
**FLIPPED LEARNING IN EFL EDUCATION:
A CRITICAL INTEGRATIVE REVIEW OF OUTCOMES, BARRIERS,
AND CONDITIONS FOR EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION**

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ABSTRACT

Flipped learning has become a prominent approach in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education because it relocates direct content delivery to the individual learning space and reserves classroom time for interaction, guided practice, feedback, and higher-order language use. However, the evidence is frequently presented as a simple comparison between flipped and conventional teaching, while the conditions that explain successful or unsuccessful implementation receive less integrated attention. This critical integrative review synthesises empirical and review-based evidence published between 2015 and 2025 to examine three questions: which learning outcomes are most consistently associated with flipped EFL instruction, which barriers account for variation in results, and which enabling conditions support effective and equitable implementation. Searches were undertaken across ERIC, Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, SpringerLink, Taylor & Francis Online, SAGE Journals, and relevant citation chains. Twenty-six peer-reviewed empirical studies met the eligibility and methodological-quality criteria and were analysed through structured data extraction and thematic synthesis. Five interconnected findings emerged. Flipped instruction was generally associated with stronger behavioural, cognitive, and social engagement; increased opportunities for oral interaction and collaborative learning; improvement in selected language outcomes, particularly speaking, writing, reading, grammar, and vocabulary; greater learner autonomy and self-regulation; and substantial implementation challenges involving access, workload, pre-class preparation, instructional design, and teacher readiness. The evidence also showed that positive outcomes were conditional rather than automatic. The strongest implementations linked concise and

accessible pre-class input to purposeful in-class communication, incorporated accountability and scaffolding, monitored learner participation, and received institutional support. To translate the synthesis into practice, the review proposes the ALIGN framework: Access, Linkage, Interaction, Guidance, and Needs-sensitive monitoring. The review concludes that flipped learning should be treated as a pedagogical redesign rather than a video-delivery technique, especially in resource-constrained EFL settings.

KEYWORDS: flipped learning; EFL education; learner engagement; self-regulated learning; technology-enhanced language learning; integrative review.

1. INTRODUCTION

The expansion of digital technologies has encouraged language educators to reconsider how classroom time is organised. In a conventional English as a Foreign Language (EFL) lesson, a substantial proportion of face-to-face time may be devoted to explanation, note-taking, controlled exercises, and correction. The flipped model attempts to redistribute these activities: learners encounter introductory content before class, while classroom time is used for interaction, problem solving, collaborative tasks, feedback, and supported language production (Bergmann & Sams, 2012; Bishop & Verleger, 2013). In principle, this restructuring is attractive for language education because language development depends not only on receiving information but also on using the target language for meaningful purposes.

Flipped learning is more demanding than the simple instruction to watch a video before a lesson. The Flipped Learning Network (2014) describes a flexible learning environment, a learner-centred culture, intentional content, and a professional educator as central elements of the approach. Similarly, Abeysekera and Dawson (2015) argue that its motivational value depends on how learning activities are sequenced and how cognitive load is managed. A weak implementation may merely transfer a lecture from the classroom to a screen. A strong implementation, by contrast, creates a coherent learning cycle in which pre-class input prepares students for communicative and cognitively demanding work in class.

The approach has attracted considerable interest in EFL settings. Studies have reported improvements in engagement, speaking, listening, writing, reading, grammar, vocabulary, learner autonomy, willingness to communicate, and higher-order thinking (Hung, 2015; Chen Hsieh et al., 2017; Lee & Wallace, 2018; Amiryousefi, 2019; Samiei & Ebadi, 2021; Samadi et al., 2024). Several meta-analyses have also found an overall positive association between flipped instruction and language-learning outcomes (Shahnama et al., 2021; Vitta & Al-

Hoorie, 2023; Chen et al., 2025). These conclusions have strengthened the perception that flipped learning is an effective alternative to teacher-centred instruction.

Nevertheless, the evidence is heterogeneous. Learners do not always complete pre-class tasks; some have limited access to devices, data, or stable internet connections; teachers may face an unsustainable preparation burden; long or poorly designed videos may increase rather than reduce cognitive load; and students accustomed to teacher-led learning may initially resist the responsibility required by the model (Lo & Hew, 2017; Turan & Akdag-Cimen, 2020; Li & Li, 2022). Moreover, many studies use small convenience samples, short interventions, self-report measures, or single institutional contexts. A positive post-test result in one course therefore cannot be treated as evidence that the model will produce the same effect in every educational setting.

A further problem is the separation of outcomes from implementation conditions. Existing reviews have mapped research trends, summarised advantages and challenges, or estimated average effects (Turan & Akdag-Cimen, 2020; Shahnama et al., 2021; Vitta & Al-Hoorie, 2023). Recent evidence syntheses confirm that flipped learning can be beneficial while also demonstrating that the magnitude and direction of outcomes vary by educational level, treatment duration, location, activity design, and the way pre-class learning is checked (Chen et al., 2025). Educators therefore need more than the general conclusion that flipped learning “works.” They need an explanation of when it works, why it works, and what must be in place for it to work equitably.

This need is particularly important in South Asian and other resource-constrained EFL contexts. Unequal access, large classes, examination-oriented curricula, limited professional-development opportunities, and variation in learners’ digital readiness may influence implementation. A model developed in a well-resourced university cannot be transferred without adaptation to a setting where learners depend mainly on mobile phones, have irregular connectivity, or have had little experience with autonomous learning. The pedagogical promise of flipped learning must therefore be evaluated together with feasibility, inclusiveness, and contextual fit.

The present study addresses this need through a critical integrative review. Instead of treating achievement, engagement, autonomy, technology, and institutional conditions as separate issues, it brings them into a single analytical account. The purpose is to identify the outcomes most consistently associated with flipped EFL instruction, explain the barriers that contribute to uneven findings, and derive practical conditions for effective implementation.

Research Questions

1. What learner-engagement and language-learning outcomes are most consistently associated with flipped instruction in EFL education?
2. What learner-related, technological, pedagogical, and institutional barriers explain variation in the effectiveness of flipped EFL instruction?
3. What conditions support effective, sustainable, and equitable implementation, particularly in resource-constrained educational contexts?

Contribution of the Review

The review makes three contributions. First, it separates frequently reported benefits from the methodological limits of the evidence. Second, it interprets outcomes together with the conditions under which they were produced. Third, it converts the synthesis into the ALIGN implementation framework, which offers a concise set of design principles for teachers, curriculum developers, and institutions. The framework is not presented as a universal formula; rather, it is a practical interpretation of recurring evidence across the reviewed studies.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Review Design

A critical integrative review design was adopted. Integrative reviews are appropriate when a field contains quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods studies and when the purpose is to compare findings, examine methodological diversity, and generate a conceptual interpretation rather than calculate a single pooled effect (Whittemore & Knafl, 2005; Torraco, 2016). This design was selected because research on flipped EFL instruction includes quasi-experiments, case studies, surveys, interviews, learning analytics, and mixed-methods investigations.

The review used a transparent search, screening, extraction, appraisal, and synthesis process. It did not reproduce a meta-analysis because several recent meta-analyses already estimate average effects (Shahnama et al., 2021; Vitta & Al-Hoorie, 2023; Chen et al., 2025). Instead, the present review examined how outcomes interact with implementation conditions and contextual constraints. The analysis therefore prioritised explanatory synthesis over statistical aggregation.

Search Strategy

The search was completed in June 2026 and covered publications from January 2015 to December 2025. The date range captures the period in which flipped learning became

established in technology-enhanced language education while allowing the review to include the most recent evidence available at the time of writing. Searches were conducted in ERIC, Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, SpringerLink, Taylor & Francis Online, and SAGE Journals. Reference lists of major reviews and meta-analyses were also examined to identify eligible empirical studies.

Search combinations included: (“flipped classroom” OR “flipped learning” OR “inverted classroom”) AND (“English as a foreign language” OR EFL OR ESL OR “second language”) AND (achievement OR speaking OR writing OR reading OR listening OR grammar OR vocabulary OR engagement OR autonomy OR “self-regulated learning” OR barriers OR implementation). Searches were supplemented by combinations involving “teacher readiness,” “pre-class preparation,” “learner engagement,” “digital access,” and “institutional support.”

Google Scholar and publisher platforms produce dynamic result totals that vary over time and according to indexing. Raw hit counts were therefore not treated as reproducible evidence. Instead, methodological transparency was established by documenting the final analytical corpus, inclusion criteria, search terms, and study characteristics. Every empirical study included in the synthesis is listed in Appendix A.

Table1. Eligibility criteria.

Criterion	Included	Excluded
Population/context	Learners studying English as a foreign or second language in school, university, language-institute, or comparable educational settings.	Studies unrelated to language education or focused only on a non-English target language.
Intervention	A clearly described flipped or inverted instructional model with pre-class input and active in-class learning.	Online learning, blended learning, or video use without a genuine reorganisation of pre-class and in-class activity.
Criterion	Included	Excluded
Evidence	Peer-reviewed empirical research reporting learning outcomes, engagement, perceptions, implementation barriers, or enabling conditions.	Editorials, commentaries, conference abstracts, unpublished dissertations, and papers with insufficient outcome evidence.
Time/language	Published in English from 2015 to 2025.	Published outside the period, except seminal conceptual and methodological sources used for background.
Methodological clarity	Clear participants/context, intervention, data sources, analytical procedure, and evidence-linked conclusions.	Reports lacking sufficient information to assess how claims were produced.

Study Selection and Analytical Corpus

Screening was conducted in three stages. Titles and abstracts were first examined for relevance to flipped English-language instruction. Potentially eligible papers were then assessed in full against the criteria in Table 1. Finally, studies were appraised for methodological clarity and relevance to the review questions. Twenty-six empirical studies were retained as the core analytical corpus. Review articles, meta-analyses, and seminal conceptual sources were used to position and interpret the empirical findings but were not coded as primary studies.

The final corpus represented multiple EFL contexts, including Taiwan, China, South Korea, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq, Turkey, Indonesia, and other Asian settings. University learners were the most common population, although secondary-school and language-institute learners were also represented. Studies addressed speaking, listening, writing, reading, grammar, vocabulary, engagement, autonomy, self-regulation, and higher-order thinking. This variation enabled comparison across outcomes while also revealing a strong concentration of evidence in tertiary education.

Quality Appraisal

Each empirical paper was appraised using five criteria adapted for educational review research:

(1) clarity of the educational context and participant characteristics; (2) adequacy of the intervention description; (3) appropriateness and transparency of the data-collection methods; (4) clarity of the analytical procedure; and (5) alignment between evidence and conclusions. Each criterion was rated 0 (not evident), 1 (partly evident), or 2 (clearly evident). Studies scoring below 5 out of 10 were excluded. The appraisal was used to moderate interpretation rather than to treat all designs as directly equivalent. For example, a well-described qualitative case study could provide strong evidence about implementation experience but could not establish comparative achievement effects.

Table 2. Quality-appraisal dimensions.

Dimension	Question applied	Purpose in synthesis
Context and participants	Are setting, level, sample, and relevant learner characteristics described?	Supports judgement of transferability.
Intervention clarity	Are pre-class, in-class, duration, technology, and teacher roles sufficiently explained?	Distinguishes a genuine pedagogical flip from video supplementation.
Data quality	Are instruments, measures, or qualitative data sources appropriate and transparent?	Assesses confidence in reported outcomes.
Analysis	Is the analytical process suitable for the	Reduces reliance on unsupported

	research design and clearly reported?	interpretation.
Evidence-conclusion fit	Are conclusions proportionate to the design and findings?	Prevents causal overstatement and overgeneralisation.

Data Extraction and Thematic Synthesis

A structured review matrix was used to record the country and educational level, sample and research design, target language skill or construct, pre-class and in-class activities, technology used, reported outcomes, implementation barriers, enabling conditions, and methodological limitations. The matrix allowed the same questions to be asked of each paper and reduced the risk of selecting only favourable findings.

The findings were synthesised using thematic analysis. Following the logic of Braun and Clarke (2006), the process involved repeated familiarisation with study findings, initial coding, comparison of codes, development of candidate themes, review of theme boundaries, and final definition of the themes. Codes such as “more speaking time,” “repeatable input,” “video length,” “non-completion,” “peer interaction,” “teacher workload,” and “technical access” were first recorded separately. They were then grouped into broader explanatory categories. Contradictory or null findings were retained rather than removed.

Five themes were developed: (1) engagement and participation; (2) language-learning outcomes; (3) learner autonomy, self-regulation, and higher-order thinking; (4) technological and pedagogical barriers; and (5) teacher and institutional enabling conditions. A final cross-theme analysis examined why the same approach produced different results across settings.

Ethical Considerations

The review analysed published research and did not involve direct participation by human subjects. Formal ethical approval was therefore not required. Academic integrity was addressed through source attribution, faithful representation of study findings, and explicit acknowledgement of the limitations of the review process.

3. RESULTS

Characteristics of the Evidence Base

The evidence base was diverse in outcome focus but uneven in context and design. University EFL courses were dominant, and many studies were conducted in Asian educational settings. Quasi-experimental and mixed-methods designs were common. Sample sizes were generally modest, interventions were often limited to a single course or semester, and learner perceptions were frequently used alongside achievement tests. These features

make the evidence useful for identifying recurring patterns but require caution when generalising to other institutions, age groups, and resource conditions.

The studies also varied considerably in what they called a flipped classroom. In stronger designs, learners completed short and structured pre-class tasks, readiness was checked, and classroom time was devoted to interaction or application. In weaker designs, the intervention was described mainly as access to videos before class, with limited explanation of how pre-class and in-class learning were connected. This variation is central to interpreting the results: the label “flipped classroom” did not represent a single, uniform treatment.

Table3. Thematic synthesis of the evidence.

Theme	Recurring evidence	Important qualifications	Representative studies
Engagement and participation	More preparation, classroom talk, peer collaboration, question-asking, and behavioural/cognitive engagement.	Emotional engagement is less consistent; participation declines when preparation is burdensome or unmonitored.	Hung (2015); Chen Hsieh et al. (2017); Amiryousefi (2019); Li and Li (2022)
Theme	Recurring evidence	Important qualifications	Representative studies
Language outcomes	Positive gains reported in speaking, writing, reading, grammar, vocabulary, and listening-related performance.	Effects vary by skill, design, duration, and assessment; short interventions and small samples limit generalisation.	Al-Harbi and Alshumaimeri (2016); Lee and Wallace (2018); Samiei and Ebadi (2021); Öztürk and Çakıroğlu (2021)
Autonomy and self-regulation	Self-paced review, responsibility, planning, and higher-order activity can be strengthened.	Autonomy is not automatic; unprepared learners require orientation, prompts, and accountability.	Zainuddin and Perera (2019); Zhao and Li (2021); Samiei et al. (2024)
Implementation barriers	Access problems, long videos, workload, non-completion, technical difficulty, and resistance to unfamiliar roles.	Barriers are distributed unequally and may widen participation gaps.	Lo and Hew (2017); Turan and Akdag-Cimen (2020); Li and Li (2022)
Enabling conditions	Concise input, direct link to class tasks, teacher presence, feedback, scaffolding, institutional support, and monitoring.	Technology is an enabling tool, not the core pedagogy; design quality is decisive.	Wu et al. (2017); Öztürk and Çakıroğlu (2021); Fathi et al. (2023)

Theme1:EnhancedEngagementandClassroomParticipation

The most consistent advantage in the reviewed literature was the reallocation of classroom time from explanation to activity. Hung (2015) reported that EFL learners in a flipped course demonstrated more active participation and positive learning experience than learners in a conventional format.Chen Hsieh et al. (2017) similarly found that pre-class preparation supported oral participation and interaction. When foundational explanations were encountered before class, students entered the lesson with greater familiarity and could devote more time to communicative use of English.

Engagement was not limited to attendance or visible participation. Amir yousefi (2019) found that learners in flipped listening and speaking classes invested more effort in the content and reported greater confidence and willingness to communicate. Li and Li (2022) examined engagement as a multidimensional construct and found stronger behavioural, cognitive, and social engagement in the flipped class. However, the difference in emotional engagement was not statistically significant. This distinction is important: students may participate more and think more deeply without necessarily experiencing uniformly positive emotions.

Collaborative design was another recurring influence. Wu et al. (2017) showed how an online learning community could extend oral practice beyond the physical lesson and support in-class communication. Zhao and Li (2021) emphasised the importance of peer collaboration during pre-class learning rather than treating preparation as an isolated individual activity. These findings indicate that the value of flipping comes from a wider interactional environment, not merely from moving content online.

The evidence also identified a threshold condition: preparation must be manageable and purposeful. When students perceived pre-class tasks as lengthy, repetitive, or unrelated to the lesson, participation weakened. Li and Li (2022) reported excessive workload, lack of preparedness, long videos, and technical challenges as negative influences. Therefore, increased engagement should be interpreted as an outcome of coherent design and supported participation, not as an automatic effect of the flipped label.

Theme2: Improvement in Language-Learning Outcomes

Across the corpus, flipped instruction was associated with improvement in several language domains. Al-Harbi and Alshumaimeri (2016) reported stronger grammar performance and favourable attitudes among Saudi secondary-school learners. Karimi and Hamzavi (2017) found gains in reading comprehension, while Hashemi Fardnia et al. (2018) also reported improvement in reading. Samiei and

Ebadi (2021) extended this evidence by showing positive results for inferential reading comprehension, including delayed-post-test performance in a WebQuest-based flipped environment.

Writing was another well-represented area. Afrilyasanti et al. (2016), Ekmekci (2017), Lee and Wallace (2018), and Qader and Yalcin Arslan (2019) reported positive development in writing performance or learner perceptions of writing instruction. Fathi et al. (2023) found that a collaborative flipped-writing course using video clips supported both writing development and motivation. These studies suggest that pre-class exposure can create additional classroom time for drafting, feedback, revision, and peer collaboration—processes that are difficult to accommodate when class time is dominated by explanation.

Speaking and oral interaction also benefited in several contexts. Chen Hsieh et al. (2017), Amiryousefi (2019), and Yeşilçınar (2019) reported positive results for speaking-related performance, participation, or confidence. Wu et al. (2017) linked online community activity with oral proficiency, and Lin and Hwang (2018) used learning analytics to examine factors affecting oral performance. In these studies, the mechanism was not video exposure itself; it was the increased availability of guided speaking time, peer exchange, and teacher feedback. The pattern is positive but not uniform. Öztürk and Çakıroğlu (2021) found that self-regulated-learning supports within a flipped course benefited speaking, reading, writing, and grammar, but not listening to the same degree. Webb and Doman (2016) also demonstrated that gains in ESL/EFL settings vary according to the outcome examined. Meta-analytic evidence supports an overall positive effect while identifying moderators such as educational level, location, duration, classroom activity, and checks on pre-class comprehension (Shahnama et al., 2021; Vitta & Al-Hoorie, 2023; Chen et al., 2025). Consequently, it is more accurate to conclude that flipped learning can create favourable conditions for language development than to claim that it guarantees improvement in every skill.

Theme3: Learner Autonomy, Self-Regulation, and Higher-Order Thinking

Flipped learning changes the distribution of responsibility between teacher and learner. Students are expected to plan when and how they engage with pre-class content, identify areas of difficulty, and arrive prepared to apply knowledge. Zainuddin (2017) found that first-year learners valued the flexibility of the model, while Zainuddin and Perera (2019) linked flipped learning with competence, autonomy, and relatedness. The ability to pause, repeat, and revisit content was particularly useful for learners who required more processing time.

However, the reviewed evidence rejects the assumption that providing digital materials automatically produces autonomous learners. Adnan (2017) showed that students' perceptions of flipped learning can include hesitation and practical concern. Learners who have developed through strongly teacher-centred systems may not possess the time-management, monitoring, or help-seeking strategies required for independent preparation. In such cases, the demand for autonomy may initially function as a barrier.

The most convincing results occurred when self-regulation was explicitly supported. Öztürk and Çakıroğlu (2021) designed the flipped environment around self-regulated-learning strategies

and found stronger development across several language skills. Samadi et al. (2024) reported improvement in cognitive self-regulation and higher-order thinking, including analysing, evaluating, and creating. These findings imply that self-regulation should be taught through prompts, schedules, progress checks, reflection, and structured choices rather than treated as a learner characteristic that already exists.

Higher-order thinking was facilitated when pre-class content released classroom time for interpretation, evaluation, problem solving, and production. Alsowat (2016) reported positive findings

for higher-order thinking, engagement, and satisfaction. Samiei and Ebadi (2021) showed that inferential reading benefited from a design that required learners to connect explicit information with implicit meaning. Thus, the flipped model is most pedagogically valuable when it changes the cognitive level of classroom activity, not merely the location in which explanation occurs.

Theme4: Technological and Pedagogical Barriers

The first barrier concerns access. Flipped learning often assumes that learners possess a suitable device, sufficient data, stable connectivity, a quiet study environment, and enough discretionary time to complete tasks. These resources are unevenly distributed. Lo and Hew (2017) identify access and technical difficulty as recurring challenges, and similar concerns appear in EFL studies in which learners experienced connectivity problems or platform-related obstacles. In low-resource contexts, a technically sophisticated design may therefore exclude the students who most need instructional support.

The second barrier is pre-class non-completion. A lesson designed around prior preparation becomes difficult when a substantial group arrives unprepared. Teachers may repeat the online content, which removes the time intended for active learning, or proceed with the

planned activity, which leaves unprepared students behind. The studies indicate that non-completion is not always simple unwillingness. It may result from unclear expectations, excessive workload, inaccessible materials, weak perceived relevance, low digital confidence, or competing responsibilities.

The third barrier is cognitive and instructional design. Long recordings, dense slides, unstructured reading, and multiple platforms can overload learners. Pre-class content that is disconnected from classroom activity is quickly perceived as additional homework. Li and Li (2022) found that lengthy videos and workload reduced engagement. The quality of sequencing—what learners do before class, how readiness is checked, and how the content is used during class—is therefore more important than the quantity of digital material.

The fourth barrier is teacher workload and readiness. Developing videos, quizzes, instructions, classroom tasks, and feedback procedures requires substantial time, especially during initial implementation. Teachers also need skill in instructional design, digital communication, classroom facilitation, and learning analytics. Turan and Akdag-Cimen (2020) found that teacher-related and technological challenges recur across English-language flipped studies. Without professional development and reusable institutional resources, the model may be difficult to sustain.

Finally, pedagogical culture can create resistance. Learners may interpret reduced lecturer roles as reduced teaching, while teachers may feel that control is weakened when students work collaboratively. Examination-oriented institutions may also reward coverage and memorisation more directly than interaction or independent preparation. These tensions explain why the same model may be welcomed in one setting and resisted in another.

Theme 5: Teacher Readiness and Institutional Support

The reviewed studies consistently positioned the teacher as central rather than peripheral. In successful flipped environments, the teachers selected essential pre-class content, anticipated difficulty, monitored preparation, designed communicative tasks, provided rapid feedback, and adjusted instruction using evidence from learner performance. The shift is therefore from information transmitter to instructional designer, facilitator, diagnostician, and feedback provider.

Teacher presence must extend across the learning cycle. Before class, presence is communicated through clear instructions, short orientation messages, guiding questions, and accessible support. During class, it appears through scaffolding, monitoring, targeted explanation, and feedback. After class, it may include reflection, revision, or follow-up. Li

and Li (2022) identified instructor presence as a positive factor in engagement, while Wu et al. (2017) demonstrated the value of an organised online community rather than isolated content delivery.

Institutional support influences whether teacher effort becomes sustainable. Reliable learning platforms, technical assistance, access to recording tools, protected preparation time, professional development, and shared repositories reduce the burden on individual teachers. Institutional policies can also support equitable access through downloadable resources, device-lending arrangements, campus connectivity, or alternative formats. Without such support, successful implementation may depend on exceptional individual effort and disappear when the teacher or course changes.

An additional enabling condition is continuous monitoring. Learning analytics, short readiness checks, and low-stakes quizzes can identify students who are not engaging with the pre-class materials. However, monitoring should guide support rather than merely punish non-completion. Lin and Hwang (2018) demonstrate how learner data can illuminate oral performance and learning behaviour. The broader lesson is that flipped instruction should be adaptive: evidence about learner participation should be used to shorten content, modify tasks, provide extra scaffolding, or offer alternative access.

Cross-Theme Finding: Effectiveness Is Conditional

Across all five themes, one conclusion was dominant: the effectiveness of flipped EFL instruction is conditional. Positive outcomes emerged when the intervention changed the quality of classroom activity and when learners were supported to complete the pre-class component. Negative or mixed results were associated with weak linkage, inaccessible technology, excessive workload, limited accountability, or insufficient teacher preparation.

This conditional interpretation is consistent with recent meta-analytic evidence. Chen et al. (2025) reported a large average positive effect across language-learning studies while also finding

meaningful moderation by study and instructional characteristics. An average effect therefore does not remove contextual variation. For practitioners, the central question is not whether to use videos or a learning platform; it is whether the whole learning sequence is accessible, connected, interactive, supported, and responsive to learner needs.

4. DISCUSSION

Interpreting the Evidence

The findings support a qualified positive judgement of flipped learning in EFL education. The model can increase active use of class time, widen opportunities for communication, and support selected language outcomes. It can also create conditions for autonomy and higher-order thinking. However, these outcomes arise from pedagogical redesign rather than from the technological transfer of lectures to an online environment.

The review clarifies three mechanisms. First, prior exposure reduces the amount of classroom time required for initial explanation and can lower the processing burden during live interaction. Second, increased classroom time for production, collaboration, feedback, and revision provides forms of language practice that are difficult to achieve in lecture-dominated lessons. Third, flexible access allows learners to repeat input and regulate pace. These mechanisms explain why positive findings appear across different language skills even though the specific activities differ.

At the same time, the mechanisms can fail. Prior exposure is useful only when learners actually engage with comprehensible material. Active classroom time is productive only when tasks require meaningful language use and receive appropriate support. Flexible access promotes autonomy only when learners possess or are taught self-regulatory strategies. Each potential benefit therefore has a corresponding design requirement.

This interpretational also explains why emotional engagement is less consistent than behavioural or cognitive engagement. A learner may complete more tasks and participate in more discussion while also feeling pressure from additional preparation. The model redistributes workload rather than eliminating it. Teachers must therefore monitor not only completion and achievement but also workload, confidence, frustration, and perceived fairness.

The ALIGN Framework for Effective Flipped EFL Instruction

The cross-study synthesis was translated into the ALIGN framework. ALIGN represents five conditions that should be examined before, during, and after implementation: Access, Linkage, Interaction, Guidance, and Needs-sensitive monitoring. The framework is intended as a planning and evaluation tool. A course does not need advanced technology to meet the conditions; a low-bandwidth mobile design may be more effective than a complex platform if it is more accessible and better connected to classroom learning.

Table4.TheALIGNImplementationframework.

Element	Corequestion	Practicalindicators	Riskwhenabsent
A— Access	Caneverylearnerreac handusethe pre-class material?	Mobile- compatibleanddownloadabl e files; captions/transcripts; lo w-data options; alternative offline access; reasonable tas k length.	Digital inequality, exclusion, non- completion, and widening performa nce gaps.
L— Linkage	Istherelationshipbet weenpre- classpreparationandc lassroomworkexplicit t?	Each pre-class task prepares anamedin- classactivity; readiness check s; no unnecessary duplication.	Learners perceive preparation as extra homework; teachers reteach all content.
I— Interaction	Does class time require purposeful lan guage use?	Pair/group problem solving, discussion, role play, peer feedback, drafting, revisi on, and teacher feedback.	The model becomes online lecturing plus conventional classroom exercis es.
G— Guidance	Are learner taught ho w to prepare and regulate their learning?	Orientation, schedules, guiding questions, short quizzes, progress prompts, exemplars, and help channels.	Unprepared learners are blamed for skills they have not yet developed.
N— Needs- sensitive monitori ng	Isevidenceaboutparti cipation used to adapt teaching?	Completion data, exit tickets, l earner feedback, l workload checks, targeted sup port, and iterative redesign.	Problems persist unnoticed; the desi gn serves only already- confident learners.

Implications for Teachers

Teachers should begin with a single unit or skill rather than immediately flipping an entire course. A pilot allows the teacher to observe access, preparation behaviour, workload, and classroom flow. Pre-class materials should focus on essential input and normally be short enough to complete without displacing other study responsibilities. A video should be accompanied by a purpose, such as two guiding questions, a note-taking template, or a brief readiness task.

The classroom activity should make preparation necessary and visible. For example, a pre-class explanation of persuasive language can lead to an in-class debate; a model paragraph can lead to collaborative drafting and peer review; a pronunciation demonstration can lead to monitored oral practice; and a reading strategy explanation can lead to problem solving with a new text. When the class activity simply repeats the content, students quickly learn that preparation is optional.

Teachers should also plan for incomplete preparation. A brief recovery station, summary card, or peer-supported catch-up task can allow unprepared learners to join the lesson without requiring the teacher to repeat the entire lecture. At the same time, consistent low-stakes accountability communicates that preparation matters. The aim is supportive responsibility rather than punishment.

Assessment should reflect the pedagogical purpose. If examinations reward only memorised content, learners may resist interactive preparation that appears unrelated to grades. Participation, application, revision, oral production, and reflective learning can be incorporated into formative assessment or course portfolios. Such alignment strengthens the credibility of the model.

Implications for Curriculum Developers and Institutions

Curriculum developers should specify the learning function of each phase rather than merely recommending technology use. Course documents can identify what learners acquire before class, what they do with that knowledge in class, and how understanding is consolidated afterwards. Shared templates and model units can improve consistency across teachers.

Institutions should recognise that high-quality flipped instruction requires preparation time and professional learning. Training should cover instructional design, accessibility, learner analytics, online communication, and facilitation of active language tasks. Technical support and shared media resources can prevent every teacher from recreating the same materials independently.

In resource-constrained contexts, equity should be built into the design from the beginning. Mobile-first materials, compressed files, downloadable audio, transcripts, printed alternatives, and campus access points may be more important than advanced interactive features. Institutions should also collect learner feedback about data costs, device sharing, and study conditions. A technically available resource is not necessarily practically accessible.

Implications for South Asian EFL Contexts

The evidence has particular relevance for South Asian institutions where English may be taught in large, mixed-proficiency, examination-oriented classes and where learners' access to digital resources varies. A direct transfer of a high-bandwidth model is unlikely to be equitable. The ALIGN framework suggests a gradual approach: select essential content, provide low-data access, connect preparation to communicative classroom tasks, teach

students how to prepare, and monitor who is being left behind.

Flipped learning may be especially useful where limited class time restricts speaking practice. Grammar, vocabulary, instructions, and model texts can be introduced before class, allowing face-to-face time to be used for pair work, presentations, role plays, problem solving, and feedback.

Nevertheless, the approach should complement rather than replace teacher explanation. Short, targeted clarification remains necessary when learner data indicate misunderstanding.

Local research should examine feasibility as carefully as achievement. Relevant outcomes include completion rates, data costs, teacher preparation time, attendance, participation across proficiency groups, and learner perceptions of workload. Such evidence would help institutions determine whether the model is sustainable and inclusive rather than merely innovative.

5. LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This review has several limitations. First, it was restricted to English-language publications and may therefore underrepresent evidence published in other languages. Second, the integrative design prioritised explanatory synthesis and did not calculate pooled effect sizes. The conclusions should be read alongside existing meta-analyses rather than as a replacement for them. Third, the evidence base is concentrated in tertiary and Asian EFL contexts; school-level, vocational, rural, and low-connectivity settings remain less represented. Fourth, many primary studies used modest convenience samples, short interventions, self-report measures, or researcher-developed tests. These limitations reduce certainty about long-term transfer and scalability.

Future studies should use clearer descriptions of the intervention so that readers can distinguish

content delivery, active learning, and technology effects. Comparative research should report pre-class completion, exposure time, teacher workload, and the design of in-class tasks. Longer studies are needed to examine retention, sustained autonomy, and whether initial novelty effects diminish. Researchers should also analyse differential participation: average gains may conceal that confident, well-connected students benefit more than learners with limited access or weak self-regulation.

Research in South Asian and other resource-constrained settings should evaluate low-bandwidth and mobile-first versions of flipped instruction. Multi-site studies could compare urban and rural institutions, different educational levels, and varying class sizes. Cost,

feasibility, teacher workload, and equity should be treated as outcomes alongside proficiency. Finally, future work should test the ALIGN framework empirically and refine its elements through teacher and learner evidence.

6. CONCLUSION

This critical integrative review examined outcomes, barriers, and enabling conditions in flipped EFL education. The evidence indicates that flipped instruction can strengthen learner engagement, create more time for meaningful language use, improve selected language outcomes, and support autonomy, self-regulation, and higher-order thinking. However, these benefits are neither universal nor automatic.

The decisive factor is not the presence of videos or an online platform but the quality and inclusiveness of the learning design. Effective implementations provide accessible pre-class input, establish a clear link with classroom activity, use class time for purposeful interaction, guide learners in self-regulation, and monitor participation so that teaching can be adapted. These five conditions are summarised in the ALIGN framework.

For teachers and institutions, the practical message is to flip pedagogy rather than merely flip content. A modest, well-connected, low-bandwidth design can be more effective than a technologically complex model that learners cannot access or understand. When access, linkage, interaction, guidance, and monitoring are addressed together, flipped learning has substantial potential to support communicative and learner-centred EFL education.

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Ethical statement: The study is based entirely on published literature and did not involve human participants or personal data.

Data availability: The empirical studies included in the analytical corpus are documented in Appendix A. No new dataset was generated.

Author contribution: The author conceptualised the review, conducted the search and synthesis, and prepared the manuscript.

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