Flipping the EFL oral training course via an online learning community

Ming-Yi Scott Chen Hsieh[a], Jie-Chi Yang[b] & Wen-Chi Vivian Wu[c]
[ab]*Graduate Institute of Network Learning Technology, National Central University, Taiwan*
[c]*Department of English Language, Literature, and Linguistics, Providence University, Taiwan*
*curtis3883@gmail.com

Abstract: Since the advent of new technology for learning, innovative language instructors have been constantly seeking for new pedagogy to match the potential of technology-enhanced instruction. While the literature is replete with studies supporting the adoption of technologies to facilitate language teaching and learning, research into enhancing EFL learners' oral proficiency by creating an online learning community in a flipped classroom remains scanty. Therefore, the current study aimed to examine the impact of an online learning community in a flipped classroom, specifically via mobile platforms, on EFL learners' oral proficiency and their perceptions. Forty eight English-majored sophomores enrolled in two oral training classes at a four-year comprehensive university in central Taiwan were recruited to participate in this study. A mixed method was employed to analyze multiple sources of data, including pre- and post-tests on oral reading and comprehension questions, a "Community of Inquiry" (CoI) questionnaire, and the teachers' in-class observations. The flipped instruction measured by the CoI indicated that the online learning community not only facilitated meaningful and positive collaboration, but also significantly improved the participants' oral proficiency, making them feel more competent in those highly interactive learning events, such as storytelling, dialogue interaction, class discussion, and group presentations.

Keywords: flipped learning, online learning community, oral training, Community of Inquiry

1. Introduction

The development of communicative competence has been the overarching learning objectives, and exposure to communicative practice is generally recognized as an essential element of successful foreign language learning and teaching (Council of Europe, 2001). However, inadequate communication and interaction between teachers and students, excessive teacher-led lectures, and relatively fatiguing test-based teaching methods still suppress the development of students' communicative competence. Studies concerning effective oral instructions in an EFL setting (such as Taiwan) remain scarce. Even with years of linguistic input, EFL learners still bumble when speaking English out loud.

Therefore, there has been a burgeoning integration of various platforms or devices into language teaching and learning, with the purpose of designing and supporting language learning to match the potential of technology-enhanced education. One possible way of doing so is the implementation of an online learning community in the classroom. Research has shown that the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework has developed into a widely-used model for examining and evaluating the learning community (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2001; Garrison, Cleveland-Innes, & Fung, 2010), encompassing three interdependent elements that facilitate meaningful online learning: teaching presence, social presence, and cognitive presence. A great deal of literature suggests that online learning community has been found to be an effective way to promote the sharing and building of knowledge by learners (Ke & Hoadley, 2009), to enhance students' overall learning, and to help learners develop more positive learning attitudes in comparison with traditional classes (Gazi, 2009).

In addition, in line with previous research which highlighted the educational potentials of mobile devices (Johnson et al., 2013; Johnson, Adams, & Cummins, 2012), MALL has become a

burgeoning phenomenon worldwide. One of the alternative approaches that integrates technology into language learning and that contributes to ample opportunities for students to learn is the flipped learning (Hung, 2015; McLaughlin et al., 2014), where technologies (such as mobile devices) are employed to make efficient use of class time and students are given more opportunities to participate in meaningful engaging activities in an learning community, thus enhancing the learning outcomes and student engagement. However, there has been little investigation into online learning community in the field of MALL, let alone the in-depth probe into whether the integration of online learning community via mobile platforms into flipped learning can enhance EFL learners' oral proficiency. Therefore, the current study aimed to examine the effect of an online learning community for flipped learning, specifically via mobile platforms, on EFL learners' oral proficiency and learning perceptions.

2. Methods

2.1 Participants

The participants included 48 sophomore English-majors in two required English Oral Training classes at a four-year university in central Taiwan, mostly female and between the ages of 19 and 20. The participants had studied English for at least seven years through high school and their English proficiency was considered to be at the upper-intermediate level.

2.2 Data collection and analysis

Multiple sources of data collection were employed to examine the participants' perceptions of the flipped learning experience, including (1) pre- and post-tests of oral reading and comprehension questions, (2) Community of Inquiry survey, (3) two semi-structured focus-group interviews, and (4) in-class observations by the instructors.

The pre-tests and the post-tests, respectively for the traditional instruction and the flipped learning instruction, were identical in content and the participants were asked to respond orally to paragraph reading and comprehension questions. The means of the pre- and post-tests were calculated to compare the instructional differences (i.e., flipped versus traditional). Furthermore, a Paired-Samples t-Test was employed to investigate the participants' oral learning outcomes in two different instructions. To compare the differences between the flipped learning and past lecture-based experiences, Community of Inquiry survey was employed, with descriptive statistics used to examine the participants' responses to two elements: social presence and teaching presence.

3. Results and discussion

Descriptive statistics showed that the mean score of the post-test was higher than that of the pre-test. Comparing the post-tests, the mean score of the flipped learning (M=85.98) was much higher than that of the traditional instruction (M=66.6). In addition, the Paired-Samples t-Test indicated that in both forms of instruction, the participants performed significantly better on the post-test ($p<.001$) compared to the pre-test, and that the post-test of the flipped instruction was higher than that of the traditional instruction at a significant level ($p<.001$). These results indicated that while both methods of instruction were effective in enhancing the participants' oral proficiency, the flipped instruction contributed to significantly better learning outcomes than the traditional lecture-based instruction ($p<.001$), echoing the findings of previous studies that have shown student acceptance of the flipped classroom (as documented in Mortensen & Nicholson, 2014).

With respect to whether the online learning community in the flipped instruction made any differences in the social presence, the Paired-Samples t-Test indicated that significant differences in the social presence and teaching presence were found between the flipped instruction and the traditional lecture-based instruction, as students expressed significantly positive perception of the flipped learning compared with past traditional learning. In terms of the social presence, the online learning community in the flipped instruction supported the social and interpersonal communication required for online learning. As for the teaching presence, the online learning community in the flipped instruction revealed

that the participants benefited from explicit curriculum and interactive learning activities, and from ample opportunities that the instructor created for collaboration and reflecting on their learning.

Based on these results and the instructors' in-class observations, the online learning community in the flipped classroom significantly enhanced the participants' oral proficiency because of the employment of Community of Inquiry theoretical framework in instructional design to enhance learning outcomes.

4. Conclusions

The results of the current study revealed that the participants held positive perception of the flipped learning adopted in the current study. Furthermore, the online learning community in the flipped instruction not only led to meaningful learning while facilitating positive interaction and collaboration, but also significantly enhanced the participants' oral proficiency, making them more competent in learning activities, such as storytelling, dialogue interaction, class discussion, and group presentations.

References

Council of Europe. (2001). *Common European framework of references for languages: Learning, teaching, assessment*. Cambridge: CUP.

Garrison, D. R., Anderson, T., & Archer, W. (2001). Critical thinking, cognitive presence, and computer conferencing in distance education. *American Journal of Distance Education, 15*(1), 7-23.

Garrison, D. R., Cleveland-Innes, M., & Fung, T. S. (2010). Exploring causal relationships among teaching, cognitive and social presence: Student perceptions of the community of inquiry framework. *Internet and Higher Education, 13*, 31-36.

Gazi, Z. A. (2009). Implementing Constructivist Approach into Online Course Designs in Distance Education Institute at Eastern Mediterranean University. *Online Submission, 8*(2). Retrieved from http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED505939.pdf

Hung, H. T. (2015). Flipping the classroom for English language learners to foster active learning. *Computer Assisted Language Learning, 28*(1), 81-96. DOI: 10.1080/09588221.2014.967701

Johnson, L., Adams, S., Cummins, M., Estrada, V., Freeman, A., & Ludgate, H. (2013). NMC Horizon Report: 2013 higher education edition. Retrieved from http://www.cdc.qc.ca/pdf/2013-Horizon-Report-creative-commons-copy.pdf

Johnson, L., Adams, S., & Cummins, M. (2012). The NMC horizon report: 2012 higher education edition. Retrieved from http://akgul.bilkent.edu.tr/nmc/2012-Horizon-Report-HE.pdf

Ke, F. & Hoadley, C. (2009). Evaluating online learning communities. *Educational Technology Research and Development, 57*, 487-510.

McLaughlin, J. E., Roth, M. T., Glatt, D. M., Gharkholonarehe, N., Davidson, C. A., Griffin, L. M., Esserman, D. A., & Mumper, R. J. (2014). The flipped classroom: A course redesign to foster learning and engagement in a health professions school. *Academic Medicine, 89*(2), 236-243.

Mortensen, C. J., & Nicholson, A. (2014). Improved student achievement through gamification and the flipped classroom. Paper presented at the ADSA-ASAS Joint Annual Meeting, 20-24 July, Kansas City, Mo.