

Critique of “Classroom Interaction and learning Anxiety in the IRS Integrated Flipped Language Classrooms” by Zhang,C.,&Lin,H.K.(2019), Asia-Pacific Education Researcher,28(3),193-201.

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Abstract: This is a critique essay that goes from summarizing the research background of the article,literature review,research objectives,research methods,to analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of the article,and proposing appropriate solutions.Through an in-depth look into the article,entitled“Classroom interaction and learning anxiety in the IRS integrated flipped language classrooms”,the strengths,embodying a logical literature review about related research,innovation of the combined PS-IRS teaching strategies,and well-arranged research procedures,are exhibited in the critique.Also,three obvious weaknesses are underlying the research design and data analysis.It is revealed that identical online preparatory learning content should be provided in the future research,and the measuring instrument of the English learning anxiety should be refined.Overall,the research being criticized is of significant pedagogical implications.

Keywords: Flipped language classrooms;IRS;Summary;Critique

1. Summary of the Study

1.1 Context for the Study

This study is situated in EFL learning in flipped classrooms.With its increasing popularity in higher education,flipped classrooms have received much attention and changed traditional pedagogical practice.With the help of flipped classrooms,students are accessible to receive both asynchronous learning and synchronous learning via different forms of teaching activities.Additionally,students can collaboratively work on group tasks in the flipped classrooms,which contradicts the knowledge-transmission teaching practice.In spite of its popularity,the effectiveness of the flipped learning gradually is confronted with tremendous pressure,and challenges have ineluctably arisen.Thus,further exploring its effectiveness in the practical EFL learning contexts is of necessity.

1.2 Summary of the Literature Review

Although research on the flipped classroom is still in its infancy,most publications offer the definition that describes the flipped classroom as a type of blended learning.The flipped learning network defined the flipped classroom as an inverted classroom structure.Primarily,the flipped classroom is defined as a pedagogical approach entailing asynchronous learning via multimedia lectures for previewing knowledge out of the class,and synchronous learning via student-centered activities in class.In language-learning contexts,its advantages are apparent in prompting students’reading abilities through videos and web-based technologies,and providing content-rich learning materials or comprehensible inputs without the limits of time and space.However,the EFL learning contexts and interactive activities should be taken into account in the flipped classrooms.

It is challenging to stimulate students’participation and WTC in the flipped classrooms.Shao and Gao pointed out:“East Asian learners experience learning anxiety and are unwilling to communicate in classroom activities”.Consequently,reticence and learning anxiety have been under heated discussion in recent years.In the L2 context,reticence,namely lack of participation,suggests subordination or a potential handicap in activating communicative skills.While,in language learning,anxiety is defined as“a distinct complex

of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process". Reticence and learning anxiety are closely linked to each other. Additionally, internal factors, such as low confidence, apprehension, fear, and situational conditions, play significant roles in affecting students' classroom involvement and instruction receptivity. Thereby, it is necessary to build up a warm learning atmosphere to motivate learners' participation in the class activities, and reduce their learning anxiety. Technologies seem to offer us the solutions.

In recent years, technologies have been widely employed in education. Researches have proved that properly applied technologies can boost students' positive participation in classroom activities, and reduce students' learning anxiety by constructing a comfortable learning climate. The interactive response system is among the valuable technologies. Although the effectiveness of IRS in strengthening L2 students' active learning and enhancing their learning participation has been testified, literature related to it is limited. Additionally, activities in the classroom are mostly teacher-led, in which little autonomy is given to students. While, the innovative pair-and-share activities applying IRS technology can break through this situation and fully provide students opportunities to work with each other and present their ideas.

1.3 Rationale and Aims of the Study

When connected with flipped classrooms, the pair-and-share IRS strategy might facilitate learning much better than a teacher-led IRS strategy. PS-IRS may give more openings for students to engage in an organized IRS learning process, and allow them to share their opinions orally in front of their peers. Therefore, this study is aimed to examine these claims in EFL classrooms. It is attempting to enhance EFL classroom interaction and communication with an expectation to bridge the under-explored gaps. Overall, the current study seeks to supply empirical evidence concerning the effect of IRS on WTC within the two instructional settings respectively, and examine the changes in students' learning anxiety in the flipped classrooms.

1.4 Summary of the Research Methodology

Eighty-five second-year university students from General English Language Classes in south Taiwan were chosen as the participants. Forty students were assigned to the control group, and others were in the experiment group. As for teaching in the control group, the teacher will adopt the TL-IRS teaching strategy with a question-and-response mechanism mediated by the ZUVIO system, a web-based IRS tool. Whereas, students in the experiment group will be situated in a series of teaching activities applying PS-IRS teaching strategy with the assistance of the same system. The same English teacher with over ten years of teaching experience and sufficient knowledge about the two teaching strategies was responsible for the teaching. This study lasted 16 weeks, and instruments for this study include the WTC questionnaire with a five-point rating scheme, consisting of 6 items, and a questionnaire for English learning anxiety with a five-point rating scheme, composed of 32 items. The Cronbach's alpha showed that both questionnaires are in high levels of acceptability in their internal consistency. The questionnaires were respectively conducted on the first and last week, and an independent T-test was performed to elicit quantitative data about the research questions.

1.5 Summary of Main Results

As for students' WTC under IRS teaching strategy, the results of the pre-questionnaire on WTC showed there were no discrepancies between the two groups. After the experiment, students who received the PS-IRS teaching strategy in the flipped classrooms had stronger communication willingness than the control group. Besides, the PS-IRS teaching strategy facilitated student-to-student interactivity and student-to-whole class interactivity. Meanwhile, the independent sample t-test showed no statistically significant changes in students' English learning anxiety before and after the experiment between the two groups. However, the further paired sample t-test proposed that the PS-IRS technique may be more successful and advantageous in creating a warm and steady learning climate, and lessening students' English learning anxiety within the flipped classrooms.

2. Critique of the Study

2.1 Strengths and Weaknesses

An in-depth look into this article clearly exhibits the strengths, including a logical literature review about related researches, innovation of the combined PS-IRS teaching strategies, and well-arranged research procedures. Initially, knowing the benefits of flipped classrooms, the author began his literature review with the understanding that WTC and learning anxiety imperil students' language learning. Then, the author attempted to seek solutions from technologies to set up an advantageous learning environment, and after that established the research niche by comparing the two different teaching technologies. The writing of the literature review sets an excellent example for novice researchers. Each step is tightly tied to each other, and eventually shows the blueprint of this research. Furthermore, realizing the strengths of IRS, the author broke through the traditional TL-IRS teaching strategies, and elaborately designed the PS-IRS teaching steps, which expose students to activities and boost their willingness to work on the group discussions. In line with the trend of flipped learning in the EFL learning context and the suggestions of recommending IRS teaching technologies, the innovative PS-IRS teaching strategies expand the literature on the application of IRS to flipped classrooms, and display another possibility of the IRS technologies. Eventually, one of the keys to ensuring the success of this research lies in the deliberately designed

PS-IRS teaching procedures, which can be apparently distinguished from the TL-IRS teaching procedures. This study makes a list of the teaching steps of each technique respectively. It appoints an experienced teacher who is familiar with these two teaching strategies to conduct the teaching tasks for both groups. Therefore, the independent variable is controlled in the research experiment.

Although this study possesses a body of strengths, there are still several drawbacks underlying the research design and data analysis that we can improve in the future and similar contexts. First of all, the study determinedly interprets two types of IRS in-class teaching activities, while it overlooks the out-of-class activities, especially for the control group. In the flipped classroom context, students are required to be involved in online learning to get ready for the structured teaching on campus. This negligence of the variables coming from out-of-class interventions possibly makes the data collected one-sided and inaccurate. Additionally, though the whole experiment lasted sixteen weeks, the flipped teaching ended in the 10th week, and the data was collected in the 1st and 16th week. The five-week experiment vacancy may influence the accuracy of the post-questionnaire data. At last, personally speaking, the instruments in this study are inadequate to reflect the actual situation of PS-IRS teaching strategies in flipped classrooms. It is inaccessible to perceive students' understanding of this teaching technique.

Overall, this study, on the one hand, enriches the literature related to flipped classrooms and exhibits more possibilities of IRS teaching techniques; on the other hand, the research room for this study is broad, and we can perfect it in the following researches from the perspectives of research design, data analysis, and even theoretical deepening.

2.2 Recommended Solutions

Concerning problems existing in this study, the efforts we can make to progress the future studies are counting on the following aspects. As the independent variable, the different in-class IRS teaching modes are clarified in the experimental process. However, in terms of the teaching activities for both groups, given the influence of out-of-class activities in flipped classrooms, the study should design identical online preparatory learning content to alleviate threats to the validity of the research design. Meanwhile, we can consider collecting the data of the post-questionnaire from both groups once the teacher finishes the teaching experiment, or we can prolong the flipped lessons to sixteen weeks. In this way, students' instant perceptions about the research can be captured. An important point noticed in the study is that the independent sample t-test results show no difference in students' English learning anxiety between the experiment group and the control group after the intervention. As Spielberger mentioned: "Anxiety is the subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with an arousal of the autonomic nervous system." Besides, trait anxiety and state anxiety are distinct from each other, for the former is relatively stable, while the latter is considered a response to a particular provoking stimulus. Hence, the anxiety level may be eased when students take the delayed post-questionnaire. What's more, the measuring instrument of the English learning anxiety can be refined according to the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory for the fact that it is one of the most influential and cited measurements of anxiety, which may help to perfect the data collection instrument and to elicit significant data for this study. To acquire more comprehensive statistics, a mixed-methods approach is appropriate to employ. Both qualitative and quantitative data can be elicited to answer a set of questions with the help of mixed-methods research. In detail, conducting interviews after the PS-IRS teaching interventions enables us to better understand students' perceptions and attitudes toward this teaching mode.

2.3 Pedagogical Implications

The pedagogical implications of this study are profound and lasting. To start with, language educators should develop various forms of teaching materials and elaborately teaching designs, but they should also prioritize considering the learning goals when they select particular kinds of technologies. Furthermore, it should be noted that the discrepancy between learning settings and cultural contexts will bring diverse learning outcomes, which drives language educators to conduct student-centered teachings, and to innovate with the time. Overall, although this study shows us the effect of PS-IRS teaching technology in flipped classrooms, it is of significance to suggest that further evidence is needed to prove the effectiveness of this technology in other EFL contexts so that its applications can be further developed.

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