Students' attitude towards the use of Flipped Classroom to teach listening comprehension

Actitud de los estudiantes hacia el uso de Aula Invertida para la enseñanza de la comprensión auditiva

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Abstract:

This study explores students' perspectives and experiences on the implementation of a flipped classroom model to develop listening comprehension. Within a qualitative data approach, using an open-ended questionnaire, information was collected from three university students chosen through convenience sampling. The data suggest that the implementation of this model improved students' learning and motivation. By analyzing their responses using a content analysis method, the benefits perceived by the students who experienced the flipped classroom model were identified and grouped into five themes: Peer learning, Better preparation, Improved understanding, Motivation, and Autonomy. The findings of this study may be relevant not only for students but also for educators who are willing to improve their online teaching.

Keywords:

Flipped classroom, listening comprehension, English language teaching

Resumen:

Este estudio explora las perspectivas y experiencias de los estudiantes sobre la implementación de un modelo de aula invertida para desarrollar la comprensión auditiva. Dentro de un enfoque de datos cualitativos, mediante un cuestionario de preguntas abiertas, se recolectó información de tres estudiantes universitarios elegidos mediante un muestreo de conveniencia. Los datos indican que la aplicación de este modelo mejoró el aprendizaje y la motivación de los estudiantes. Al analizar sus respuestas mediante un método de análisis de contenido se identificaron los beneficios percibidos por los estudiantes que tuvieron la experiencia del modelo de aula invertida, dichos beneficios se agruparon en cinco temas: Aprendizaje entre pares, Mejor preparación, Mejora de la comprensión, Motivación y Autonomía. Los hallazgos de este estudio pueden ser relevantes no sólo para los estudiantes, sino también para los educadores que deseen mejorar su enseñanza en línea.

Palabras Clave:

Aula invertida, comprensión auditiva, enseñanza del inglés

Introduction

English language learning implies the mastery of four main skills: reading, writing, listening and speaking (Brown, 2000. p. 232). We use these skills in our daily life when we read newspapers, listen to music, have conversations with others, etc. Hence, developing these skills is essential when learning and teaching another language such as English. Learning the language by focusing on skills may sound challenging in any context, yet it is not impossible.

A very particular context was experienced in the last two years. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, institutions were obliged to stop face-to-face classes and implement online teaching methods (Marmolejo, 2020) and in Mexican education, several models were adopted since the beginning of the pandemic. One of them was the flipped classroom model, which has had an increasing use in recent years. The efficiency of this model has supported students' learning improvements as they demonstrated their understanding of the subject (Bergman and Sams, 2012) as well as significantly improved their listening skills (Ahmad, 2016). Nevertheless, further research on how students perceive the efficacy of flipped classrooms on a small scale by exploring students' experiences while

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learning with this model is needed (Abeysekera & Dawson, 2015). Thus, the present article aims to investigate the students' attitudes towards the implementation of the Flipped Classrooms method, specifically for listening comprehension.

Literature review

Receptive skills

As previously mentioned, there are four primary abilities a person must have in order to learn a language. Those are divided into two categories: productive (writing and speaking) and receptive (reading and listening). According to Harmer (2001), "receptive skills are the forms in which people extract meaning from the discourse they see or hear" (p. 199). In addition, our schematic information is activated when we are stimulated by specific words that fit into patterns that we are familiar with (Al-Jawi, 2010). In other words, based on our previous knowledge, we comprehend the pieces of discourse we have contact with. Due to that process, students may come to class with previously built schemata on the topics they will be using in class. For this, there are techniques in which the learner processes the input received through spoken or printed elements (Brown, 2000).

These processes can be seen from two different perspectives: With bottom-up processing, students start by analyzing from the smallest units of the language, such as letters and words, to larger units, such as sentences or paragraphs. On the other hand, for the top-down process, learners start from their background knowledge based on information previously learnt and/or experienced, from larger units of the language to the lowest (Helgensen, 2003).

Listening:

According to Helgensen (2003), "listening is the active, purposeful process of making sense of the information we hear." (p. 23) Hence, to help students make sense or understand the message of the spoken language, teachers can make use of different teaching strategies in class.

A common listening class is divided into three stages: pre, while- and post- stages. According to Miller (2003), the use of stages is useful since it allows learners to do more things with the information they listen to rather than using the information only for testing. Consequently, learners may focus on activities derived from the listening depending on the stage rather than only testing their understanding.

First, the pre-listening stage prepares students by engaging them in the topic, activating their schemata, and

working with top-down ideas. At this point, a listening task is given. Second, during the while-listening phase, students are "on task", engaged in real-time processing of the input. Lastly, the post-listening stage includes reviewing responses after listening, reviewing top-down features, such as the exact definition of the passage or speaker's information, and bottom-up features such as individual words or phrases.

Flipped Classroom

The Flipped classroom is a fairly novel method created by Bergmann and Sams in 2007. The heart of this model is that traditional classes are inverted: While the traditional methodology gives the explanation in class and gives homework for home, in flipped classroom, homework is done in class while the topic explanation is done at home before attending the class. (Bergmann & Sams, 2012) This model not only inverts the order of the activities, but also fosters the flipping of the cognitive processes involved.

According to Bloom (1956, as stated in Forehand, 2010), the lowest three levels of cognitive learning are: knowledge, comprehension and application, whereas the highest are: analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. With the implementation of a flipped classroom methodology "knowledge and comprehension, the lowest levels of Bloom's Taxonomy, are taken care of in students' own time" (Kırmızı & Kömeç, 2019). This change allows for lower-order cognitive tasks to take place outside the classroom, while higher-order cognitive tasks take place in the classroom with the support of peers and the teacher.

As stated by Ahmad (2016), flipped classroom model relies on several theoretical foundations, highlighting three of them: First, the blended learning approach is beneficial not only for the combination of face-to-face and computer-based instruction in one single method but also due to the fact that students are able to choose the location where they receive content. Second, this method is also based on the student-centered approach due to the fact that in the flipped classroom, each student is responsible for arriving at class with a basic knowledge of the materials, so all need to take responsibility for their learning process. What is more, learners may have control of the rate of receiving materials online. Third, active learning is built into this method because of its support on pedagogies focused on students who must be actively engaged in their learning process.

A variety of pedagogies focused on student activity and participation in their learning process are used while covering key course materials; hence, it is important to

consider students' opinions and beliefs about their learning process. This study aims to identify the students' attitude towards the implementation of the flipped classroom as well as their preferences for online learning. Therefore, the research question set is the following: What are the students' attitudes towards flipped classroom?

Methodology

In this study, a constructivist approach was adopted. According to Creswell (2013), in this view "individuals seek to understand their world and develop their particular meanings that correspond to their experience" (p. 140) so this is the research framework in which our participants shared their views regarding their flipped learning experience when working with listening comprehension in English.

These views were then explored by applying an interpretive framework of social constructivism (Creswell, 2013). This means that the data collected through open-ended questions containing the participants' views were gathered and organized to be analyzed and interpreted.

Due to the nature of the study, it was necessary to implement a qualitative approach. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) defined this approach as "a set of interpretive material practices that make the world visible." (p. 3) Consequently, the researcher interacted with the participants and created meanings based on their responses.

According to Farquhar, (2012) "the aim of case study research is to dig deep, look for explanations and gain an understanding of the phenomenon through multiple data sources and this understanding extends to test theory" (p. 8). That is to say, in order to explore the perception each of the students had regarding the use of flipped classroom when fostering their listening skills, a case study was used in this investigation. In the study, the benefits perceived by the students experiencing the flipped classroom model were identified, listed and grouped in five main themes.

Setting

This study was conducted somewhere at a language center of a public university in Mexico. The language center's objective is to provide professional language education through teaching, research and cultural extension in accordance with the requirements needed to accomplish the learning of a language, in our case, English.

The creation of the course was defined by the students' profile: young adults who have already finished their English course at the university, but have not achieved the

expected level in order to pass the certification asked as a requirement for their degree. After presenting a listening course proposal and making the necessary changes, the use of flipped classroom as part of the lesson planning was executed. Also, an emphasis was given on skill-based syllabus in order to focus on the main ability to be developed through the course: listening.

Tasks were designed in order to fulfil students' necessities, expecting that the students would develop listening comprehension by using several strategies (listening for specific information, listening for specific information, making inferences, making predictions, etc.) in order to follow and comprehend a variety of discourses. Thus, YouTube videos, such as news reports, commercials, interviews and conversations were used to take advantage of the real-life vocabulary and the availability of closed captions

In contemplation of the current situation, tasks were implemented online. Some of the different platforms used were Nearpod, Kahoot, Google Classroom and Jamboard. Nevertheless, Liveworksheets.com was the main website used for the tasks in class and homework due to the possibility of making several interactive exercises easily.

For pre-class activities, the instructions were uploaded to the Google Classroom board, attaching a YouTube video related to the topic. Learners took notes about the YouTube video, which was related to the listening strategy to be taught in class. Then, learners answered a task on Liveworksheets.com related to the topic of the class.

For the whole-class part, students discussed the topics reviewed in pre-class activities, making questions and solving their doubts. Moreover, they were also answering some tasks rehearsing the listening strategy and reviewing the responses
Lastly, for post-classes, an activity related to the topic was made and uploaded to Google Classroom board, such as a writing reflection, a video or a recording

Participants

Three volunteers between 20-25 years old took part in this project. All of them have approached English as a foreign language because of the scholarly curriculum. Participants were selected by using the convenience sampling method, which consists of a selection of a non-random sample of members of the target population that meet certain practical criteria. (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). Therefore, the participants in this research were selected on the basis of accessibility and their willingness to participate since they were taking listening classes

taught by the researcher, which allowed them to achieve the purpose of the study.

Participants were explained that their anonymity would be respected, that the information provided would be only used for research purposes, and that the project complied with the necessary ethics in research.

Instruments

In accordance with Rowley (2014), "research questionnaires are documents that include a series of open and closed questions to which the respondent is invited to provide answers" (p. 2). Additionally, respondents may answer with facts, or their attitudes, beliefs, behaviors or experiences. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the instrument's flexibility, questionnaires were found to be an efficient manner of carrying out the research. It was decided to employ open-ended questions in the questionnaire to get respondents to express their answers in their own words, aiming to avoid guiding them in a particular direction (Züll, 2016).

Data analysis

Based on the nature of the qualitative data, the approach used to analyze the collected data was content analysis. Content analysis is a method where the content of the message forms the basis for drawing inferences and conclusions about the content (Prasad, 2008). Besides, Forman and Damschroder (2007) stated that "In qualitative content analysis, data are categorized using categories that are generated, at least in part, inductively (i.e., derived from the data), and in most cases applied to the data through close reading" (p. 40). For this research, qualitative data retrieved from the questionnaires were analyzed through content analysis.

Students were asked to answer a questionnaire related to their flipped learning experiences throughout the course. After the completion of the forms, the researcher proceeded with the coding process. The process was divided into three stages. In the first one, the answers were read multiple times. Secondly, aided by an Excel spreadsheet, data were divided into parts for in-depth examination, extracting important keywords and phrases. Finally, the perceived benefits were listed and grouped into 5 main themes.

Findings

The research question was focused on the students' perceptions regarding flipped classroom. The findings of the questionnaires suggested that learners had positive views on flipped learning which corroborates the findings in studies such as Roth, Channy & Suppasetseree (2016);

Li & Suwanthep (2017); Kırmzı & Kömeç (2019); Fahmi, Friatin, & Irianti (2020). To further the understanding on which are the benefits perceived by the students we use some excerpts of the experiences shared by the participants to present such benefits grouped in five themes obtained from the collected data.

Peer learning

Participants stated that the interaction with their classmates not only helped them to comprehend the topic but also made them aware of the deficiencies they may have with the language:

> *It [material revision] is feedback and allows us to learn about our mistakes. (Participant 1)*

> *The discussion of ideas was good feedback (Participant 2)*

> *I could see my shortcomings when I was talking with my colleagues (Participant 3)*

According to Bergmann & Sams (2012), the flipped classroom model also increases student-student interaction by doing collaborative groups; for example, group discussions, in which "learners work together and learn from each other" (p. 27). These statements show that students used group activities as a form of receiving feedback from their peers' participation.

Better understanding

Subjects stressed that the technological resources used made learning the language online easier and more engaging than in face-to-face classes:

> *They [technological means] attracted my attention more. (Participant 1)*

> *I found the language a bit easier to practice online with the different platforms compared to face-to-face mode. (Participant 2)*

> *It [the class] is dynamic and you understand it better. (Participant 3)*

These statements show that, since students are accustomed to using technological resources, flipped classroom incentivization of the use of digital sources played an important role in order to make an entertaining and easy-to-follow course.

Motivation

Another advantage found during the analysis was that learners consider flipped classroom as an amusing and

comfortable method to learn English online. The main reason for this was the variety of tasks used during the course.

> *The activity platforms are varied and with time it motivates you to do the work continuously. (Participant 1)*

The findings also show that the activities students enjoyed the most were doing quizzes (Kahoot, liveworksheet.com) and taking notes from videos with captions (YouTube):

> *Kahoot, because it allows us to evaluate ourselves with a time limit. (Participant 1)*

> *In my case working with Kahoot and Liveworksheet made it easier for me to understand the topics and activities. (Participant 2)*

> *Watching videos with subtitles and making notes on what it was about because they make you think fluidly without having to stop the video to understand. (Participant 3)*

In addition, subjects shared that the topics used in class were interesting for them because of their topicality:

> *I actually found all of them interesting but especially learning to identify the emotions and feelings that are expressed in a conversation, and learning to deduce what might happen in the future. (Participant 2)*

> *Those [topics] on health, quarantine and isolation because those are current issues and help us to understand news or reports about what is happening. (Participant 3)*

Those statements also suggest that students are interested in topics they may face in real-life situations, such as conversations about the future (Participant 2) or talking about current issues such as quarantine and isolation (Participant 3).

Autonomy

Students' autonomy was also reflected in some participants' answers, principally in Participant 1 and 2's reflection:

> *I know I have to keep practicing. (Participant 1)*

> *Most of them were platforms I hadn't used before and I was able to do some research on how to use them. (Participant 2).*

As stated not only by Bergmann & Sams (2012) but also by Kumaravadivelu (1994), efficient students must take responsibility for their own learning, which means that students should reflect on their learning process and feel free to investigate on their own, promoting learners' autonomy.

Increased preparation

It was also commented that materials provided before classes, such as videos and articles, prepare them for the topics to be reviewed during class:

> *I already knew the topic that was going to be discussed and, above all, the new vocabulary to be able to practice it (Participant 3)*

This statement demonstrates that, because of the flexibility of the teaching model, students have more time to prepare for the next class by reviewing the topic during class as traditional classes do.

Conclusions

In this study, the data suggest that the flipped classroom model contributed positively to students' learning of listening comprehension. The data also show that students get prepared by doing the tasks assigned before class. In addition, learners considered that their learning was easier on account of the flipped classroom model and peer learning rather than face-to-face classes. Moreover, the topics and platforms used in class were found interesting and motivating.

Unfortunately, due to space constraints, in this paper, we could only include some of the excerpts shared by the participants. However, the findings of this article may show the benefits of teachers incorporating the flipped classroom model in their teaching practice. In addition, there is no information that could describe the impact of this listening comprehension course on the development of the rest of the skills (reading, writing and speaking). Yet, we consider there was some subjective observed improvement based on the teacher's judgement and observations. Nevertheless, further research is needed in order to reach a conclusion.

We are aware that the main limitation of this study is that of the few participants who take part in it, however, due to its exploratory nature we believe it makes the initial contribution to the area. A larger sampling may get a

broader picture of the students' perceptions regarding the use of flipped classroom when fostering listening in the learning of a language.

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