A Study on the Motivational Strategies in College English Flipped Classroom

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Abstract

Flipped classroom is a great reform that brings a huge impact on the classroom teaching. Its essence is autonomous leaning, whose effect is determined by students' motivation. Therefore, to bring the advantages of the flipped classroom into full play, the top priority is to stimulate students' motivation. The paper makes a study on the motivational strategies to be employed in the flipped classroom.

Keywords: flipped classroom, motivation, motivational strategies

1. Introduction

Flipped classroom is attracting growing concern all over the world, including China. Numerous college English teachers in China are trying practicing this new teaching mode. But many of them find that it does not work out as expected. Students cannot adapt to it. In contrast, they prefer the traditional classroom, where they can at least be informed of some knowledge with the teacher's supervision and direct knowledge imparting, although they cannot internalize the knowledge as well as the flipped classroom promises. Why does this transforming teaching mode fail? This study will first explore the root reason and then give some suggestions.

2. An Introduction to Flipped Classroom

Flipped classroom is an instructional strategy that reverses the traditional learning environment by delivering instructional content, often online, outside of the classroom to meet the students personalized way of learning. The content delivery may take a variety of forms, such as online video lessons, online collaborative discussions, digital research, and text readings.

In 1993, King (2010) emphasized the importance of the use of class time for the construction of meaning rather than information transmission in his article "From Sage on the Stage to Guide on the Side". This idea was further developed by Harvard professor Mazur (1997). He created a peer instruction mode which moved information transfer out of the classroom and information assimilation into the classroom. He believed that the students would truly master the conception through the persuasion and peer discussion in class. In 2000, Lage, Platt and Treglia (2000) also suggested moving information presentation via lecture out of the classroom to media such as computers or VCRs to meet the needs of students with a wide variety of learning styles in a paper entitled "Inverting the Classroom: A Gateway to Creating an Inclusive Learning Environment", which discusses their research on flipped classrooms at the college level. The term "Model of Classroom Flipping" was first put forward by Baker (2000). He suggested that the teaching content should be presented to students before class through web tools or course management tools, and the teacher's role should change from "the wise man on the platform" to "the guide of students by side". In 2004, a breakthrough of the flipped classroom took place when Khan Salman uploaded a large number of instructional videos made at the request of a younger cousin he was tutoring because she felt that recorded lessons would let her skip segments she had mastered and replay parts that were troubling her (Thompson, 2011). Based on this model, he founded the famous Khan Academy. In 2011 educators in Michigan's Clintondale High School flipped every classroom. As a result, the college attendance in this school went from 63 percent in 2010 to 80 percent in 2012 (Rosenberg, 2013). In 2011, the flipped classroom was selected as the great reform that brought a huge impact on the classroom teaching by the Global Times of Canada. Now it has been recognized and practiced increasingly all over the world.

3. The Difficulties in Implementing Flipped Classroom

The flipped classroom is really a great teaching mode, but it is more than likely to function inadequately and even fail because of the following two reasons.

On the one hand, few students possess sufficient cognitive drive to ensure them to devote their entire energy into their study throughout the learning process. The flipped classroom gives learners great autonomy, enabling them to control their learning time, space, and progress, which can enhance their motivation and benefit their study. However, the autonomy is a double-edged sword. For students who lack motivation and self-discipline, the autonomy will be abused. For example, some students listen to music or see films while watching the learning videos given by their teachers before class. Some even do not watch the learning videos at all. This will definitely affect their performance in the following stages because all stages of the flipped classroom are closely connected with each other. Without the knowledge the teacher asks them to preview before class , they cannot get fully involved in the classroom activities designed to reinforce the acquisition of the knowledge, and then they cannot accomplish successfully the task their teacher assigns them to internalize those knowledge. Finally a good learning effect cannot be achieved.

On the other hand, teachers are not fully aware of their vital role in the flipped classroom, failing to bring every element in the learning process into full play. The flipped classroom does not only mean information transfer, it also involves knowledge internalization. In order to realize the knowledge internalization, in class, more time is spent on higher-order thinking skills such as problem-finding, collaboration, design and problem solving as students tackle difficult problems, work in groups, research, and construct knowledge with the help of their teacher and peers. The flipped classroom shifts instruction from the traditional teacher-centered mode to a learner-centered model, changing the teacher's role from a class dominator to the student's learning facilitator. However, this does not mean that the teacher's role is weakened, on the contrary, it is strengthened in that the teacher needs not only to prepare the pre-class instructional content, but also to design and organize the class activities mentioned above, monitor and guide the students, and evaluate the student's performance. To accomplish these tasks successfully, the top priority is to stimulate students' motivation, because autonomous leaning is the essence of the flipped classroom and students' motivation determines the effects of autonomous learning. But some teachers fail to motivate students. As a result, students cannot complete the leaning tasks and have no desire to participate in learning activities.

In conclusion, if teachers cannot stimulate, sustain and enhance students' motivation in the flipped classroom effectively, the flipped classroom can be a total failure, even worse than the traditional classroom. Therefore, teachers should employ motivational strategies to bring the advantages of the flipped classroom into full play.

4. An Introduction to Motivation

Learners learn at different rates and reach different levels of proficiency in the second language learning, which has been a subject of interest for years. Many researchers agree that apart from intelligence and aptitude, the learner's motivation plays a crucial role in L2 learning. Learners with a stronger motivation are supposed to learn at a higher rate and can achieve a higher level of proficiency than learners with a weaker motivation without consideration of any other individual differences in language learning.

Gardner and Lambert (1972) divide the concept of motivation into instrumental and integrative. Instrumental motivation focuses on learners' desire to acquire a language as a means for attaining instrumental goals, such as getting a job, passing an examination, reading technical material etc. Integrative motivation, on the other hand, refers to learners' desire to learn a second language in order to experience a new culture, communicate with native speakers of the target language.

Dornyei (1998) explains the importance of motivation as follows: "Motivation provides the primary impetus to initiate learning second language and later the driving force to sustain the long and often tedious learning process". He advances a "Three-level Theory", which is the most influential one in the studies of motivation in L2 learning. "Three-level" refers to Language Level, Learner Level and Learning Situation Level. "Language Level" explores learners' instrumental motivation and integrative motivation; "Learner Level" involves learners' need for achievement, self-confidence, language use anxiety, perceived L2 competence, causal attributions and self-efficacy; "Learning Situation Level" consists of course-specific motivational component (motivations related to teaching programs, teaching materials, teaching methods and learning tasks), teacher-specific motivational component (motivations related to teachers' behaviors, personality and teaching style) and learning community motivational component (motivations related to learning groups' goal orientation, code of conduct, cohesion, and a reward system).

Williams and Burden (1997) develop a framework of motivation in L2 learning, which categorizes motivational factors into internal factors and external factors. Internal factors involve learners' age, interest, attitudes, perceived value of activity, sense of agency, mastery, self-concept, confidence, anxiety and language developmental stage; external factors contain the learning environment, learners' interaction with parents, teachers and peers, and the broader context. Internal factors and external factors interact with each other.

Keller (1987) develops ARCS model for motivation instruction. ARCS refers to Attention, Relevance, Confidence and Satisfaction. Attention strategies focus on arousing and sustaining learners' curiosity and interest; Relevance strategies aim to enhance learners' values of the learning activity by making the teaching materials and teaching activities relevant to the learners' needs, interests, and motives; Confidence strategies help students develop a positive expectation for successful achievement; Satisfaction strategies provide extrinsic and intrinsic reinforcement for effort.

In addition, researches prove that motivation is a state rather than a trait, dynamic rather than static. It is subject to wax and wane due to various internal and external variables. Therefore, unlike intelligence and language aptitude, motivation is likely to be enhanced so as to promote L2 learning. Therefore, language teachers should employ motivational strategies to create the basic motivational conditions in order to initiate students' motivation, and maintain and protect it, as well as foster and increase it in the process.

5. Motivational Strategies in the Flipped Classroom

Based on the above-mentioned theories, some suggestions are given in the following to stimulate learners' motivation in the flipped classroom.

5.1 Arousing Students' Interest in the Flipped Classroom

In the first class, teachers should ensure students have a favorable impression of the flipped classroom by giving them an introduction about it: its difference from the traditional teaching mode, its requirements, its evaluation system and the benefits it can bring.

5.2 Setting Motivational Goals

First, the goals should stimulate both the instrumental motivation and the integrative motivation. For one thing, the goals should be relevant to students' instrumental needs, such as passing exams, making academic communication and facilitating career development. For another, familiarizing students with the target language culture can sustain and prolong their motivation. After students pass the exams or acquire the skills in academic communication, instrumental motivation will disappear. Therefore teachers should arouse their awareness that the purpose of L2 learning is much more than that. Its ultimate purpose is to integrate into the globalized world by learning more about it. Globalization increases the frequency of international communication sharply. Any communication, including academic communication, involves intercultural skills, requiring certain knowledge of other countries' politics, culture, history and traditions. Teachers should convince students of this fact and fire their interest in target language culture. The interest in culture, in turn, can stimulate students' interest in language.

Second, the goals are challenging but attainable. If the goals can be achieved too easily, students will slack off in their studies. If the goals are too high to be reached, students will lose confidence and interest, even give up their effort. The difficulty degree of the goals must be within students' "zone of proximal development", neither too high nor too low. Vygotsk's "zone of proximal development" (ZPD) is the difference between what a learner can do without help and what he or she can do with help. It is an area of learning that occurs when a person is assisted by a teacher or peer with a skill set higher than that of the subject. A goal that conforms to this theory can stimulate students' strong and lasting motivation.

Third, there are a series of phased goals to support the general objective. Short-term goals can provide immediate stimulus and feedback, feelings of mastery, perceptions of development and progress that help to foster intrinsic motivation (Ushioda, 1996). Every time students achieve a phased goal, their confidence is reinforced. The success they experience in the progressive realization of sub-goals will enhance their motivation to accomplish the next higher objective.

Fourth, both the phased goals and the general objective are divided into different levels targeted at students with different abilities to ensure that every student can get motivated.

5.3 Setting Specific and Manageable Goals, Plans, Requirements and Evaluation Standards

The detailed information clarifies what to learn and how to learn, which works as a guidance for students to manage their own study, increases their goal-orientedness, and facilitate their self-evaluation and peer evaluation.

It will motivate them to work harder to get praise from teachers and classmates.

5.4 Creating Motivational Learning Situations

Malone and Lepper (1980, 1987) suggest four motivational elements in creating motivational learning situations: challenge, curiosity, control and imagination.

First, moderately challenging activities can boost learners' self-esteem and bring them the biggest intrinsic motivation. Therefore, the autonomous learning materials and tasks as well as the classroom activities should be relevant to students' abilities and within the "zone of proximal development", namely be slightly higher than the language knowledge that students have mastered to wake up their exploration spirit. For example, teachers can design activities focusing on all necessary skills instead of only one skill to make the class more challenging and effective.

Second, curiosity contains sensorial curiosity and cognitive curiosity. Accordingly, both the way the learning materials are presented and the learning activities should give students' senses an all- around stimulation, such as the use of props and costumes. Besides, teachers can make use of the unexpected or uncertain matters to capture students' attention. Moreover, teachers can design exploratory problems to stimulate students' cognitive curiosity. What is more, any contradictory events can arouse students' cognitive needs. Students are likely to think the new knowledge unreasonable when they try to understand it with their former experience. Therefore teachers can design some activities that can arouse students' confusion to inspire their exploratory spirit.

Third, the more freedom students possess in making choices, the stronger their sense of control is. Accordingly, teachers can offer them more than one activity for them to choose, or let them choose their favorite role in role play to personalize their learning process.

Fourth, imaginary situations, such as "role play", can satisfy students' emotional needs by giving students the opportunity to experience power, wealth, honor and success. Far from an impractical illusion, the imaginary situation should be relevant to students' realistic needs and experience. It should serve as an opportunity for students to apply what they have just learned to practice, which gives students a sense of satisfaction. Teachers can integrate real-life situations into the learning activities to help students internalize knowledge.

5.5 Offering Students Personalized Guidance

First, the personalized guidance will boost students' sense of achievement and confidence. The ZPD learning activity is what students cannot complete without the assistance of teachers or peers. Therefore teachers should help students solve their problems. The help must be within an appropriate point. The purpose of help is to make students not need their teachers any longer. Teachers' help is like the scaffold, which is removed from a building after construction is completed. Therefore teachers should enlighten students to think openly instead of giving them direct instructions. In addition, teachers can provide students with some classic learning cases or the achievements from former students, which offers students a reference and a stimulation of their belief that "if they can do it, I can too." Only in this way can students get a great sense of satisfaction, which will enhance their confidence and motivate them to pursue a higher goal.

Second, the individualized communication with students can give them the feeling of being accompanied, help to develop a good teacher-student relationship and protect their motivation. On the one hand, the competent students have more expectations and requirements of teaching. If their needs are not satisfied, their motivation will be frustrated. On the other hand, the underachievers are eager for teachers' encouragement. Inadequate attention from the teacher will generate their sense of inferiority and sense of alienation. Therefore, for the competent students, teachers should focus on the further promotion of their proficiency; for the underachievers, teachers should focus on the reinforcement of their knowledge foundation and give them more encouragement.

Third, through communicating with students, teachers can learn about students' confusion, which enables them to design the following classroom activities that are relevant to students' needs of solving the confusion. As a result, students will be motivated to participate in these activities and their minds will be activated in class.

5.6 Dividing Students Into Groups

First, the size of group influences the learners' motivation greatly. Nunan (1999) mentions "Students who remain silent in groups will actively contribute to discussions when the size of the group is reduced to five or three." Therefore teachers need to divide students into groups of three to five members.

Second, besides the teachers' help, students also need their classmates' assistance to finish the ZPD leaning activity. We cannot just look at what students are capable of doing on their own; we have to look at what they are capable of doing in a social setting. In many cases, students are able to complete a task within a group before

they are able to complete it on their own. Therefore, teachers should inspire the group members to help each other and cooperate well, thus not only the assistance receivers but also the assistance givers can reap benefits. The receivers will obtain the sense of success from their achieving a task and the givers will gain satisfaction from helping others. And according to Edgar Dale's "Cone of Learning", helping others is the most efficient learning method compared with listening to lectures, group discussion and etc. By helping others, students can reinforce their mastery of knowledge, which is also a source of satisfaction.

5.7 Creating a Pleasant and Relaxing Learning Environment

In his "Affective Filter Hypothesis", Krashen (1981) explains that the emotional factors can filter the input. A cheerful mood free from anxiety can accelerate the language acquisition and make a positive contribution to students' motivation.

To build up a supportive and non-threatening learning environment, teachers should be patient with and respect students, give them more encouragement and praise, and avoid punishing them. Furthermore, teachers need to strike a balance between competitive activities and cooperative activities. It is true that competition can motivate students for victory. However, it has some negative influence on students' motivation. First, it tends to make students feel upset and worried, especially the psychologically weak students or the low-proficiency students. Second, it can hinder students' cooperation and mutual help, and damage the harmonious learning atmosphere because its purpose is to defeat others. Third, the winners' motivation is greatly increased while the losers' may be frustrated. Therefore measures should be taken to eliminate the negative influence as much as possible. The first one is to educate students to treat competition correctly. The second one is to make some evaluation items that encourage students to help each other. The third one is to increase the chances of winning. Despite these measures, competition should not be held frequently, because it will exert excessive mental pressure on students.

5.8 Offering Motivational Evaluation and Feedback after Every Learning Activity

More emphasis shoud be placed on formative evaluation in the flipped classroom to monitor and motivate students' autonomous learning. The evaluation ought to focus on the following aspects: students' performance in pre-class autonomous learning, the achievement of group cooperation and students' individual performance in cooperative learning.

First, teachers should first make positive comments on students' performance to bring students the joy of success. Even the tiniest progress should be given generous appreciation and praise to cultivate students' awareness that what really counts in the flipped classroomis not the result but the process.

Second, teachers should help students form positive attribution. According to Bernard Weiner (1992)'s attribution theory, a person's own perceptions or attributions as to why they succeeded or failed at an activity determine the amount of effort the person will engage in activities in the future. Attributions of failure to lack of ability produce low self-esteem and low expectancies of future success, on the other hand, failure ascribed to insufficient effort results in maintenance of expectancy of success and guilt, both motivators. When attributions lead to positive affect and high expectancy of future success, such attributions should result in greater willingness to approach to similar achievement tasks in the future than those attributions that produce negative affect and low expectancy of future success. Therefore teachers should express confidence in their capability and guide them to explain their failures by the lack of efforts and appropriate learning strategies applied rather than by their insufficient ability. To those students who have worked hard but make unsatisfactory progress, teachers should make them understand that language learning is a time-consuming and demanding long-term process, which cannot be accomplished at one stroke, and encourage them that they are moving ahead as long as they keep up their efforts, even though the progress is not obvious sometimes.

Third, when students make mistakes, teachers should try to consider students' problems by standing in their shoes. Thus they can have a more accurate and personal understanding of students and thereby forgive their mistakes and even appreciate their fantastic ideas. This will relieve students of their fear after making mistakes and give them the feelings that the teacher still has expectations of them instead of giving them up, which will motivate them to live up to the teacher's expectations.

Fourth, teachers should give informational feedback to help students make an objective analysis of their strengths and weaknesses, as well as their development and inadequacy. The superficial remarks such as "well done", "goodwork" and "quite right" can only bring students temporary satisfaction without practical help for their further development. Soon students will get tired of them and then lose motivation. Only detailed and specific feedback can support students to perform the future tasks more independently and successfully.

Fifth, students are also the assessment subjects, who should be encouraged to make mutual evaluation and

self-evaluation. Besides the aspects mentioned above, students' evaluation should also include the assessment on their contribution to the group work. This process develops students' sense of responsibility, which a source of motivation.

5.9 Set Students a Good Example with Teachers' Own Behavior

Dornyei (2001) regards teacher's own behavior as the most important motivational factor. One successful and important teaching behavior is to be enthusiasm. Teachers should convey their excitement and passion both in words and body language, share their personal interest in L2 and L2 learning with the students, or show students that they value L2 learning as a meaningful experience that produces satisfaction and enriches their life. In this way, students' positive attitude and interest in L2 learning will be facilitated.

6. Conclusion

Effective designing and implementing these motivational strategies for the flipped classroom teaching will enhance students' motivation, guarantee the effectiveness of students' autonomous learning, bring the functions of the flipped classroom into full play, and will greatly benefit students' language proficiency, autonomous learning abilities, critical thinking abilities, cooperative skills and creative power.

Acknowledgements

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