

USING FLIPPED LEARNING MODEL IN READING CLASSES TO DEVELOP ENGLISH MAJORS' READING COMPREHENSION

Trinh Thi Hang

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Abstract: *This study focuses on examining the efficacy of flipped reading class model in developing English majors' reading comprehension. An experimental research was carried out in which the control group was taught with the traditional steps of a reading lesson while the experimental group was taught using flipped learning approach. A pretest and a posttest were administered to both groups before and after the experimental program to measure the effectiveness of flipped reading classes. A questionnaire, informal interviews and class observation were conducted to the experimental group to investigate into students' reaction to flipped reading lessons. The obtained results showed that flipped learning did help English majors develop their reading comprehension.*

Keywords: *Flipped learning, reading comprehension.*

1. Introduction

It was generally agreed that reading comprehension is one of the most crucial skills for foreign language learners in general and English language learners in particular to master. Reading in English has become a critical skill in terms of academic and career success [8]. With strengthened reading skills, English as a second/foreign language (ESL/EFL) readers will make greater progress and attain greater development in all academic areas [1]. Due to the great importance of reading comprehension in ESL/EFL learning, numerous studies have been conducted to facilitate effective reading lesson delivery.

However, our initial investigation into the current situation of teaching and learning foreign language reading skills at different universities revealed that reading classes seem rather boring with tedious activities in the course books. Moreover, it takes too much time for students, especially those who are learning advanced English reading courses, to read lengthened and complicated texts in class before they can do the required tasks.

This study is aimed at using flipped learning model in reading classes with the hope that English-majored students can develop their reading comprehension in a more active and interesting way. With flipped learning, tasks in the course books are done individually by students before class, and the valuable class time is reserved for active interaction between the teacher and students as well as between students and students themselves.

Trinh Thi Hang

Faculty of Foreign Languages, Hong Duc University

Email: Trinhthihang@hdu.edu.vn (✉)

2. Theoretical overview

2.1. Reading comprehension

According to John Kruidenier (2002) comprehension is an active process and the reader must interact and be engaged with the text for it to work well. As comprehension takes place, words are decoded and associated with their meaning in the reader's memory and phrases and sentences are processed rapidly or fluently enough so that the meanings derived from one word, phrase, or sentence are not lost before the text is processed. Snow (2002) defined reading comprehension "as the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language". He stated that comprehension entails three elements: the 'reader' who is doing the 'comprehending', the 'text' that is to be comprehended, and the 'activity' in which comprehension is a part.

Peter Westwood (2008) claimed that reading comprehension is often conceptualized as functioning at different levels of sophistication and referred to as literal, inferential and critical. The most basic level (literal) is where the reader is able to understand the factual information presented in a passage of text. The next level is referred to as the inferential level. At this level the reader is able to go beyond the words on the page and infer other details. Being able to operate at the inferential level means that the reader is using information effectively to deduce cause and effect, and to anticipate what may come next. At a more demanding level (critical reading), the reader is able to appraise what he or she is reading, detecting good writing style from the author, recognizing when some statements in the text are biased or incorrect, appreciating the writer's viewpoint, comparing and contrasting information with other facts they have read elsewhere, and reflecting upon the importance or otherwise of the opinions presented.

2.2. Flipped learning

The governing board and key leaders of the Flipped Learning Network (2014) have defined 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".

In flipped classes, lessons/lectures are not taught during class time. They are delivered to students before class as input materials in the forms of screen casts, podcasts and videos. Students study by themselves at their own pace before class. Classroom time is for the students to apply knowledge by solving problems, doing practical work and getting necessary support. With the flipped classroom, students have direct access to the knowledge and the teacher serves as a coach and mentor. Students have to be well-prepared for their contact moments with their teacher and peers. During the class time teachers are to focus on knowledge application and deeper processing of the learning material.

However, flipped materials do not always have to be tied to technology [2]. Students can study various types of materials (e.g., readings from a textbook and worksheets developed by their teacher) on their own outside of class time and grasp the meaning of the content. Based on their understanding, they consolidate their content knowledge by raising questions and engaging in class activities through group work facilitated by their instructor [6].

3. The study

3.1. Subjects

Participants in the study consisted of two groups (27 students/1 group) of third-year English majors at Hong Duc University. One group served as the control group, and the other as the experimental group. These students were taking the final reading course in the curriculum. After finishing this course, students are expected to achieve English reading competency level equivalent to CAE.

3.2. Instruments

In order to find out whether this model worked well in reading classes and how the students reacted to the experimental program, different instruments were utilized in the study.

Pretest and posttest: A pretest was administered at the beginning of the course before the experimental program to make sure that two groups had the same level of reading comprehension. At the end of the course, a posttest was conducted to find out whether flipped learning made any difference to the reading comprehension of the experimental group in comparison with the control group. Both tests included questions to check students' reading comprehension at three different levels referred to as literal, inferential and critical.

Survey questionnaire: A small-scaled survey questionnaire was administered after the experimental program to investigate into students' reaction to the flipped classes.

Class observation: During the reading lessons, class observation was done by the researchers to see how students worked in the flipped classes.

Interviews: Interviews with the students in the experimental group were carried out to investigate into students' attitude to the experimental program.

3.3. Research methods

In order to measure the efficacy of the experimental program, both quantitative and qualitative methods were utilized.

Quantitative method: Results of the pretest and posttest as well as the survey questionnaire were synthesized and compared between the control and experimental groups to find out whether flipped learning could improve English majors' reading comprehension.

Qualitative method: Class observation and interviews with the students provided the researchers with raw data for analyzing the students' reaction and attitude to the experimental program.

3.4. Procedures

After the pre-test in the first week of the semester, a group was randomly chosen as the experimental group and the other as the control group. For the control group, three traditional steps of a reading lesson, namely pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading were carried out throughout the reading course.

For experimental group, the course begins with an introduction about flipped learning in which students read the reading materials and do all the reading comprehension tasks as required in the course book by themselves before going to class. Moreover, students had to read two more pieces of reading materials related to the topic of the lesson on the Reading

Group set up on the Messenger by the teacher at the beginning of the course. Then, they made comparison and found the connections among the three reading passages. Each student was required to make two questions about things that they wanted to know more about the topic of the lesson. Class time is for students to focus on deepening understanding, discussing issues related to the topics, seeking answers to their questions and applying knowledge in real life. All these were done with the help of in-class activities prepared by the teacher.

In a 50-minute flipped classroom, the teacher used the first 5 minutes to warm up the students as in traditional classes. The next 10 minutes is reserved for lexical comprehension: Understanding key vocabulary words in a text. Students are exposed to the important and new words in the text they have read before class, and attempt to use these words in meaningful sentences. Another 10 minutes is for literal comprehension: Answers the questions who, what, when, where, why, and how. The next 20 minutes is for inferential ability: Answers questions that have the reader relate the new information to background knowledge, deduce cause and effect, predict future events etc. The remaining 20 minutes is for critical reading: Comment on the writing styles, writers' bias, viewpoints, comparing and contrasting information in the three reading passages they have read before class etc. The experimental program took place in ten weeks from week 2 to week 11 of the semester. Class observation was conducted throughout the ten experimental weeks. The final week is reserved for the posttest. A survey questionnaire and informal interviews were carried out in the final week after the posttest.

3.5. Results and discussions

The results of the pretest and posttest administered at the beginning and at the end of the reading course to find out to what extent flipped learning model can help students improve their reading comprehension are presented in the following table.

Table 1. Results of the pretest and posttest

Points (/10)	Control group		Experimental group	
	Pretest (%)	Posttest (%)	Pretest (%)	Posttest (%)
8.0-10	7.41	7.41	11.11	14.81
6.5-7.5	25.93	33.33	22.22	59.26
5.0-6.0	62.96	55.56	59.26	25.93
0-4.5	3.70	3.70	7.41	0

As can be seen from the table, both the control and experimental groups have more or less the same level of reading comprehension in the pretest. However, after the experimental program, the experimental group witnessed better results with more students achieving 8-10 points. The number of the students who received 6.5-7.5 points also increased from 22.22% to 59.26%. Fewer students got mark 5-6 (with the number decreasing from 59.26% in the pretest to 25.93% in the posttest). No student got mark 0-4.5. In the meantime, the results of the control group experienced less change with the same number of students achieving excellent and weak marks in the pretest as in the post test. The number of the students who got mark 6.5-7.5 slightly increased from 25.93% to 33.33%. It can be said that the experimental program helped to improve reading comprehension for the students of the experimental group.

In addition to the tests, a survey questionnaire was also administered to the experimental group to find out how students evaluated the intervention program. The questionnaire consisted of five closed questions. The following table shows the results of the survey.

Table 2. *Students' evaluation of the intervention program*

No.	Questions	A (%)	B (%)	C (%)	D (%)
1.	<i>How much do you like the flipped reading lessons?</i> A. very much B. much C. not very much D. not at all	18.52	74.07	7.41	0
2.	<i>What do you think of the class atmosphere during flipped reading lessons</i> A. very interesting B. interesting C. boring D. very boring	22.22	77.78	0	0
3.	<i>What reading skills have you improved after the course? (more than one answer can be accepted)</i> A. Skimming for gist B. Scanning for details C. Understanding author's attitude D. Summarizing long texts	66.67	74.07	59.26	48.15
4.	<i>What other skills have you improved after the course (more than one answer can be accepted)</i> A. Being autonomous in learning reading skills B. Being more active in reading classes C. Being able to deepen a reading text D. Being able to find support materials from the Internet	96.30	88.89	85.19	100
5.	<i>What difficulties have you encountered in flipped reading lessons? (more than one answer can be accepted)</i> A. Too much pre-class preparation B. Working with un-prepared partners C. Not having an internet-connected computer D. Having too many new words in their chosen reading passages	74.07	37.04	29.63	22.22

The figures in the table show that most of the students liked flipped reading classes. 18.52% liked it very much, and up to 74.07% like it much. Only 7.41% did not like it very much. No student stated that they did not like flipped classes at all. Similarly, most of the students remarked flipped reading lessons are 'very interesting' (22.22%) and 'interesting' (77.78%). No student found them boring. In terms of reading skills, all the students stated that they improved such skills as skimming for gist (66.67%), scanning for details (74.07%), understanding author's attitude (59.26%) and summarizing long texts (48.15%). Moreover, the students also assumed that they improved other skills as well. 96.30% became autonomous in learning reading skills; 88.89% were more active in reading classes; 85.19 were able to deepen a reading text; and 100% were able to find support materials from the Internet. However, there

still existed some difficulties for students. 74.07% complained there was too much pre-class preparation. 37.04% had to work with un-prepared partners one time or another. 29.63% did not have an internet-connected computer which made them difficult to follow the course. 22.22% had too many new words in their chosen reading passages. Class observation and informal interviews with the students of the experimental group also reinforced that flipped learning model really helped students to improve their reading comprehension in a novel way. They became more motivated, active and interested in the reading lessons.

4. Conclusion

Reading has always been considered an important language skill to be mastered for language learners. This study exploited flipped learning model to improve English majors' reading comprehension. Based on the theoretical framework of reading comprehension and flipped learning, steps for delivering a flipped reading lesson were put forward.

To find out whether this new model is effective in developing English majors' reading comprehension, an experimental research was conducted during 10 consecutive weeks of the reading course for third-year English majors at Hong Duc University. Two groups who were in their final reading course were chosen and randomly assigned as the control group and experimental group. While the control group was taught with traditional three steps of a reading lesson, the experimental one was provided with slipped reading lessons. A pretest and a posttest were administered to check the efficacy of the experimental program. Observation was also made in slipped classes throughout the semester. A survey questionnaire and informal interviews were conducted at the end of the course to find out students' reaction to slipped reading classes. The results from the tests, class observation, questionnaire and interviews demonstrated that slipped classes really helped students improve their reading comprehension, and made a positive change in the way students act in reading classes.

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