The Effectiveness of Different Modalities in Facilitating Grammar Acquisition in the Flipped Classroom

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ABSTRACT
The flipped classroom model (FC), as a new instructional approach, has been implemented by different disciplines over the past few years. However, the use of this model is still in its infancy in the field of foreign language education. The present study explored the efficacy of using the FC model in facilitating the acquisition of grammar among novice level learners of Chinese as a foreign language by measuring their comprehension and awareness of usage of the target grammar patterns as well as by collecting responses from a semi-open-ended questionnaire regarding learners’ experience of and attitudes towards the FC model.

KEYWORDS
Flipped Classroom, Foreign Language Education, Grammar Instruction, Learning Modality

INTRODUCTION
The flipped classroom model (FC), as a new instructional approach, has gained increasing attention among educators from different disciplines and across different levels, especially postsecondary. One of the earliest studies on flipped learning, Lage, et al. (2000), defines the flipped classroom or “inverted classroom” as the classroom where “events that have traditionally taken place inside the classroom now take place outside the classroom and vice versa” (p. 32). In their 2012 book, Bergmann and Sams introduced the way they switched from traditional instruction to the flipped classroom model by sharing their design, implementation, and reflections on this new practice. Although they used the flipped classroom model with high school students in Math and Science classes, the pedagogical implications have been expanded to include other disciplines and other education levels.

Compared with the increasing adoption of the flipped classroom model in various disciplines, the implementation of this innovative instructional model in foreign language classes is still in its infancy. Is the flipped classroom model a good fit for the foreign language classroom? The goal of language education is to develop learners’ communicative competency and cultural awareness so that they can function in the target community, skills that cannot be achieved without plenty of practice in class. However, there is not always enough time for students to practice using the target language in class. FC can free up more class time by moving the explicit instruction part of language teaching outside the classroom. FC should thus appeal to foreign language educators. Many scholars argue that the FC model conforms well to the communicative and interactive nature of language education.

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(Wang & Qi, 2018) and the social cultural framework of second language acquisition (Moranski & Kim 2016). However, there is far less literature on the implementation of FC in foreign language education than in STEM and other disciplines (Hung, 2015; Lee & Wallace, 2018; Moranski & Kim, 2016; Wang & Qi, 2018; Wang, et al. 2018).

The methodology employed in previous research on FC implemented in different disciplines, including foreign language courses, has been mainly surveys and questionnaires to measure students’ perceived improvement through various factors, such as satisfaction, engagement, performance, and so on (Nagy, 2018; Mohamed & Lamia, 2018; Wang & Qi, 2018; Yılmaz, 2017). Research that uses objective and specific measurements to assess the actual gain in learners’ performance is scarce (Wang et al., 2018; Moranski & Kim, 2016). In the field of foreign language education, the studies that investigate the effectiveness of FC mostly concern learning English as a foreign language (Chen et al., 2016; Hung, 2015; Lee & Wallace, 2018). The participants in these studies have all had many years of learning English. It is unknown if the effects and benefits observed can be applied to novice language learners. Another gap identified is that, with the exception of a few studies (Wang et al., 2018; Moranski & Kim, 2016), most studies along this line examined the holistic performance among language learners rather than specific language competence.

The present study attempted to investigate the implementation of FC with a particular aspect of language instruction: grammar by both objective measurements and surveys. As is summarized on the ACTFL (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages) website, research shows that explicit teaching of grammar rules alone has little effect on people’s language acquisition, comprehension, or writing abilities. Explicit instruction in these concepts helps students obtain declarative knowledge. It is only through plenty of practice in communicative contexts that students can truly develop the procedural knowledge that is used in real communication. Unfortunately, there is usually not enough in-class time for learners to practice with their peers in a communicative context.

This article uses the following structure to report the study briefly introduced above. A literature review is provided in the first section on the research of FC in general and, in particular, FC in foreign language. The second section reports the methods employed in the present study, including participants, training materials, procedure, and data analysis methods. The results of the present study are summarized and reported in the third section. The fourth section discusses the results and the last section addresses the conclusion drawn from the present study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Effectiveness of FC in Different Disciplines

Studies and publications on the practice of the flipped classroom model have flourished over the past five years or so as well. Akçaşir and Akçaşir (2018) did a large-scale review of studies on the flipped classroom and summarized the advantages and challenges of the 71 studies that were included in their analysis based on their criteria. Among all the studies, 79% were published in 2015 and 2016; thus, it can be said that research on flipped classroom has just begun.

Previous research along this line mainly focused on the design, implementation, and efficacy of the flipped classroom model as well as on learners’ experience with this instructional model in different disciplines among different groups. Some studies reported improved learning outcomes in STEM classes (Battaglia & Kaya, 2015; Eichler & Peeples, 2016), business courses (Balaban et al., 2016), and other professional training courses (Bösnerv, 2016). Akçaşir and Akçaşir (2018) stated that a majority of studies (52.11%) reported improved learning performance. Other studies reported increased student satisfaction, engagement, motivation and so on. Some studies reported that learning became more flexible after the flipped classroom model was adopted and that it enhanced individualized learning and learner autonomy.
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