The Effects of Flipping an English for Academic Purposes Course

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ABSTRACT

This article addresses the lack of research into the effects of flipping tertiary level English for Academic Purposes courses. An experimental method was used to compare the outcomes and satisfaction of students (n=29) enrolled in a flipped and a traditional version of an Advanced Presentation and Discussion course at a university in South Korea. Results show that students in the traditionally taught class achieved better objective assessment outcomes, students in the flipped class achieved better competency-based assessment outcomes, and satisfaction was the same. These findings are of interest because they confirm some previous assertions about flipped learning while contradicting others. It is suggested that instructors need to consider the instructional design, video production, use of face-to-face time, and audience-specific considerations at the outset of establishing a course in order to develop effective learning environments.

KEYWORDS

Blended, EAP, E-Learning, Flipped, Video Lectures

INTRODUCTION

The popularity of flipped learning methods is on the increase. The move in higher education towards flipped methods of instruction, which began in secondary education (Bergmann & Sams, 2009), can be viewed as part of an educational approach that promotes blended learning. Blended learning is a combination of face-to-face (F2F) and instruction, often in online environments, outside the classroom (Lage, Platt, & Treglia, 2000). The “flip” in flipped classrooms refers to the inverting of the traditional classwork/homework relationship; teacher-led instruction takes place outside the class, while activities relating to it take place inside (Pierce & Fox, 2012). This approach is said to be of benefit to students as it allows for more student-directed discussion, time for problem-solving activities, self-directed and self-paced learning, and greater responsibility for learning (Roehl, Reddy, & Shannon, 2013). Flipped classrooms often use recorded lectures which students view outside the classroom and at their own pace (O’Flaherty & Phillips, 2015). This asynchronous approach to instruction allows for increased amounts of time in class for the instructor to facilitate the application of knowledge (Pluta, Richards, & Mutnick, 2013). In-class, instructors facilitate inquiry, clarify concepts, and encourage planning, analysis, and application of knowledge (Anderson, Krathwohl, & Airasian, 2001). Synchronous activities to strengthen understanding of concepts include micro lectures, student presentations, debates, and discussions (O’Flaherty & Phillips, 2015). The promotion of the flipped learning approach is supported by research into student satisfaction and course grades (Mason, Shuman, & Cook, 2013; Wilson, 2014). It has been shown that students adapt quickly to flipped learning (Mason, Schuman, & Cook, 2013; McLaughlin, et al., 2014) and that, when compared to traditional versions of the same course, students’ satisfaction increases (Butts, 2014; Critz & Wright, 2013; Mason, Schuman, & Cook...
2013; McLaughlin, et al., 2013; Pierce & Fox, 2012). Research has also shown improvements in test results and course outcomes (Mason, Schuman, & Cook 2013; McLaughlin, et al., 2013; Pierce & Fox 2012). While there are many positives, research also shows that establishing flipped environments is labour intensive and time consuming for staff (Critz & Wright, 2013; Gannod, Burge, & Helmick, 2007). To address this, some institutions are developing programs to assist instructors (Butts, 2014; Critz & Wright, 2013; Gannod, Burge, & Helmick, 2007). It has also been reported that in some contexts flipped learning has not led to any changes in performance (Clark, 2015) and may not benefit certain groups of students (Owston, York, & Murtha, 2013).

Research into the effects of flipped learning in the field of TESOL has, since 2013, begun to increase (Bauer-Ramazani, et al., 2016). The research so far has shown that flipped classrooms in TESOL contexts can improve learning outcomes (Ekmecki, 2017; Hung, 2017; Kang, 2015; Kvashnina & Martynko, 2016; Leis, Cooke, & Tohei, 2015; Webb & Domar, 2016, 2017) and student satisfaction (Ekmecki, 2017; Hung, 2017; Kang, 2015; Kvashnina & Martynko, 2016; O’Flaherty & Phillips, 2015; Soliman, 2016; Sung, 2015; Yujing, 2015). However, there is as yet little research into the effectiveness of flipped teaching methods on student outcomes or satisfaction among students enrolled in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses that focus on teaching skills such as presentation and discussion. It is important for practitioners and institutions to understand the effects design and teaching decisions have on the outcomes their students achieve in these contexts as more flipped courses are developed and as institutions seek to provide optimal learning conditions. By presenting the methods used in creating and teaching the first term of a flipped presentation and discussion course, comparing outcomes and satisfaction with a traditionally taught section, and discussing how the former may have affected the latter, this paper contributes to the discussion on how flipped learning classes can be effectively introduced. The paper seeks to answer two questions:

1. What effect does flipping an EAP class have on student grades?
2. What effect does flipping an EAP class have on student satisfaction?

Theoretical Foundations of Flipped Learning

Abeysekera & Dawson (2014) suggest conducting critical analysis of flipped classrooms through the lenses of cognitive load theory (CLT) and self-determination theory (SDT). CLT (Sweller, Ayres, & Kalyuga, 2011) states that the brain processes information through audio and visual channels in the working memory and then transfers this information to the long-term memory. In the long-term memory, new information is integrated with existing via schemas and is retained. It is said that the processing power of the audio and visual channels is finite. Within CLT, three types of cognitive load are said to operate during the learning process: germane, intrinsic, and extraneous (De Jong, 2010; Sweller, 2005; Sweller, Van Merriënboer, & Paas, 1998). Germane load allows learners to build schemas and transfer information to the long-term memory by providing relevant information (Kolfschoten, et al., 2010). Intrinsic load consists of the effort put into the cognition of varying complex content (Cierniak, et al., 2009; Shadiev, et al., 2015; Sweller & Chandler, 1994). Extraneous load is made up of elements unnecessary to the learning process or that make the process more difficult and strains learners cognitive powers (Leppink, et al., 2013; Schmeck, et al., 2015).

Abeysekera & Dawson (2014) state that flipped methods allow for self-pacing and tailoring to expertise, processes that allow for greater cognitive processing. It has been suggested that, while changes in the modes of delivery instructors use do not necessarily result in any significant change to cognitive processing (Russell, 2013), changing pedagogic practices by putting lectures online and allowing learners to control the pace at which they are learning could help them manage cognitive load (Clark, et al. 2005). CLT researchers have also found that flipped learning allows for the tailoring of instruction to different levels of expertise by using learning analytics and pre-class activities (Clark,
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