the use of materials and didactic strategies to personalize activities to the students' needs. From the students' part, greater engagement with the learning process is expected, i. e. from identifying individual needs to directing efforts to complete asynchronous activities and participating in discussions during synchronous moments. Thus, we consider that, as relevant as the FC proposal may be, it is not suitable for every learning environment, and its usefulness should be evaluated by teachers and students in their local learning contexts.

Besides offering the opportunity for a more active and critical language learning,<sup>2</sup> the FC opens up a discussion about the importance of internet access and urban mobility. The new technologies have become an indispensable part in all aspects of daily life, including language learning. As a result, mixed approaches that combine traditional learning with the advantages of new educational technologies are rapidly increasing (Debbağ & Yildiz 2021). The use of technology enables students to come more prepared to class and to experience different sources of materials, such as videos, websites, blogs, apps etc. The experience with such materials is essential for the academic learning context, where in addition to learning a target language and culture, it is expected the development of critical thinking and the ability of problem solving.

According to Yough et al. (2019), the individual and learning-centered understanding of education in blended learning models enables a set of crucial skills in preservice teachers, such as the use of technology, self-regulation, active participation and peer collaboration. Therefore, the FC approach may provide future teachers with the insight in how instructional choices are connected to learning goals, displaying an ownership and creativity of their learning process. Some studies, such as Fraga & Harmon (2015) by comparing the experiences of preservice teachers in traditional and flipped environments, indicate that students present more prepared and confident after the experience in the latter. Thus, in a teacher's educational context, it is imperative that the course design is aligned with the content and student's goals, which can be achieved by flipping the classroom.

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<sup>2</sup> As it allows greater awareness about the individual process of language learning.

The following table presents a summary of the main features of FC within four central perspectives: individualized learning, participation, autonomy and critical teacher training.

Individualized learning (Sota 2016)	Students have the opportunity to decide how they would like to organize their learning process; feedback sessions
Participation (teacher and student protagonism) (Schneiders 2018)	Increased possibilities for planning materials and activities; further access to relevant content
Autonomy (Ofugi 2016)	Strategies aware of individual rhythm, materials and results.
Critical teacher training (Aquino & Oliveira 2023)	Experience with strategies, materials; space for reflection and self-regulation; collaborative learning opportunities

Table 1: Advantages of using FC in academic contexts

In learning GAL in an academic context, these aspects are particularly relevant, given that it involves a complex set of competencies, such as language and didactic knowledge, confidence, problem solving, peer interaction and self-management, essential skills for future teachers, researchers and translators. At USP, most students begin the course with little or no experience with German, while at the end of their formation they are expected to be proficient in the language at an advanced level (B2-C1), well-prepared for professional practices, mostly in teaching. Furthermore, classes tend to be crowded, especially in the introductory courses, with 30 to 50 students in *Língua Alemã* I and II.<sup>3</sup> In addition to these issues, most students, especially those in the evening group,<sup>4</sup> have full-time jobs, making extra-class participation difficult. Therefore, didactic activities must be meticulously organized to address students' needs and difficulties.

This setting tends to negatively impact the student's motivation, causing them to abandon the course or gradually reduce participation. Therefore, we considered that changes in teaching approaches and materials were imminent to allow a more student-oriented learning experience. Given the multiple possibilities of the digital technologies and to help students on their path to autonomy, we developed a proposal based on the FC approach. In the next section we introduce the structure of the program and the student's profile.

<sup>3</sup>Jupiterweb (usp.br)

<sup>4</sup> German language seminars are offered in morning (8am to 12pm) and evening (7pm to 11pm) classes.

### 3 Experience Design

In most Brazilian GAL teaching environments, imported teaching materials based on standardized European language use are prevalent. The course, German Language II (Língua Alemã II), uses the textbook *Daf Kompakt neu A2* (Braun et al. 2016). This hegemonic model, lacking linguistic and cultural diversity, offers little local social relevance and negatively impacts student motivation (Aquino & Ferreira 2023).<sup>5</sup> Consequently, despite their structured progression, these materials have lost their relevance, particularly in the university setting.

The group of this praxis report consisted of approximately 30 students with varying ages, language proficiency levels, and professional and academic goals.<sup>6</sup> Most students had no prior knowledge of German before the course. These evening classes took place three times a week with a duration of one hour and forty minutes. The docent, and author of this article, was responsible for this group since the first semester of the German course thus, having a vast experience with students' needs and difficulties. As mentioned earlier, this group presented some particular challenges, such as limited time for extracurricular activities, the difficulty of accessing individual needs and the increase in demotivation and lack of participation.

At the beginning of the semester, the docent discussed with the students those challenges and suggested the implementation of the FC model, which was presented during the first two weeks of class. In addition to encouraging the implementation of the FC proposal, the students collaborated to establish specific goals for the semester's activities, such as: (i) flexible activities and exercises (especially considering out-of-class moments); (ii) reduce focus on textbook's progression to achieve contents and tasks tailored to students' needs; (iii) provide strategies and guidance to encourage autonomy and participation; and (iv) in the synchronous sessions prioritize discussions, production tasks (particularly on grammatical topics), feedback sessions, and space for carrying out alternative projects, such as the *Meine Empfehlung* (My Recommendation). The final didactic proposal was structured as follows:

Asynchronous Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) watch video lessons created by the docent on Moodle</li> <li>(ii) answer interactive online exercises created by the docent</li> <li>(iii) prepare a flexible list (from most to less important) of Grammar and Vocabulary exercises</li> </ul>
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<sup>5</sup> Currently, the *Zeitgeist* project, which aims to develop a German textbook tailored to the local academic context in Brazil, is nearing completion and is expected to address the gap of the international materials (vgl. Wucherpfennig & Oliveira in diesem Heft).

<sup>6</sup> Die Autorin bestätigt, dass sie alle erforderlichen Einwilligungen eingeholt hat und die geltenden Datenschutzrichtlinien während ihres Arbeitsprozesses vollumfänglich respektiert hat. Sie übernimmt die persönliche Verantwortung für die Einhaltung dieser Bestimmungen.

Synchronous Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) discussion of questions and experiences, feedback sessions</li> <li>(ii) collaborative learning in small groups: discussions and talks solutions</li> <li>(iii) final discussion with the group</li> <li>(iv) other activities, such as interactive music lessons with Kahoot</li> </ul>
Non obligatory Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) text and video production to be published on Padlet</li> <li>(ii) elaboration presentations for the <i>Meine Empfehlung</i> project</li> </ul>

Table 2: structure of FC teaching activities

In the asynchronous domain, students engage in self-oriented learning by watching video lessons crafted by the docent and accessible on Moodle. Elaborated with authentic texts (not designed for teaching purposes), these exercises further reinforce their understanding through interactive online exercises designed to be both engaging and instructive. Additionally, students are encouraged to take an active role in their learning journey by preparing a flexible list, prioritizing Grammar and Vocabulary, of exercises based on individual needs. In the face-to-face moments other activities were implemented to address other linguistic and cultural themes, such as music classes using the Universities Spotify's collaborative playlist (coordinated by the docent) and competitive games like Kahoot. These materials were all prepared by the docent and adapted depending on the interests and needs of the group.

In synchronous sessions, the focus shifts to collaborative learning, where students participate in discussions to share insights, experiences, exercises and receive valuable feedback (from the docents, classmates and tutors). Small group interactions provide a platform for collective problem-solving and solution talks. The program concludes with a comprehensive final discussion involving the entire group, fostering a sense of shared learning. As an optional but incentivized component, students could partake in production activities, such as text and video for Padlet publication, and the creation of presentations for the *Meine Empfehlung*, offering an enriched and creative dimension to their language learning experience. This project was based on individual presentations about songs, texts, events, music and literature that students would like to suggest to their classmates.

This proposal aimed to reflect on new ways of teaching and learning GAL in an academic context by providing approaches and materials that were closer to the needs of the local target audience. In the next section we discuss the results of this experience.

## 4 Discussion

The FC applied to GAL in an academic context indicates several relevant experiences. Firstly, the incorporation of FC has shown potential in addressing challenges such as the rigid progression of textbooks that affects student motivation. By emphasizing asynchronous learning through video lessons and online exercises, the students were able to gain flexibility in their learning process, allowing for individualized learning paths. This approach fostered more autonomy, enabling them to take an active role by engaging with authentic materials and collaboratively discussing. Students related that they enjoyed learning about different learning strategies and materials (especially the authentic ones), which encouraged them to search for solutions beyond the proposed activities. For the students who showed interest to work as teachers in the future, the FC model has proven effective to introduce a variety of materials and didactic strategies. The activities encourage these students to reflect on their practices, when fostering a collaborative learning environment with classmates.

Despite its merits, this proposal faced some challenges. In addition to the considerable extra work for the docent, many students did not participate in the synchronous activities and were not engaged in face-to-face discussions, which had a direct impact on the success of the FC for these students. Even with an open space for debate, the docent noted that some students still prefer the traditional teaching model, in which the teacher presents the content and assigns tasks based on the textbook. Taking into account that active participation is required to the success of the FC, a lack of engagement can be even more detrimental to the students' learning process.

However, in view of the satisfaction of a large group and the final evaluation results compared to the previous semester (by docent observation and grades),<sup>7</sup> the FC has shown promising results in terms of motivation, participation and language learning process. By providing students with more agency in their learning process, this approach may encourage a sense of responsibility and autonomy, potentially mitigating demotivation.

## 5 Conclusion

The implementation of FC in the context of GAL at USP has revealed its potentials and challenges. The study aimed to enhance the language learning experience by promoting autonomy, critical thinking, and engagement through the use of digital materials and authentic materials. Despite facing obstacles such as the resistance among some students and the substantial extra workload for the docent, the FC model demonstrated promising results. The incorporation of asynchronous activities, authentic materials, and collaborative learning opportunities provided students with flexibility and autonomy in their learning paths. Moreover, the FC approach contributed to the development of essential skills for future teachers, fostering a critical reflective experience.

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<sup>7</sup> The average grade of the previous semester was 6.0 and the semester with the FC project, 7.2 (the grades go from 0 to 10).



This praxis report highlights the transformative potential of the FC approach in GAL education. By addressing students' specific needs and adapting teaching methods, educators can use digital materials to create a more dynamic, participatory, and culturally relevant language learning environment. Further research and continuous refinement of such approaches are crucial to optimizing their effectiveness and ensuring their applicability across diverse learning contexts.

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## Zusammenfassung des Beitrags auf Deutsch

Dieser Praxisbericht an der Universidade de São Paulo betont das transformative Potenzial des Flipped Classroom (FC)-Ansatzes im Bereich Deutsch als Fremdsprache (DaF). Durch die Anpassung der Lehrmethoden an die spezifischen Bedürfnisse der Studierenden und den Einsatz digitaler Materialien schaffen Dozent\*Innen eine dynamische, partizipative und kulturell relevantere Lernumgebung. Der FC-Ansatz revolutioniert den traditionellen Unterricht, indem er die Einführung neuer Inhalte durch digitale Materialien außerhalb des Unterrichts ermöglicht und die Präsenzstunden für interaktive und kooperative Aktivitäten nutzt.

Dieser Bericht zeigt, wie der FC-Ansatz im DaF-Unterricht die Motivation und das Engagement der Studierenden steigert. Die Verwendung digitaler Ressourcen ermöglicht es Dozent\*Innen, Unterrichtsinhalte auf ansprechende Weise zu präsentieren, was besonders in heterogenen Gruppen von Vorteil ist. Darüber hinaus integriert der FC-Ansatz kulturelle Relevanz in den Sprachunterricht, was zu einer effektiveren und bedeutungsvollen Lernerfahrung führt und gleichzeitig das kulturelle Bewusstsein und die kritische Reflexion der Studierenden fördert. Insgesamt bietet der FC-Ansatz eine vielversprechende Methode, um den modernen Herausforderungen des Sprachunterrichts zu begegnen und die Qualität der DaF-Bildung zu verbessern.

Die Forschungsergebnisse zeigen, dass der FC-Ansatz signifikante Verbesserungen in verschiedenen Bereichen des Sprachenlernens mit sich bringt:

1. Erhöhte Lernmotivation: Studierende berichteten von einer gesteigerten Motivation, sich aktiv am Lernprozess zu beteiligen. Die Möglichkeit, neue Inhalte im eigenen Tempo durchzugehen, reduzierte den Druck und ermöglichte eine gründlichere Auseinandersetzung mit dem Material.
2. Verbesserte Sprachkompetenz: Die Anwendung interaktiver und kooperativer Aktivitäten im Präsenzunterricht führte zu einer besseren Verinnerlichung und Anwendung der Sprachkenntnisse. Studierende konnten das Gelernte in realitätsnahen Kontexten üben, was ihre kommunikative Kompetenz deutlich stärkte.
3. Erhöhte Teilnahme und Engagement: Der Wechsel zu einem partizipativen Lernmodell führte zu einer aktiveren Teilnahme der Studierenden im Unterricht. Durch die Nutzung digitaler Ressourcen wurden vielfältige Lernstile angesprochen, was das Engagement weiter förderte.

4. Kulturelle Relevanz und Bewusstsein: Die Anpassung der Lehrmaterialien an die kulturellen Hintergründe und Interessen der Studierenden erhöhte die Relevanz des Unterrichts. Dies führte zu einem tieferen kulturellen Bewusstsein und einer kritischeren Reflexion über die eigenen und fremden Kulturen.

5. Positive Rückmeldungen: Die Dozentin berichtete von positiven Erfahrungen mit dem FC-Ansatz. Sie hob hervor, dass der Ansatz nicht nur die Lernumgebung dynamischer und interaktiver gestaltete, sondern auch die Unterrichtsvorbereitung und -durchführung flexibler und effizienter machte.

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