
BUILDING COMMUNICATION SKILLS THROUGH FLIPPED CLASSROOM

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Abstract

Flipped or inverted classroom has become a trend and a popular method of teaching and learning in educational practice. However, not many studies have been done in the practice of teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) in Malaysia. This paper discusses the use of flipped learning as a method to teach communication skills among a group of ESL learners in one higher learning institution. The study generally aims to analyse the effectiveness of flipped classroom method in enhancing students' communication skills and abilities. The sample of respondents comprised of 75 ESL learners who were selected to undergo a five-week flipped communicative language program, which was designed to promote active learning and greater classroom engagement among its learners. Findings indicate a positive relationship between flipped teaching and active learning, thus improved learners' verbal communication skills in certain ways.

Keywords: *ESL teaching, flipped classroom, communicative language learning, e-course, active learners.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Blended teaching and learning approach has become popular over the recent years. Numerous studies have been conducted on the effectiveness of this method. A combination of online learning tools and classroom teaching has become a trend in today's education setting. At the same time, the issues of poor communication skills among undergraduates have been one of the most debatable in Malaysia. A combination of this element in the blended learning approach could be a possible solution to the existing problem. This paper will discuss the issue of whether flipped learning can be integrated in the English communication lessons involving learners of higher learning institutions and aims to unpack the following question:

Does Flipped Learning help to improve Verbal Communication Skills among second language learners?

The Concept of Flipped Learning

In a normal practice of flipped learning, students will be given prior reading, or exposure before the lessons begin. Learners are given parts of the lesson before they enter the class. A simple definition of the word 'flipping' derives from the concept that a usual classroom is historically a place where the delivery of content is done through certain styles of lecture. One of the definitions of flipped classroom is a reversal of traditional teaching where students gain first exposure to new material outside of class, (usually via reading or lecture videos) and then class time is used to do the harder work of assimilating

that knowledge through strategies such as problem-solving, discussion or debates (Bishop and Verleger, 2007). Embi and Ebrahim Panah (2014) in regards to Behaviourism and Constructivism learning theories, state how flipped learning in technological oriented classrooms encourages students to construct and expand their own knowledge. It allows students to learn at their own pace, thus promote greater classroom engagement. Flipped learning has been closely related to different types of learning styles such as the peer assisted, collaborative and cooperative learning (Bishop and Verleger, 2007). The following table simplifies the explanation of the restricted and broader definitions of flipped classroom:

Table 1: Restricted definition of the flipped classroom.

| Style | Inside Class | Outside Class |
|-------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Traditional | Lectures | Practice Exercises & Problem Solving |
| Flipped | Practice Exercises & Problem Solving | Video Lectures |

Table 2: Broader definition of the de-facto flipped classroom.

| Inside Class | Outside Class |
|--|---|
| Questions & Answers | Video Lectures |
| Group-Based/Open-Ended Problem Solving | Closed-Ended Quizzes & Practice Exercises |

Table 1: The restricted and broader definition of flipped learning

Flipped Learning in the ESL Setting

In an ideal ESL classroom, Nation (2007) suggested four components in the ELS teaching and learning practice. These components are meaning-focused listening and reading, language-focused instruction, meaning-focused speaking and writing, and fluency development activities. It is believed the most neglected component is the development ESL learners' fluency. Han (2015) carried out a study on flipped learning in one ESL classroom involving a group of Chinese students. Through flipped learning, Han (2015) found how learning enhances both constructive and critical thinking when students comprehend and digest the teaching materials before they come to class.

Flipped Learning Using Social Networking Tools

Social networking tools such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Edmodo, Blackboard, and YouTube have proven to give positive impact in learning. A number of studies had indicated some positive outcomes of these online tools in the teaching and learning environment. Students are easily attracted to the technology, making the sites as among the popular learning tools.

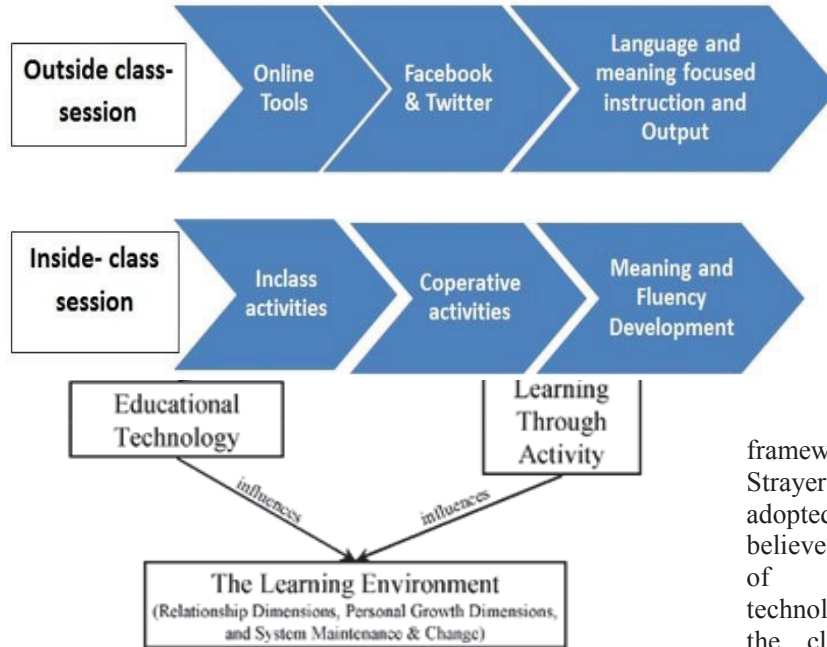
Wallace (2014) claims that one of the powerful aspects of social networking tools that support the teaching and learning activities is when they are integrated into certain teaching models. This is because the social networking tools:

- Facilitate a sustained ecological change in classrooms.
- Raise the standard and professionalize teachers
- Motivate students by enabling a viable, high-quality education

Flipped learning is considered as one of the best methods, especially in a classroom that has a big number of students. Alsagoff, Baloch, Hashim (2014) suggest teachers to use interactive web tools in order to create a meaningful and creative way of learning among their students.

2. METHODOLOGY

By using both qualitative and quantitative approaches, this research basically analysed the mediation of flipped learning among the ESL learners in their English language lessons. Students are given some class instructional materials via Facebook and



Twitter before the lecture starts. They were asked to read and review the materials on their own. A theoretical framework based on Strayer (2007) is adopted. Strayer believes that the use of education technology outside the classroom can promote active learners in certain

ways. His conceptual framework is mapped as follows:

Chart 2: Strayer’s (2007) Conceptual framework of flipped classroom.

Our flipped learning activities, then, were designed by combining the aforementioned theoretical framework with Nation's (2007) four components of ELS teaching and learning.

The sample comprises 43 males and 44 females. A set of questionnaire was administered to 87 university students. Some of them were further interviewed in order to gauge their perceptions towards flipped learning. These students were given a 5-week of flipped learning lessons. This 5-weeks ELS course focuses on presentation skills as well as oral discussion activities.

The lesson plan was divided into three parts which are the outside class-session, inside class- session and assessment:

1. Outside class- session:

- a. Students were given access to a Facebook group and Twitter.
- b. Pre lesson planned were given out, course content and discussion were given out prior to the lesson.
- c. The instructor posted the lesson over the social networking sites two days prior to the face to face meeting in the lecture.
- d. The instructor used prevalent media content such as YouTube videos and TED Talks. This is to ensure contextualization, authenticity and sustainability are met.
- e. The students had to continue their studies after the 5-week course. Therefore, sustainability is one of the critical elements. Students were asked to produce an oral presentation that was assigned to them after the 5 weeks of flipped learning lessons.

2. Inside class-session

- a. A lesson plan is discussed in the networking sites, classroom discussions were conducted based on the topics that were posted earlier.
- b. Two hours of class time were allocated for students to reproduce and discussed about what they had discovered earlier (online).
- c. Cooperative learning is seen as one of the significant output among the students.

3. Assessment

- a. Students were asked to produce an oral presentation and discussion in groups in front of their instructor.
- b. Students were given two weeks to prepare their 20-minute presentation and 30-minute oral discussion.
- c. Topics were varied according to the syllabus.

3. FINDINGS

Flipped Learning in the Teaching of Oral Presentation Skills

A set of questionnaire adapted from Strayer (2007) were given to all 87 students via Survey Monkey and the results are as follows:

| Evaluation on the Flipped Learning | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree | Total | Weighted Average |
|---|-------------------|--------------|--------------|----------------|-------|------------------|
| I find learning through online and in class are useful | 2.3% (2) | 5.8% 5 | 64.7% 55 | 27.6% 23 | 85 | 3.16 |
| I find learning through online and in class has helped me to identify my problem in my presentation | 1.18% 1 | 8.24% 7 | 65.88% 56 | 24.71% 21 | 85 | 3.14 |
| I find I have improved overall in my performance and my skills. | 1.19% 1 | 14.29% 12 | 65.48% 55 | 19.05% 16 | 84 | 3.02 |
| This exercise has made me aware of the importance of presentation | 1.19% 1 | 4.76% 4 | 65.48% 55 | 28.57% 24 | 84 | 3.21 |
| This exercise will be more accurate and fair in accessing my presentation. | 1.19% 1 | 3.57% 3 | 70.24% 59 | 25.00% 21 | 84 | 3.19 |
| I believe learning from YouTube videos provide better experience | 3.61% 3 | 26.51% 22 | 57.83% 48 | 12.05% 10 | 83 | 2.78 |
| Learning via YouTube allows me to gain better insight of the importance of presentation skills | 1.19% 1 | 11.90% 10 | 65.48% 55 | 21.43% 18 | 84 | 3.07 |

Table 2: Findings from the questionnaire

Findings from the interview were as follows:

| | |
|----------------------------------|--|
| Learning activities | More learning activities in class as they saw the outside-class session is more interesting |
| Assessment Process | Change the assessment as it is being done in class; instead make it via the social network. It can be edited, animated to make the presentations more interesting. Find the on spot correction by the lecturer is more effective and videos of the outside class-session are very helpful. |
| Videos and Outside class-session | Suggested more interactive videos- making it more interesting. Knowing on what to expect in class help the learning faster. |
| Role of the instructor | Easy to communicate with the instructor. More discussion from the students' side. Given to chance to talk and express views. |

Table 3: A Summary of Interview Responses

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Our findings came to the following conclusion. Firstly, the findings indicate that flipped learning gives a positive impact to the second language learners. In contrast to their attitude in the normal classrooms or lectures, students became more active in their learning. These students were keen to learn using media enhancements and were easily motivated to speak in class. The instructors involved in the experiment did not have to wait for their responses. Students became responsible for their learning and more engaged in the content.

Secondly, does flipped learning promote active learning? Yes, it does. According to Prince (2004) active learning is being described as any instructional method that engages students in the learning process. As flipped learning is in contrast with the traditional teacher-centred approach, it is obvious that flipped learning does promote active learning in the classroom. The two components of 'in class' and 'outside class' activities encouraged student-centred learning that fostered more positive attitude and behaviour.

Lastly, towards certain extent, flipped learning helps improve students' verbal communication skills. As flipped learning brings excitement to the classroom, careful designed lesson plans are required in order to make sure that learning can take at the maximum capacity. Second language learners need more practices to enhance their communication skills. Flipped learning therefore, can be the solution to help minimize the problem. By incorporating online learning tools and face to face interaction in the classroom, flipped learning could be a teaching approach that contribute to the improvement of verbal communication skills among the second language learners. By combining a variety of activities, flipped learning will definitely provide some exciting and colourful lessons to the ESL learners.

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