The Effect of Using Flipped Class on Teaching Reading Comprehension at Cihan University

Marjan R. Abbasian, Israa B. Azeez

Department of English, Cihan University-Erbil,
Kurdistan Region, Iraq

Abstract—Reading comprehension is one of the important skills of language learning, there are many methods that are used to develop this skill such as flipped classroom. Flipped class has been used to teach different topics and it proved to be effective in many fields. Thus, this study aims to explore the effect of flipped class on improving reading comprehension skills for Kurdish and Arabic EFL at China University-Erbil. Hence, the main question of this study is to figure out whether implementing flipped class on EFL will improve their reading comprehension skills? Will it develop the students reading abilities including both levels "elementary and intermediate?" In addition, to which level of students is more applicable? According to the mentioned questions, it is presupposed that flipped class has more positive results in teaching reading comprehension skills than the tradition class. This is due to the fact that the student will have access to online facilities and internet to gain further information about the topic before the class. Thus, it is assumed that it will improve Kurdish and Arabic EFL reading comprehension skills including both levels "Elementary and intermediate." However, it is presumed that the flipped class will have a greater impact on intermediate level than on elementary level. To answer the aforementioned questions, two groups of students were chosen; the controlled group and traditional group. Both groups had pre-test (to evaluate their English proficiency) then they participated in different sessions (traditional and flipped class). After conducted all the sessions, results were analyzed. It is believed that teaching with flipped class is more effective and comes out with more positive outcomes than the traditional class teaching.

Keywords—Blended learning, Reading comprehension skills, Flipped class, Student-centered method.

I. Introduction

Learning methods have confronted with lots of changes during the past decades. One of the most effective tools that helped this change is the internet and technology. With the advent of technology in pedagogy, the blended approach could improve the learning experience for the students. The "blended learning" approach could link the technology with the classroom more and also improved the designed learning outcome measures. A type of blended learning approach is the "flipped or inverted classroom" in which the responsibility and mastering the subjects are on the students. In this approach, the role of the traditional class and teacher is changed to an active student-centered way and the teacher plays the role of a facilitator for them.

One of the skills that is so important in this modern world is reading. No one can deny the role of this skill in any English language class. In English language class, we do not read only to achieve a source of information but also as a way to extend our knowledge of the language. It is a good way to widen our views toward the foreign culture.

Reading is considered as a conceptual process in the reader's brain. The reader should understand and digest the author's intention. The reader's cognitive abilities can be shown from his language use ability. Hence, it is a mutual relationship between reading and comprehension.

In general, studies suggest that flipped classroom strategy had a positive effect on the students' proficiency in English language skills. Furthermore, this study aimed at exploring the impact of the flipped learning on reading comprehension skill of the Kurdish EFL learners in the 2nd stage of English department at Cihan University. According to this, the main research questions of the present study were as follows:

RQ: Does flipped classroom has any impact on Kurdish and Arabic EFL learners' reading comprehension at elementary (and intermediate) levels?

According to the mentioned questions, the following hypotheses were presupposed:

H: Flipped classroom has a positive impact on Kurdish and Arabic EFL learners' reading comprehension.

II. Literature Review

Although "Flipped classroom" is a new learning atmosphere, it is not a completely novel idea. Most of the time, the teachers give the reading text as a kind of home assignment to their students to have a kind of background in class discussion. Hence, this way of teaching reading skill can be considered as an inverted classroom. However, a few key characteristics distinguish the flipped classroom from an inverted classroom. In the flipped classroom, students watch video recorded lectures outside of class, thus increasing time for active learning and practice to occur in the class (Strayer, 2012). While implementation of this method may look slightly different for each teacher, essentially "the 'flipped' part of the flipped classroom means students watch or listen to lessons at home and do their 'homework' in the class" (Fulton, 2012, p. 13).

According to Petel and Jain (2008, p.114), the most important activity in any language class is reading. Reading is not only a source of information and a pleasurable activity but also as a means of consolidating and extending one's knowledge of the language. Reading is very necessary to widen the mind, gain, and understanding of the foreign culture. Reading is certainly an important activity for expanding knowledge of a language. Classroom means students watch or listen to lessons at home and do their "homework" in the class (Fulton, 2012, p. 13**).**

According to Baker (2000), Toto and Nguyen (2009), the delivery of the "lecture" before coming to class is the first step in the flipped classroom model. In class, students are prepared to take part in the collaborative situation the teacher has designed because the background knowledge has been created before the class. In 2010, Cherry suggested that blended learning involves a shift in strategy in three areas: From teacher-centered to student-centered learning, from limited to high interactions between students and resources. The concept is gaining popularity, due to the widespread use of technology in education which provide the opportunity for teachers to accomplish the flip such as iTunes, YouTube, and Learning Management Systems.

Khan (2012), a widely recognized online educator, popularized the flipped classroom through his website, Khan Academy. This website contains over 4120 short educational videos, most detailing a specific math concept (Thomas, 2013). Khan works on the problems step by step on each video. "Khan's idea was that youngsters would watch the videos at home and work on the problems in class, essentially 'flipping' the classroom" (Kronholz, 2012, p. 25).

In general, studies suggest that the flipped classroom strategy positively affects students' performance and proficiency levels in various areas of English language. According to Hung (2015), flipped instructional model in English classes develops students' academic performance in general. However, being a relatively new trend, there seems to be little rigorous research done to measure the effects of this pedagogy (Goodwin and Miller, 2013), especially on four essential skills in language learning including writing, listening, reading, and speaking.

III. Methodology

A. Significance of the Study

This research is beneficial for teaching language in general since flipped class can be used in teaching different topics not only reading comprehension. It helps the teacher to get advantage of technology and link the students with the outside world. Flipped class can be used in teaching literature or in teaching grammar. Blended learning encourages self-learning and increases the productivity of the class. Hence, this study is valuable for teachers who seek for an innovative method of teaching.

B. Participants

This study is implemented on second stage students in English language department – Cihan University, Erbil. Forty students were chosen to participate in this test. The students are from different levels (elementary and intermediate) and they have different reading comprehension abilities. Moreover, the participants include both Arabic and Kurdish students.

C. Data Collection

In this research, six different texts were chosen from Select Readings – Upper intermediate 2nd edition by Lee and Bernard (2015). The texts cover a diversity of topics with relatively different levels of difficulty. In each text, the focus is on the following reading comprehension skills: Skimming which means run your eyes over a text, it is a quick reading for information; the reader will not read every word and will not concentrate on details. The students should skim the text for the general and the main idea only leaving out all the unnecessary details. The second skill that is important is scanning which means reading a piece of writing and searching for a particular specific information such as a name, meaning of a term, or a definition. The third skill is intensive reading for details. Intensive reading involves reading the text word by word, looking for, and understanding all the details. It includes understanding the meaning of unfamiliar vocabulary, guessing the meaning of some words from the context, understanding sentence structure, and the cohesive devices used in the text as pronoun usage. In addition to the mentioned skills, a comprehensive reader must be able to identify the writer's main purpose and the main idea of the reading and should be able to infer logical conclusions from what have been mentioned in the text.

C. Testing Method

The total number of sessions conducted for this study was six sessions, three sessions implementing traditional class for controlled group and the other three for experimental group implementing flipped teaching. Forty students were chosen from second-stage English department – Cihan University – Erbil. Participants then undergo all the sessions, the traditional and the flipped class.

Pre-test

First of all a pre-test had been arranged to measure the students language proficiency, especially their reading skills. According to the results from the test, the participants were divided into elementary and intermediate depending on their scores in the test.

Control group

For each session in the traditional class, a text was given to all the participants and they saw the text for the 1st time in the class without having prior knowledge or studying at home. The class was delivered in a classical way by explaining the content and discussing all the related points. After explaining, the participants answered all the questions related to the text. The number of questions is 15 for each text. Different styles of questions were used such as TOFEL-ILETS-PET. Moreover, the nature of the questions is different from one text to another and they cover different reading skills.

Experimental group

Regarding flipped class, three texts were chosen as well, before attending the class the text was sent to the participants via email. Moreover, the teacher gave instructions to the students about how to study and use online resources as internet and dictionary to understand the text and learn more about the topics. Hangout Meeting on Google Meet had been arranged with the participants as well two days before the sessions in the class, therefore the students had plenty of time to read more about the topic. When the participants came to the class, they had prior knowledge about the topic in general even though they did not master the text fully. Then the students and the teacher discussed the text again in the class after which the participants answered all the questions. Here are samples of questions used in the text with the reading skill they cover:

1. Vocabulary: Developing and learning new vocabulary is essential in learning any language. By providing different texts about different topics, the students are introduced to a bulk of new words in each text. Hence, one of the important skills is to understand the meaning of "new words" from the context such as: The meaning of the word "malleable" in paragraph 1 is closest in meaning to:

    a – complicated   b – Puzzled
    c – Confused   d – Suggestable

2. The main idea of the reading: A comprehensive reader must be able to identify the main aim of the text. In any text, you can find many ideas but usually there is one main idea and many sub ideas. The student has to read intensively to understand the main points

    For example: The author's main purpose of the article is:
    a- Introduce the philosophy and practice of TCM
    b- Explain how many people are abandoning western medicine
    c- Point out how the body is connected with nature and universe

3. Scanning for detail: The other significant skill in reading is scanning. Scanning is used in reading to find a specific information in the text, it is used to find a definition, to understand the use of pronouns and for checking a piece of information whether it is true or false. For example: Each of the following is true about video games except for:

    a- They can increase attention span
    b- Time spent playing them should be limited
    c- They can improve the pattern of recognition

4. Skimming: In addition to scanning, skimming is important as well. Skimming means running the eyes over a text to get the main idea. For the purpose of skimming you do not read the whole text word by word. It is a quick reading to get the main idea regardless of details. For example: Which one of the following can be inferred from the paragraph

    a- Eating healthy food can have negative impact on brains functions
    b- Eating fat has a bad effect on the brain ability to function properly
    c- Vegetarians have a higher functioning brains that meat eaters

5. Summary: After reading the text, the students should be able to summarize the main points of the reading and leaving the unnecessary details. The summarized text is usually shorter than the original one.

IV. Data Analysis and Discussion

After applying all the sessions and marking the results of both the traditional class and the flipped class, it has been noticed that the number of pass students increased relatively in flipped class in comparison to the traditional class. It has been noticed that students' recognition of new terminology improved within flipped class because the students were able to use internet and dictionary the check the meaning of words by themselves and learning the synonyms of the terms. In the first test for traditional class, the average of correct answers was only 31% as shown in Table 1 bellow. This is due to the fact that the students did not have any prior knowledge about the topic. However, in the first test for flipped class the participant had 43% of correct answers. Moreover, in the second and third test for both, it has been noticed that the students' performance improved. Yet, the number of correct answers within flipped class was higher it reached 54% in the last test as shown in Table 2. This shows the effect of blending online resources for learning new terminology.

Similar results were found for skimming and scanning for details. It is difficult for students to master the text after reading it only for 1 time and inferring general conclusions from the text. The number of correct answers varied from one test to another but in the flipped class, the students ability to infer and understand the text increased because the text has been read many times. The average of correct answers for traditional class was 42% while for the flipped class, it was between 49%. Also see Chart 1 below:

As for summarizing and writing the main idea of the text, the students faced difficulty in the beginning because they were not sure which piece of to choose and which to leave out. In the first test for both classes, most of the students were not able to write a full comprehensive summary of the

Traditional class				
Answers	Vocabulary (%)	Scanning (%)	Skimming (%)	Summarizing (%)
Correct answers	31	42	43	29
Incorrect answers	62	53	48	63
Left out	7	5	9	8

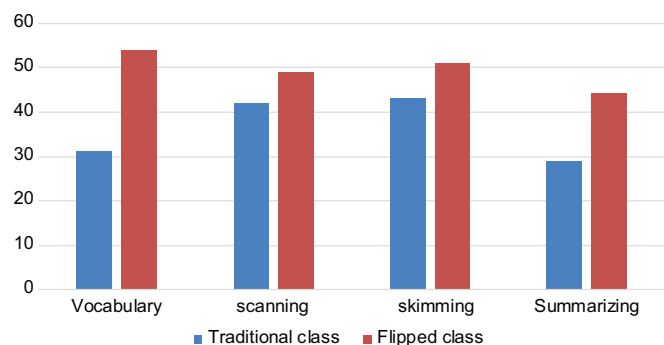| Flipped class				
Answers	Vocabulary (%)	Scanning (%)	Skimming (%)	Summarizing (%)
Correct answers	54	49	51	44
Incorrect answers	42	48	44.5	53
Left out	4	3	4.5	3

Chart 1: Correct answers for both flipped and traditional classes

text. However, their ability to elicit the main idea improved for the later tests. Many students wrote about the main points in the reading without adding unnecessary detail.

V. CONCLUSION

According to the results obtained from the tests, the flipped class has a greater influence on students performance. The participants performed differently when they received instructions based on flipped class. The average of pass students increased within flipped class. Moreover, the statistics showed that the flipped class is more interactive, the blending of online resources had a positive impact on the students, and it gave them chance to read more about the topic. Hence, when the participant joined the class they had a prior knowledge about the text and they participated in different class activities and group discussion. On the contrary, reading the text in the class only without any prior reading was not enough for them to share their ideas.

As ESL, it is difficult to master all the words in a given text from the first reading, keeping in mind that in most of the texts, there is a usage of figurative language that has implied meaning and depends on the context. In many texts, there are examples of metaphor, simile, irony, and idioms so the students may face a difficulty in getting the implied

meaning of these words. In flipped class, the student has the chance to check the meaning of these terms and idioms and learn them in the context in which they are used.

It is important to shed the light on the point that implementing flipped class during the pandemic of COVID-19 is effective. During the current situation, not all the students can join class lectures; therefore, they have other opportunities to get the learning material within flipped class.

Flipped class proved to be effective in improving reading skills for both elementary and intermediate levels. It helped the intermediate to gain more knowledge about the reading; it helped them to share their comment and questions in addition to learning vocabulary and new sentence structure. As for elementary level, as mentioned above, it is difficult for them to control the topic since English is not their first language. The students had the chance to check the new terminology and the figurative language in the dictionary before coming to the class.

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