

Design of the Flipped College English Listening Class: Problems and Solutions

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ABSTRACT : As a new teaching pattern, flipped class boosts learning and teaching efficiency. However, the design of flipped class is often a great challenge to teachers. In the paper the authors list the defects that often occur in the design of flipped English listening class: lack of clear goals, poor activities design out of authentic context, inappropriate order of acquisition difficulty, ineffective design and poor supervision of students' autonomous learning tasks. And some countermeasures are thus proposed: design clear teaching objectives, make authentic context-based activities, offer tasks with different levels of difficulty, strengthen the monitoring of independent learning with an aim to promote students' deep learning and English listening.

KEYWORDS: flipped design; College English listening class; problems and solutions

1. Introduction

Listening comprehension lies at the heart of language learning[1] is a major channel for learners to gain comprehensible input[2]. Listening is crucial in language acquisition, and learners need to learn how to listen. Only then can they better learn the language through listening [3]. However, although developing L2 listening is crucial, language learners are rarely taught "how to listen effectively" (ibid). Instead, L2 listening classes tend to focus on the product, rather than the process of listening, which amount to a form of test rather than actually teaching learners how to go about a listening text. A listening lesson often does no more than obtaining correct answers to a set of comprehension questions, which, according to Vandergrift, does little to help students understand and control the processes leading to comprehension. Therefore, it often results in a dull classroom atmosphere and low teaching efficiency in the College English listening class.

With the development of modern information technology and the advancement of teaching concepts, the flipped classroom teaching mode has been gradually applied

in college English listening teaching, providing a new technology platform geared for promoting students' effective learning.

2. Flipped college English listening class: mode and procedure

“Flipped Classroom/Inverted Classroom” is an information-based teaching model that originated in the United States. Eric Mazur, a professor of physics at Harvard University, mentions that learning mainly involves two processes: knowledge transfer and knowledge internalization. The two learning processes are reversed in the flipped class: the knowledge transfer process is transferred from in-class to out-class, the knowledge internalization process is transferred from out-class to in-class, resulting in more time for engaging practice activities in class.

The modes of the current flip classroom implementation mainly include Ramsey Musallam's “explore-flip-apply” flip teaching mode, Jackie Gerstein's four-stage model of “ experimental engagement, concept exploration, meaningful construction , demonstration and application”, the brief process of the two stages of the flip teaching “before and during the class” by Robert Talbert, the “Tai Chi ring” flip classroom model by Zhong Xiaoliu[4]. The flipped college English listening class designed and implemented by the authors is shown in Figure 1:

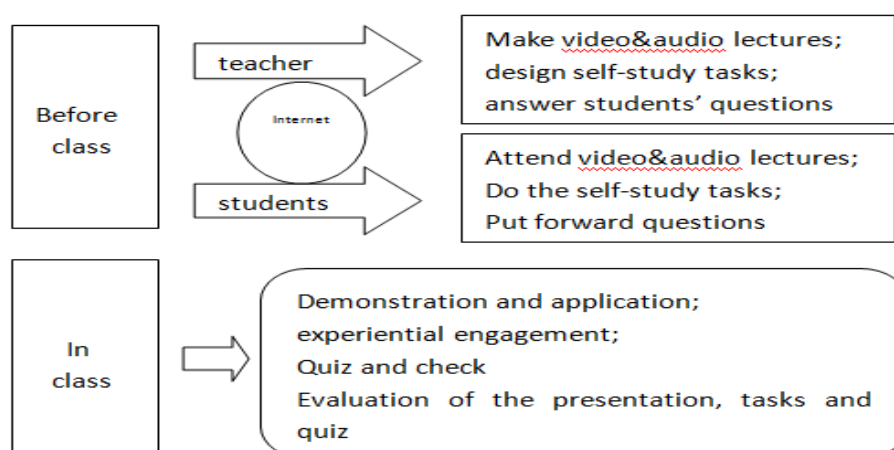


Figure 1: Flipped English Listening Teaching Model

To be exact, the flipped listening class goes as follows: the teacher develops teaching videos and materials to be consumed before class through the online platform. The students repeatedly watch the teaching videos and complete the self-learning tasks in the worksheet based on their own pace. Thus, more classroom time is used for teacher-students interaction, students-students interaction and knowledge internalization. The time for culture background introduction, pronunciation skills explanation, playing videos are reduced in class, and more time is spent in enhancing students' self-learning ability, team building and problem-solving skills, leadership skills and innovation spirit.

3. Problems in the design of flipped English listening class

Flipping the classroom is not simply video recording and reversal of the teaching processes. Aaron, one of the founders of the flipped class, said at the Shanghai International Education Forum: “Flipping the class is not just video recording, but effective classroom management.” The teaching content and process must be transformed into “a smart design” to arouse students’ interest in learning. Since the flipped college English listening class is still in its initial stage, there are several problems in the teaching design:

3.1 Pay too much attention to the form of flipping, ignoring the goals of teaching

Every teaching activity is created for a certain teaching goal. However, in the design process of flipping class, some teachers neglect the teaching objectives for the sake of “flip”. Flipping is an innovative teaching mode, which weighs much in the evaluation of teachers’ performance in most universities. In order to run after the new teaching mode, some teachers neglect the essence of teaching, even the teaching goals. They tend to design too many complicated teaching sessions and activities, such as discussion, pair work, group work, etc. However, they lack reflection on the goals of the activities, and some activities are somehow irrelevant to the subjects and contents of the listening texts. Therefore, the teaching effect is far from satisfactory although the class has been flipped.

3.2 Fail to design authentic and meaning-focus tasks

Authenticity is very important in constructing the flipped classroom model. The activities and tasks should be authentic since the learners would be more motivated to learn once they find the tasks are relative to their learning needs. In listening activities, some teachers fail to design context-based diversified tasks, instead, they tend to adopt multi-choice questions based on the listening materials, which are of low authenticity and interaction. They focus on the training of understanding and memory (to understand, grasp the key points, factual memory, etc.), but pay less attention on some meaning-focus tasks to train students’ analysis, reasoning and evaluation[5]. There are few interest-capturing listening tasks such as distinguishing facts and opinions, identifying weaknesses in the process of reasoning, determining whether the evidence used is reasonable and credible.

3.3 Design tasks of inappropriate order of acquisition difficulty

According to the cognitive load theory, since the capacity of working memory is limited, resources beyond the working memory capacity cannot be memorized. If the task is too difficult, cognitive overload may occur. On the other hand, if the task is too easy, it will be difficult for students to achieve a sense of accomplishment, and the interest for further inquiry will also be weakened. In the task design, it often occurs

rs that the tasks lack appropriate order of acquisition difficulty and there is no “scaffolding” for students to solve problems.

3.4 Ineffective design and poor supervision of autonomous learning tasks

In the flipped listening class, students need to follow the “autonomous learning tasks list” to have self-study before class (including consulting words in the dictionary, finding cultural information, watching videos, completing listening tasks, asking questions, etc.). The “autonomous learning tasks list” is a learning support tool designed by the teacher according to the teaching objectives, content, the student’s language skills and cognitive ability. The quality of the design determines the effectiveness of students’ independent study, experiential engagement and exploration in the class, and the extent to which students gain knowledge internalization and expansion and get mastery of the listening strategies. However, some teachers often fail to design a tailored- made learning tasks list to ensure the effect of self study. Instead, they simply copy the listening exercise from the textbooks to make the task list. And there is also poor supervision of autonomous learning tasks of the students. Since not all students are self-motivated, some students do not do the tasks before the class. This might lead to less participation and engagement from this group of students. Due to a lot of reasons such as large number of students, limited time, insufficient experience, teachers neglect to check whether the students have finished the tasks and how well they performed before class.

4. Countermeasures

4.1 Set clear scientific teaching objectives to promote students’ cognitive coupling

The teaching goal is an important part of the teaching process. In teaching listening, the specific and measurable teaching objectives should be set based on the topics, key points, students’ cognitive structure, language proficiency and other factors. At the same time, the teaching objectives should also be made clear to students in the pre-class introduction to capture their interest, help them know the text better and improve their cognitive coupling.

4.2 Design tasks based on the cognitive domain

In Bloom’s Taxonomy for the cognitive domain, there are six-tier pyramid of learning levels: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation. The level of human cognition is gradually developed from the low-level “knowledge” to the highest level of “evaluation”. In a typical flipped listening class, the teacher should provide students exposure to the topic before class (through listening to pre-recorded instructions or lectures and completing prescribed self-learning tasks) so that students are prepared to participate during class time in

higher-order activities such as problem-solving, analyzing, discussion and debates. This frees up classroom time to promote active learning. Class activities should focus upon a framework of higher level cognitive activities to inspire deeper learning which means more “engagement” around the topic and the learning experience. By utilizing this technique, the teacher becomes the facilitator, while students get access to increased opportunities to engage deeper. The main goal is to cultivate deeper, richer learning experiences for students when the instructor is present to guide and coach them. Emphasis is put on higher-order thinking skills and application to complex problems through collaborative, project-based learning.

4.3 Design authentic and interaction-oriented tasks

In ESL teaching, the most crucial thing in designing a learning task is to improve the learners’ ability to use. Otherwise, the learning task loses its fundamental purpose[6]. Learners should be fed as rich a diet of authentic task as possible, because, ultimately, if they only encounter contrived tasks and listening texts, their learning ability would be made more difficult to improve. Students will be highly motivated if they see the tasks related to their life and future success. Unlike multi-choice questions, the novel and diverse real-life tasks and interactive practice activities not only arouse students’ motivation but also involve them in comprehending, manipulating, producing and interacting in the target language. In-depth discussions, impromptu presentations, demonstrations, simulations, peer tutoring can build confidence and assist students develop industry required skills in a relaxed, comfortable environment. For example, teachers can make good use of the *English Fun Dubbing* APP to provide students with small clips of movies, ask students to listen, imitate and practice; encourage students to make pen pal with foreign friends to make real communication and improve their sense of accomplishment; for the topic of tourism, teachers can ask students write guide words based on videos they have watched, read and record them, display and share in groups. As Milman puts it, the flipping classroom teaching mode frees classroom time from traditional teacher-centered teaching, and is conducive to carrying out various interactive teaching activities such as peer learning, cooperative learning, and project exploration[7].

4.4 Strengthen the monitoring and evaluation of independent learning

A significant barrier in flipped class is the students who do not prepare for sessions fall behind and may struggle. Therefore, it is important that teachers strengthen monitoring students’ self-learning to know if the students are adequately prepared for the in-class activity. Teachers should pay attention to each learner and respond positively to their needs. There must be a multi-level supervision from teachers, supervision from software, supervision from classmates: establish online discussion forum; timely conduct quiz for students; predict students’ Zone of Proximal Development to establish new learning objectives and content; give timely

feedback and evaluation by trace analysis and behavior observation to form the unique “metacognitive process” and “growth track” of the individual students.

5. Conclusion

Students’ motivation, which underlies the whole listening process, can be affected by the smart design of the flipped class. Activities that are designed to be challenging, but achievable, can help motivate students. Great efforts should be done to carefully design the flipped English listening class to facilitate students’ significant learning gains and inspire their future success.

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