AN INVESTIGATION OF THE USE OF FLIPPED CLASSROOM IN IMPROVING STUDENTS' CAUSE AND EFFECT ESSAY WRITING

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ABSTRACT

This research aimed to investigate the effectiveness of flipped classroom approach in improving students' cause and effect essay writing skills compared to the conventional teacher-centred approach. Samples consisted of two randomly selected intact groups from the Foundation Level students of a university, with a total number of 60. The control group went through the conventional teacher-centred lecture while the experimental group was exposed to the flipped classroom approach. This research involved a mixed-method design which used both the qualitative and quantitative approaches. Data were collected through a quasi-experimental method involving a post-test and also group interview and classroom observation sessions. Quantitative data were analysed using independent sample t-test and the qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis. The findings indicated that the students were generally in favour of and were interested in learning through flipped classroom approach due to the flexibility of the learning materials and enhancement of lecturer-students interaction. The t-test result for post-test showed that the experimental group differed significantly from the control group [t (58) = -9.607; p < .05]. The mean score of the post-test of the experimental group (M=16.50 ; SD=1.358) was higher than the mean score of the control group (M=12.20 ; SD=2.041). In conclusion, it showed that the flipped classroom approach was effective in improving students' cause and effect essay writing skills in comparison to the conventional teacher-centred approach. The implication of the research reflected that further research should be conducted to expand the implementation of flipped classroom approach to other writing genres.

KAJIAN PENGGUNAAN PENDEKATAN PEMBELAJARAN FLIP BAGI MENAMBAH BAIK KEMAHIRAN PENULISAN ESEI BERBENTUK SEBAB DAN AKIBAT

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini bertujuan mengenal pasti keberkesanan pendekatan pembelajaran flip bagi menambah baik kemahiran penulisan esei berbentuk sebab dan akibat, berbanding dengan pendekatan kuliah konvensional berpusatkan guru. Sampel kajian terdiri daripada dua kumpulan pelajar asasi sebuah university yang dipilih melalui pensampelan berkumpulan secara rawak. Pelajar yang dipilih berjumlah 60 orang. Kumpulan kawalan telah mengikut kuliah secara konvensional, manakala kumpulan eksperimen didedahkan kepada pendekatan pembelajaran flip. Kajian ini menggunakan kaedah penyelidikan campuran yang melibatkan kaedah kualitatif dan kuantitatif. Data dikumpulkan melalui kaedah kuasi-eksperimen yang melibatkan ujian pos dan juga sesi temu bual berkumpulan dan pemerhatian di bilik kuliah. Data kuantitatif dianalisis menggunakan ujian-t tidak bersandar dan data kualitatif dianalisis menggunakan analisis menggunakan analisis tematik. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa secara amnya pelajar berminat belajar melalui pendekatan pembelajaran flip kerana fleksibiliti bahan pembelajaran dan penambahbaikan interaksi antara pensyarah dan pelajar. Keputusan ujian-t menunjukkan bahawa perbezaan kumpulan eksperimen adalah signifikan berbanding dengan kumpulan kawalan [t (58) = -9.607; p < .05]. Skor min untuk ujian pos kumpulan eksperimen (M=16.50 ; SD=1.358) adalah lebih tinggi daripada skor min untuk ujian pos kumpulan kawalan (M=12.20 ; SD=2.041). Sebagai kesimpulan, pendekatan pembelajaran flip berkesan untuk menambah baik kemahiran penulisan esei berbentuk sebab dan akibat berbanding dengan pendekatan kuliah konvensional berpusatkan guru. Implikasi kajian menggambarkan bahawa kajian lanjutan adalah perlu untuk mengembangkan penggunaan pendekatan pembelajaran flip kepada genre penulisan yang lain.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ESL	English as a Second Language
UAE	The United Arab Emirates
H_0	Null Hypothesis
L2	Second Language
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
SCL	Student-centred Learning
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
SLA	Second-language Acquisition
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
GA	Group A
GB	Group B
GC	Group C
GD	Group D
GE	Group E
GF	Group F
S1	Student 1
S2	Student 2
S3	Student 3
S4	Student 4
S5	Student 5
M	Mean
SD	Standard Deviation
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1   Background of the study

In the current trend of higher education, flipped classroom is a way of teaching where lecture content is conveyed to learners through computer devices, while practices and application based activities are carried out during class hours. The lecture content could take the form of voice over presentations as well as screen cast which is a combination of animations, screen captures and other multimedia elements (Arnold-Garza, 2014).

Flipped classroom approach is essential to the learning process of the new generation's students because it encourages and guides the students, who are passive learners, to take responsibility of their own learning through working independently and taking part actively in the learning process (Louis, 2006). In a flipped classroom environment, students are granted with some authority over time, location and pace of learning (Staker & Horn, 2012). Through watching teacher-made instructional videos that are related to the topics and subject matters that they are learning in their syllabus, students are able to watch and learn the knowledge before the lesson commence, to ease

their class discussion, as well as making their self-revision more intuitive and interesting. This would raise their interest in learning English, and enable them to take initiative and responsibility to learn (Engin & Donanci, 2014), and also revise the knowledge that the instructors intend to convey.

Students who are grown in new media technologies are impatient while doing worksheets and attending lecture classes (Collins & Halverson, 2010). They prefer a more interactive classroom environment with teaching materials which utilise modern technology that they have grown accustomed to, such as laptops, tablets and smartphones. However, the existing software which are supposed to be developed for the purpose of education usually do not correlate with the curriculum goal (Gremmo & Riley, 1995). Hence, this reflects the importance of self-made instructional videos as a teaching and learning material for students. This is because lecturers who are currently lecturing the related course would understand what is needed by both the students and the syllabus, and would also be able to create videos with contents that are parallel to their students' level of proficiency. Besides, tools used in flipping the classroom are common technological devices that students use in their daily life, such as tablets, smartphones and laptops. Hence, it is not necessary for the educational institutions to prepare extra budget for educational tools. Moreover, having resources like these enable students to repeatedly watch and listen to the teacher's lesson as much as they want, allowing better support to weak students (Engin & Donanci, 2014). Hence, it makes the teaching and learning process more efficient and effective.

1.2   Problem Statement

Academic writing plays an important part in the teaching and learning of English. It is important is because learners are granted the chances to express their own ideas in words. Besides, writing strengthens the learners' capacity of grammar and vocabulary, as well as helping them develop new ideas and insights of the related topics (Messaouda, 2014). Academic writing incorporates the skills of learning, comprehension, application and synthesis of information. Moreover, writing includes inspiration of creativity and element of problem solution (Defazio, Jones, Tennant, & Hook, 2010).

In the learning of academic writing, students who are brought up in the Malaysian education system are accustomed to classroom setting which leans towards

teacher-centred style of teaching as well as drilling and repetition technique (Normazidah Che Musa, Koo Yew Lie & Hazita Azman, 2012). The issue however, is the shortcoming of teacher-centred approach, which is criticised for not cultivating students' problem solving and critical thinking skills, and its incompetence in optimising their learning in class (Tanusree Chakravarty Mukherjee & Kamala Vainy Kanapathi Pillai, 2013). Students of the modern days are able to surf and get access to various information with the use of the world wide web, which allows them to transform from being mere users of content into more capable producers and publishers of content. In this case, conventional approaches of teaching and learning can no longer attract and motivate students to learn effectively (Gitsaki, Robby, Priest, Hamdan & Ben-Chabane, 2013).

Just like other technical subjects which rely on students' understanding of principles and theories before application, academic writing is considered a complicated and tedious English based subject. This is because students are required to interpret and master the underlying concepts and principles before they could construct a good academic essay. This includes understanding the definition of terms, understanding and remembering the structures of different essay genres, as well as using the appropriate writing style in academic writing. As explained by Yap (2016), when the lecturer is giving explanation and scribbling on the board, learners would be busy jotting down the notes, losing attention, while some might be sleeping. It would be a challenge to ensure that students would simultaneously stop jotting down notes from the board and place more focus on the class as the lecturer engages in giving explanation about the lecture. This shows that learning could be boring and tiring when it is done in a conventional teacher-centred learning environment.

Moreover, the increasing diversity in students' learning styles in a class is also an issue which lecturers encounter these days (Lage, Platt, & Treglia, 2000). It is challenging for lecturers to cope with students' diversity of learning styles by using the conventional teacher-centred style of teaching as different students have their own preferable ways of learning writing.

Besides the influence of students' learning style, part of the reasons that possibly affect students' learning capability could also be their motivation (Hiew, 2012). Local students, particularly those who enroll in primary and secondary school, even up to university level are taught and lectured in teacher-centred chalk and talk method, with the classroom environment of instructors playing the role of being superior in terms of knowledge and thoughts. This could cause the students to be merely

following the instructions and lessons passively, without the confidence and motivation to voice out their point of views.

The main goal of flipped classroom's implementation is to change the conventional sequence in which lectures come before exercises or activities. In a flipped classroom, learners would be provided with learning materials prior to the class sessions for advanced preparation, and classroom session is used to complete activities which are closely facilitated by the lecturer (Karlsson & Janson, 2016). Through the flipped classroom approach, students are encouraged to learn their lecture materials beforehand, which indirectly allow for more independent learning. When they are in the classroom, they would be more likely to participate in activities, as the in-class session is mainly focused on class discussion based on the exercises and interaction among students and their lecturer, which leave them no other option but to engage themselves in the activities (Arnold-Garza, 2014). Thus, this will effectively trigger their motivation and initiative in developing the writing skills.

Flipping the classroom could also be the solution to students' diversity in learning styles. It is because the lecture materials provided in the form of instructional videos provide the opportunity of multiple learning styles paths for the learners to attain their language learning objectives. In addition, by using interactive activities, including group or pair work, it could assist learners to proceed to higher levels in the Bloom's hierarchy of learning (Ghailan, 2016).

Moreover, by giving students ease of access to the flipped classroom videos, they are granted the freedom and convenience of replaying the videos as much as they desire, allowing them to revise on the information given in their own time and speed,

and later coming to the class well prepared. This could aid in strengthening the knowledge learnt, but at the same time, give students with lower proficiency an opportunity to revise the information which are taught in the lesson out of their class period. Through this way, the lecturer and students would be able to have classroom sessions in the form of interactive sessions and question-answer sessions (Engin & Donanci, 2014). Even though it is yet a debatable issue that recorded lecture videos could be used to substitute a classroom lesson entirely, it is customarily approved and established that these kind of materials could be an excellent supplement to the regular teaching and learning sessions (Hürst, Mueller, & Ottmann, 2006).

By implementing flipped classroom, with the combination of online materials and in-class activities, lecturers could utilise instructional videos online to lessen the time for in-class lecture and increase opportunity for student-centred learning activities in class. This could potentially have a positive outcome on learners' experience in learning as well as giving them motivation (Wihnan, 2000).

1.3   Research Objectives

This study has three main objectives. They are to: (i) identify the differences between the use of conventional teacher-centred approach and flipped classroom approach in ESL academic writing class, (ii) identify the students' responses towards the usage of flipped classroom approach in improving their cause and effect essay writing skills, (iii) determine whether there is any significant difference in the mean score of the cause and effect essays' assessment between the use of conventional teacher-centred approach

and flipped classroom approach in teaching and learning cause and effect essay writing skills.

1.4   Research Questions

Following are the research questions of the study:

1. What are the differences between the use of flipped classroom approach and conventional teacher-centred approach in ESL academic writing class?

2. What are the students' responses towards the use of flipped classroom approach in improving their cause and effect essay writing skills?

3. Is there any significant difference in the mean scores of the cause and effect essays assessment between the use of conventional teacher-centred approach and flipped classroom approach?

1.5   Research Hypothesis

The research hypothesis tested in this study is:

H_0: There is no statistically significant difference in the mean scores of the cause and effect essay writing assessment between the control and the experimental group.

1.6   Significance of Study

The significance of this study is to discover whether the implementation of flipped classroom approach in the teaching and learning of academic writing in tertiary level Foundation classroom results in improvement of the students' writing skills, particularly in the genre of cause and effect. It is also aimed to gauge the students' responses and opinions about this approach, to determine whether it is favoured by the Foundation level students.

This area of research would be relevant to the teaching and learning of English academic writing in tertiary classroom setting, specifically at the Foundation level because it helps in determining whether the suggested approach of teaching, which is known as flipped classroom, lives up to the expectation, which is to improve the teaching and learning of academic writing skills, particularly in the area of cause and effect essays. Based on the research by Gitsaki, Robby, Priest, Hamdan, and Ben Chabane (2013), there are already three higher education institutions in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) that adhere to the mobile learning initiative, which indicates the potential and viability of such method in real life. Teaching and learning academic writing has always been a tedious and daunting task. With the introduction of a series of videos developed by the lecturer of the subject, it is hoped that it could ease students' learning and increase their interest towards academic writing. This could be useful to lecturers who find their current methods of teaching academic writing related subjects less effective and productive.

1.7   Scope and Limitations of Study

The major limitation of this study is that only cause and effect essay genre is focused on. This is due to the requirement of the Academic English syllabus in the university at their semester level.

Another limitation of this study is that the targeted participants of the study are narrowed down to only students of foundation level of study. This is because of the constraint of university's policy in conducting research.

1.8   Operational Definition

1.8.1   Teacher-centred Learning

Teacher-centred learning is when the teacher or instructor plays an active role of delivering knowledge to the students in the classroom environment. In this situation, students learn in a more passive way where they only listen and memorize the knowledge conveyed (Danker, 2015).

1.8.2 Student-centred Learning

Student-centred learning is interpreted as a setting in which students are required to be responsible for their own learning process, and they seek knowledge actively (Danker, 2015).

1.8.3 Flipped Classroom

According to Bergmann and Sams (2012), Flipped Classroom is defined as an approach where lecture is conveyed through instructional videos developed or selected by the instructors, at the comfort of the learners' home, while homework is completed as an in-class activity.

1.9 Chapter Summary

Academic writing is an essential skill for students to equip themselves to meet the needs of future studies in the academic world. In the local education context, students generally learn English academic writing through a teacher-centred approach. This approach of learning raises concerns as it lacks room for students' responses. Hence it would be difficult to attract students' interest in learning academic writing. This leads to the attempt to conduct the study on flipped classroom and its implementation in conveying the knowledge of academic writing to tertiary level students.