

The Role of Flipped Class Model in improving Classroom Teaching Quality in Business Studies

Prof. Lu Guan

Associate Professor – International Business School, BNUZ, [CHINA](#)
guanlu@bnu.edu.cn

Chuyi Chen

Undergraduate Student – International Business School, BNUZ, China.
Ekp_vam@163.com

ABSTRACT

Flipped class has recently become more and more popular as a new teaching model, which promotes the education reform in idea and teaching method. This paper discusses the ways in which flipped class contributes to current classroom teaching quality in Business Studies, which is dominated by traditional teaching philosophy and methods. Qualitative study is applied in this study, including the conduction of survey, interviews and case studies, which are conducted in the context of China. The article reports on work in progress on the research. The early findings highlights that issues of traditional classroom teaching of business education involve the ineffectiveness of using case methods, teacher's domination in the process of knowledge transfer, and the gap between theories on textbooks and practice in real business world. Flipped class model is believed to have contribution to overcome above challenges in various dimensions.

Keywords: Flipped Class, Teaching Quality, Business Studies, China.

1. Introduction

Flipped class model, also called as flipped classroom, is an instructional strategy and a type of blended learning that reverses the traditional learning environment by delivering instructional content, often online, outside of the classroom (Baker, 2000; Bergmann & Sams, 2012). It moves activities, including those that may have traditionally been considered homework, into the classroom. In a flipped classroom, students watch online lectures, collaborate in online discussions, or carry out research at home and engage in concepts in the classroom with the guidance of a mentor (Strayer, 2012). As a new method of classroom teaching, the flipped class application first appears in America and has recently received extensive interests and discussion in practice worldwide (Sahin et.al, 2016).

According to the literature, there are three main characteristics of the flipped class teaching model compared with the traditional classroom teaching (such as Baker, 2000; Bergmann & Sams, 2012; Sahin et.al, 2016). Firstly, the role of teachers has been changed to focus on providing guidance, encouragement and help with problem solving. In a classroom with a traditional style of instruction, individual lessons may be focused on an explanation of content utilizing a lecture-style. Student engagement may be limited, and class discussions are typically centered on the teacher, who controls the flow of the conversation. In the flipped class teaching model, things are changed as students review the knowledge in class and learn new knowledge after class.

Secondly, students' status is changed. Flipped class model intentionally shifts instruction to a learner-centered model in which class time explores topics in greater depth and creates meaningful learning opportunities, while educational technologies such as online videos are used to deliver content outside of the classroom. In a flipped classroom, content delivery may take a variety of forms. Often, video lessons prepared by the teacher or third parties are used to deliver content, although online collaborative discussions, digital research, and text readings may be used. students study independently before class, choose the learning contents, learning time and learning strength as well as the learning style according to their own actual situations, which can effectively ease students' learning stress, so that they can find more proper learning methods.

Thirdly, flipped class model also redefines in-class activities, and the time for teachers to teach in class has been shortened gradually. In-class lessons accompanying flipped classroom may include activity learning or more traditional homework problems, among other practices, to engage students in the content. Because these types of active learning allow for highly differentiated instruction, more time can be spent in class 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. Also, students have more time for autonomous learning practice. In this way, students can allocate learning time according to their own actual situations.

Since the first implementation of flipped class model in a high school in the early 2000s, this new teaching method has greatly aroused interest of both educational practitioners and researchers. While flipped classrooms have proven to be effective in secondary schools for quite some time, recent work has shown that flipped methods could be equally effective in improving student learning at the college and university level as well (Johnston & Karafotias, 2016, Song, 2015; Huang, 2016). This research looks at particular the application of flipped class model for business education in the context of Chinese higher education. There are two main reasons why Business Studies in China are chosen for discussing the role of flipped class as a new teaching model. Firstly, since social and economic reform began in the 1980s in China, the country has experienced profound transformation and marketisation (Warner, 2002). Economic development has been dramatic in the past 10 to 15 years, and with the biggest population in the world, China recently became the second largest economy and is increasingly playing an important and influential role in the global economy (the World Bank, 2016). Developing high-caliber business talent to meet the need for business leaders is therefore a key challenge facing China's higher education. It is the fact that, Business Studies has become one of the most popular subjects in China's universities. Yet, as reported by the World Bank's research, China remains a developing country and rapid economic ascendance has brought on many challenges as well. Imbalanced educational resource is one of the challenges, and traditional educational system also needs to be updated accordingly. We believe that this background of China would provide valuable but distinctive findings of the research.

Secondly, similar to the rest of the world, traditional teaching activities of business studies in China's higher education have been greatly challenged since the past 10 to 15 years. For example, one of the key challenges is to bridge students' managerial theories and practice in real business and social environment through real cases and professional guidance and resources. Criticisms towards traditional teaching models accelerated more recently under the rapid development of technologies and the younger generation entering universities. Having a big population of business studies students in the college and universities, evidence from China could thus provide useful insights of discussing the application of flipped class as a new teaching model in business education.

This research aims to explore the role of flipped class model in Business Studies in order to improve traditional teaching quality. Qualitative methods will be applied to discuss the current issues of traditional classroom teaching in business education. Literature will be reviewed to analyse the theory and practice of flipped class as a new teaching model. Based on the survey and interview data, the ways in which flipped class could contribute to traditional classroom teaching of business education will then be explored in details.

2. Empirical Study

2.1 Research methods

Our study is constructed through evidence from four core elements. Firstly, we undertook an extensive analysis of secondary material, which incorporated evidence from China and beyond, to develop the functional classification and theoretical analysis of flipped class. We collected and compared data of various applications of flipped class worldwide, and we also analyzed from the literature in terms of the ways in which and the extents in which this new teaching model contributes to traditional classroom teaching quality improvement.

Secondly, research focus was then placed on the teaching activities of Business Studies. Business and related subjects (such as the 'FAME' group – finance, accounting, management and economics) are among the most popular fields of study at universities worldwide (TopUniversities, 2014, HESA, 2005).

Having the biggest student population, the study of teaching quality could provide useful insights of the role of new teaching model such as flipped class in the traditional teaching environment. Moreover, changes and competition have been greatly accelerated in business during the past 20 years, which have undoubtedly brought challenge and opportunity to both academic teaching and researches in higher education. How to improve teaching quality to provide talents for the real business world has become one of the key questions facing various Business Schools around the world. Thus, we believe that this background of Business Studies would provide valuable but distinctive findings of the research.

Thirdly, the research aims to provide an overview of the perceptions of both students and teachers regarding the current issues of traditional teaching methods of Business Studies. Given the exploratory nature of the questions and issues outlined above, we undertook a survey in a selected University. This survey is administered to a random sample of respondents from the subject of Business Studies. The questionnaire reflected a piloting exercise. There were total 123 questionnaires sent out and 120 returned in the pilot study. Respondents are firstly asked to identify their subject and grade, and then to express their opinions about and perceptions towards current teaching quality, especially the traditional classroom teaching. To strengthen the empirical-base, we also hold semi-structured interviews to both students and teachers, lasting from half to over 1 hour respectively. With the interviewee's permission, all the interviews were recorded, transcribed and content analyzed. In the following stage of this research, after our pilot study a national-wide survey and interviews will be conducted.

Fourthly, we are going to undertake some comparative case studies. For those Business School who have already applied flipped class model to their teaching will be selected to reflect a cross-section of institutions regarding factors like type, size and etc. Both questionnaire and interviews will be conducted to ask for users' opinion about the application of flipped class model. Also, prior to interviews substantive data about each institution was collected; sources included development history, students and teacher profiles, market evaluation, financial statistics and reports into specific issues or projects. This information enabled us to appreciate the organisational context within which the interviewees operated, to refine questions to reflect those circumstances and enhanced our overall findings.

2.2 Issues of traditional classroom teaching of Business Studies

We are still in the early stage of this research, and the below findings are summarized from our early studies of second-hand data and pilot studies.

2.2.1 The effectiveness issue of using case methods

Results of the pilot survey show that case study is one of the common methods in current teaching practice in the class of Business Studies. In fact, teaching case studies have been a highly popular pedagogical format in many fields ranging from business education to science education. Business case studies give background information about a company and are believed to be an effective learning material to get a basic sense of how things run in the real business setting.

Results of the pilot survey showed that the overall satisfaction rate of case methods was not optimistic. Two main concerns involved were 'the organization of case discussion in the class' and 'the quality of selected cases'. For the former, challenges came from the size of discussion group and limited time for interaction during the class. As for the quality, renewal of case material is a key issue to keep information updated. In practice, business school faculty generally develop case studies with particular learning objectives in mind. Teaching case studies need not adhere strictly to the use of evidence, as they can be manipulated to satisfy educational needs. However, developing teaching case studies is a time-consuming job and frequent information update is also important, which required a great deal of faculty involvement.

2.2.2 Teacher's domination in the process of knowledge transfer

Lecture is the main method of business education, and teacher's domination in the classroom has long been the tradition of teaching. However, student profiles have greatly changed during the past 10 years. While the older generation are used to the traditional classroom teaching, the younger generation, usually called Millennials, have higher level of expectations from the teaching. Our pilot research result indicated that students now asked for more critical analysis, more self-learning opportunities, and more time for classroom interaction during the lecture. Interviews with teachers also showed that it has become more

and more difficult to keep student concentrating on lectures lasting for more than 30 minutes.

Plus the fact that digital era, information explosion, big data and all the external changes have greatly influenced people's daily life including learning activities, needs the role of teachers to be changed in the class. Knowledge transfer should not be the primary task of teacher during the class time, rather than learning organizer, which means to provide guidance and to answer questions for students.

2.2.3 The gap between theories on textbooks and practice in real business world

As a topic for discussion and debate, the relationship between business educational theory and practice has received more attention than most (Carr, 2006). Considering the fact that business environment and practice has changed a lot during the two past decades and there are so many innovative business patterns and themes emerged, concerns increased over the gap between theory and practice in business education, especially in Higher Education. One of the fact is that business academic journals are terribly starting losing readers, including those top journals. Unfortunately, despite all these concerns and discussion to convince how theory should be related to practice, our pilot research show that very little seems to have effectively changed and teachers continue to cling to an image of theory as incomprehensible 'jargon' that has nothing to do with their everyday problems.

All of the above would undoubtedly undermine enrollment of business education, and would also have negatively impact on the popularity of business graduates in the labour market. Thus, closing the gap between the theory and practice of teaching is an critical quality issue.

2.3 Value of flipped class model in Business Studies teaching

The notion of a flipped class model draws on such concepts as active learning, student engagement, hybrid course design, and course podcasting. The value of a flipped class is in the repurposing of class time into a workshop where students can inquire about lecture content, test their skills in applying knowledge, and interact with one another in hands-on activities. During class sessions, instructors function as coaches or advisors, encouraging students in individual inquiry and collaborative effort. All of these value are believed to greatly contribute to traditional business education.

2.3.1 Helps to promote students' interests and improve classroom involvement

In the traditional classroom teaching, teachers often remain as the principal part, in charge of the teaching progress and learning progress. The one-way teaching method has ignored students' individual difference and demands. Students lose the interests in learning because of the boring classroom teaching atmosphere. In the flipped class teaching model, the status of students and teachers has greatly changed. Teachers need to respect students' learning ability and individual difference, the dominant position and provide systematic and targeted instruction to help students to study independently and solve problems effectively. The effective communication between teachers and students as well as students and students can be carried out to stimulate students' interests in learning and improve their ability in knowledge transfer and application (Li, 2016).

2.3.2 Helps to develop students' self-learning ability

In the traditional teaching process, teachers have ignored students' individual difference, and spent a lot of time and energy in teaching theories in the textbooks. In fact, many students have prepared lessons before class and initially grasped and understood the contents. If teachers only give instructions on the text, students' learning initiative will be influenced and they even will lose the self-learning ability. The flipped class teaching model enables students to use the network platform to learn basic concept, so that it can shorten the teaching time, students can properly adjust the learning progress, effectively grasp the knowledge and timely record problems in learning and the effectiveness of classroom teaching could be improved. The flipped class teaching model promotes students to study independently, stimulate students' learning interest and trains their autonomous learning ability, contributing to students' overall development.

3. Discussion: application of flipped class in teaching business studies

As said before, we are still in the early stage of this research. Since the process of data collection has not been finished, analysis and discussion do not have a sound basis generated from the research findings. However, the early findings obtained from the pilot study do generate some interesting discussion in terms to how to apply flipped class in teaching business studies.

Firstly, the application of flipped class to improve traditional classroom quality requires both students and teachers to change their mindset. Some students may struggle due to their developing personal responsibility. In a self-directed and home learning environment, students who are not at the developmental stage required to keep on-task with independent learning may fall rapidly behind their peers. Therefore, students' self-learning initiatives and motivation are essential. For teachers, it is very important to transform the traditional educational idea and respect students' dominant position in the classroom learning.

Secondly, there is no single model for the flipped classroom. But one thing is for sure that various learning activities can be involved and the application of new technology helps to attract students' participation. As the flipped class becomes more popular, new tools may emerge to support the out-of-class portion of the curriculum. In particular, the ongoing development of powerful mobile devices will put a wider range of rich, educational resources into the hands of students, at times and places that are most convenient for them. Business education, in particular, will likely employ elements of the flipped classroom, supplementing traditional out-of-class work with video presentations and supporting project-based efforts during regular class times. At a certain level of adoption, colleges and universities may need to take a hard look at class spaces to ensure they support the kinds of active and collaborative work common in flipped classes.

Thirdly, university can provide support and encouragement to facilitate teachers' self-development. Considering the fact that business education nowadays has been greatly challenged as its theories taught do not seem to be applicable to most business environments, academic teachers' inability to bridge business theory to practice need to be solved. The application of flipped class model is valuable in this sense. That is because teachers nowadays need more time to update her/his knowledge base rather than spend too much time to explain concepts and theory. On the other hand, in the independent study, students' scope of knowledge expands and the thinking deepens, having very high requirements for teachers' knowledge reserve. Teachers need to enrich theoretical knowledge and improve the overall quality continuously to effectively meet the demands of students' individual difference. Therefore, teachers' continuous self-development is essential.

Fourthly, flipped class model is a whole new ball game to business education in China's college and universities. Challenges are great to institutions, students and teachers. A dedicated design is therefore critical. For example, an effective evaluation system of the programme and continuous two-ways open communication channels are required. The promotion of knowledge sharing and good practice model is also valuable.

4. Conclusion

The rapid development of information technology has promoted the application of flipped class teaching model in teaching. It has overturned the traditional classroom teaching. Students can study independently through taking advantage of the teaching videos and teaching courseware after class. The flipped class has overturned the traditional deep-rooted teaching thoughts and greatly challenged the existing Business Studies teaching practice. Considering the great challenges that the business education is now facing, flipped class model does provide opportunities for classroom teaching quality improvement. The application of flipped class requires college teachers to clearly know the important responsibility of them in classroom teaching, explore and practice continuously and fully exert students' subjective initiative in the classroom learning, promoting students' overall development. Support from the institutions is also required.

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Authors' Backgrounds



Prof. Lu Guan is an Associate Professor in The International Business School at Beijing Normal University (Zhuhai). In 2011, she received her Ph.D. from the Management School of the University of Liverpool, UK. After that, she went back to China and worked 2 years for a post-doctoral research project, which was in the field of Chinese industrial relations. Since September 2014 she works as a lecturer for BNUZ, teaching modules of HRM, OB and etc. Her research interest is in the areas of governance in the non-for-profit organizations, human resource management, on which she has published several articles.



Miss Chuyi Chen is in her last year of undergraduates studies in the International Business School at Beijing Normal University (Zhuhai) and her major is Business Administration. She took part in various student activities during the past four years. In the summer of 2015, she was selected to be an English teacher in AIESEC Education project and worked in St. Petersburg, Russia for 2 months. In 2016, she joined in TEDxZHUHAI and was involved in holding the 2016 Meeting. In the same years, she worked in DDB 4A Advertising Agency on the brand SKITTLES of MARS for 2 months. Later she established a street snap team with 14 people called SHIN in BNUZ and worked on marketing plan.