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Flipped Learning Beyond the Video Approach in Teaching Foreign Languages

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Abstract

The flipped classroom or flipped learning has been the subject of increasing research in recent years. A so-called innovative pedagogical approach that engages and motivates students beyond the traditional lecture approach especially in higher education. The approach incorporates the ideals of active learning in that students are required to engage in lessons and the learning processes rather than sitting passively waiting for information to be imparted from an instructor. However, much of the literature on the flipped classroom deals solely with the use of video. It is the purpose of this article to show that flipped learning is a valid pedagogical approach which can be applied without the use of lecture videos. Concrete examples are offered to show how this approach can be applied in teaching foreign languages.

Keywords: student engagement, flipped learning, active learning, intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation

Introduction

The traditional role of the teacher, is often seen as an information provider, imparting knowledge on the learner who is expected to sit for hours, listening and, theoretically, absorbing information presented. However, for some time, it has been considered that students learn more when they participate in the process of learning, whether it's through discussion, presentation, or application, taking the classroom from a teacher-centred approach to a more student-centred environment. Flipped learning adheres to this approach as it is designed to encourage students to undertake the information-transition part of the class in advance leaving time in the class for more interactive lessons and practice work. Flipped learning has often been associated with video lectures creating a reluctance for varying reasons for instructors to engage in this approach. However, video lectures are only one medium of a flipped classroom and other approaches and materials should not be disqualified from the flipped learning pedagogy.

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History

The concept of students preparing before the class to use material in class is hardly a new concept. However, the term 'flipped classroom' or 'flipped learning' is relatively recent. The precursor to such terms started around the year 2000 with terms such as inverted classroom (Lage et al., 2000) and just-in-time teaching (Novak, 2011). Perhaps two of the most well known are Bergman and Sams, and Sal Khan's *Khan Academy*. Bergman and Sams were high school chemistry teachers and used video to teach students during the mid-2000's. Through workshops and the publication of their book "Flip your Classroom: Reach Every Student in Class Every Day" (2012) their approach pushed the concept of flip learning into greater notoriety. Sal Khan has produced over 6,000 video lessons which he has broadcasted on the Khan Academy channel on Youtube since 2006. In 2011 he was invited to talk on the online media organization TED in which he specifically talks about using video to create a 'flipped classroom'. In more recent years, attention to flipped learning has increased at an exponential pace, since at least 2014, resulting in 131 peer-reviewed articles in the first half of 2017 alone (Talbert, 2017b).

What is flipped learning?

The precise definition of 'flipped learning' is often contested. "Many models have been presented in literature for the flipped classroom; that is, no single accepted model has been established. It can even be stated that there are as many approaches to the flipped classroom as there are researchers implementing it" (Basel, 2005).
Abeysekera and Dawson (2014) define the flipped classroom as a set of pedagogical approaches that:

1. Move most information-transmission teaching out of class
2. Use class time for learning activities that are active and social and
3. Require students to complete pre and/or post class activities to fully benefit from in-class work

The governing board and key leaders of the Flipped Learning Network (FLN), a group of experienced flipped learning educators, define the term 'flipped learning' as "…a pedagogical approach in which direct instruction moves from the group learning space to the individual learning space and the resulting group space is transformed into a dynamic, interactive learning environment where the educator guides students as they apply concepts and engage creatively in the subject matter" (Flipped Learning Network, 2014). The site also draws a distinction between *a flipped classroom* and *flipped learning*. Activities can be undertaken before a class and used in the classroom (flipped classroom), yet the student cannot be considered to be learning unless material is accompanied with structured activities that lead to comprehension, fresh knowledge and an awareness of the learning process that are assessed in a proceeding lesson. In practice simply asking students to read a text for discussion in a proceeding lesson does not fall within the ideology of flipped learning. However, texts

supported by explanations or materials requiring learners to identify key concepts or question and compare notions preceding a lesson, is core to the flipped learning pedagogy.

Essentially, there are two components of flipped learning; one that takes place in the classroom and one that takes place outside the classroom. Both must be carefully considered and planned for the approach to be effectively implemented. Educators also need to be sensitive to factors which may affect access and completion of tasks; How much time is required for activities outside the classroom? Do students have access to those materials or activities? Are there limitations on what can be achieved outside the classroom? Is the material relevant for all students? What activities are relevant to the classroom? Is the relationship between activities undertaken before the class and during the class understood? What is the ultimate purpose of this lesson? Although many of these factors are required for any pedagogical approach, asking students to undertake activities which require a degree of autonomy and initiative, requires careful consideration. Instructors contemplating such an approach should also be aware of often greater demands on time and planning as materials are required for in-class and pre/post lesson (Talbert, 2017a, p. 191).

Benefits of flipped learning and student engagement

The benefits of the flipped learning approach are that it can significantly engage and motivate students towards goals. In most countries, higher education policy often expects their students to undertake substantial out-of-class, and in most cases independent work. The amount of time required varies depending on a range of factors including subject, field, institution and even country. However, actual time attributed to out-of-class work is often substantially less than is expected, especially for undergraduate courses. One study in Australia found that expected time input for one subject each week by universities, was the same amount of time students allocated for all subjects (ACER, 2010). The cornerstone of flipped learning is therefore how activities outside the classroom are created to improve motivation and engagement for both the tasks themselves and the classroom activities.

The actual term 'student engagement' is a concept that appears omnipresent across higher education. Indeed, 'disengagement' is of concern to many educators at university. Baron and Corbin (2012, p. 759) highlighted the many concerns of teachers regarding their students including poor attendance, lack of preparation for tutorials, and an overall feeling of antipathy to be on campus. As a consequence, many governments and universities have employed or are looking to employ practices that enhance student engagement. Baron and Corbin claim that what has been implemented so far has in many cases, failed to have any significant impact. "Indeed, we would argue that in some ways any trend towards disengagement has often been fostered, rather than ameliorated, by universities and by government policy" (2012, p. 759).

Flipped learning offers increased motivation and engagement (Abeysekera and Dawson, 2014; Basel, 2015; Hung, 2014; Talbert, 2017a). Abeysekera and Dawson (2014) dissect the improvement in engagement through its relationship with the pedagogical theory of self-determination (SDT). This theory determines two main types of motivation: intrinsic

and extrinsic. The former refers to actions students willingly undertake because they are inherently enjoyable or provide satisfaction, usually because they are novel, challenging or are visibly attractive. The flipped classroom approach is designed to appeal to the intrinsic motivation within the student. Since students are exposed to concepts in advance, are able to ascertain and understand concepts at their own pace and have some autonomy over the material, they are more willing to be engaged with activities in the classroom. However, it would be naïve to assume the majority of students are motivated in this way alone. "Only a minority of students enrolled in contemporary higher education institutions are found to be intrinsically motivated." Abeysekera and Dawson (2014, p. 5).

Extrinsic motivation refers to students undertaking an activity because they lead to a separate goal or reward, for example getting a certain grade for a class. However, the concept of 'reward' is often more complex than 'getting a certain grade'. The flipped classroom approach involves creating a learning environment that supports students being the centre of the learning process and providing opportunities for students to research and disseminate information themselves. A flipped classroom should also allow students to bring their own knowledge, opinions and experiences to the learning process and the classroom. According to Abeysekera and Dawson (2014), the results of such an approach satisfy students needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness. The action of doing activities before class offer rewards beyond completing the activity itself including a desire to share information with those within the same learning environment, contribute to the group's identity and add to the group's ultimate goals.

Relationship between flipped learning and active learning

The interest in recent years over flipped learning can be attributed to its relationship to active learning. The pedagogical approaches of active learning are broad and any precise definition of the term open to contradiction and criticism. However, in a general sense, active learning is any instructional technique in which students undertake meaningful learning activities and consider the process and reason for doing them. Activities which ask students to actively participate in the class are fundamental to this approach. "The core elements of active learning are student activity and engagement in the learning process. Active learning is often contrasted to the traditional lecture where students passively receive information from the instructor" (Prince, 2004). Andrews, Leonard, Colgove and Kalinowski (2011), show the considerable support in literature for active learning because of evidence that it leads to improved learning.

Activities that lend themselves to this approach include group discussions, case studies, collaborative learning, problem based learning, and enquiry-based learning (Hung 2014, p. 2). Since the flipped classroom promotes many of the concepts of this pedagogical approach, flipped learning often falls under the larger umbrella of active learning.

General notions of flipped learning

It is often considered that flipped learning is synonymous with video lectures, which are watched outside the classroom before lessons. The advantages of using video are that students are free to learn at their own pace, stopping the recording or rewinding whenever a point becomes confusing or cannot be initially understood. Also, students have time for advanced preparation and prior knowledge of the material they will cover in the following class. Indeed, a search of 'flipped learning' on Youtube results in many recorded clips giving instruction on how to create one's own video lecture.

However, removing the use of video lecture does not mean the classroom no longer becomes flipped. "Video is simply not necessary for flipped learning, and many alternatives to video can lead to effective flipped learning environments" (Talbert, 2017b). Bergmann and Sams, and Khan have gained notoriety through the use of video lectures in flipped classrooms. Talbert (2017c) comments that even these innovators have not defined flipped classrooms as requiring video lectures. "The thing is, Bergmann and Sams have never said (to the best of my knowledge) that *flipped learning must use video*…And as for Sal Khan, even though he has made his mark on the world through making videos, I have never heard him say that to flip a class one *must* use a video. So the idea that flipped learning requires video seems to be more perception than fact."

Talbert (2017c) records a summary of responses by teachers highlighting the reluctance of educators to undertake such an approach:

- *I like the idea of flipping my classroom, but I just don't have time to make the videos.*
- *I like the idea of flipping my classroom, but I just don't have the tech skill to make the videos.*
- *I don't have time or skill to make videos for my class, and I don't feel comfortable using someone else's videos* (for a number of reasons).
- *I'm not flipping my class because I just don't think it makes sense to use videos in what I teach.*

The perceived correlation between flipped learning and video lectures is strong, yet beyond the video there are a plethora of techniques and ideas which support the ideals of this pedagogical approach, often requiring less knowledge of technology than making online videos. Indeed, it is fundamental to many educators that education should be accessible. It is argued that introducing online videos can create barriers both through lack of knowledge and/or funds.

Alternatives to video lectures for foreign language learners

The following techniques promote the ideals of a flipped classroom in learning a foreign language specifically English. However, the majority of these concepts can be adopted and adapted to other courses across the board.

Project Based Lessons

Project based lessons (PBL) require students to research a topic or concept and create a concrete product for a proceeding lesson (e.g. a presentation, poster, brochure, a stage performance). Students often have a great deal of autonomy in collating data and choosing materials, and are often required to work in groups. Instructors prepare students for tasks by defining themes, assisting data collection, and previewing necessary language demands. Presentation of their end-product allows instructors and peers to gauge what fresh knowledge has been gained, providing feedback and further insight.

Outcomes of PBL are consistent with the ideals of active learning, positively engaging students in the process of learning. Stoller (2002, p. 110), highlights the positive results of PBL lessons.

Increased intrinsic motivation as students are guided to real-world subject matter and topics that are of interest to the student.

Increased autonomy for the student, particularly when students are given the freedom over material they can research and present.

Use of skills required for researching and presenting information including the process of information, which mirror real-life tasks.

If TBL lessons are required to be undertaken in a group, collaboration, teamwork and communication skills are all required.

Increased knowledge on content.

Increased focus on fluency and accuracy at different project work stages.

Increased confidence and self-esteem.

ESL/EFL websites

There are a range of activities that students can easily find on English learning websites including podcasts, recordings, activities, video clips and even grammatical and lexical activities. Most are designed to be user-friendly requiring little technological knowledge. Many require no subscription fee and are accessible from any device capable of internet connection. The increasing amount of material available through these websites offer ample choice. Many websites dedicated to language learning have graded material allowing students autonomy over the material best suited to their level. Similar to video, students can review, rewind or stop on activities, learning at a pace they feel comfortable with. Since online websites can be accessed at any time, students have complete autonomy over the time and place they view material. Such website stimulate intrinsic motivation as activities are often novel, visibly, attractive and provide a sense of satisfaction upon completion of tasks. Extrinsic motivation factors include a desire to provide recommendations and feedback to both classmates and instructors. In assisting other members, students contribute positively to the group's learning process and overall goals.

Text with activities

Providing students with a text article or section of a textbook to read as a pre-task is hardly avant-garde in pedagogy. Yet providing written material, whether that be online or in hard form, before a lesson can still motivate students to fully engage in the learning process. Online material or electronic textbooks are particularly useful as they do not require printing, are durable, inexpensive and usually easily saved. Simply providing material and asking students to read it, though is not preparing students for a flipped lesson, which is supposed to free up time in class for active learning techniques. Structured activities which require students to engage with materials, including guided practice assignments or metacognitive strategies provide opportunities for feedback in proceeding lessons. Instructors using electronic textbooks can annotate sections through various online tools (Talbert, 2017a, p. 192).

Augmented Reality

Perhaps the most engaging of activities for students is the introduction of simulation through this fast-developing technology. There are a variety of sites which offer material on virtual or augmented reality including many university campuses. Taking a tour through the university, students not only understand more about their studying environment but are able to explain various facets of university life and facilities. Popular augmented applications such as Layar or Wikitude offer opportunities to explore and interact with environments outside campus. Google Earth allows access to anywhere globally providing information on annotated *points of interest*. Rivas (2010) recommends 100 virtual tours around the world. Through these mediums, students become not only engaged with learning but the world around them. An improved knowledge with real purpose provides opportunities for students to communicate what they have learned in following classes.

Conclusion

Descending from the principals of active learning, flipped learning has developed into a new term in pedagogy. The approach seeks to engage and motivate students in the learning process by creating a new information-transition paradigm, which aims to provide students with greater autonomy. The classroom is no longer a teacher-centred environment but a place for sharing ideas, opinions and understanding of various concepts. By flipping the traditional process of learning, students have more opportunities to interact with and learn from other members of their learning environment. Such a framework teaches metacognitive and lifelong skills which can be employed in life outside of the learning institution. Yet to be fully appreciated, flipped learning must escape from the perceptions that it can only be achieved through the medium of video lectures. Adapting techniques that already exist, or adopting ideas from new technology are valid and relevant for this approach, particularly in language learning. While this pedagogical approach may have failings, it provides an ideology

which aims to reach and influence a generation of learners to be willing and positive about education.

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