Research on College Students' Roles in Integrated English Course in a Flipped Classroom

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With the rapid development of modern science and technology, education reform and innovation is bound to become an inevitable topic in contemporary society. Flipped classroom emerges as the times require. It is widely used by many educational researchers both at home and abroad. Many studies on the flipped classroom are of teaching pattern and teachers' roles, but few are concerned about the changes of students' roles. Based on this situation, by doing questionnaire survey in Ningbo Dahongying University in Zhejiang Province, this paper analyzes the changes of students' roles in three class periods: before-class, in-class, and after-class. It finds that the students, from traditional classroom to flipped classroom, have been changed into active learners, output learners, cooperative collaborators, objective evaluators, and self-reflective learners.

Keywords: flipped classroom, traditional classroom, students' roles

Introduction

With the rapid development of modern science and technology, traditional classroom could not catch up with the steps of information technology. Thus, education reform and innovation has become an inevitable topic in the modern society. During the process, higher education emphasizes more on quality cultivation, which leads the teaching mode to change from the traditional one to a newly developed method—flipped classroom.

Flipped classroom was put forward and practiced by two teachers of Woodland Park high school. The essence is to make students flip over traditional learning process, let learners in extra-curricular time complete the knowledge by autonomous learning. Classroom becomes a place of interaction between teachers and students, and is mainly used to solve puzzles, have discussions, report ideas, so as to achieve a better teaching and learning effect. Flipped classroom changes the role of teachers and students, teachers' role has been changed from knowledge imparting to promoters and guide of students' learning. But as opposed to a traditional classroom, what changes are the students experiencing in a flipped classroom? To answer this question, a questionnaire survey was made on 67 English major students, class of 2013 who are taking Integrated English courses in Ningbo Dahongying University in Zhejiang, China.

The research finds that students' role has been changed from the traditional passive recipients of knowledge to the center of the learning process. This kind of learning method can give students a lot of freedom of study, and it can make a good supervision as well as make up for the deficiency of traditional teaching.

A Literature Review of Flipped Classroom

The idea of flipped classroom originally derived from Woodland Park High School of the Colorado Rockies in 2007, two chemistry teachers Jonathan Berman and Aaron Sams. To begin with, they planned to offer a chance to absent students by autonomous learning online. However, the online materials have become popular among other students who mainly used the materials to review and reinforce lessons. Thus, the two chemistry teachers began to rethink, and proposed the concept of the “flipped classroom”. In this teaching mode, the teacher is no longer a centre of classroom, but the student is. The roles of teachers and students have changed a lot.

This teaching mode has been widely welcomed by students. In recent years, many foreign schools warmly welcome this new flipped classroom teaching mode. Mortensen (2015) simply described the flipped classroom as students viewing asynchronous video lectures on their own and then engaging in active learning during scheduled class times. Naafi'ah Nawi (2015) pointed out that “A significant improvement in the students' academic achievement was also observed where through the interactive classroom activities, students developed a deeper understanding of the subject concepts” (p. 133).

In China, flipped classroom is still a new mode and becomes popular in recent years. Studies in this area are later and fewer than those in the West, but more are on the change of roles from traditional classroom to flipped classroom.

Domestic scholars have made a lot of research on the role orientation of teachers from different perspectives. From the point of view of the relationship between teachers and students, WANG Wen-tao (2014) stressed that teachers should be supporters of the sustainable development of students. LIU Li-ping (2012) under the multimedia network environment analyzed the role of teachers, pointed out that the teachers should become a multimedia network operator, knowledge navigator, students' tutor, learning facilitator, web designer, and network security protector. ZHU Li (2013) stressed that the development of modern education requires teachers to change their roles in order to adapt to the impact of educational technology. With the support of modern educational equipment, teachers can be the real builders and administrators of the school.

According to the above overview of researches, many researchers realized that the roles of students and teachers have been totally changed from traditional classroom to flipped classroom.

Furthermore, to answer the question of whether such changes of roles are beneficial to students' language learning, ZHU Feng-mei (2015) believed that flipped classroom is to truly implement the “learner as the center” and “output driven by task type teaching” concept, and make students autonomous learners, so as to better reach the English professional talent training goal.

Research Design

In order to clarify the changes of students' roles in a flipped classroom, a questionnaire consisting of 15 questions was distributed to 67 students in two classes of 2013 who are taking Integrated English courses in Ningbo Dahongying University in Zhejiang, China.

Questions of the questionnaire are designed to include three parts: students' roles before the class (Q1–Q6), students' roles in the class (Q7–Q11), and students' roles after the class (Q12–Q15). Each question includes five selections, A means strongly agree, B means agree, C means not sure, D means disagree, and E means strongly

disagree. (67 questionnaires have been sent out while 63 valid questionnaires were returned. All the participants of questionnaire were asked to finish the questionnaires based on their real behavior.)

Results and Discussions

In order to present the research results in a clearer way, the details of the outcomes will be demonstrated by figures and tables. And the discussion about the results will be extended to three aspects: students' roles before the class, in the class, and after the class.

Students' Roles Before the Class: Active Learners

Questions 1 to 6 are about students' self-learning before the class. Results show that students have been active learners before class in a flipped classroom. The results are as follows (see Figure 1 and Table 1).

Figure 1. Q1-Q6.

Table 1

Q1-Q6

Questions	Results				
	A	B	C	D	E
1	50.79%	38.10%	9.52%	1.59%	0%
2	42.86%	44.44%	11.11%	1.59%	0%
3	38.10%	42.86%	15.87%	1.59%	1.59%
4	38.10%	41.27%	19.05%	1.59%	0%
5	36.51%	44.44%	17.46%	1.59%	0%
6	36.51%	41.27%	22.22%	0%	0%

According to Figure 1 and Table 1, it can be intuitively found that the requirements for students in traditional classroom and flipped classroom have a big difference. From the result in Question 1, 50.79% students strongly agree that they would watch videos before the class, 38.10% students agree while 9.52% students are not sure if they would watch videos before the class. Only 1.59% students (one student) disagree with it. The results of

Questions 2 to 6 are similar to Question 1. Almost all of the students would take notes when they watch videos and repeat watching videos when they do not understand and mark it when they still cannot understand. Besides, they would look at other learning materials as supplementary materials and actively communicate with the teacher and classmates about the new lesson.

In traditional teaching mode, the pre-task for students in most cases is only to preview the text. However, even if it is a small task, most of the students still ignore it after all, because they think it is not necessary and the teacher will explain the whole text in class. Thus, students' role in traditional classroom is a passive learner, while in flipped teaching mode, the pre-tasks for students are previewing text, watching videos and taking notes, and preparing for the group presentation, as well as finding the answers for the given questions or sometimes preparing several questions about the text. The pre-tasks in flipped classroom are obviously more than traditional classroom. What is more, in flipped teaching mode, teachers no longer repeat the video contents. Thus, students must allot more time to preview text in order to catch up with the teacher. And this kind of self learning helps students understand the text. In order to perfectly finish the tasks, students will search more information on the Internet. According to this situation, it is easy to find that students' role changes into an active learner. Because students will get more information before class, the learning difficulty in flipped classroom is lower than traditional classroom. The result of Question 6 shows that most of the students communicate with teacher and classmates about the new text before class, but it is impossible in a traditional classroom. Consequently, from traditional classroom to flipped classroom, students' role before the class is changing from a passive learner into an active learner.

Students' Roles in the Class: Output Learners, Cooperative Collaborators, and Objective Evaluators

Questions 7 to 11 are about students' participation degree in class. Results show that students' roles in the class become output learners, cooperative collaborators, and objective evaluators in a flipped classroom. The results are as follows (see Figure 2 and Table 2).

Figure 2. Q7-Q11.

Table 2

Q7-Q11

Questions	Results				
	A	B	C	D	E
7	39.68%	36.51%	23.81%	0%	0%
8	42.86%	49.21%	3.17%	4.76%	0%
9	44.44%	36.51%	17.46%	1.59%	0%
10	50.79%	44.44%	4.76%	0%	0%
11	46.03%	47.62%	6.35%	0%	0%

Firstly, students become output learners in the class. According to the result of Question 7, 39.68% students strongly agree that they would take the initiative to participate in the question and answer in the class and 36.51% agree it, while 23.81% are not sure. In Question 8, almost of students think they could have more opportunities to speak in flipped class. Speaking and writing are output skills in language learning while listening and reading are input skills. WEN Qiu-fang (2008) put forward output-driven hypothesis which claims output is ultimate goal of language learning. Students in traditional classroom always use ear for listening to teacher which is an input mode. Actually, it restricts students' thinking. The only thinking mode of students in traditional classroom is teacher's thinking. However, flipped classroom makes up for this shortcoming. In flipped classroom, students are required to use mouth for discussing and speaking in the class. The discussion and speech can be individual or group work. In this way, students can expand their horizon, and deepen their thinking. It brings more thinking collisions between students and teachers.

It also finds they are cooperative collaborators in the class. Through the results of Questions 9 and 10, most of the students would actively take part in group discussions and be the delegate to speak. They would cooperatively have learning with group members and do the presentation together. In the flipped classroom, group work is an important part. Students need to work together and it makes them become cooperative collaborators.

Moreover, they also regard themselves as objective evaluators in the class. In the results of Question 11, 46.03% of the students give a strongly positive answer that they would make an objective assessment of the presentation of the other groups and 47.62% of the students agree with it. In the flipped classroom, the evaluation can be divided into three parts: teacher's evaluation, group-group evaluation, and self-evaluation. Thus, students need to give an objective comment of other group's presentations. And it shows that students in a flipped classroom become objective evaluators.

Therefore, from traditional classroom to flipped classroom, students' roles in class become more colorful. It is changed into output learners, cooperative collaborators, and objective evaluators. And in this way, they become the centre of the class, while the teacher only serves as a guide and organizer to continue of the class.

Students' Roles After the Class: Self-reflective Learners

According to the results of Questions 12 to 15, which are about students' feedback after the class, students are self-reflective learners. The results are as follows (see Figure 3 and Table 3).

Figure 3. Q12-Q15.

Table 3
Q12-Q15

Questions	Results				
	A	B	C	D	E
12	0%	0%	47.62%	41.27%	11.11%
13	41.27%	34.92%	19.05%	4.76%	0%
14	42.86%	42.86%	14.29%	0%	0%
15	42.86%	46.03%	11.11%	0%	0%

In the results of Question 12, 47.62% of the students are not sure that they would have a lot of homework to do after the class, 41.27% of the students disagree with it while 11.11% of the students strongly disagree with it. It shows that the flipped classroom pays less attention to after class part, most of the work will be done before the class and in the class. Through the results of Questions 13 to 15, most of students would sum up the contents of the classroom and reflect on the shortcomings of themselves and groups. What is more, about 43% of the students strongly agree that they could promote their own learning and learn from each other through the evaluation of the other groups, and about 46% of the students agree with it. In traditional classroom, students will have a lot of homework after class. And it is a way for students to consolidate, and internalize knowledge. However, things become different in flipped classroom, if they have any question about the text after class, they can watch the video again. Traditional classroom pays more attention to the periods of in-class and after-class, but flipped classroom pays more attention to the periods of before-class and in-class. Thus, the necessary part after the class in flipped classroom is self-reflection. The result shows that the students after the class in the flipped classroom are self-reflective learners.

Conclusion

The study of students' roles in flipped classroom is based on the questionnaire whose participants are the students of taking Integrated English course in Ningbo Dahongying University. From the above results, it can be found that traditional classroom pays more attention to in-class and after-class parts, but flipped classroom pays more attention to before-class and in-class. These two modes vary in many aspects. With the development of science and technology, the new mode, flipped classroom is more suitable for the modern society, in which the students' roles take on the active learners, output learners, cooperative collaborators, objective evaluators, and self-reflective learners. Although in the beginning stage of revolution, it may not seem very successful, there are still some students who like the traditional classroom. There is no denying that flipped classroom is a worthwhile try by placing students as the center of class, offering them more opportunities to output, evaluate, and cooperate with others, which is in accordance with the ultimate target of higher education.

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