

Chapter 45

A Flipped Learning Approach to University EFL Courses

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ABSTRACT

This chapter reports on a research project in a university English as Foreign Language program in Japan that explored ways to sustain active participation in e-learning tasks that were intended to improve students' scores on the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC). A flipped learning (FL) approach to a blended learning (BL) teaching methodology was adopted. A web-based courseware, ATR CALL BRIX was used. The students used mobile devices to access the courseware before class in order to prepare for in-class teacher-student analysis of their performance on the learning tasks. The teaching methodology integrated the online and in-class tasks in a single learning environment by means of an e-mentoring system used in conjunction with an in-class student self-evaluation task.

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BACKGROUND

Defining Flipped Learning

BL is a combination of face-to-face delivery and online delivery of learning materials and activities (Osguthorpe & Graham, 2003). Teachers interested in BL are searching for ways to make use of the rapidly expanding number of online easily-accessible learning resources. The increase in the use of technology to connect learning environments inside and outside the classroom has recently accelerated due to two developments in educational resources: the free online access to university courses via software, e.g. iTunes U, and websites such as Coursera (<https://www.coursera.org/>); and the sophisticated communication capability of mobile devices such as smart phones and tablet computers.

A promising response to these developments is the FL approach to the BL teaching methodology (Stuntz, 2013; Bishop & Verleger, 2013) which reverses the conventional patterns of classroom learning. Hamdan, McKnight, McKnight, & Arfstrom (2013) define the differences between FL practices and distance learning and BL courses by explaining that if the use of computers and online content does not alter conventional patterns of direct instruction in teacher-centered classrooms, it is not FL. In FL courses students are provided with outside-of-class online learning materials conventionally presented in class by the teacher. Classroom time is used for students to seek advice from the teacher and to help each other as they complete tasks which are usually done as outside-of-class assignments (Lage, Platt, & Treglia, 2000).

Yarbro, Arfstrom, McKnight, & McKnight (2014) define FL 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” (p.5). FL facilitates active collaborative learning during class time by allowing teachers to respond to individual differences in the comprehension of course content. At the same time students are given opportunities to find learning methods and materials that suit their own learning styles (Lage, Platt, & Treglia, 2000) through engagement in project-based learning activities which include small-group discussion and problem-solving activities. Thus, FL has the greatest chance of success with small-sized classes that make peer interaction manageable and allow teachers to take on a coaching role.

The rationale of FL, the expectations for student participation in their own learning, and the role of the teacher should be explained and demonstrated to students in the early stages of a course.

Flipped Learning for Foreign Language Learning

Recent studies offer encouragement that an FL approach to language teaching should be further investigated through a classroom-based action research methodology. Stuntz (2013) reported that students in a FL CALL EFL course needed instruction and practice in the use of communication and study media such as Gmail and Google Docs to complete outside-of-class assignments. Improvements in these skills allowed for effective use of class time to discuss outside-of-class learning tasks with both their peers and the instructor. The collaboration resulted in higher quality task products. A Learning Management System platform can guide students through the outside-of class online learning tasks (Sung, 2015).

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