EXPLORING ADVANTAGES OF IN-CLASS FLIPPED LEARNING TO ENHANCE CULTURAL COMPETENCE

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Abstract: This research study is a form of qualitative action research that aims to explore the benefits of in-class flipped learning as a means to enhance student cultural competence in an American Culture course. It was conducted at a university in Vietnam, where the recent COVID-19 pandemic introduced unprecedented online courses for education. However, blending online and offline instructional methods in the classroom was relatively easy for students, contrary to the initial concerns of the stakeholders and society. The instructor implemented in-class flipped instruction to improve the cultural competence of undergraduate business majors in an American Culture course. The focus was on enhancing students' knowledge and perspectives on cultures and learner autonomy through technology. The study was conducted for a semester, and each lesson plan was designed to achieve these objectives. The students had access to a textbook as a reference to explore further. The course created an insightful and collaborative learning environment based on qualitative analysis of the interviews, class observations, and students' work, including weekly assignments and end-of-semester group projects. The study found that college students can quickly improve their mindset with proper guidance and resources. This can be achieved by increasing interactions between students and instructors and transforming learners' mindsets on their responsibility for learning. Overall, this research study shows that in-class flipped learning can effectively enhance cultural competence among students, particularly in courses related to cultural studies and business. It also highlights the importance of creating an interactive and collaborative learning environment to facilitate student learning and development.

Keywords: in-class flip, cultural competence, autonomy, interaction

Introduction

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, students in Vietnam experienced a new style of learning that was previously unheard of. However, after the pandemic, all students returned to traditional brick-and-mortar school environments at the university where the researcher was employed. As a result, the learning management system and online course offerings were discontinued.

The researcher-instructor aimed to bridge the gap between online and traditional learning for the American Culture course offered to third-year undergraduate business administration majors by addressing the challenge of learner autonomy, commonly observed in the classroom. The instructor faced challenges in teaching due to the need for more guidance from Vietnamese education policies on promoting learner autonomy. It was understood that teachers and students maintain a unique bond

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in Vietnamese culture, making students close to younger members of a family and teachers take the role of senior members.

According to the two Vietnam education policies, learners' self-study has been promoted. Vietnam Education Policy's (2006) "Methods and Forms of Organization" section given below fosters learners' self-study methods at most but not learner autonomy:

Phương pháp giáo dục phổ thông phải phát huy được tính tích cực, tự giác, chủ động, sáng tạo của học sinh; phù hợp với đặc trưng môn học, đặc điểm đối tượng học sinh, điều kiện của từng lớp học; bồi dưỡng cho học sinh phương pháp tự học, khả năng hợp tác; rèn luyện kỹ năng vận dụng kiến thức vào thực tiễn; tác động đến tình cảm, đem lại niềm vui, hứng thú và trách nhiệm học tập cho học sinh.

English Translation: The general education method must promote the students' positivity, self-discipline, initiative, and creativity; suitable to the characteristics of the subject, the features of the students, and the conditions of each class; foster students' self-study methods and the ability to cooperate; practice skills to apply knowledge into practice; affect the emotions, bring joy, excitement, and responsibility for learning to students.

The Vietnam Education Policy (2018) document, titled "Promotion of General Education Program," also mentions learners practicing self-study ability:

Các môn học và hoạt động giáo dục trong nhà trường áp dụng các phương pháp tích cực hoá hoạt động của học sinh, trong đó giáo viên đóng vai trò tổ chức, hướng dẫn hoạt động cho học sinh, tạo môi trường học tập thân thiện và những tình huống có vấn đề để khuyến khích học sinh tích cực tham gia vào các hoạt động học tập, tự phát hiện năng lực, nguyện vọng của bản thân, rèn luyện thói quen và khả năng tự học, phát huy tiềm năng và những kiến thức, kĩ năng đã tích luỹ được để phát triển.

English translation: Subjects and educational activities in the school apply methods of active student activity, in which teachers play the role of organizing and guiding actions for students, creating a friendly learning environment and problem situations to encourage students to actively participate in learning activities, discover their own abilities and aspirations, practice habits and self-study ability, develop their potential and accumulated knowledge and skills for development.

Vietnamese education policies need to provide more guidance on promoting learner autonomy to make integrating technology into teaching and learning for students more manageable. However, the incorporation of technology into education has also presented its own set of challenges. According to a study by Kang and Duong (2021), the COVID-19 pandemic caused significant difficulties for students during initial online learning, particularly concerning internet connectivity and technical issues.

The researcher decided to use in-class flip learning without stations to bridge the gap between online and traditional learning methods, boost learners' cultural competence, and address learner autonomy issues in incorporating technology into teaching and learning in Vietnamese educational environments. This approach was chosen to reduce the potential obstacles in the home setting, such as unreliable internet connections, and to address educational policies that do not support learner autonomy. This approach was explored using digital technology and appropriate teaching strategies to

learn if the abovementioned challenges could be overcome. The research questions that guided this study are:

1. How does in-class flip impact learners' knowledge and views of cultures?

2. How does in-class flip promote learner autonomy?

The study shed light on the importance of instructional design by examining the effectiveness of in-class flipped learning for boosting student cultural competence in an American Culture course. The study focused on students with limited access to resources, technical support, and learner autonomy through the incorporation of technology into their learning experiences. The goal was to evaluate how in-class flip helped students improve their cultural knowledge and views by observing their engagement with cultural topics, responses to cultural differences and similarities, perceptions of their artistic abilities, and how it promoted learner autonomy.

Theoretical Framework

This study is primarily grounded in the concept of cultural competence and the in-class flip learning as below.

Cultural Competence: Based on previous research, cultural competence, also known as intercultural competence, refers to the ability to adapt to various cultural settings and display reflective awareness of cultural influences on one's thoughts and actions. It includes effectively obtaining and sustaining culture-specific skills to interact and function with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. (Wilson, Ward, & Fischer, 2013, p. 3; Chao, Okazaki, & Hong, 2011, p. 2; Williams, 2001, p. 2).

Deardorff (2006, p. 242) outlines cross-cultural attitude strategies for effective communication in intercultural situations, including practicing openness and flexibility, demonstrating humility and sensitivity towards others, showing a spirit of adventure, using humor, and practicing positive change. Williams (2001, p. 1) and Martin and Vaughn (2007, p. 32) identify four components of cultural competency: self-knowledge and awareness of one's own culture, awareness of one's worldview, experience and knowledge of different cultural practices, and attitude towards cultural differences.

In recent studies, Frawley, Russell, and Sherwood (2020, p. 1) explore cultural competence in higher education from multi-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary perspectives. The book discusses leadership and the role of higher education in cultural competence policy and practice. It promotes dialogue on creating cultural competence. Russell (2020, p. 6) emphasizes the importance of critical self-reflection in developing cultural competence. It involves gaining intimate knowledge about oneself and one's position in the world and recognizing the consequences of that positioning. Additionally, cultural competence is not just a skill to be learned but a way of being that involves a journey inward to self and outward to the community.

In-Class Flip: There is growing interest in implementing flipped learning models across various subjects to enhance learner autonomy in Vietnam. These models are being chosen to assess their impact on student achievements, engagement, and satisfaction levels (e.g., Nguyen & Nguyen, 2019). Nguyen & Nguyen (2019) have analyzed the advantages and difficulties of applying the flipped

classroom model to teaching activities. Additionally, Nguyen, Lee, Nguyen, & Naidu (2019) have investigated the effects of the flipped classroom model on improving learners' writing achievements and their attitudes toward this approach.

This study presents a modified version of the flipped learning approach called the "in-class flip without stations" model. It involves specific procedures during in-class sessions (refer to Figure 1 in the article). This model aims to enhance the traditional flipped learning approach by introducing the in-class learning phase. In formal flipped learning, students learn new material at home through online lectures or digital materials and then participate in interactive activities in class. According to Kang and Duong (2021), completing pre-class work can be difficult for some students due to a lack of internet or technology access, challenging home environments, or personal circumstances. During the COVID-19 pandemic, these challenges were revealed as a significant obstacle for many students. The "in-class flip without stations" model addresses these challenges by supporting these students during in-class sessions.

According to Gonzalez (2014, p. 8), an in-class flip involves the teacher recording a video lecture for direct instruction, similar to a traditional flip. However, instead of assigning students to watch the video at home, the video serves as a station in class that small groups rotate through. The remaining class time is used for various activities, such as independent and group work. Some activities relate to the lesson, while others focus on different course materials. The teacher is freed up to provide more one-on-one time with students, as the direct instruction runs independently, just like with a traditional flip.

To clarify, in-class flipped learning involves flipping the traditional classroom setup. Students are provided with flipped content during class and rotate through station work according to the teacher's instructional strategy (Barnes & Gonzalez, 2015, p. 13). The aim is to offer students various methods and approaches to learn a class topic at their own pace and with greater control over their learning.

Ramirez (2019, p. 14) identifies six types of in-class flip stations: Flip stations for flipped content (digital or paper-based), practice stations for applying and practicing learned content, independent stations for extra resources, feedback stations for providing feedback, teacher support stations for struggling students, and peer instruction station for students to teach each other. In the in-class flip lesson, there are four ways to design the station rotation model: Sequence, Mixed, Looped, and Half n'Half. As per Ramirez (2017, p. 13), these variations offer different model implementation approaches. Students can choose and move to any station at their own pace in these variations. The teacher is present to oversee, clarify, and offer assistance as necessary. Those who require instruction will begin at the flip station, while those who already understand the material can move on to the practice stations. Some students may need to revisit specific content explanations depending on their previous knowledge and needs. As a result, the sequence of their flow will differ.

In-class flipped learning can also be offered without station work, according to Ramirez (2019, p. 15). The workspace includes a support desk and a student workspace that doesn't have stations. Students are given flipped content to work on in three different ways: alone (Solo), with a partner (Duo), or in a small group (Group). A teacher supervises the student's progress and provides support through the Support Desk.

Materials and Methods

Materials

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, the university's Learning Management System (LMS) became unavailable. As a result, the researcher decided to share course materials with students through Google Drive. Initially, interview protocols were created for initial and exit unstructured interviews. Guidelines for class observations were also developed. Then, course-related materials were explicitly designed for in-class flip instructions. The course textbook and references were available in print, while flipped contents were accessible via Google Slides.

Additionally, various educational resources, including YouTube, Kahoot, PBS Learning, National Geographic Learning, and culture-related websites (such as statueofliberty.org, worldwildlife.org, and fws.gov/program/endangered-species), were also utilized. Other course-related materials, such as technology scaffolding and peer review checklists, were included. Course materials for collecting student work were also developed to analyze them qualitatively. This included worksheets, project descriptions, rubrics, instructions on weekly assignments, and submission guidelines.

Methods

Research Site and Participants: The site for the action research was a large university in Ho Chi Minh City, where the researcher-instructor was employed. Participants were 12 undergraduate business administration majors enrolled in the American Culture course. They consisted of four male students and eight female students in their junior year. Ten of them were excellent English speakers, and only two often needed help with the English language.

Data Collection*:* Throughout the 12-week course, the researcher-instructor collected qualitative data. Interviews (initial and exit) were conducted using unstructured questions. This method was adopted to learn transformational moments of students' views of their culture and other cultures through a more open and unstructured approach.

Participant observation was utilized to collect qualitative data. The researcher-instructor observed the entire class session every week and took notes of student work, interactions, and any encounters that might be meaningful to this study according to the class observation guidelines. The American Culture course began with getting to know the students. The researcher then created weekly action plans and guided the participants. They brought their devices for research and worked in groups for weekly assignments. In-person activities followed a sequential procedure determined by the researcher, as given below.
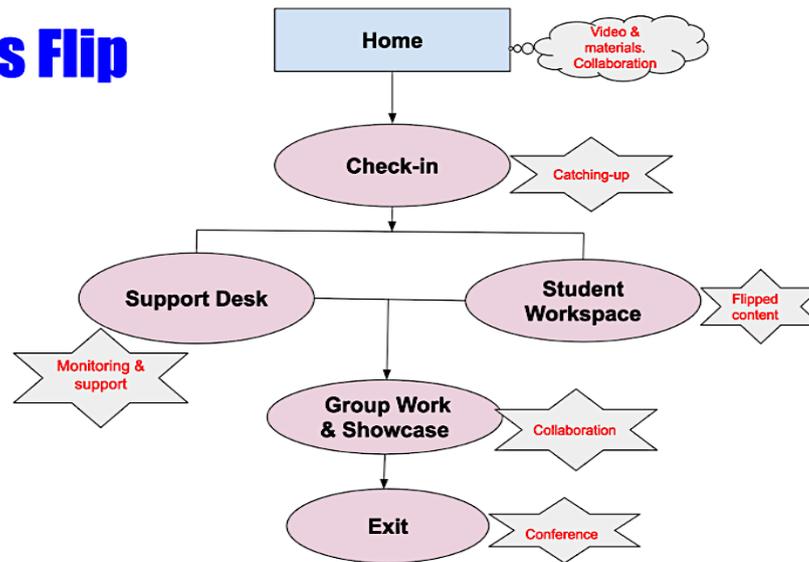
Figure 1: In-Class Flip Instruction for a Culture Course

Students accessed course materials and collaborated on assignments and group projects through shared files on Google Drive before attending in-person classes. Weekly collaboration outside of class was required.

The in-class flip session starts with a short conference called Check-In between the instructor and students. The Workspace includes a Student Work Space where students work on flipped content independently, in pairs, or small groups and a Support Desk for assistance. Students then work on weekly group projects with scaffolding for technology tasks and peer review checklists. The class ends with a 10-minute conference called Exit for feedback and questions.

Throughout the semester, students conducted weekly group assignments. They worked on their final project, which aimed to increase cultural awareness by creating a cultural exchange program focused on the third culture. The project included the U.S., Vietnam, and a third country of their choice to propose methods for coexisting harmoniously as global citizens. They continued their project until their final showcases in week 12.

Data Analysis*:* The researcher qualitatively analyzed the interview data using Patton's (2001) research perspective and the research objectives. Patterns and themes were examined in the data related to the learners' knowledge and views of cultures and their autonomy. The researcher also qualitatively analyzed classroom observation notes and student work collected throughout the semester. Below is a summary of the findings.

Results and Discussion

After analyzing the data qualitatively, it was found that the participants' attitudes and reactions toward the target culture had undergone a positive shift. This change was observed between American and Vietnamese cultures and among other cultures, including their own.

Regarding the first research question, How does in-class flip impact learners' knowledge and views of cultures?, all participants displayed transformed attitudes toward the target culture and other cultures at the end of the semester. While discussing American cultural values, some participants initially expressed dissatisfaction due to the significant disparities from their own culture. In the initial interview, all participants defended their traditional values with determination and conviction. At the outset, some participants were confident in their Vietnamese cultural values, such as unity, harmony, respect, and the significance of family. Student A was particularly vocal in her criticism regarding the degree of individualism in American culture, as interpreted below.

Although the Vietnamese generally admire American culture, they find certain facets disagreeable. Specifically, Vietnamese people prioritize reverence towards elders, whereas Americans tend to prioritize individualism. Additionally, Vietnamese people place great importance on living in harmony. If something displeases me within my family, I would rather wait and observe the situation rather than criticize it.

Participants' perceptions of cultural differences and similarities evolved as the semester progressed. During the third week, the participants were taught about six essential traditional American values. These values include individual freedom, self-reliance, equal opportunity, competition, material wealth, and hard work. The instructor explained through flipped content the practical benefits of these values, and the participants actively engaged in lesson materials without making negative comments about the target culture. As the weeks passed, the students' attitudes toward American values changed, and they stopped criticizing them. Student B even mentioned this positive transformation in class, as interpreted below.

Working hard is a crucial factor in achieving success. It is a precious quality that should be appreciated. When family members witness each other striving diligently, it fosters a sense of admiration and strengthens their bonds.

The researcher studied how the participants viewed their ability to navigate different cultures. Over time, the students applied their newfound knowledge to their discussions and presentations. Through weekly readings and collaborative assignments, they better understood their and other cultures (including the target culture).

While observing the final group showcases, the researcher noticed that the instructional approach used in this study significantly improved the students' cultural competence. It transformed them and helped them develop an appreciation for diversity, understanding other cultures, a sense of global citizenship, and autonomy in their actions. The positive effects of this instructional method were apparent. One project group even named their project "Flavors of Diversity" and shared their findings, as described below.

The objective of this gathering is to encourage comprehension and admiration of ethnic and racial diversity among the attendees. By exchanging food and culture, participants can learn about different lifestyles, connect with individuals from various backgrounds, and establish bridges of understanding and respect across cultural barriers. The gathering also aims to promote global citizenship, acknowledging that we are all part of a larger human community and have a shared responsibility to advocate for social justice, fairness, and inclusivity for all, irrespective of their background or identity. Finally, the event also encompasses a charitable aspect, where any excess food is donated to underprivileged individuals, promoting the idea of social responsibility and inspiring participants to utilize their skills and resources to support others in their community.

At the start of the semester, the participants held a generally unfavorable view of the target culture; however, they demonstrated transformed attitudes by the end. Throughout various class activities, students shared their thoughts and perspectives. Their changed attitudes toward the target culture proved the instructional approach in this study was beneficial. Student C expressed this sentiment during the exit interview, as interpreted below.

The United States is a large country with a significant influence on other nations. It often takes the lead in testing new concepts that other countries adopt. The U.S. and its people profoundly impact many aspects of social life and contribute to a more open-minded society. As a Vietnamese student, I have gained a deeper understanding of American culture through this course. Learning about American voices and their habits has positively impacted my thinking, actions, and behavior. I am confident that others in this course share my perspective.

Regarding the second research question, How does in-class flip promote learner autonomy?, it was initially noted that the students exhibited a level of apprehension around their instructor. They would remain reticent even during breaks and would speak in hushed tones to one another. Interestingly, all the students had not brought their laptops during the first two weeks of the class, preferring to rely on the instructional materials and their cell phones for all class activities. However, this changed suddenly due to the increased need to search for data and engage in group discussions. As a result of these new requirements, the students began to interact with one another in a much more open and collaborative manner.

Conclusion

The study examined the effectiveness of the "in-class flip without stations" model by incorporating online and face-to-face interactive sessions. The researcher could observe the improved learners' knowledge and views of cultures, including their own, and learner autonomy within a short period. Students improved their cultural competence by accessing flipped contents, lesson materials, and assignments/projects in this "in-class flip without stations" model. Increased interaction between students and the instructor promoted mutual aid and skills development, making them more autonomous by the end of the study.

The in-class flipped instruction demonstrates the significance of face-to-face interactions in enhancing students' learning experiences. The teacher can delve deeper into discussions with students, providing insightful and sensitive responses. Meanwhile, students can learn from each other and grow through their interactions to meet the responsibilities for their learning. Despite the emergence of Generative Artificial Intelligence (Gen AI) and its influence on education, the in-person aspect of this

instructional approach highlights the unique bond that human interactions create, which cannot be replicated by other forms of interaction.

The findings of this study suggest that college students have the potential to make remarkable progress and display growth in their mindset in a short period, provided they receive the necessary guidance and resources. As young adults, they have an exceptional ability to perceive and change themselves. Furthermore, these encouraging outcomes indicate that it is feasible to quantitatively measure students' cultural competence when exposed to varied educational scenarios.

On the other hand, the study's results only partially met the instructor's expectations. A notable issue was that the students used software they already knew about for their final group projects instead of exploring new technology. Moreover, gauging how much their independence as learners had improved was challenging.

The study had a limitation: it only explored the effectiveness of the "in-class flip without stations" model with a small group of participants. While the researcher was able to have detailed conversations and interactions with the participants to better understand their evolving perspectives on this learning approach, further research is needed to make the results more reliable. Therefore, the researcher plans to investigate the effectiveness of in-class flip instruction in diverse educational settings with larger samples, in order to achieve more objective and reliable research results. This approach is ideal for educators and administrators who face challenges in promoting student autonomy. Additionally, the researcher will examine the factors that influence research outcomes in different socio-cultural and socio-economic contexts.

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Declaration of Interest Statement

The author declares that she has no conflict of interest.

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