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Using Flipped Classroom Approach to Teach Adjectives to Malaysian Year 4 Chinese Intermediate ESL Learners

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Abstract

English adjective was ranked as one of the most grammatical errors committed by Malaysian Chinese ESL learners due to the different language structures between Mandarin and English. This study attempted to investigate whether Flipped Classroom Approach (FCA) is more effective for ESL learners to acquire adjectives compared to the traditional classroom approach. It was also designed to examine Malaysian Year 4 Chinese intermediate ESL learners' perceptions towards learning adjectives via FCA. This research adopted Pre-test–Post-test Non-equivalent Group Design which used several instruments, namely pre- and post-tests, questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. 60 Malaysian Year 4 Chinese intermediate ESL learners from a national-type Chinese school were divided into experimental and control groups. This intervention focused on the experimental group using 'Edmodo' to acquire input before the lesson, while the control group followed the traditional classroom approach. Both experimental and control groups had a statistically significant improvement in scores, with a mean difference of 53.16 and 23.50 respectively, yet the t-test result ($p=0.000$) depicted the significant difference between both groups' mastery of adjectives. Moreover, most of the participants have positive perceptions towards learning adjectives via FCA. This study has provided the findings and relevant information for the stakeholders on the implementation of FCA in the Malaysian primary ESL classroom. This research can be further improved by exploring the effects of FCA in other parts of speech to ESL learners with different races, level of ability and competence in a longer duration of implementation.

Keywords: Flipped Classroom Approach, Adjectives, Malaysian Year 4 Chinese Intermediate ESL Learners, Traditional Classroom Approach, Perceptions

Introduction

Grammar is the means to understand how language works (Saaristo, 2015). Any language aims at communicating meaning through grammatically correct sentences (Ellis, 2014). Mastering grammatical knowledge is important for ESL learners to be able to speak a language

to some degree of proficiency and say what they really want to say (Cotter, 2005). Ironically, Malaysian ESL learners' grammar mastery is declining (Kaur, 2012). It is vital to identify effective teaching approaches in order to develop their grammatical competence. This study was designed to examine if FCA is effective to teach adjectives for Malaysian Year 4 Chinese intermediate ESL learners.

Malaysian Chinese ESL learners struggle with low levels of English literacy due to the different grammatical structures between Mandarin and English (Jalaluddin et al., 2008). For example, Mandarin language does not have morphological markers for superlative form for adjectives (i.e. -er, -est). Consequently, they become ignorant of the rules and restrictions. As such, errors are committed after they learn some (irregular) adjectives of the comparative and superlative forms, which cannot be inflected but must be tagged with "more" or "most" to show the degree or extent of a noun description (Abdul Rashid Mohamed et al., 2004). They might assume that they can tag all adjectives with "more" and "most" regardless of whether the adjectives should be inflected or otherwise.

It is believed that teacher-centred approaches that are still widely used in Malaysian classroom settings such as chalk-and-talk method bring the pupils into boredom and therefore demotivate them in learning adjectives as they are playing the role of passive recipients instead of active learners in teacher-centred classroom (Rocca, as cited in Hanjani & Li, 2017). In conjunction with pupil-centred learning, FCA which shifts the roles of teacher and pupils (Bergmann & Sams, 2012) as shown in Figure 1, has been given due attention as an effective approach of pupil-centred learning for the 21st century learners (Rahman et al., 2015). This pedagogical concept has been examined worldwide and results show that it brings positive impact to the teaching and learning processes (Butt, 2014; Pang & Yap, 2014). However, research of FCA in Malaysian primary school settings are limited (Mukherjee & Pillai, 2013). Therefore, a quasi-experimental study was conducted to investigate if FCA is effective in teaching adjectives for Malaysian Year 4 Chinese intermediate ESL learners.

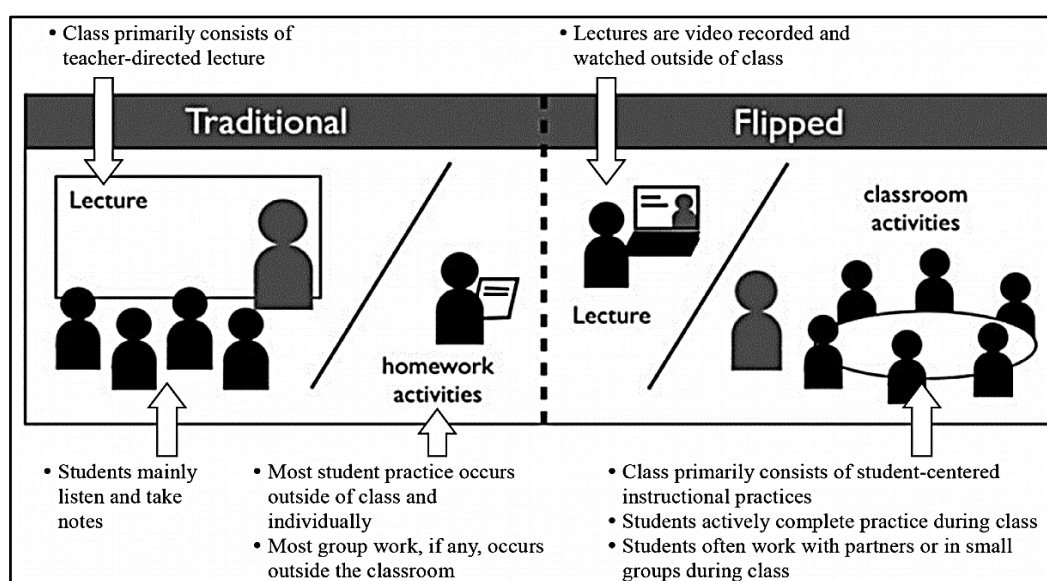


Figure 1. A comparison of the traditional classroom and the flipped classroom approaches (Dove & Dove, 2015, p. 169).

This research was conducted to achieve the following research objectives namely below:

1. To investigate the differences between the experimental and control groups in mastering adjectives by using Flipped Classroom Approach
2. To identify Malaysian Year 4 Chinese intermediate ESL learners' perceptions towards learning adjectives via Flipped Classroom Approach

Research Methodology

Research Design

Pre-test–Post-test Non-equivalent Group Design which is under quasi-experimental research design was adopted in this study to evaluate and compare the scores across conditions to determine whether one group demonstrated a bigger improvement in knowledge of fractions than another (Lodico et al., 2010) in which the respondents who are unequal, balanced or share similar characteristics cannot be randomly assigned (Chua, 2016).

Sampling

There were 60 Year 4 Chinese intermediate ESL learners from a national-type Chinese primary school were selected as the research participants. Homogenous sampling was adopted in this research to purposively select the research participants who shared the similar characteristics (Creswell, 2015). All participants were streamed according to their marks of English Language (Comprehension) and equally distributed into the experimental and control groups.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

A pre-test was administered to both groups before the experiment and a post-test was administered after the experimental treatment in testing the development of both groups of participants before and after the research. A comparison of mean and standard deviation for both control and experimental groups was made via SPSS version 24 to determine whether or not there is an effect and if that effect is significant. Independent Sample T-test was adopted to evaluate the different scores between both groups to further examine if there is a significant difference between both groups.

A questionnaire adapted from Bell (2015); Johnson (2013) with 10 Likert-items was given to the experimental group participants after the intervention to obtain their perceptions towards FCA quantitatively. Raw data for the Likert-items in the distributed questionnaires were processed and analysed using SPSS version 24 to obtain the weighted average of each item as an indicator of the dispersion or spread of the scores.

For qualitative data, semi-structured interview was conducted with four randomly selected pupils to elicit their perceptions towards FCA. Thematic analysis was done to highlight commonalities and patterns in the participant's responses (Lapadat, as cited in Threlkeld, 2017) in reference to their perception towards learning adjectives via FCA.

Validity and Reliability

The results obtained by the preliminary data analysis were validated for correctness with the support of two parameters like validity and reliability of the research. Cronbach's alpha was undertaken to assess the internal consistency and reliability of the variables to ensure consistent measurement across time and various items in the instruments (Sekaran & Bougie, 2017). Cronbach's alphas of the pre-test and post-test and questionnaire are 0.740 and 0.744

respectively. These alphas indicate that the instruments are acceptable as advocated by Sekaran and Bougie (2017).

Findings and Discussion

Research Question 1: *Are there any significant differences between the experimental and control groups in mastering adjectives by using Flipped Classroom Approach?*

Based on the findings tabulated in Table 2, both experimental and control groups had a statistically significant improvement in scores, with a mean difference of 53.16 and 23.50 respectively. However, their difference in post-test score shows that adopting FCA appears to play a role in enhancing the learners' understanding of adjectives, as the mean score of the experimental group was higher than that of the control group.

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Table 2

Mean and standard deviation of participants' scores and the margin of improvement

Group	Mean		Standard Deviation		Margin of Improvement
	Pre-test	Post-test	Pre-test	Post-test	
Experimental	35.17 %	88.33 %	14.884	8.938	+1595
Control	35.33 %	58.83 %	12.401	22.580	+705

Independent samples t-test was done as shown in Table 3 to identify the significance of both effects so as to identify the better approach and suits the participants.

Table 3

T-test results of both experimental and control groups' post-test scores

Independent Samples Test						
	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means			
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
Equal variances assumed	36.491	.000	6.673	58	.000	29.50000

According to Table 3, the Sig. value is 0.000 which is less than alpha 0.05 so the alternative hypothesis is accepted. The findings depict that both FCA and traditional classroom approaches do have significant effects on their mastery of adjectives. Nonetheless, the results of experimental group outperformed the control group. This result is relevant to Pudín's (2017) findings in which ESL learners can comprehend the knowledge better by flipping their learning process as found by Homma (2015) as FCA requires ESL learners to independently

devote their own time and effort to utilise various resources for their ungraded task (Han, 2015).

Research Question 2: *What are the Malaysian Year 4 Chinese intermediate ESL learners' perceptions towards learning adjectives via Flipped Classroom Approach?*

Table 4

Learners' perceptions towards learning adjectives via Flipped Classroom Approach

No.	Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not sure	Agree	Strongly Agree	Weighted Average
1	Flipped Classroom Approach is more engaging than the lessons I had before.	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	26.67% 8	73.33% 22	4.73
2	Flipped Classroom Approach has improved my mastery of adjectives.	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	46.67% 14	53.33% 16	4.53
3	I am interested to acquire English adjectives in Flipped Classroom Approach.	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	16.67% 5	50.00% 15	33.33% 10	4.17
4	I like to learn at home and do the "homework" in the classroom.	0.00% 0	3.33% 1	30.00% 9	33.33% 10	33.33% 10	3.97
5	I could study at my own pace in Flipped Classroom Approach.	0.00% 0	20.00% 6	40.00% 12	23.33% 7	16.67% 5	3.37
6	Flipped Classroom Approach encourages me to work with my classmates actively.	0.00% 0	3.33% 1	26.67% 8	23.33% 7	46.67% 14	4.13
7	I contacted with my teacher more often in Flipped Classroom Approach.	0.00% 0	3.33% 1	20.00% 6	36.67% 11	40.00% 12	4.13
8	I was able to apply what I have learnt in the Flipped Classroom Approach into real life settings.	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	3.33% 1	53.33% 16	43.33% 13	4.40
9	I needed academic and technical assistance in Flipped Classroom Approach.	10.00% 3	10.00% 3	43.33% 13	26.67% 8	10.00% 3	3.17
10	Overall, I prefer learning English adjectives via Flipped Classroom Approach.	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	10.00% 3	23.33% 7	66.67% 20	4.57

Based on the findings of questionnaire as tabulated in Table 4, the participants' perceptions towards FCA are positive as they agree or strongly agree (mode=22) that they preferred learning English adjectives via FCA compared to traditional classroom approach with a weighted average of 4.73. They also agree or strongly agree (mode=16) that FCA is more engaging than the lessons they had before. The thematic analysis on the interviews also shows that the codes such as "like", "interesting" and "fun" were frequently found in their responses which correspond to the findings in the questionnaire. The findings aligned with those of other studies in that ESL learners' attitudes towards flipping English lessons were generally positive just as in the diverse contexts of the existing studies (Hsieh et al., 2017; Tazijan et al., 2017; Pudín, 2017).

Furthermore, the participants perceive that FCA encourages them to work with their classmates actively (mode=14) as conveyed by Participant 25:

"If I have problem, I will ask Google, or I will ask the question to my friends or teacher on Edmodo. If they know then they will reply my post. This is very fun because I can talk to my friends and teacher on Edmodo."
(P25: 19.0.1-19.0.5)

Based on the excerpt above, the participant expressed that she enjoyed online discussion with her teacher and peers. In fact, discussions can take place in the well-suited flipped classroom environment as the learners will be engaged, applying knowledge and sharing thoughts with one another (McLaughlin et al., 2016), resulting in the effective application of the grammar knowledge into real life settings as shown in Item 8 whereby 29 of them find themselves able to apply the knowledge obtained via FCA into real life settings. For instance, Participant 25 expressed that:

"...I told them something so vivid because I use adjectives to tell them more about something."
(P25: 14.0.1-14.0.3)

The excerpt above shows that the Participant 25 could use the adjectives learnt in FCA in real life. This indicates that FCA successfully transforms the ESL classroom into more interactive manner by having learners applying the acquired content and discussing issues to work on specific content (Horn, 2013).

Another recurring finding from the questionnaire is whether FCA promotes rapport among teacher and learners. Based on the finding in Item 7, there were over two-thirds of participants who agree or strongly agree (mean=12) that they contacted their teacher more often by FCA. Incorporating FCA in teaching adjectives may fulfil each learner's individual needs during one-on-one interaction via FCA (Muldrow, 2013), with the sufficient guidance provided to learners for a pleasurable outcome. Nevertheless, there are 20% of the participants who found themselves requiring academic and technical assistance from the teacher. Truthfully, participants' lack of literacy in technology at home might become one of the barriers (Siti Zuraidah Md Osman et al., 2014) in which they might not be able to access the online materials provided. This finding is supported by one of the participants who elaborated that:

"...when I got any question and I posed the question on Edmodo, I did not ma shang (immediately) get the answer..."
(P4: 12.0.3-12.0.6)

This problem should be rectified as Engin (2014) perceives that the teacher's support plays an important role for learners when they are carrying out various projects that FCA requires in order to accomplish the tasks assigned by the teacher on the online portal flawlessly. On the other hand, the learners might face certain obstacles when they receive instructions via FCA as it differs from what they used to have before (Butzler, 2016). For instance, Item 5 shows that 60% of the participants disagree or were unsure (mode=12) whether they are able to study at their own pace via FCA. To further illustrate this point, Participant 13 pointed out the following statement:

"I don't like learning at home first because wo bi jiao xi huan ting lao shi jiang (I prefer listening to what teacher talks) then only I can understand better..."
(P13: 13.0.1-13.0.5)

Moreover, since this approach differs from the lessons the learners had before, there were one-third of the participants who strongly disagree, disagree or unsure whether they like to learn at home and do the "homework" in the classroom. This finding is supported by Hao (2015) that not all learners are able to commit to the full responsibility that FCA requires. There are studies which show that the pupils did not get used to the routine of FCA as they were not self-disciplined to complete the required homework and came to class unprepared (Herreid & Schiller, 2012). Therefore, McLaughlin et al (2016) state that having pupils to complete the pre-lesson task is highly likely to be one of the challenges while implementing FCA in a Malaysian ESL classroom settings.

Conclusion

It is vital to note that the results of the study are limited by the sample size, the characteristics of the subjects, the length of the study and the selected grammatical item used in the study. Within these limitations, it can be concluded that there are significant differences between learning adjectives via FCA and traditional classroom approach. Most of the learners hold positive perceptions towards FCA as it provides a platform for them to communicate and collaborate with their peers and help them to enhance their mastery of adjectives by accessing the online materials on *Edmodo*. The results of the study is expected to provide the basis for many other treatments based on FCA to develop different skills in different language learning contexts in the Malaysian Primary ESL classroom. Therefore, more studies are recommended to be carried out by researchers to discover how FCA can be employed effectively in other aspects in the Malaysian primary ESL classroom context.

References

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