

An Exploration of Flipped Classroom Teaching Reform in College English Audio Visual and Speaking Course

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Abstract: Under the context of information technology, Flipped Classroom reverses traditional learning environment by empowering students with learner autonomy. This paper, based on a school-based teaching reform, discusses and analyzes the feasibility, effects and challenges of adopting Flipped Classroom in College English Audio Visual and Speaking Course, and puts forward possible solutions for further innovation of college English teaching.

1. Introduction

In *Guidelines on College English Teaching* issued by Chinese Ministry of Education [1] in 2016, it is listed as one of the teaching objectives to develop college students' autonomous learning ability. Universities and colleges of all levels are required to improve classroom teaching from a unitary teacher-centered model to innovative up-to-date models under the context of modern information technology.

Flipped Classroom (or Inverted Classroom), a widely adopted innovative teaching model on a global scale in recent years, reverses traditional learning environment by empowering students with learner autonomy, which enables both learning and teaching to extend beyond the confines of time and space. In this model, teachers provide in advance video lectures and relevant multimedia learning materials for students, who before class, carry out autonomous learning via online platform, and in class, participate in teacher-student and student-student interactive activities to achieve the internalization of knowledge. American professor Robert Talbert [2] proposed a structured model for Flipped Classroom based on his mathematics teaching experience, as is shown in Table 1:

Table 1. Robert Talbert's model of Flipped Classroom.

Before class	Watching video lectures
	Exercises or assignment
In class	Quick check of exercises or quiz
	Problem-solving tasks to internalize knowledge
	Summary and feedback

In the light of Robert Talbert's model, this study, based on a contextualized school-based Flipped Classroom teaching reform in a Chinese private college, tries to explore a modified model that is tailored to College English Audio Visual and Speaking Course. The feasibility, effects and challenges of the reform will be discussed and analyzed, and possible solutions will be put forward, which may bring implications for the subsequent practice of the reform.

2. Grounded theories

2.1 Autonomous learning

Since Henry Holec [3] proposed the concept of autonomous learning, such a learning model has been widely adopted and practiced in the field of foreign language teaching. Autonomous learning refers to a learning process during which learners, based on their own conditions and demands,

select and decide their learning content and methods, carry out learning activities and achieve specific learning objectives under the guidance of teachers and through self-monitoring.

The emphasis of autonomous learning on learner autonomy does not mean that teachers' role is subordinate. Instead, there is a higher requirement for teachers' professional capability of teaching design, applying modern education technology, and integrating mixed teaching methods. Chinese college students in private colleges tend to ignore the importance of a learning plan and lack autonomous learning strategies. Thus, teachers need to be aware of the change of their role and explore relevant experimental ways of teaching for the purpose of inspiring and guiding students to form an autonomous learning habit.

2.2 Scaffolding Instruction

Scaffolding is the support given during the learning process which is tailored to the needs of students with the intention of helping them achieve their learning goals [4]. Scaffolding instruction is the provision of sufficient support to promote learning when concepts and skills are being first introduced to students. These supports are gradually removed as students develop autonomous learning strategies, thus promoting their own cognitive, affective and psychomotor learning skills and knowledge.

There are three essential features of scaffolding that facilitate learning [5, 6]. The first feature is the teacher-student interaction that should be collaborative for it to be effective. The second, learning should take place in the learner's zone of proximal development (ZPD). To do that, teachers need to be aware of students' current level of knowledge and then facilitate them to develop to a certain extent beyond that level. The third feature is that the scaffold, the support and guidance provided by teachers, is gradually removed as students become more proficient and independent [7].

3. A practical exploration of Flipped Classroom in English audio visual and speaking course

3.1 Learning and teaching content

In the Flipped Classroom model, based on relevant themes and concepts of the textbook, teachers prepare and provide diverse learning materials for students, which are tailored to the needs of students, including video lectures, supplementary reading texts and other multimedia learning resources, such as news broadcast, movies, public speaking, etc. Thus, teaching content is not confined to a unitary form of the textbook. These diverse learning resources from various channels help to broaden students' mind and stimulate their interest.

3.2 Learning and teaching procedure

Before class, it is a stage of knowledge delivery. Teachers do not play the role of imparting, but they are responsible for setting learning objectives and suggesting learning strategies; via online platform, they conduct management and supervision over students' learning activities, pace, and effects. In class, it is a stage of internalization of knowledge, which is to be achieved through teacher-student and student-student interactions in the form of question-answer tutoring, group work, pair work, role play, presentation, debate, etc. Teachers' role is a guider and scaffolder rather than a monologist while students are no more silent passive listeners but actors and speakers. After class, students further improve their assignment and reflect on what they have learned and remaining problems. Based on students' feedback, teachers give timely response, better understand students' current level, and readjust teaching design. These three stages of learning and teaching are shown by Table 2 as a revised version of Robert Talbert's proposal:

Table 2. A Flipped Classroom Model for College English Audio Visual and Speaking Course.

	Before class	In class	After class
Teachers	(1) Providing video lectures, multimedia learning resources, PPT, and other relevant documents; (2) Assigning learning tasks	(1) Internalizing knowledge: question-answer tutoring, quiz; (2) Applying knowledge: presentation, public speaking, role play, debate, etc.; (3) Summary and feedback	(1) Collecting students' feedback and giving response; (2) Readjusting teaching design
Students	Autonomous learning: (1) Individual work: Listening, watching, reciting, etc.; (2) Collaboration work: Group discussion, pair work, role play; (3) Reporting questions and problems	(1) Internalizing knowledge: question-answer tutoring, quiz; (2) Applying knowledge: presentation, public speaking, role play, debate, etc.	(1) Improving assignment; (2) Reflecting on what has been learned and remaining problems

3.3 Assessment pattern

Traditional exam-oriented English class focuses on language knowledge and skills; hence the adoption of a summative assessment. Flipped Classroom, on the other hand, emphasizes students' participation in progressive learning, which involves the dimensions of their affection, attitude and cognitive development. Thus, the assessment pattern should be a combination of formative and summative assessment, with a higher proportion (60%) placed on students' participation and a lower proportion (40%) for the final examination. To further specify the criteria for their participation, students' attendance, class performance, individual assignments, collaboration work and quizzes should be all reasonably assessed.

To sum up, the characteristics of Flipped Classroom teaching reform can be shown in Table 3, in contrast with those in a traditional class:

Table 3. A Comparison between a Traditional Model and the Flipped Classroom.

	Traditional College English Audio Visual and Speaking Class	Flipped classroom
Teacher	Monologist	Guider, scaffolder
Students	Listener	Actor, speaker
Teaching model	Unitary listening or speaking drills	Teacher-student & student-student interactions
Teaching content	Textbook	Textbook, multimedia learning materials
Assessment pattern	Summative assessment	Formative & summative assessment
Teaching technology	PPT, audio files	Multimedia resources, online learning platform

3.4 Practical effects of Flipped Classroom teaching reform

Before and after the implementation of Flipped Classroom in College English Audio Visual and Speaking Course, a pre-test and a post-test were respectively conducted among the author's classes: two as the experimental group where Flipped Classroom was implemented for one term, and two as the control group where a traditional teaching model was employed. Both the pre-test and the post-test consisted of two parts: listening and speaking, which adopted the national College English Test (Band 4).

As is shown in Figure 1, students' English listening and speaking levels have been improved under both the traditional teaching model and Flipped Classroom model. For the listening part, the average listening score of the control group increased from 58.35 to 62, with an increase rate of 6.6%, while that of the experimental group from 58.15 to 64.75, with an increase rate of 10.2%. As for the speaking part, the average speaking score of the control group went up from 59 to 62.5,

increased by 5.6%, while that of the experimental group from 59.2 to 66.5, increased by 11%. Apparently, Flipped Classroom has better teaching effects, especially on improving English speaking level.

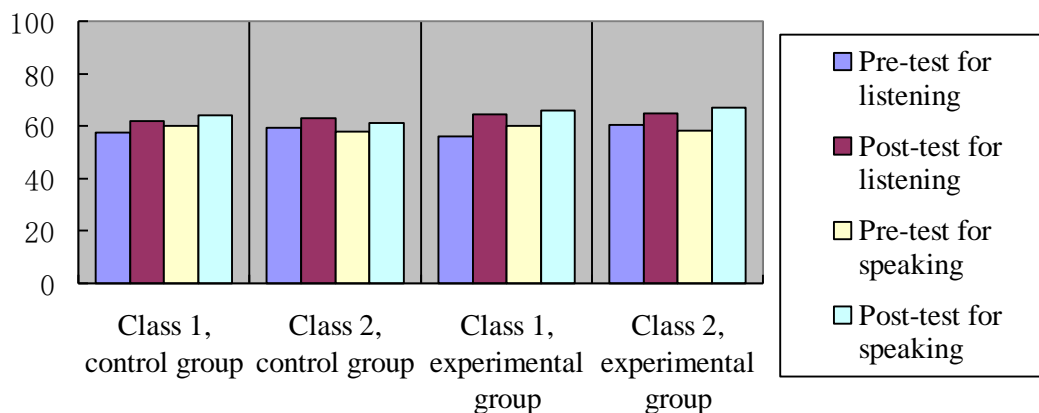


Figure 1. Pre-tests and Post-tests for listening and speaking between the control and experimental group.

In order to investigate students' acceptance of the reform, a survey was conducted among students of the experimental group. 93 questionnaires were handed out and 88 valid ones collected. 58 students (65.9%) stated that they preferred Flipped Classroom to the traditional teaching model; 51 students (57.95%) assumed that their autonomous learning ability had been improved by the reform; 48 students (54.55%) believed that the Flipped Classroom had helped them build up confidence in expressing themselves in English. Nevertheless, 18 students declared that they had difficulties in catching up with the class and finishing pre-class assignments which, they claimed, were overloaded to them.

4. Challenges and solutions

4.1 Individual differences among students

From the practical teaching experiment, it can be drawn that applying Flipped Classroom is feasible and effective in College English Audio Visual and Speaking Course, with an aim to cultivate students' autonomous learning ability and improve their English proficiency. However, individual differences among students need to be taken into consideration, in terms of their English levels, cognitive styles, personality, learning habits, etc. [8]. For instance, for student groups of different English levels, teachers can design different learning tasks in order of the difficulty; as for students that find difficulty in keeping up with the class, teachers should have more intensive follow-up monitoring and guidance. All these are as a matter of fact the forms of scaffolding which facilitate students to learn in their personal ZPD.

4.2 Theoretical and technical requirements for teachers

Flipped Classroom places a high requirement on teachers' theoretical knowledge of second language acquisition and teaching methodologies. Therefore, teachers should take the initiative to upgrade themselves with the latest research and relevant theories concerning Flipped Classroom in the field of foreign language teaching; hence the competence for the new role as a scaffolder. In the meantime, a systematic training is needed to equip teachers for applying modern information technology to Flipped Classroom, such as making video lectures, editing multimedia learning materials, and operating the online learning platform, etc. Only when teachers have been well prepared with theoretical knowledge and practical techniques, can they be competent for a new role in Flipped Classroom.

5. Summary

It can be concluded from the study that the significance of Flipped Classroom firstly lies in cultivating students' autonomous learning ability: whenever it is and wherever they are, students can study online learning resources by themselves as long as they have access to the Internet. Secondly, students can enjoy a personalized learning by setting and adjusting the pace based on their own conditions and demands. For instance, learners in a lower level are not confined to watching or listening to multimedia learning resources once only. Rather, they decide freely how much time they invest in different learning tasks. Thirdly, such a reform brings changes of roles for both teachers and students: Teachers evolve from a monologist in traditional classroom teaching to a facilitator in flipped classroom while students are actors and speakers instead of silent passive listeners.

Under the context of information technology, teachers of college English need to upgrade and develop professional capacity and optimize teaching practice through continuous learning and training. Flipped Classroom, a widely used information-based teaching mode, calls on teachers of college English to be equipped with the sense of a new role, theoretical knowledge and practical techniques, so as to cultivate students' autonomous learning ability and effectively improve English proficiency.

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