



Features of Flipped Classroom and Their Roles in Developing the Spoken English Proficiency among Business English Undergraduates in China

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study sought to investigate the characteristics of the flipped classroom model and their impact on enhancing students' proficiency in spoken English within the context of the Oral Business English course in China. Utilizing a qualitative approach, data were gathered through three research instruments: classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. **Methodology:** Data were collected from three instructors delivering Oral Business English courses and their respective students across three universities in China. These data underwent analysis through thematic analysis techniques.

Findings: The results indicated that instructors employed a structured three-section class approach integrated with technological tools in their implementation of flipped classroom pedagogy. Additionally, the findings illuminated the multifaceted roles of the flipped classroom paradigm in fostering students' advancement in spoken English proficiency, encompassing the refinement of speaking abilities and the cultivation of critical thinking skills through active engagement. Despite these benefits, certain challenges were identified, including increased workload for both instructors and students, as well as occasional disruptions due to internet or technological issues. **Suggestions:** Moreover, the study suggested that instructors should possess a nuanced understanding of the appropriateness of activities tailored to their students' learning levels. Additionally, it emphasized the necessity for teachers to meticulously design and execute flipped classroom instruction in a systematic manner, thereby fostering heightened student engagement in speaking exercises.

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Introduction

In recent years, Chinese universities have prioritized higher education reform, aiming to serve local economic development. This includes offering courses directly relevant to the local economy. With this focus, Business English has emerged as a major program, with 428 universities in China

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offering it as of 2023 (MOE, 2020). Consequently, undergraduates are increasingly seeking proficiency in English for professional contexts, particularly oral communication in the workplace. However, despite this demand, there's a notable gap between the importance placed on speaking skills and students' actual proficiency levels (Xu, 2019; Yang, 2020).

Since 2018, various regions in China have initiated the Classroom Teaching Innovation Competition, encouraging university educators to share impactful teaching innovations for higher education across the country. This initiative underscores the necessity for teachers to continually update their teaching materials and adopt innovative methods, particularly emphasizing the integration of flipped classroom techniques. The flipped classroom model, as described by Graham, Woodfield and Harrison (2013), merges online learning with traditional in-person instruction, aiming to offer students personalized education tailored to their unique requirements (Bergmann & Sams, 2012).

In recent years, there has been a surge in research examining the efficacy of the flipped classroom model, particularly in language learning contexts (Zarrinabadi & Ebrahimi, 2019; Zhang, Li, et al., 2016). However, there remains a dearth of evidence elucidating the precise impact of flipped classroom methodology on the teaching and learning processes in language education (Zarrinfard, Rahimi, & Mohseny, 2021). While some studies have explored how instructors implement flipped teaching strategies to enhance language proficiency among students, the majority of these investigations have focused on general English-speaking courses, catering to either non-English majors or English majors. Within the realm of English for Specific Purposes, such as Business English, existing literature offers primarily conceptual discussions rather than detailed examinations of the benefits associated with flipped classroom approaches (Borisova et al., 2019).

Business English, as an interdisciplinary field, prioritizes the acquisition of business knowledge alongside language proficiency and intercultural communication skills (Wang & Cui, 2020). Students majoring in Business English transition from a focus on general language skills to honing their English communication abilities in international business settings. Central to this transition is the course Oral Business English, mandated for undergraduates in Business English programs according to the Teaching Guide for Foreign Language and Literature Courses in Higher Education (MOE, 2020). However, there is a paucity of research specifically examining the flipped teaching methodology within the Oral Business English course. Furthermore, there is limited investigation into the potential challenges students may encounter in a flipped learning environment.

This study aims to bridge the existing gap in literature by investigating the impact of flipped classroom methodology on the enhancement of spoken English proficiency among Business English students enrolled in the Oral Business English course. Specifically, the study seeks to uncover the characteristics of flipped classroom implementation in Oral Business English courses, examine how instructors structure flipped classes in speaking courses, and assess the influence of flipped teaching design on Business English undergraduate students' spoken English proficiency in Chinese universities. To guide the research, the following questions were formulated:

1. What are the primary features of flipped classroom implementation in the Oral Business English course for Business English undergraduates in China?
2. How does the teaching and learning process within flipped classrooms contribute to the development of spoken English proficiency among Business English

- undergraduates in Oral Business English classes in China?
3. What challenges do Business English undergraduates encounter in flipped classroom settings within the Oral Business English course in China?

Literature Review

Spoken English Proficiency

As per the framework proposed by Goh and Burns (2012), the advancement of spoken proficiency entails an increased capacity to generate fluent, accurate, and socially appropriate discourses. This notion encompasses various dimensions of spoken proficiency, as outlined in their model of speaking competence, which encompasses language and discourse knowledge, fundamental speaking skills, and communication and discourse strategies. However, for language learners, possessing a foundational understanding of a language does not necessarily translate into proficiency in spoken communication. For instance, in regions like China and other Asian countries, despite learners having studied English for extended periods and having acquired reading and writing competencies, challenges persist in their ability to express themselves orally in practical contexts (Lian & Budin, 2014).

Regarding the matter of spoken English proficiency in tertiary education, several researchers have delved into this issue within speaking English courses. Their findings have illuminated various factors contributing to this challenge, including tendencies toward silence, reluctance to engage, and limited interaction with both instructors and peers. These factors collectively suggest that the scarcity of opportunities for oral self-practice is a pervasive issue in speaking classes (Liu, Li, & Zhao, 2016; Xu, 2019). Moreover, linguistic limitations, such as insufficient vocabulary, pronunciation difficulties, and deficiencies in reading and oral presentation skills, along with psychological barriers like anxiety, fear of errors, and aversion to negative feedback, are identified among the factors contributing to learners' subpar spoken English proficiency (Amoah & Yeboah, 2021; Rabab'ah, 2016).

Furthermore, despite the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China's longstanding provision of the Business English major at the tertiary level, spanning nearly two decades, the persistent issue of inadequate spoken English proficiency among Business English students persists. Despite the considerable time and effort invested by students in learning English, the outcomes remain less than satisfactory (Xu, 2019). This deficiency is notably reflected in the results of spoken English assessments administered to students. For instance, Huang (2018) highlighted students' substandard performance in the Cambridge Business English Certificate test, an official examination tailored for Business English majors.

In response to the aforementioned issue, several researchers have proposed strategies to enhance the spoken English proficiency of Business English students, drawing from their investigative findings. For instance, Goh and Burns (2012) advocate for teachers to foster and assist students in refining their spoken proficiency by adeptly employing various speaking skills to articulate diverse meanings. Additionally, the efficacy of classroom interactions, crucial for facilitating student learning, hinges on the quality of learning cycles provided by teachers (Liu et al., 2016). Furthermore, pedagogical factors such as teaching

content and methods play significant roles in improving spoken English proficiency. Researchers have increasingly turned their attention to exploring the dynamics of classroom teaching and learning in foreign language education. As argued by Wächter and Maiworm (2014), given the evolving comprehension of language acquisition processes and the centrality of communication, there is a growing imperative to approach classroom situations with creativity and novel perspectives.

Flipped Classroom in English Education

The adoption of the flipped classroom model, pioneered by Bergmann and Sams (2012) in 2007, has gained widespread popularity as a pedagogical strategy. As elucidated by Hung (2015), flipped instruction emphasizes the structuring and linkage of learners' in-class engagements with out-of-class endeavours, integrated with technology. With its overarching aim to cultivate students' active learning, fostering conceptual comprehension, analytical abilities, and collaborative skills, flipped instruction has emerged as a favoured teaching and learning approach among educators (He et al., 2019). Consequently, it has garnered considerable attention from both teachers and researchers in recent years.

Previous research on English language learning in flipped classrooms has predominantly focused on examining the impacts of this instructional approach. Studies have investigated how flipped classrooms influence various aspects of language acquisition, including grammar learning (Kheirābādi, 2017), improvement of reading skills and pronunciation accuracy (Bakla, 2018), enhancement of writing proficiency (Ekmekci, 2017; Leis, Cooke, & Tohei, 2015; Soltanpour & Valizadeh, 2018), and development of speaking abilities (Li & Suwanthep, 2017; Lin & Hwang, 2019; Zarrinabadi & Ebrahimi, 2019). For instance, Wu, Hsieh and Yang (2017) demonstrated that flipped classrooms facilitated improved speaking skills among EFL learners through fostering active engagement within an interactive and collaborative learning environment. Additionally, studies have assessed students' learning outcomes in flipped classrooms (Amiryousefi, 2019; Zhang, Li, et al., 2016) and explored the attitudes of both teachers and students toward this instructional approach (Alebrahim & Ku, 2020; Shi et al., 2020).

While numerous researchers have advocated for the effectiveness of flipped instruction in language classrooms, there remains a dearth of detailed exploration into specific techniques regarding the implementation of flipped classroom practices. For instance, how teachers discern which materials should be covered outside of class and during in-class sessions has yet to be thoroughly investigated (Jiang et al., 2022). Furthermore, although some studies have examined learners' speaking performance in flipped classrooms, particularly at the tertiary education level in the Northwest district of China, there remains a significant gap in understanding students' perspectives and the challenges they encounter in flipped instruction (Zhang, Li, et al., 2016). Consequently, there is a pressing need to delve into the outcomes of learning speaking skills, which poses both importance and challenges in research. This study endeavours to scrutinize assertions about flipped classrooms by examining their roles in fostering spoken English proficiency among Business English undergraduates. It is posited that addressing this gap will contribute to a deeper understanding of the interplay between teaching practices and student achievements in spoken English, thereby potentially enhancing the efficacy of oral English teaching and learning reforms.

Methods

Design

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design, utilizing classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis to collect data addressing the research questions. Thematic analysis was then utilized to analyse the gathered data.

Participants and Setting

In this study, participants were selected using purposive sampling techniques. The sample consisted of three teachers and their respective students enrolled in the Business English major at three universities within a province in China. The participants were specifically chosen from universities where the Oral Business English course was mandatory for second-year Business English undergraduates and spanned an entire academic year. Prior to recruiting teacher participants, calls for participation were disseminated, specifying that the investigation aimed to explore features of the flipped classroom model. Additionally, teacher participants were required to have a minimum of three years' experience teaching Oral Business English using flipped methods, along with holding a Master's degree in the field of EFL or related fields in Business.

Teacher Participants

Among the eight respondents who had implemented flipped teaching across the three universities, three teacher participants were selected based on their strong commitment to the teaching profession and their active involvement in research endeavours. [Table 1](#) provides general information about these teacher participants at the three universities. Jane, Annie, and Kevin were responsible for teaching the Oral Business English course to Business English undergraduates at their respective universities. Consequently, the study investigates the implementation of flipped teaching by these three instructors in their Oral Business English courses and its impact on students' spoken English proficiency.

Table 1

General Information of the Teacher-Participants

| Name | Sex | Position | Teaching Time | Educational Background of the Teachers |
|-------|--------|----------------------|---------------|---|
| Jane | Female | Associated Professor | 14 Years | BA in English MA in English Education |
| Annie | Female | Lecturer | 9 Years | BA in English MA in Business English |
| Kevin | Male | Lecturer | 9 Years | BA in International Economic and Trade MA in Foreign Linguistics and Applied Linguistics |

Student Participants

For the semi-structured interviews, students with varying levels of spoken English proficiency were deliberately selected. Specifically, participants were chosen to represent high, low, and moderate proficiency levels in spoken English. Two methods were employed to select student participants for the interviews. Firstly, instructors' records of students' previous performance marks were consulted, as it was assumed that these marks could offer insights into students' proficiency levels in Oral Business English. Additionally, assistance was sought from the instructors, who provided recommendations for students demonstrating different levels of spoken English proficiency in their classes. Consequently, a total of six students were selected and interviewed from Oral Business English classes across the three universities, with 2 students each representing high, intermediate, and low proficiency levels in spoken English. This diverse selection aimed to elicit information regarding the challenges faced by students of varying proficiency levels and the strategies employed to navigate flipped classroom environments. Furthermore, gaining insight into students' perceptions of how teachers facilitate the improvement of their spoken English was considered essential.

Data Collection

The data for this study were gathered through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Drawing from [Goh and Burns \(2012\)](#), speaking development is construed as an enhanced capacity to utilize linguistic knowledge, fundamental speaking skills, and communication and discourse strategies to generate fluent, accurate, and socially appropriate discourses. In this context, spoken English proficiency denotes the ability to effectively employ spoken English for communicative purposes and to undertake various business activities or tasks in international workplace settings, such as organizing trade fairs, conducting company visits, and negotiating business deals. Furthermore, the study employed rubrics from the Speaking Test Assessment Scales for Speakers of BEC Vantage to evaluate students' proficiency in spoken English. These rubrics encompassed assessments of lexical resource, discourse management, pronunciation, and interactive communication.

Observation

In this study, classroom observations were undertaken to investigate the characteristics of flipped classroom instruction and the teacher's role in fostering students' spoken English proficiency. A total of four observations were conducted, with each session lasting 1.5 hours, held monthly throughout the academic year. The objective was to gain a comprehensive understanding of flipped teaching practices implemented by the three instructors. The lectures were either audio- or video-recorded, and subsequent transcriptions were collected. Overall, there were 12 observation sessions, with four observations conducted for each instructor across the three universities. These observations typically lasted for 1.5 hours, aligning with the standard class duration in the respective universities.

Interview

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with both teacher and student participants. Interviews with student participants sought to elicit their perspectives on the characteristics of the flipped classroom, challenges encountered, and potential solutions. Furthermore, the impact of flipped classroom features on their spoken English proficiency

was explored. For teacher participants, inquiries focused on their pedagogical principles guiding course planning and strategies employed to enhance students' spoken English proficiency. Each interview session, whether with teachers or students, lasted between 45 to 60 minutes and took place during the final month of the academic year.

Documents Analysis

This study scrutinized various documents, encompassing teachers' instructional materials such as teaching plans, slides, course syllabi, online course platforms, and teaching reflections. These documents provided insights into how teachers structured their flipped teaching approaches and facilitated opportunities for students to practice spoken English proficiency.

Data Analysis

During this stage, the iterative process of thematic analysis outlined by [Braun and Clarke \(2006\)](#) was employed to analyse the data collected from interviews and observations. However, these steps were not strictly sequential but often carried out reflectively. Initially, I immersed myself in the data corpus, transcribing the collected data into written transcripts. Careful scrutiny of audio and video recordings facilitated accurate transcription and coding of the data. Subsequently, formal codes were assigned to the transcribed data, followed by a thorough review of the codes. As the coding process progressed, categories emerged and were progressively refined and abstracted. Themes were then defined, accompanied by clear descriptions, culminating in the final write-up of the analysis.

Findings

The findings derived from classroom observations, interviews, and document analysis were presented with the objective of elucidating the characteristics of flipped classroom instruction and its role in enhancing spoken English proficiency among Business English undergraduates in Oral Business English courses.

Features of the Flipped Classroom in the Oral Business English Course

Active Learning in the Three-Section Teaching

In the study, it was observed that all three teachers implementing the Oral Business English course adopted a flipped teaching approach. They adhered to methodologies that combined online learning resources such as slides, audio, and video clips with offline components including evaluation forms, tasks, and additional slides. Students were actively engaged in both online and offline learning activities, participating in discussions, presentations, and providing feedback. The teachers emphasized students' active involvement throughout the flipped classroom sessions, spanning pre-class, in-class, and post-class activities. Additionally, students collaborated and interacted with each other during these activities. This echoes findings from a study by [Shao and Liu \(2021\)](#), which concluded that flipped classroom models effectively invert traditional instructional strategies. Further elaboration on these observations is provided in the subsequent paragraphs.

Pre-Class Section

During the pre-class section, students were instructed to access the Oral Business English online course platform, where they independently studied basic expressions related to upcoming topics. This phase emphasized individual learning, as students navigated through the online materials at their own pace. Figure 1 provides a visual representation of the teaching contents featured in Annie's Oral Business English online course.

| | | | | | |
|------|---|----|--|----|---|
| 课程章节 | | | 第5章 Welcome to the Company | | |
| 1 | Course Introduction 1.1 Course Introduction I 1.2 Course Introduction II | 2 | Pleased to Meet You 2.1 2.1 Introductions and Greetings 2.2 2.2 Receiving Visitors at the Office 2.3 2.3 Meeting Guests at the Airport 2.4 Mini-test | 3 | How about Your Accommodation 3.1 Hotel Reservation 3.2 Check in and Check out 3.3 Mini-test |
| 4 | I'd Like to Have a Dinner with You 4.1 Dinner Reservation 4.2 Table Manners 4.3 Mini-test | 5 | Welcome to the Company 5.1 Company Presentations 5.2 Product Presentations 5.3 Mini-test | 6 | It's the Meeting Time 6.1 Meeting Preparations 6.2 A Formal Business Meeting 6.3 Mini-test |
| 7 | Business Negotiation 7.1 Inquiry and Offer 7.2 Price Negotiation 7.3 Mini-test | 8 | Orders and Payment 8.1 Placing Orders 8.2 Payment Terms 8.3 Mini-test | 9 | Packaging 9.1 Selling Packaging 9.2 Transportation Packaging 9.3 Mini-test |
| 10 | Customer Complaints and Service 10.1 Customer Complaints and Service in Business Activity 10.2 Customer Complaints and Service in International Trade 10.3 Mini-test | 11 | Shipment and Delivery 11.1 Negotiation for Shipment and Delivery 11.2 Dealing with Shipping Problems 11.3 Mini-test | 12 | Developing New Market 12.1 Analysis on the Market 12.2 Methods of Developing Market 12.3 Mini-test |
| | | | 5.1 Company Presentations | | |
| | | | 5.1.1 Getting Started | | |
| | | | 5.1.2 Listening Strategy | | |
| | | | 5.1.3 Mini-lecture & Useful Expressions | | |
| | | | 5.1.4 Additional Video Clips | | |
| | | | 5.1.5 Assignment | | |
| | | | 5.1.6 Cultural Values & Students' Work | | |
| | | | 5.2 Product Presentations | | |
| | | | 5.2.1 Getting Started | | |
| | | | 5.2.2 Listening Strategy | | |
| | | | 5.2.3 Mini-lecture & Useful Expressions | | |
| | | | 5.2.4 Additional Video Clips | | |
| | | | 5.2.5 Assignment | | |
| | | | 5.2.6 Cultural Values & Students' Work | | |
| | | | 5.3 Mini-test | | |

Figure 1: Contents of Annie's Online Course.

i. In-Class Section

In the in-class section of the teachers' sessions, typically, three main steps were followed: knowledge expansion, demonstration, and assessment. Initially, teachers summarized key information pertinent to conducting group presentations. Subsequently, designated groups presented on the assigned topics, while simultaneously uploading their posters to the online platform for peer review. Notably, a Group Presentation Rubric provided by the teachers facilitated feedback from students, covering aspects such as content, language use, delivery, PPT design, and teamwork. Furthermore, teachers offered their own comments towards the conclusion of the class.

ii. After-Class Section

Students were tasked with revising and restructuring their presentations using feedback provided by both their peers and the teachers.

Table 2 illustrates a comprehensive flipped teaching plan, emphasizing the cultivation of students' active learning and English communication skills across the three class sections. With guidance from the teachers and through self-directed learning, students expanded their language proficiency, thereby enhancing their preparedness for speaking exercises in the class (Liu et al., 2016).

Table 2

Flipped Teaching Plan

| Teaching Steps | Sub-Procedures | Requirements | Purposes |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------|--|---|
| 1. Pre-Class Section | 1.1 Online Learning | a. Watch the mini-lecture and the additional video clips of the online course b. Form groups to prepare for the in-class demonstration of the related topic | To learn basic expressions and be ready for the demonstration |
| | 1.2 Online Tasks | a. Watch the micro lectures and learn how to introduce b. Discuss the question which are relating to the specific topic | To deepen understanding |
| | 2.1 Knowledge Expansion: | a. Listen attentively and finish the work. b. Retell with some key keywords | To practice listening and speaking skills |
| 2. In-Class Section | 2.2 Group Demonstration | a. Do group demonstrations b. Initiate discussions Offer feedbacks | To work cooperatively To understand weaknesses and strengths |
| | 2.3 Assessment | | |
| 3. After-Class Section | Reflection | Revise the plan and record a video and upload it to the platform | To revise |

Technology Integration

Eady and Lockyer (2013) emphasized the pivotal role of technology in modern learning experiences, posing both challenges and opportunities for educators and learners alike. Classroom observations revealed the integration of various technologies in the flipped teaching of Oral Business English classes. For instance, teachers instructed students to access an online course platform to acquire basic expressions and essential vocabulary, providing them with flexibility in terms of time and location for learning. Additionally, the platform facilitated various teaching activities, such as selecting presenters and soliciting comments from students, thereby fostering learning autonomy among them (Warni, Aziz, & Febriawan, 2018). This aligns with findings by He et al. (2019), who noted that different activities promoted students' active learning and collaboration spirit.

Teachers utilized a range of technologies including PowerPoint slides, tablets, cell phones, selfie sticks, and computers. Instead of traditional paper-and-pen methods, students were often asked to complete exercises on their tablets, with results instantly displayed on computer screens. This streamlined the assessment process, allowing teachers to identify mistakes efficiently. Annie emphasized that teaching innovation in higher education necessitated the integration of information technology, particularly within the context of flipped classrooms.

The requirement for teaching innovation had promoted the integration and innovative development of information technology and education teaching, and continuously stimulated the vitality of classroom teaching in universities. We are asked to update teaching contents and innovate teaching methods especially with flipped classroom.

(Annie, Semi-Structured Interview)

Roles of Flipped Classroom in Oral Business English Classes

Data gathered from interviews and document analysis revealed that the three teachers emphasized the significance of nurturing students' core speaking skills and fostering their engagement in critical thinking practices within their flipped classrooms.

Enhance Speaking Skills

The study uncovered that teachers supported students in honing core speaking skills, encompassing pronunciation, intonation, and the effective use of communicative functions or speech acts within their flipped classroom environments.

A proficient command of English with standard pronunciation not only bolsters learners' confidence but also enhances various language elements such as vocabulary, grammar, listening, and speaking skills (Li & Suwanthep, 2017; Zhang, Du, et al., 2016). Consequently, incidents of correcting students' pronunciation and intonation were common in the flipped teaching of Oral Business English courses by the three teachers. For instance, teachers aided students in overcoming challenges related to learning vowels, consonants, and speech flow. In interviews, Pete from Jane's class recalled the seriousness with which oral presentations were approached. If errors occurred, Jane would record and provide correct pronunciations or intonations for practice. Furthermore, Annie and Kevin introduced basics of English phonetics and speaking techniques in their online courses, including rules for English pronunciation such as vowels, consonants, syllables, rhythm, and intonation.

Moreover, students learned to perform precise communicative functions or speech acts while preparing for and delivering group presentations. Ann from Kevin's class reflected on learning how to express, explain, provide feedback, and offer evidence during interactions. Additionally, through interactions with teammates and Kevin, she grasped how to initiate and conclude topics, clarify meanings, take turns, and utilize verbal and non-verbal cues to regulate conversations and discussions. The core speaking skills of interaction management and speech functions were underscored during the preparation and delivery of group presentations.

In the process of preparing for the teamwork, my group and I met at least once a week to discuss problems we encountered, share information we had collected together. I gradually learned how to communicate with my teacher and other peers.

(Ann from Kevin's Class, Semi-Structured Interview)

In the flipped classroom, teachers not only facilitated students in speaking confidently with correct pronunciation but also fostered self-assurance in expressing opinions. They encouraged students to discuss observations, share feelings, and articulate thoughts. Additionally, students utilized social networks such as WeChat to seek feedback and guidance from their teachers, thus overcoming the fear of speaking in face-to-face interactions. Consequently, students developed confidence and actively engaged in oral communication practices (Sheerah & Yadav, 2022). Flora, a student from Jane's class, highlighted in an interview the sense of fulfilment experienced during presentations. She

recalled the eagerness among students to share their designs once prepared for presentations.

I enjoyed the moment of being together with my teammates. We may feel excited especially when new ideas sparked. Once we were ready, we felt so eager to do the presentation and share with Annie and other students.

(Flora from Jane's Class, Semi-Structured Interview)

Promote Engagement in Critical Thinking Skills for Speaking Practice

The California Critical Thinking Skills Test (CCTST) evaluates interpretation, analysis, inference, evaluation, explanation, and self-regulation ([Insight Assessment, 2023](#)). Observations and student interviews underscored the application of these critical thinking skills during speaking practice in flipped classes, including analysis, interpretation, explanation, and induction. The following examples illustrate how teachers facilitated students' engagement in critical thinking skills in Oral Business English classes.

During internet research, students were tasked with discerning the validity and relevance of information, employing critical thinking to select and filter information effectively. They organized and synthesized useful information and engaged in effective communication. For instance, Pete recounted in an interview that to prepare for group presentations, they studied materials provided by Jane and conducted additional research. This process honed their skills in critically searching and selecting pertinent information. Below is Pete's recollection from the interview:

We often find lots of materials on the online platform, which are useful for us to finish the speaking tasks. With Annie's guidance, we learned how to look for and select useful information from different resources critically.

(Pete from Jane's Class, Semi-Structured Interview)

Moreover, interviews revealed that students developed critical thinking skills during speaking practice. For instance, Jimmy from Anne's class noted that during group work preparations and presentations, teammates collaboratively negotiated and meticulously designed every aspect. This collaborative effort fostered cooperative work and critical thinking.

When preparing the group presentations assigned by the teacher, we negotiate the plots and use standard language for the different characters, all this developed our critical thinking skills in particular.

(Jimmy from Annie's Class, Semi-Structured Interview)

In conclusion, interviews and document analysis revealed that teachers emphasized the significance of fostering students' critical thinking skills during speaking practice. For instance, students were tasked with critically evaluating information found online, discerning its validity and relevance, and selecting pertinent material. They then synthesized and organized this information in a critical manner. Jane expressed in her teaching reflection that she actively promoted students' critical thinking skills during speaking practice.

I combine audio and video clips with activities such as quizzes, discussions, and debates to develop students' higher-order thinking skills. Students may internalize business knowledge and

speaking skills through the analysis and reflection. It was helpful to develop their critical awareness.

(Jane, Documents Analysis)

Problems Faced by the Students in Flipped Classrooms

In addition to their positive attitudes towards flipped classroom teaching, students reflected on encountering challenges, including excessive workloads such as an abundance of learning materials and activities, as well as internet or technology failures.

During an interview, Harris noted that the extensive reading materials consumed considerable time. He expressed concern that this might lead to loss of interest and careless reading. As a recommendation, Harris suggested that Annie could provide useful suggestions or categorize the reading materials, enabling students to focus on essential learning content.

There are a lot of materials provided. Some of the materials are exercises, but most are reading materials that need to be read carefully. It would take a lot of time to read. Therefore, I may not read them carefully.

(Harris from Annie's Class, Semi-Structured Interview)

Furthermore, some students mentioned during interviews that the abundance of activities in their offline classes could induce anxiety, particularly when they were unable to participate for various reasons. Doris expressed her concern about feeling lost or forgetting tasks assigned by Kevin during an interview excerpt:

Too many activities tend to make us feel bored. Some activities distract us and leave us little room for reflection. In addition, many activities are done online. But once our phones or pads run out of battery, we are unable to participate in the activities.

(Doris from Kevin's Class, Semi-Structured Interview)

Indeed, these circumstances resonate with the position of [Lie et al. \(2020\)](#), who suggested that teachers should understand the impact of various factors on student participation in online learning.

Discussion

This study investigated the impact of flipped classroom methodology on the development of spoken English proficiency among Business English undergraduates enrolled in the Oral Business English course. The teachers employed a structured three-section teaching process, integrating both online and offline activities to foster a cooperative learning environment between teachers and students. Notably, the flipped classroom approach effectively engaged students in the learning process, facilitating improvements in their speaking skills.

Consistent with the findings of [Jakob and Asrifan \(2022\)](#), students demonstrated enhanced speaking abilities through activities such as watching instructional videos and engaging in group discussions. This active participation provided students with opportunities to express themselves and share opinions, ultimately boosting their

confidence levels, as noted by [Sheerah and Yadav \(2022\)](#).

Moreover, the study observed improvements in students' spoken English proficiency at a phonological level, with particular emphasis on pronunciation. [Hahn \(2004\)](#) highlighted the significance of prosodic features like stress and intonation in enhancing communication clarity. Consequently, learners were equipped with the skills necessary for effective interpersonal communication, including expressing feelings, providing instructions, and offering advice.

Overall, the findings of this study underscore the effectiveness of flipped classroom methodology in promoting spoken English proficiency among Business English undergraduates. Through structured activities and collaborative learning experiences, students were able to develop essential speaking skills and enhance their overall communicative competence.

The study highlighted the effectiveness of flipped classroom methodology in fostering students' core speaking skills, such as performing precise communicative functions and engaging in cooperative activities. These findings align with prior research by [Kristianti, Artini and Utami \(2023\)](#) and [Awidi and Paynter \(2019\)](#), which emphasized the benefits of flipped learning environments in promoting active student engagement and dynamic classroom interactions. Additionally, the study revealed that students developed critical thinking skills, including interpretation, analysis, evaluation, and explanation, through their participation in flipped Oral Business English classes.

Furthermore, the integration of various technologies into the flipped teaching approach played a crucial role in enhancing students' motivation and interest, ultimately improving their spoken English proficiency. Consistent with the findings of [Ghanizadeh, Razavi and Jahedizadeh \(2015\)](#), digital technologies facilitated language teachers in providing timely feedback and supporting the development of language skills. Similarly, the use of video lessons and pre-class tasks, as highlighted by [Lin and Hwang \(2019\)](#) and [Wu et al. \(2017\)](#), empowered students to take ownership of their learning process, contributing to increased participation levels, as noted by [Rahman, Nur and Akib \(2023\)](#). Overall, the study underscores the positive impact of flipped teaching on students' language learning outcomes and classroom engagement.

The study also identified challenges associated with implementing the flipped classroom approach, such as increased workloads due to excessive learning materials and activities, as well as technology-related issues. [Blau and Shamir-Inbal \(2017\)](#) suggest that time-consuming activities requiring lower-order cognitive processing can be shifted to out-of-class phases, allowing class time to focus on higher-order cognitive activities, thereby enhancing learning efficiency. Therefore, teachers introducing flipped classrooms should possess a thorough understanding of its mechanics and ensure that activities are appropriate for students' learning levels. Additionally, systematic design and implementation of the flipped approach are crucial ([Evseeva & Solozhenko, 2015](#)).

Moreover, it is essential to reconsider the role of technology in teaching. With certain applications offering correction and feedback functions, questions arise regarding the potential impact on the roles of teachers and the overall teaching process. Thus, achieving a balance between the roles of teachers and technologies in flipped teaching becomes

imperative in language education (Jiang et al., 2022). This highlights the need for thoughtful integration of technology to enhance learning outcomes while maintaining the integrity of traditional teaching practices.

Conclusion

This qualitative study explored the impact of flipped classroom methods on English language learning outcomes. Data from classroom observations, interviews, and document analysis revealed that teachers utilized a three-section class process, integrating technology, to enhance spoken English proficiency in Oral Business English courses. The flipped classroom facilitated skill development and critical thinking practice. However, challenges such as increased workloads and technology issues were noted. This research contributes to understanding the effectiveness of flipped classroom methods in improving spoken English proficiency and highlights the importance of integrating technology in language education. Teachers can benefit from insights to enhance student participation and promote digital competence, ultimately improving learning outcomes. Students can leverage flexible learning opportunities to enhance their language skills.

Limitations

Acknowledging its limitations, this study focused on flipped classroom features in Oral Business English within a specific region of China. Future research could expand to broader contexts, examining variations in flipped classroom designs across different regions and domains. Additionally, combining qualitative and quantitative data could offer a more comprehensive understanding of students' spoken English proficiency development. Exploring the impact of digitalization on language learning in flipped teaching could also be a promising avenue for further investigation.

Data Availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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