

# Discussion on Flipped Classroom Teaching Mode in College English Teaching

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## Abstract

Flipped classroom is now one of the most highly valued models in universities. From domestic and foreign research, flipped classroom can provide language input for students' autonomous learning via modern information technology, which creates more opportunities for classroom output activities and eventually can effectively improve the teaching effect of College English. This paper analyzes the concept of flipped classroom, summarizes the advantages and disadvantages of flipped classroom teaching model in College English teaching from the existing problems in English teaching, and focuses on the innovative exploration of flipped classroom for college English teaching ideas based on the characteristics and theoretical basis of flipped classroom teaching model. This paper is expected to provide implications for the implementation of the flipped classroom teaching model in College English teaching in China, so as to promote the reform of College English teaching, perfect the flipped classroom teaching model to adapt to the form of College English teaching in China, and lay the foundation for implementation of flipped classroom on a large scale.

**Keywords:** college English, flipped classroom, education reform

## 1. Introduction

In the information age, the rapid development of computer network and other information technology has given new direction to education reform, thus education informatization is the current trend of education development. In order to grasp the opportunities offered by the information age, China issued the *Outline of the National Mid-term and Long-term Education Reform and Development Plan (2010-2020)* in 2010, and clearly pointed out that the revolutionary impact of information technology on education development must be highly valued. Moreover, in *Development Plan of Education informatization Decade (2011-2020)* issued by the Ministry of Education in 2012, it is pointed out that higher education informatization is an effective way to promote the innovation and quality of higher education reform.

College English, as a compulsory basic course for college students in China, should not only cultivate students' comprehensive English application ability, but also improve their cultural literacy. In order to achieve the goal of College English teaching, many teaching reforms and innovations have sprung up over the years. Accordingly, under the circumstances of the national educational information reform, English teaching in Colleges and universities is also constantly exploring new models. The emergence and rise of the flipped classroom teaching model provides a totally new opportunity for college English teaching reform. The application of the concept of flipped classroom is of great significance in solving the problems such as teaching inefficiency, inactive students, etc. Based on this, the author of the paper tries to apply the concept of flipped classroom to innovative exploration of college English teaching, combining her own teaching experience.

## 2. The Definition of Flipped Classroom

Flipped classroom mode has been springing up in foreign countries for a long time. The original purpose is to solve teaching difficulties caused by time, place and number of teachers. For example, in the early 1990s, Professor Eric Mazur of Harvard University attempted to carry out practice and research on flipped classroom to help students who were unable to keep up with their coursework. In 2000, J. Wesley Baker of the University of Sedaville called on teachers to transfer their roles at the 11th International Conference on College Teaching. He suggested that teachers use tools, such as web, to display teaching as their students' homework. In class, teachers

should participate in students' self-study and mutual learning. The year 2011 was the most significant year for flipped classroom, when the Khan Academy, founded by Salman Khan, attracted worldwide attention. Its teaching video covered subjects such as physics, mathematics, biology, finance and contemporary economics. Subsequently, MOOCs, Massive Open Online Courses Rose in 2012 and the "flipped classroom" quickly swept the world of education.

"Flipped classroom" is also called "inverted classroom", which completely subverts the traditional college English teaching mode. There are different opinions on its definition. It is generally accepted that the definition of flipped classroom is: in an information-based environment, curriculum teachers provide a variety of learning resources, so that learners can complete the process of knowledge transfer before class, and in the classroom teachers and students can complete the process of knowledge internalization through answering questions, collaborative inquiry, interactive exchanges and other activities together (Wang & Zhao, 2013). At present, some schools in the United States have carried out flipped classroom experiments, and achieved good teaching results. However, if the teaching idea and teaching mode of flipped classroom are introduced into China, it is necessary to modify it in accordance with the specific educational environment in China and to explore a suitable flipped classroom model for China.

### **3. The Advantages of Flipped Classroom**

#### *3.1 To Enhance Students' Autonomous Learning Ability*

*The College English Curriculum Requirements* puts forward the idea of "enhancing students' autonomous learning ability", which conform to the teaching mode of flipped classroom. Chinese traditional teaching mode adopts the teaching process that teachers teach knowledge in class and students digest and take in knowledge after class. Due to the large number of students, the effect of knowledge transfer in class is not good, and it is difficult for teachers to check and correct homework in time. On contrast, flipped classroom reverses the traditional teaching process, which transfers the original classroom knowledge to pre-class autonomous learning, and extra-curricular exercises and consolidation of knowledge to the class. Under this mode, students can arrange their learning schedule, according to their own cognitive level and the students who have extra energy can also expand their learning. On the whole, students become the controllers of learning progress. They have the maximum freedom of learning, more time and energy for autonomous learning. It effectively avoids the dependence of compulsory thinking of learning content in traditional education. Students are no longer just mastering knowledge. More importantly, they have learned how to learn. Accordingly, their learning ability and academic performance is bound to be improved.

#### *3.2 To Make Full Use of the Resources Brought by Modern Information Technology and Promote the Informationization of College English Teaching*

The evolution of flipped classroom itself is inseparable from the progress of multimedia technology. Currently, many kinds of online classes, including micro-classes and MOOCs, are the important basis for realizing classroom turnover. Among the courses in universities, English classroom teaching is one of the most representative. It has a large number of resources and is very suitable for the integration of multimedia technology and English knowledge. On the one hand, it is helpful to reduce the teachers' teaching time in the classroom, on the other hand, it can increase the chances of students' independent inquiry to a great extent. Otherwise, Micro-course resources can help teachers enhance their teaching materials and supplement the teaching content, rather than enrich flipped classroom teaching, so that students can not only obtain explicit knowledge, but also acquire invisible knowledge. Students should not only learn autonomously, but also cooperate with other students. In this way, information technology has become the medium of communication between teachers and students. Additionally, although flipped classroom mode is different from traditional classroom teaching, it also different from traditional online education. Traditional online education also provides learners with learning resources through online video, but there are still some problems such as lack of interactive experience, repetition with classroom teaching, and serious truancy. Comparatively, flipped classroom model effectively combines physical classroom with virtual classroom. It is able to input knowledge through online classroom and conduct students-centered interaction through physical, which can better help students achieve internalization of knowledge.

#### *3.3 Promote the Construction of a Suitable Teaching Mode for College English*

In College English teaching, students are not only required to master the corresponding English knowledge, but also to cultivate a mode of thinking in English so as to enhance their intercultural communicative competence. This relies on innovative practice based on the idea of flipping the classroom. Consequently, teachers should actively use the teaching means such as network teaching platform and micro-mail groups to make a feedback

summary on the mastery of English knowledge of students, so as to rationalize and perfect their knowledge structure, and eventually promote their English ability. The traditional teaching mode, in which teachers mostly teach in the classroom and arrange assignment based on textbooks, restricts the development of students and the expansion of their thinking. Meanwhile, when students study after class, most of them only complete the tasks assigned by teachers, but ignore the process of deep understanding of knowledge. But the model of flipped classroom gives students enough time to think and communicate. Teachers ask students to study autonomously before teaching, require students think independently in class, and then guide them to internalize external knowledge, grasp the connotation of knowledge, so that knowledge can be used flexibly in real life. Although the traditional teaching mode has been out of date, the completely reversed teaching mode is not suitable for college English teaching. Thus it is necessary to construct the suitable flipped mode for college English.

#### **4. Limitations of Flipped Classroom in College English Teaching**

##### *4.1 Limitation on Class-Scale*

At present, due to China's large-scale expansion of enrollment, College English class size is up to 50 to 60 people. Too many people make it difficult for teachers to pay attention to every student. With such a large number of students, teachers may not remember the names and looks of some students during the semester under the traditional classroom model. On the other hand, big class size is also no small challenge for flipped class. Because the flipped classroom advocates the implementation of differential teaching, promote the development of students' individuality, which is not easy to achieve in such situation. And in large classes, students' participation is affected. Students with excellent performance or strong expressive ability are usually the participants of interaction, while students with introverted personality or poor ability are often forgotten. Gradually, the strong get stronger, and the weak get weaker. Moreover, the seats in colleges and universities are also fixed, which is not conducive to the organization of diversified teaching activities. Hence, restricted by the number and space, the interaction not only between teacher and students but also students and students are reduced, and it is difficult to achieve the deep interaction pursued by the flipped classroom.

##### *4.2 Inadequate Autonomous Learning Ability of Students*

Knowledge transfer in the flipped classroom is carried out by the means of extracurricular autonomous learning. Teachers provide students with rich paper materials and multimedia resources in advance. And students read textbooks and reference materials, watch teaching videos, animations and pictures with the help of information technology. They also search for relevant information on the Internet, complete after-school exercises, test the learning effect, summarize the knowledge and find problems independently. The series of learning activities put forward high requirements for students' autonomous learning ability and information literacy. However, students' purpose of learning English is college entrance examination before entering university. In order to get high marks, most of them are accustomed to the supervision of parents and relying on the guidance of teachers in the traditional classroom. Once entering university, students cannot adapt to flipped classroom which is far from traditional teaching mode. In addition, flipped classroom requires students to find information through the network and interact with teachers and students on the teaching platform, which is based on students' self-control and self-discipline ability. At the same time, the development of network technology is not all good for learning. There are many tempting factors on the Internet, which interfere with learning. In such a free, relaxing and unrestrained environment, students are easy to get lost. The author has conducted a questionnaire survey on students. 56% of the students surveyed said that their autonomous learning was good at the beginning. However, after a period of time, they would do something on the Internet that has nothing to do with learning. Therefore, strengthening students' management consciousness and cultivating self-effective ability of anti-interference and self-conscious learning habits are the primary tasks of flipped classroom.

##### *4.3 The Characteristics of English Subject*

*College English Teaching Guide* (2015), the guiding document of the Ministry of Education, clearly points out that the goal of College English teaching is to cultivate students' ability to use English, enhance their awareness of cross-cultural communication and communicative competence, develop their ability to learn independently, improve their comprehensive cultural quality and enable them to use English effectively in life, social intercourse and future work to meet the needs of the state, society, schools and individuals. From the statement, it can be got that college English curriculum should give consideration to instrumentality and humanity. For non-English majors, instrumentality is particularly important, which is mainly reflected in the application ability of English. The improvement of college students' English application ability is just like physical training, which emphasizes the process of continuous and gradual training, and the result is the natural outcome of the process, so instrumentality determines that the learning process needs repeated practice rather than the grasp of simple

knowledge points and other language forms. On the contrast, science and engineering courses focus on knowledge points, and the acquisition process is not so important. The two different courses characteristics decide whether it is suitable for classroom reversal. “Flipped Classroom” move new knowledge to pre-class. With the help of short-term video learning autonomous control learning, it not only achieves the goal of knowledge transmission, but also stimulates students to carry out autonomous learning, which is twice the result with half the effort for science and engineering majors. While college English bring language activities into English teaching, which enhances English situational practice. Thus, only through the students’ autonomous learning before class can students not use English flexibly. Flipped classroom has certain enlightenment for all subjects, and provides a possible direction for classroom teaching reform. But it should not be respected as the most advanced and suitable teaching method for various courses. Hence, the practice of introducing flipped classroom must take the characteristics of target courses into account, especially in foreign language teaching, and it is necessary to make adjustments to the strategies and methods of implementation.

## **5. Strategies of applying flipped classroom in College English Teaching**

### *5.1 Constructing Flipped Classroom Mode in Line With English Discipline*

Not all subjects and teaching contents are suitable for flipped classroom mode. Although a large number of studies on College English flipped classroom have appeared in China, these studies are more theoretical and have not proved that the flipped teaching model is helpful to students’ practical ability. In College English teaching, some contents are suitable for flipped classroom teaching mode, while others are suitable for the traditional teaching mode. The two should be combined organically and promote each other. The content that is easier to understand can be taken flipped classroom model; relatively speaking, teaching difficulties and focus, should be used traditional teaching mode. In this way, teachers can get feedback from students quickly, and decide whether they can proceed to the next step. Meanwhile, it is easier for students to understand the difficulties, because there is teacher’s voice, gesture and expression for face-to-face explanation. In addition, in view of the large number of students, teachers can divide students into groups according to their characteristics to complete their learning tasks. According to different levels of students, the teaching mode should also be changed in accordance with their aptitude and apply individualized education. For students with strong comprehension and self-learning ability, they can be encouraged to complete self-study after class, find problems and ask questions in the learning process. For the students with poor English, teachers should pay attention to them in class and encourage them to communicate more with teachers and other students after class. Generally speaking, such aspects as unit content warm-up, learning content detection, and unit content expansion can be moved to pre-class as the forms of language, image, sound etc. for students to learn autonomously. On the contrast, the knowledge points that need to be practiced and controversial topics can be put in class. Therefore, after the adjustment, the partially flipped classroom can very well promote college English teaching.

### **5.2 Improve teachers’ information literacy**

Information literacy is an important quality that people in the information society should possess. Flipped teaching mode is the product of the combination of teaching and modern information technology in colleges and universities. In traditional classroom teaching, teachers mainly rely on the explanation of the new content with the help of their own rich knowledge capacity. But in the flipped classroom course, teachers change from the passers of knowledge to the guide of students’ knowledge internalization, which puts forward higher requirements for teachers’ professional ability, so teachers must improve information literacy when they apply flipped classroom. At the same time, in the information age, massive information resources make people face enormous challenges. Thus how to effectively use all kinds of information is the foundation and guarantee of lifelong learning ability.

Teachers are the key to improve the quality of teaching, and all the teaching objectives must be achieved through teachers’ operation. In the importance of information literacy, researchers (Qin, Liu etc, 2001; Li, 2004; He, 2008) shows that English teachers with good information literacy can create a more natural English learning environment, improve students’ learning efficiency, enhance students’ autonomous learning and thinking ability, and promote teachers’ professional development. In the traditional teaching mode, English teachers with accurate expression and strong classroom control ability can be competent for college English teaching, but just the language ability is not enough for the era of modern information teaching. In the process of College English teaching, in order to enable students to complete their pre-class autonomous learning and learn at any time and anywhere, teachers must fully prepare pre-class video and teaching PPT. Teachers should also design the teaching content in advance, select appropriate teaching methods, and arrange all the teaching links well. Therefore, teachers must be familiar with all kinds of operating software, especially courseware production and

video editing. Skilled use of modern information technology has become a must for today's teachers' ability. The skillful use of modern information technology has become the ability that teachers must possess today. This puts forward higher requirements for teachers. If teachers fail to grasp modern educational technology in time and adapt themselves to the change of new technology, their authority in front of students will be greatly undermined. Therefore, teachers must have the concept and consciousness of lifelong learning, keep pace with the times, participate in special training regularly, constantly improve their information literacy and professional literacy, combine college English teaching with information technology organically, create a positive classroom teaching environment for students, meet students' expectations, reduce students' anxiety of language use and eventually improve the effectiveness of classroom teaching.

### 5.3 Effective use of teaching platform and various communication tools

Convenient daily communication tools can provide convenience for the interaction between teachers and students. At the same time, many colleges and universities have developed or purchased network learning platforms, which create good hardware for the implementation of flipped classroom. Teachers can establish relevant groups by means of communication tools, so as to upload relevant pre-class learning materials for students to study autonomously. For example, at present, WeChat is the most frequent communication and social mobile software in China, and it is also a useful tool for people to fragment learning. Moreover, college students have the highest degree of acceptance and tolerance for new things, and they are the most active users of WeChat. What's more, they are willing to express and share their ideas and are by participation. The author conducted a survey on the use of WeChat for students in teaching classes and found that students use WeChat up to 100%. 85% of the students spent more than an hour a day on Wechat; 78% used it as a learning tool; more than 65% of the students had formed the habit of learning English on Wechat. They would regularly read articles about English recommended by WeChat subscription, listen to audio or watch videos in English consequently, the flipped classroom can make full use of the functions of WeChat to help students complete pre-class and after-class autonomous learning tasks, and realize the connection and integration of online (after-class) and off-line (classroom) learning. Furthermore, students can also discuss a topic on the learning platform. To the students who have good performance, other students and teachers can also give some praise to encourage. To some typical universal problems, teachers can record them in time and analyze them in class so as to achieve in-depth learning. In addition, teachers can use some existing English learning websites as a supplement to the classroom. Colleges and universities can also cooperate with these English learning websites to help college English classroom achieve "partial reversal".

### 6. Conclusion

The transformation of modern teaching mode is the general trend. The development of information technology has triggered the wave of flipped classroom in College English Teaching. However, the practice of teaching reform, which originated in the United States, does not apply to all disciplines and it must experience the process of "localization" inevitably. Thus, how to design and make the web-based courses for college English and how to combine the web-based courses with the real classroom organically still need further exploration in practice. The emergence and application of each model is not smooth and it is difficult to distinguish which one is good and which is bad, so the key is to form an effective knowledge construction (Bao & Zhang, 2009). Flipped classroom teaching mode does provide a kind of student-centered teaching and learning form, and create harmonious teaching atmosphere, so the teaching effect of flipped classroom is really worth affirming, which improves student's ability of independent thinking and autonomous learning. But in any curriculum and situation, we must not apply and flip it without thinking. We must treat this concept with a scientific and rigorous attitude, and adjust the turnover mode according to the characteristics of the discipline. It is a long time to find a suitable teaching process for college English course, and the effect is not significant in the short term. Teachers and students need to explore, practice and improve together.

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