EFL: FLIPPED APPROACH IN IMPROVING STUDENTS' SPEAKING SKILLS IN HE IN UZBEKISTAN

Guzal Jalilova G'ulomovna
Navoiy state pedagogical institute First year doctoral student Department of Foreign Languages
guzalina-jalilova @mail.ru

ABSTRACT

This article aims to investigate the influence of 'Flipped classroom' approach on students' English speaking skills. The subjects of this research are freshmen year students of the foreign language department in Navoiy Pedagogical Institute. Overall, six weeks were devoted to conduct this research. Two research questions are investigated: 1) Does the flipped classroom improve EFL students' speaking performance more than those who learn with the non-flipped classrooms? 2) What are the students' perceptions of the flipped classroom?

Key words: 'Flipped classroom' approach, speaking skill, fluency, motivation.

INTRODUCTION

Speaking competence is considered one of the detrimental aspects in communication. Every year thousands of students are graduating from the faculty of Foreign Languages in Navoiy Pedagogical Institute. However, most students' speaking proficiency level does not match to the required level when they graduate. Teaching methodology is one of the areas should be improved in order to overcome this issue. In order to enhance this situation, the Presidential Decree No. 1875 "The measures of strengthening the system of learning foreign languages" implemented in 2012 and this led to the introduction of State Educational Standards (2013) by the Cabinet of Ministers (CM) that recommended particular levels for learners at the end of each educational stages that based on domestic multistage of adopting the CEFR from A1 to C1 (A. Musoyeva, 2019). According to this system, bachelor's degree graduates in language departments are required to reach B2 level which means they have to become independent users of L2.

Hasanova (2007) claims that even though the GTM shifted to Communicative Language Teaching in recent years, it is still the topic of discussion in seminars and workshops. Considering the situation in Navoiy Pedagogical institute, this issue is still remaining one of the problems needs to be solved. In this regard, the implementation of 'flipped classroom approach' in language departments can enhance the situation since this approach, mainly focuses on in-class speaking activities rather than teacher-led lectures, which requires students to be active 'users of language' during classes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Blended learning has four models, namely, the rotation model, the flex model, self-blend model and the enriched virtual model. According to Heather and Michael (2012) the flipped model is emerged from the rotation model. There have been conducted many investigations which focused on more general features of blended learning in different fields. However, there have been less studies which explores various functions and benefits of flipped model. This model is also called 'inverted classroom' and 'reversed instruction' (Bergmann & Sams, 2012). Flipped instruction is often described as a technology enhanced learning approach classroom (Hamdan et al., 2013). However, before technological advancement some institutions used printed materials and course books as a main tool. Nowadays, LMS tools and social media are being utilized to organize flipped classroom. Electronic sources are provided prior to the face to face classes via, for example, Telegram, Facebook, Google classroom, Moodle, Canvas, etc., so that learners can be aware of the new topic and do pre-

formative assessment before coming to the class. In this learner-oriented approach, students may have more opportunity to speak, discuss as well as receiving more feedback from their instructors and groupmates. Nguyen (2014) claimed that *learner autonomy*, *self-paced learning process*, *motivation*, *collaboration* noticeable improved in this model. As the flipped learning process is more individualized, students have to be more responsible on their own learning. According to the research done by Brame (2013), different higher order thinking skills (HOTs) can be improved through flipped model, by replacing teacher-led lectures by student-centered high level cognitive speaking activities, like debates, discussions, task-based activities, problem-solving tasks, etc.

RESEARCH

This research was conducted in Navoiy Pedagogical Institute. The participants were selected among freshman year students. Overall 25 students participated in this research.

In the beginning stage, data about students' weaknesses gathered with the help of 'Google docs' and face-to-face interviews. This survey revealed that, most of the students had both linguistic and psychological problems in speaking in English. Since most of them only had grammar-focused courses before entering the university, they had less experienced in communication in English. Besides, due to shyness, lack of ideas, lack of motivation they cannot express their ideas about various topics.

According to Nunan (1999), communicative competence involves different aspects:

- Knowledge of grammar and vocabulary;
- Knowing different speech acts (requests, apologies, thanks, refusals);
- Knowing to speak appropriately in different topics and situations.

In the context being investigated, students have good grammar and vocabulary skills (B1 level according to CEFR). They can do different grammar tasks (multiple choice questions, fill-in gap exercises, correcting mistakes tasks) without much effort. However, when it comes to oral performance (impromptu speech on daily topics, expressing their own views on different issues), they had very low motivation. Another problem was connected with overuse of Uzbek language among students during classes. Even though the conversations with professors are in English, they inclined to speak in L1 with their peers which is one the main hindrances to develop fluency in L2.

In the second stage of the research, the selected group was taught 6 lessons which were organized with a traditional method. This period involved 3 weeks. These classes involved three key elements: lectures by the teacher, in-class activities and home task.

Having analyzed the students' attitude and perceptions towards to these classes, it was revealed that there was almost no evidence in improving their speaking skills. As they claimed, there is inadequate time for student speaking process and almost each lesson the same students were actively participated in speaking activities. The rest of the class remained silent and inactive during activities.

In the third stage, during another three weeks' classes were organized with 'flipped classroom' approach in which students were involved in three phases of learning: *pre-class, in-class, and post-class.* The technological applications implemented in this period were 'Flipgrid', 'Mimind', 'Socrative' and 'Kahoot'. Before coming to

face to face classes, they were aware of the new topic and do some LOTs tasks, including answering to general questions about the topic in 'Telegram group chats'; brainstorming their knowledge in 'Mimind' application; and revise their background knowledge with the help of 'Kahoot'. Throughout in-class period, they were involved in mini group discussions, problem-solving activities and peer-review tasks. After each lesson, the instructor provided oral feedback according to the performances of the students. As a home assignment, they had to write a reflection to the lesson considering their own opinions about their gains in the lesson and suggestions to the instructor.

Different types of small group discussions were organized, including 'Jigsaw reading':

'Jigsaw reading'- This activity is organized as small group discussions. Before the lesson students should read the part of the article they are assigned. The article titled 'How technology affects human health' is divided into 4 parts. Each group is responsible for one part of the article (group I- beginning part, group II- main body 1, group III-main body2, group IV- conclusion).

In class students should work in 4 mini groups. First, students who read the same parts of the article have a discussion on that part. After discussing in groups, students are required to reorganize mini groups which has one member from 4 previous groups. Now, students from different groups should inform each other about the information they analyzed. They take notes and summarize the ideas. At the end a teacher analyzes their understanding by asking them questions on that topic.

The objectives of this group activity are:

- to encourage students to work collaboratively;

- to improve critical reading skill;

-to practice speaking competence;

-to practice how to summarizing ideas;

Students' perceptions

The data collected from pre and post speaking tests results revealed that there were improvements mainly in three aspects of students speaking performance: 1) *motivation* to express their ideas and 2) discuss them with their peers *(collaboration)*, 3) critical thinking skills. According to their answers in the post stage face to face interviews, the lessons were stress-free and more fun due to interesting interactive tasks and thought-provoking activities. Besides, some shy students claimed that 'Flipgrid', 'Xrecorder' applications helped them a lot to practice their speaking skill in collaboration with their group mates which apparently increased their confidence to collaborate with their group mates in discussions. Moreover, in-class sessions, each student had constructive feedback from the instructor which made a teacher a motivator, facilitator rather than 'information provider'.

CONCLUSION

The results of the research showed positive outcome. It was proven by students' perceptions taken by interviews and post-test analysis. Implementation of digital applications motivated them to practice their knowledge in more interactive and interesting ways. There was a remarkable improvement in three aspects of learning within

six weeks. Firstly, they become more active participants during lessons rather than 'silent listeners'. Secondly, usage of different technological tools motivated them to work collaboratively, even the students who preferred to speak less, tried to express more ideas; each student has their own role and function in group projects. Thirdly, feedback provided by the instructor positively influenced them to work harder.

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