FLIPPING THE CLASSROOM IN COLLEGE ENGLISH TEACHING

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Abstract

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Li Chen

Under the Supervision of Dr. David Gillota

The flipped classroom, a learning model that uses technology to move lectures outside of the classroom and uses activities to move practices inside the classroom, has had widespread application in many areas in recent years. In a Chinese context, traditional college English teaching is often teacher-centered, and students lack interactive communication and practice. However, they have a preference for interactive and experiential learning approaches. It’s imperative to apply flipped classroom in college English teaching to meet students’ needs and characteristics. In this paper, I will do a literature review on what is the flipped classroom, and analyze its effectiveness. At last, I will discuss how to implement a flipped classroom in college English teaching.

*Key words: Flipped classroom, student-centered, College English teaching, Cooperative learning*
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Chapter I: Introduction

Since the 1970s through the 1980s, information technology has developed rapidly. Represented by multi-media, computers, and the Internet, human society has entered the information age. During this time, great changes have taken place in the concepts of education, including objects, goals, modes, and processes of education. These technological advances have brought new opportunities as well as new challenges for the development of education. For students, teachers are not the sole way for obtaining knowledge or handling problems. They are exposed to diversified learning materials to seek the answers or gain knowledge from different channels. So teachers should improve their teaching practices to meet the different needs and characteristics of their students.

In China, English is a required subject in all types of educational institutions; most college students began to learn it in primary school. However, the effectiveness of English learning is not so satisfactory. For getting a higher academic score in exams, they spent lot of time in studying the vocabulary, grammar and the text to enhance their abilities in reading and writing, but they are unable to communicate fluently in English. College English, a compulsory course for non-English majors in China, has long been a didactic teacher-centered model. Students learn passively and have low efficiency in speaking and listening. The instructor explains the grammar and language usage and analyzes the text, organization and main idea, while the students are listening and taking notes. There is limited interaction between the instructor and students and between students themselves. Students’ tolerance for lecture-based teaching has decreased. So it’s imperative to shift from the lecture-based teaching model to a more interactive and flexible student-centered form to improve students’ learning effectiveness.
Therefore, the flipped classroom, a popular technology-fused approach, provides a feasible way to meet their needs.

A flipped classroom, also known as an inverted classroom, means that “events that have traditionally taken place inside the classroom now take place outside the classroom and vice versa” (Lage, Platt, & Treglia, 2000). It reverses the order of the traditional process of a class, provides students the assignments, videos, or other learning materials before the class, and replaces the didactic lectures with active class activities, such as cooperative learning between teams or peers, task-based learning, place-based learning, etc. The instructor plays the role of a guide and facilitator; he or she is able to monitor student performance and be ready to help students get deeper comprehension.

**Statement of the Problem**

There will be two parts in my seminar paper. In the literature review, I will introduce what is the flipped classroom and analyze why we need to flip our classrooms. And then, I will use the library research on how to implement a flipped classroom. I will also introduce the current research about flipped classrooms in China. In the past part, I will discuss how to implement a flipped classroom in college English teaching.

**Definition of Terms**

A flipped classroom, also known as an inverted classroom, was first proposed by Lage et al. (2000). It means that “events that have traditionally taken place inside the classroom now take place outside the classroom and vice versa.” It emphasizes students’ preparation before the class and interaction between teachers and students during the class. It restructures the traditional lecture, integrates learning resources on the internet and the face-to-face instruction in the classroom. The instructors don’t give lectures for hours but just provide practical assistance for
the students. As cited by Wu (2017), “the idea of flipped classroom is a form of blended learning which encompasses any use of technology to leverage the learning in a classroom, so a teacher can spend more time interacting with students instead of lecturing” (P. 51).

**Purpose of the Study**

This seminar paper is aimed at discussing how to implement the flipped classroom in college English teaching. The traditional teacher-centered didactic English lectures are not attractive for EFL college students. As teachers, we should rethink the way we teach. We should keep pace with the times, integrate the advanced technology into our teaching, and try every means to make our classes more interesting and interactive. We should put flipped classrooms into our teaching to stimulate students’ interest and improve their learning effectiveness.

**Significance of the Study**

As mentioned before, college English is a compulsory course for non-English majors. For some students, they don’t have any motivation about English learning, the traditional teacher-centered didactic lectures will make them bored and lose concentration. Some innovative teaching methods are needed to improve their active learning. The flipped classroom has converted the order of traditional classroom; it is student-centered and integrates technology and face-to-face instruction, which gives students enough autonomy and flexible choices about English learning.

**Delimitation of the Study**

Now, the flipped classroom has been applied in a range of disciplines. There is a lot of research about flipped classrooms in fields such as medical science, statistics, biology, chemistry, etc. but this research is only limited to foreign language teaching.
Methodology

I conducted library research and found data from others’ experiments to prove flipped classroom is feasible and could improve students’ active learning. So I collected some materials such as the concept and features of the flipped classroom and how to implement it in language teaching.
Chapter II: Review of Literature

Based on the previous study, this chapter first gives a description about flipped classroom; then it analyze the advantages of flipped classrooms. Third, it discusses how to implement tasks and activities in a flipped classroom. Last but not least, it introduces the current research about flipped classrooms in China.

What Is the Flipped Classroom?

Generally speaking, a flipped classroom is a combination of reversed inside and outside classroom activities in relation to the traditional classroom model. It emphasizes students’ preparation before class and interaction between teacher and students during class.

According to Bergmann and Sams (2013), the flipped classroom is “that which is traditionally done in class is now done at home, and that which is traditionally done as homework is now completed in class” (P.13). In flipped classrooms, there is no need for teachers to give a lecture for hours while students only listen and take notes. It redefines class time as a student-centered environment, teachers use new technology to provide an audiovisual option to students before class, while students take their responsibilities of their learning by problem solving, group collaboration, team works, et al.

Flipped classroom has become a particularly popular model because of the availability of internet resources on any subject narrated by some of the world’s outstanding authorities (Herreid, & Schille, 2013). It provides instructional resources for students to learn at their own pace before class while class time is for enhancing students’ engagement in class activities.

Rotellar and Cain (2016) pointed out, “the rationale behind the flipped classroom methodology is to increase student engagement with content, increase and improve faculty contact time with students, and enhance learning” (P.1). According to Harvey (2014), different
forms of activity in class are more worthwhile for student learning, but active engagement between teacher and students in problem-solving and enough time for discussion are two essential ingredients (P. 118). Flipped classroom engages in students’ learning by combining teacher’s instruction with active, student-centered activities focused on specific content. Herreid and Schille (2013) pointed out, flipped classrooms are kind of “Hybrid courses” or “blended courses” that depend heavily on students preparing outside of class (P.64). Before class, students are asked to get familiar with the relevant information by watching educational videos, Powerpoints, or other materials needed. Teacher reads the student submissions to adjust the contents of teaching materials to suit students’ needs. In class, students are encouraged to engage in a set of problem-solving and student-centered activities such as group discussion, debate, presentation, etc. Teacher acts as a facilitator or a guide, they give timely and supportive feedback on students’ performance.

From the above, we can analyze four characteristics about flipping classroom. The first one, it is based on the advanced information technology. Students can get the background information and relevant learning materials online. Popularity of computers, smartphones and tablets bring teaching and learning a new revolution. Besides whiteboards and projectors, videos can attract students’ attention. For the second, it is a student-centered model. Students participate in classroom activities in an interactive and collaborative way instead of listening and taking notes of the lecture in a simple way. Third, teachers fulfill multiple roles in flipping a classroom. They must be professional to prepare learning materials according to students’ proficiency before class, observe students’ performance continually and adjust the relevant contents in class, provide online and in-person feedback and evaluate students’ performance after class. They play the role as guider, organizer, provider, participant, facilitator and evaluator. Last but not least,
activities are the main part in flipping classrooms. Student-centered activities such as discussion, group work, debates, presentation, role play etc. are very beneficial to attract students and enhance their deep comprehension of the teaching materials.

**Why do We Need to Flip Our Classroom?**

Bergmann and Sams (2013) stated, “Education is for everyone, but the way in which we deliver education—and the way in which students receive it—is not the same for everyone” (P.20). Flipped classroom offers a flexibility to both teacher and students to meet their needs and make learning more proficiency.

First of all, a flipped classroom is a true student-centered teaching methodology (Bergmann & Sams, 2013). It gives students the flexibility to have their needs met in multiple ways and greater autonomy over the pace of their learning, so students can control the learning process by themselves. Nowadays students tend to experience something innovative and more capacious spaces in their life and study. They are reluctant to do something with over-dominance of others. So this student-centered form are more suitable for them.

And then, flipped classroom implements with cooperative learning, it is a more effective teaching method than the traditional lecture-homework format (Foldnes, 2016). Traditional lecture is teacher-centered, there is often little room for collaboration between students. But in flipped classroom, students are not passive listeners. Class time is free up to enhance their engagement in active collaboration, they can “spend more time engaged in class applying information through problem-solving, case discussions, or other activities that require thoughtful processing of content” (Rotellar. & Cain, 2016).

Next, flipped classroom has been found to produce improved learning outcomes (Foldnes, 2016; Herreid & Schille, 2013; Yousefzadeh & Salimi, 2015). It has led to students’
great satisfaction and better engagement. Interaction in class is beneficial in two ways: “the student is able to clear up any confusion immediately, and the instructor is able to monitor performance and comprehension” (Lage et al, 2000). So it’s natural for students getting a better academic performance in the exams.

Kathleen Fulton (2012) listed some benefits about the flipped classroom in his article, he thought the flipped classroom model is more effective and creative than the traditional classroom model. In this model, students can move on their own pace. It is a new flexible approach which provides teachers better insight into student difficulties in class and allows them tailor their class with student capabilities to keep pace with the times. Besides, Students’ achievement, interest and involvement can be improved in this model (P. 12-17).

Herreid and Schiller (2013) surveyed more than 15,000 members in case study teaching and added some advantages of flipping a classroom. According to them, flipped classroom not only provides authentic learning environment for students, but also promotes student thinking inside and outside of the classroom. In this model, students could make the most of time in their research and experiment in class. It is more flexible, if someone missed the class, he or she will watch the lectures when they are available. Most of the students in their survey liked the flipped classroom model and involved actively in the learning process (P. 62).

To sum up, flipped classrooms can meet different needs for both teacher and students. It’s imperative to shift the traditional teacher-centered instruction to student-centered approach, where students can actively participate in classroom activities in an interactive and collaborative way.
How to Flip Our Classrooms?

Flipped classroom treats students as active learners and creates a student-centered environment where students can restructure their knowledge through classroom activities. But how?

For one thing, instructors need to prepare and organize variety of activities, besides, they must tailor their teaching with students’ proficiency. Lage et al (2000). Suggested there must be a good match between teacher’s teaching style and students’ learning styles. Teachers should use blended teaching methods to arouse students’ interest, encourage their diversity and improve their performance. Sams and Bergmann (2013) thought textbooks, problem sets, and other activities that usually implemented in the traditional classroom had become optional resources rather than required activities. The suitable activities for students were creating projects, designing video games, developing presentations, designing posters and curating blogs and so on (P.19). According to Harvey (2014), activities can take many forms, but it must contains active engagement in problem solving and the opportunity for discussion. Retellar and Cain (2016) proposed a set of 3-stage activities including pre-class (readings, short recorded video or audio lectures, or some other form of computer-based instruction), in-class (quizzes given at the beginning of class, group learning activities, problem solving, case discussions, audience response and open questions, pair-and-share activities, student presentations, quizzes, and micro-lectures ), and post-class(class projects, portfolios, examinations, and other forms of authentic assessment).

For another thing, in flipped classroom, videos are the crucial tool to improve students’ learning proficiency and effectiveness. Herreid and Schiller (2013) found that majority teachers and students prefer videos to prepare for their in-class activities, they also concluded that online
video tutorials are a valuable, flexible, and cost-effective tool for “improving student mastery of chemistry problem solving” (P.64). Moranski and Henery (2017) did a research to explore the use of video in flipped classroom, and found that the video could mediate learners’ conceptualization of language pedagogy and improve their learning effectiveness, particularly in the area of second language prevalence in the classroom (P.285). Teachers could either use currently existing videos or create their own videos. Sams and Bergmann (2012) recommend that. If teachers decided to make their own videos, they could add humor, annotations, callouts in them, and keep it copyright friendly. The videos should be short, while the voice should be animating (P.44-47). But in their another article, *Flip Your Students’ Learning*, which was published in 2013, they also pointed out, “flipped learning is not about how to use videos in your lessons. It’s about how to best use your in-class time with students”, “not all students learn best from video, just as not all students learn best by reading a textbook, listening to a lecture, or completing practice problems” (P.17-18). Besides videos, teachers should use blended tools and materials to meet students’ different needs and facilitate their learning effectiveness.

What’s more, flipped classroom prefers smaller course enrollment sizes. According to Rotellar and Cain (2016), methods used in flipping smaller courses may not be as feasible with large class enrollments (P.4), it may be more difficult to design and facilitate effective in-class activities for larger classrooms.

In addition, a short quiz either online or in class, beginning class with a question-and-answer time, learning from having other students explain concepts in different way and homework are other feasible methods to implement flipped classroom (Herreid & Schiller, 2013; Lage et al. 2000; Sams & Bergmann 2013).
Related Research on Flipped Classroom in China

In China, flipped classroom is still at its early age. It was introduced for the first time by Zhang Jinlei, Wang Ying and Zhang Baohui in 2012. In their article, they stated the information technology and learning activities are crucial to build flexible learning environments. Besides, they created a flipped classroom model which put emphasis on students’ activities and student-centered idea. After that, researchers focused their attention on theoretical introduction of flipped classroom. They introduced its definition, history, characteristics, challenge, class design and compare it with the traditional classroom model (Wang, Zhao, Sun & Liu, 2013; Zhong, Song & Jiao, 2013). Wang et al (2013) introduced some cases of successful flipped instruction in schools both at home and abroad. They hold the idea that parents could play a role to monitor students’ learning before class. It could be adapted in primary or secondary schools, since some students in those schools are too young to self-consciously watch videos and complete assigned homework. Zhong et al. (2013) combined Tai Chi thinking in traditional Chinese culture and Bloom’s taxonomy of educational objectives, constructed a Tai Chi Ring flipped classroom model.

In recent years, some researchers have tried to apply flipped classroom in college English teaching. They attempt to verify the positive impact of flipped classroom on improving students’ interest in English learning and enhancing their autonomous learning. Cui and Wang (2014) analyzed the feasibility of applying flipped classroom in college English teaching, while Gao (2014) suggested implement it by studying its characteristics. Xu and Li (2014) put forward an innovatory teaching mode based on the combination of project-based flipped classroom and e-leaning portfolios. Hu and Wu (2014) reported a university-based foreign language educational experiment on flipped classroom instruction based on self-developed College English MOOC (massive open online courses). They used Quantitative and qualitative data analyses of the
learners' feedback to show that the MOOC-based flipped classroom instructional model is suitable for College English teaching.

Besides, Li and Wu (2015) reported a flipped College English classroom experiment, which blended online lectures, exercises and communication with interactive class activities. Survey results showed that the flipped model is highly evaluated by students. According to them, three embedded features of a flipped class—effective language use, prompt feedback, and in-depth discussion—are identified as factors which promoted both language proficiency and thinking skills. Besides, it was also observed that team-based in-class output activities were helpful to motivate students. Ke (2016) proposed some tasks and activities that could be implemented in flipped classroom, including question exploration, peer competition, knowledge construction tools, task-based individual learning and learning based on problems.

In general, Chinese researchers have found the advantages of flipped classroom model, and applied the model into the course they taught. What’s more, they have proved its feasibility of implementation in College English teaching.

Summary

Flipped classroom reverses the order of traditional instruction, renders students watch online videos or read relevant materials before class and replaces the traditional didactic lecture with interactive in-class activities, such as group discussion, cooperative learning, debate, problem-based learning, and so on. This kind of integration of technology-based instruction out of class and interactive learning activities in class not only allows students learn at their own pace but also engages students in an active and interactive cooperative learning environment and enhances their effective learning. Nowadays, many researchers have implemented flipped
classroom model in their class and proved its effectiveness in many fields. However, there is insufficient attention to apply flipped classroom in the field of language education.
Chapter III: Conclusions and Recommendations

The internet plus education is the integration of the internet and traditional education through an online platform. Thanks to the openness and sharing of learning resources which are promoted by advanced technology, students are exposed to diversified learning materials by searching the internet, rather than only rely on their teacher who once was considered as the sole source of knowledge. Flipped classroom, an emerged popular technology-fused approach that overturns the traditional model of teaching, provides an attempt to meet teacher and students’ different needs in the era of internet plus education. It emphasizes students’ preparation before class and the interaction between teacher and students during class. It is a student-centered teaching methodology which gives learners greater autonomy over their pace of learning.

The benefits of a flipped classroom are obvious. For students, this student-centered model gives them flexibility to have their needs met in multiple ways, they can control the learning process by themselves; its cooperative learning model is more effective and interactive in relation to the traditional lecture-homework format; in flipped classroom, students are not passive listeners, class time is free up to enhance their engagement in active collaboration, and there is more time to spend with students on authentic research. For teachers, they can more easily customize and update the curriculum and provide it to students; classroom time can be used more effectively and creatively; they can use the method to increase the levels of student academic achievement, interest, involvement and their higher-order cognitive skills

In the literature review, there is small research on flipped classroom in the field of foreign language teaching. However, there is a demand for designing an EFL flipped classroom model in college English class.
As mentioned, college English is different from high school English. It emphasizes on students’ comprehensive abilities in listening, speaking, reading, writing, critical thinking, and their cross-cultural communication competence. Its ultimate goal is to train innovation talents who serve the society. Based on the previous chapter, the following are some suggestions to implementation of flipped classroom in college English teaching:

First, it is imperative for teacher make full preparation before class. Out of class, teacher can prepare suitable English videos and some assignments according to teaching goals and objectives. Videos should be short to ensure students watch them. They are used to deliver background information or language points. Add pictures and animate elements in videos to make it more appealing, and add notes for difficult words and expressions. The effectiveness of video lectures depend largely on student learning abilities. What’s more, it would be better if the video lectures are enthusiastic, humorous and charming with a contagious voice. Besides, quizzes can be a powerful incentive. Teacher can ask students complete an on-line quiz before they come to class to ensure that they are prepared. On-line homework can also be a motivator for students.

Second, the core of flipped classroom embodies the importance of in-class activities. It is student-centered and with English in the whole process. Class time is free for exploring topics or text in further depth. Activities include basic knowledge review, students’ self-directed learning, team work, problem solving, peer evaluation, discussion and so on, it can help students achieve higher cognitive ranks. What’s more, there are always some students accustomed to keeping silence in their college English class. They don’t like expressing themselves but prefer to be “onlookers” in class. How to turn these “onlookers” into “participants” is a crucial but tough task. So teacher should keep an eye on and encourage the introverted students in class. Besides,
teacher can provide an incentive for students to take part in these activities, for example, some extra score that can be counted in their final grades. Always give students some push and make them a little nervous.

Third, creating a motivationally supportive learning environment and adopt student-centered active learning strategies are very important. In flipped classroom model, teacher provides assistance to students in person to promote their individualized learning, while students have great opportunities for collaborative learning and problem handling with others. The dynamic teacher-student interaction is conductive to create a motivational learning environment. Besides, student-centered active learning can transform students from passive listeners to active participants, help them to understand the learning contents and improve their communicational competence in English.

Last but not the least, constantly reflection on how to optimize students learning is important to improve their learning effectiveness. Multiple assessments, such as on-line quiz, the performance in activities, writing, tests, and presentations can be used to help teacher to reflect on students’ learning outcome and effectiveness. Besides, students’ learning performance can give some directions to further improve the instructor’s capability to design in-class activities.

It is challenging for teachers to invert their classroom into a student-centered environment. It is also demanding for them to achieve the integration of information technology and college English teaching. College English teachers should devote to create a supportive environment to motivate their students to learn at anytime and anywhere to form autonomous learning. Only in this way, students can feel the charm of English and make their English learning more effectively.
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