

A Survey of Flipped Learning Approach in the ESL Context

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ABSTRACT—*Researches on flipped learning have mostly focused on generic subjects and classroom setting. Not many researches have been carried out on Second Language Learners or in the English Second Language (ESL) setting in the higher education. Most flipped learning studies are carried out on subject matters such as Mathematics and Biology (Moravec, Williams, A., Aguilar-Roca, N., & O'Dowd, D. K, 2010) As such; the effectiveness in language learning is yet to be investigated. With large numbers of undergraduates in lecture sessions, effective lecturing on communication learning such as public speaking, presentations skills and other verbal communication skills are some of the challenges faced by ESL lecturers. With these factors in mind, flipped learning may be the answer to this predicament. Therefore, this research aims at investigating the effectiveness of flipped leaning in communication skills among the SLL in the higher education setting. This research introduces a flipped learning model to the undergraduates of University Technology MARA Penang in their ESL lectures over the period of 5 weeks. A structured interview and questionnaires were carried out to gauge the effectiveness of flipped learning. It is believed with planned lesson plans; flipped learning will provide a positive enrichment and learning environment to the undergraduates.*

Keywords--- Flipped learning (FL), Second Language Learners (SLL), Higher Education Institution, Communication skills, Blended Learning (BL)

1. INTRODUCTION

The term BL has gained its popularity over the recent years. Taking into account on using partial or full online or offline in BL courses, ample studies have been carried out on its' effectiveness among the SLL. In fact, the recent (Executive Summary Malaysia Education Blue Print 2015-2015, 2015) has called upon using technology: BL in classroom teaching. However, issues addressing its' effectiveness are being questioned; how to capture the improvement and are there improvements in helping the SLL's to learn.

The combination of using online tool and classroom teaching has become a trend in the education setting. On a familiar note, the issues of Communication Skills among undergraduates have been one of the most debatable issues in Malaysia. With this inview, combining one of the elements in BL with communication skills might be the solution to poor communication skills among undergraduates. Thus, this paper will clarify and answer the question whether FL can be implemented on verbal communication skills among the SLL in the ESL higher education setting.

2. RELATED LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 DEFINING FLIPPED LEARNING

FL has been increasingly a popular method among academicians as it is believed to be able to promote active learning among learners. In a normal practice of FL, the students have prior reading or exposure before the lessons begin. Learners are given parts of the lesson before they enter the lesson. As such, learners will have background knowledge of the lesson before the lesson takes place. A simple definition by the term flipping is driven from the concept that a usual classroom is historically a place where the delivery of content is done through some type of lecture format (Embi & Ebrahim Panah, 2014) It is believed that flipped classroom or learning using pedagogies give attention to active learning through the use of technologies and learners' own knowledge construction. It enables learners to have their own pace of learning, thus making it a more effective classroom with knowledge engagement.

According to Strayer, (2007) inverting the classroom means that events that have traditionally taken place inside the classroom now take place outside the classroom and vice versa. Table 1 simplifies the explanation of the restricted and broader definition 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(Bishop & Verleger,2013)

FL has been closely related to different types of learning styles such as the peer assisted, collaborative and cooperative teaching (Bishop & Verleger, 2013)As such, Instructors will need to design their lessons to promote active learning when involving Flipped Learning.

2.2 FLIPPED LEARNING IN THE ESL SETTING

One of the popular methods in BL is FL. Flipped classroom is defined as a reversal of traditional teaching where students gain first exposure to new materials outsideclass, usually via reading or lecture videos, and class time is used to assimilate that knowledge through strategies such as problem-solving, discussion or debates (Bishop & Verleger, 2013). Many believe FL enhances both constructive and critical thinking since the learners need to comprehend and digest the materials before class.

In an ideal language course setting,four equally balanced strands are suggested in language learning. These four strands are meaning-focused listening and reading, language-focused instruction, meaning-focused speaking and writing; and fluency development activities(Nation, 2007). It is believed the most neglected component or least being discussed or parted is the fluency development in Teaching ESL /EFL Listening and Speaking .As such, Han (2015)carried out a study on FL in the ESL setting, with her Chinese ELL. The study focused on the students’ needs of the English Language Program. A significant improvement on the ESL Chinese Learners was that they were actively engaged throughout the course. In short, learning enhances both constructive and critical thinking since the students need to comprehend and digest the materials before coming to class.

2.3 FLIPPED LEARNING IN SOCIAL NETWORKING AND HIGHER EDUCATION INSTUTIONS

Social networking has a long history in the education scenario such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Edmodo, Blackboard, YouTube and many other emerging sites. Varsities, Schools and other institutions have used the social networking sites for long to impart learning inside and outside of classroom. Many researches have shown the positive outcome of this platform. Learners are easily attracted to the online technologies making the sites a popular learning tool.

Wallace, M.L., Walker, J.D., Braseby, A.M. and Sweet, M.S.(2014)claims that certain criteria in social networking and the social media platforms consists of activities that can be n integrated to effective classroom models. This is because of the criteria that are able to:

- Facilitates a sustained ecological change in classrooms.
- Raises standards and professionalizes teachers
- Motivates students by enabling a viable, high-quality education

Social media acts as an emerging classroom model with anticipation from learners. The combination of the use of social networking sites along with FL is considered an ideal online tool in the classroom setting. A study done by Danker,(2015)among her performing arts students in Sunway University Malaysia provided positive feedback when using FL in her large classroom. Her conclusive research concluded better learning outcomes compared to talk and chalk or the traditional method of lecturing. The research also concluded that students learn to communicate indirectly.

Similarly, as the higher institutions consist of larger classes, FL is considered ideal. With a large number of learners (35-100), implementing the FL is considered one of the best methods to overcome classroom management. As such, Alsagoff, Baloch, Hashim (2014) suggested infusing interactive web tools in the learning sessions to create meaningful and creative ways of learning and lecturing.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Taking a qualitative and quantitative approach, this research has analysed the mediation of FL among the ESL learners in their English Language lectures. Participants were given out of class instructional materials via Facebook and Twitter before lecturing. They were asked to read and review the materials on their own. A theoretical framework based on Strayer (2007) is adopted for this study. Strayer, (2007) believes that by combining extensive use of education technology outside of classroom and the results would be active learning during class time.

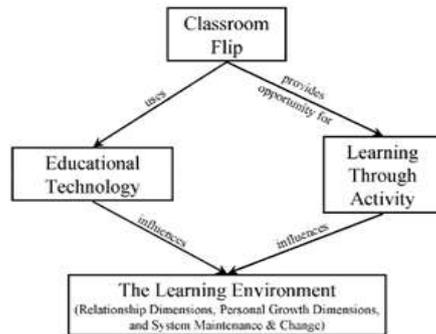


Table2: Strayer (2007) Conceptual Framework of a Flipped Classroom.

With this theoretical framework, Nation (2007) four strands, the FL activities were designed to cater for the ESL undergraduates in the UiTM Penang Campus. The study aims to answer the following questions:

1. Does FL give positive impact to SLL?
2. Does FL help to promote active learning among SLL?
3. Does FL help to improve Verbal Communication Skills among SLL?

3.1 THE PARTICIPANTS

The subjects are part 1 degree students from the faculty of Electrical Engineering, UiTM Penang. 87 students comprising of 43 male and 44 female were asked to complete questionnaires and were interviewed to gauge their perceptions on FL. These students were given 5 weeks of exposure to FL. They are SLL who have taken MUET with a score of band 3 and 4. All students have enrolled for ELC course which is College English. The 5 weeks course focused on Oral Discussions and Presentation Skills.

3.2 THE DESIGN OF FLIPPED LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Over a period of 5 weeks, the researchers divided the lesson plan into three parts which are the outside class-session, inside class-session and assessment. Table 3 clearly shows the structures of the lessons in the FL lecture.

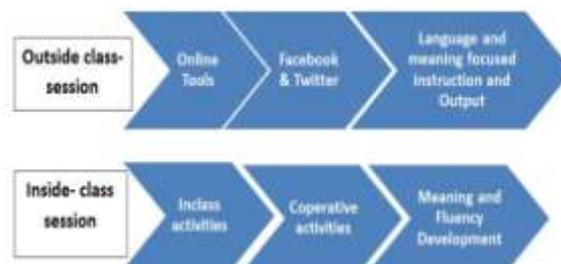


Table 3: FL Lesson Structure

3.2.1 OUTSIDE-CLASSESSION

During the 5 weeks period, the students were given access to their Facebook group and Twitter account. Pre-planned lessons, course content and discussions were given out prior to the lesson. The instructor will post the lesson over the social networking sites two days prior to the face-to-face meeting. The instructor used prevalent media content such as YouTube videos and TED Talks. This is to ensure contextualization, authenticity and sustainability are met. Researchers(Brinton& Gaskill, 1978); (Washburn, 2001)) have suggested that repeated use of contextualized vocabulary allows students to experience new vocabulary and identity in their usage. The authenticities of the target language in the academic context were chosen carefully to maximize the linguistic competence. According to Sherman (2003), authentic media allows English SLL to access a wide range of linguistic resources and genres that textbooks cannot provide. As the students have to continue their studies after the 5 weeks course, sustainability is one of the critical elements. Students were asked to produce an oral presentation that was assigned to them after the 5 weeks FL exposure.

3.2.2 INSIDE-CLASSESSION

As the questions and lesson plans were discussed in the networking sites, inside class-sessions discuss the topics that have been posted prior to the class. The main focus is to develop meaning focused output and fluency development. Two hours of class time were allocated for students to reproduce and discuss what they had learned outside of the classroom. Unlike traditional classroom teaching or other BL activities, the instructor’s role changes into a facilitator. Significant amount of active participation among students can be seen throughout the inside class session. Kagan (2004) describes that cooperative learning consist of five principles which are positive interdependence, individual accountability, equal participation, simultaneous interaction and group processing. Cooperative learning is seen as one of the significant output among the students.

3.2.3 ASSESSMENT

As the course content requires assessment, the students were asked to produce an oral presentation and discussin groups in front of their instructor. 15% were allocatedfor the assessment. Students were given two weeks to prepare their 20 minutes presentation and half an hour oral discussion. Topics vary in accordance to the syllabus.

4. FINDINGS

4.1 APPLICATION OF FLIPPED LEARNINGFOR TEACHING ORAL PRESENTATION SKILLS

Students were asked on the fundamentals and techniques on the oral presentation skills through FL. A total of 63 students agreed that they understood the fundamental needs such as Introduction, Ideas, Reviews and Conclusion. Table 4summarizes the results.

The video on Facebook and in class discussion helped meunderstand better in regards to :	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total	Weighted Average
Introduction and preview- opening remarks, words of welcome, topic and title given	2.30% 2	3.45% 3	72.4% 63	21.8% 19	87	3.14
Central idea	2.30% 2	6.90% 6	66.6% 58	24.1% 21	87	3.13
Main/sub points that is clearly stated, well developed, well supported, examples given.	0.00% 0	8.14% 7	69.7% 60	22.0% 19	86	3.14
Review and conclusion- summary of main findings /points	2.33% 2	9.30% 8	67.4% 58	20.9% 18	86	3.07

Table 4 Summarizes the Fundamental Techniques of Presentation Skills

4.2 THE EVALUATION OF FLIPPED LEARNERS – STUDENTS’ PERSPECTIVE

Both quantitative and qualitative data methodologies were used in this research design. As the aim of the research is to look into Verbal Communication Skills among the SLL undergraduates via FL, questionnaires and interview sessions were mainly asked on the Verbal Communication Skills. Furthermore, assessments were administered covering the 5 topics taught using the FL mode. Questionnaires were given to each student who participated in the research to gauge their attitudes towards Flipped learning. Questionnaires were adapted (Poon, 2013) and given to all 87 students via Survey Monkey. It is based on Likert scaling of Strongly Agree, Agree, and Disagree and to Strongly Disagree.

Evaluation on the FL	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total	Weighted Average
1. I find learning through online and in class are useful	2.3% 2	5.8% 5	64.7% 55	27.% 23	85	3.16
2. I find learning through online and in class has helped me to identify my problems in my presentation	1.18% 1	8.24% 7	65.8% 56	24.7% 21	85	3.14
3. I find feedback from my peers useful	1.19% 1	7.14% 6	75.0% 63	16.6% 14	84	3.07
4. I find I have improved overall in my performance and my skills.	1.19% 1	14.29% 12	65.4% 55	19.0% 16	84	3.02
5. This exercise has made me aware of the importance of presentation	1.19% 1	4.76% 4	65.4% 55	28.5% 24	84	3.21
6. This exercise will be more accurate and fair in accessing my presentation.	1.19% 1	3.57% 3	70.2% 59	25.0% 21	84	3.19
7. I believe I can improve my knowledge and skills after watching the presentations over YouTube and FB	1.19% 1	3.57% 3	60.7% 51	34.5% 29	84	3.29
8. I believe learning from YouTube videos provide better experience	3.61% 3	26.51% 22	57.8% 48	12.0% 10	83	2.78
9. Learning via YouTube allows me to gain better insight of the importance of presentation skills	1.19% 1	11.90% 10	65.4% 55	21.4% 18	84	3.07
10. Watching YouTube videos allows me to learn according to my leisure.	2.41% 2	2.41% 2	73.4% 61	21.6% 18	83	3.14

Table 5: An Overview of Students’ Perception Towards FL

Table 5 gives an overview of students’ perception towards FL via questionnaires that took place over a period of 5 weeks during lecture. Videos from YouTube and preplanned lesson plans were made available in Facebook and videos prior to their in-class session. More than half of the students (57.8%) agree that FL gives positive impact as they find watching videos prior to lessons helpful. Nevertheless, there seems to be a small number of students who do not think likewise. Obviously from the table, about 12% of the students did not agree that learning from YouTube allows them to gain a

better insight of presentation skills. Though, the percentage of disagreement seems small, it opens minds to the improvement of the FL lessons for instance providing a better video would be a better suggestion.

4.3. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The researchers asked the students on ways to improve the FL lessons carried out with them during the 5 weeks. Here are some of the responds from them.

Learning activities	More learning activities in class as they saw the outside-class sessions were more interesting.
Assessment Process	Change the assessment – instead of carrying it out in class it can be done via the social network. It can be edited, animated to make the presentations more interesting. Lecturers should locate students’ mistakes on the spot as it is more effective. Besides that, videos of the outside-class sessions are very helpful.
Videos and Outside-class session	Suggested more interactive videos- making as it is more interesting. Knowing on what to expect in class help learners learn faster.
Role of the instructor	Easy to communicate with the instructor. More discussion on the students’ side. Given chance to talk and express views.

Table 6: A summary of Response from the Interview Sessions

5. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Firstly, FL does give positive impact to SLL. As the study pointed out, students were seen as active speakers in contrary to the normal classroom or lecture. The students, being the Z generation were keen to learn using media enhancements and were easily motivated to speak in class. Instructor need not wait for their responses. Students become responsible to their learning and engage in the content. However, there were also students who did not complete their outside-class session. As a result, they became hesitant in class thus resulting to passive learners.

Secondly, does FL 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 FL is in contrast with the traditional teacher-centered approach, it is obvious that it does promote active learning in the classroom. The two components i.e. in- class and outside-class activities yield to student centered activities. Although most instructors consider using videos as a method to deliver the outside-classroom session; finding videos can be a difficult task as to match with the course content and syllabus. Lastly, does FL help to improve Verbal Communication Skills among SLL? It does to a certain extent. As FL brings excitement to the classroom, carefully designed lesson plans are required. As SLL require more practices for communication skills, FL can be the solution to help minimize the gap of verbal communication skills that has often been highlighted. With the incorporation of online tools and classroom discussions, FL could be the answer to promoting Verbal Communication Skills among SLL. There are ample opportunities for SLL to mediate oral communication before and during lessons as they indulge in their discussions and presentations. By combining variety of activities, FL will provide exciting and colourful lessons to learners. SLL in the higher institutions will definitely benefit from FL in the ESL setting; however there are major drawbacks to be looked into as more extensive research need to be carried out in this field.

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