



The Effects of Flipped Instruction on Iranian EFL Students' Oral Interpretation Performance

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Introduction

Flipped instruction is usually compared and contrasted with "traditional" or "standard" instruction. Based on a teaching model called *Present, Practice, Reinforce, Apply*, traditional instruction initially presents new classroom content followed by allocating time to practice the content under the teacher's supervision. To reinforce the introduced concepts, students are then required to do some assigned homework. In subsequent classes, they review the previous lesson (Spino & Trego, 2015). Flipped instruction, however, reverses this pattern by delivering the new content or the class lecture to students at home as homework. After listening to the lecture at home, the students attend classes to practice and apply the self-studied materials (Roehl, Reddy, & Shannon, 2013). Of course, flipped instruction can be realized in different models, however, in all models teachers are supposed to make use of electronic resources in their instruction (Hao & Lee, 2016). In fact, the idea behind flipping the classroom is that the students should utilize the class time solving the raised problems, discussing the related concepts and getting engaged in collaborative learning (Tucker, 2012).

Although it is claimed that "the theoretical and practical elements that support "flipping" derive from works written over 100 years ago by the most familiar face in educational theory—John Dewey ("What is Flipped Instruction?", 2016), the main theoretical frameworks for conducting flipped classrooms in the literature rest upon the two influential educational theories namely "discovery learning" and "social constructivism" put forward by Piaget (1970) and Vygotsky (1978) respectively.

At the heart of discovery learning lies the construction of meaning which is based on one's interpretation of the data (Fogarty, 1999). In other words, what is primary in this learning paradigm is the role of an individual in his learning process. Dimitriadis and Kamberelis (2006) have argued that "Piaget grounded his developmental learning theory in the individual learner and positioned children as active, intelligent, creative constructors of their own knowledge structures" (p. 170). This is realized in flipped instruction while students are working at home.

Although Vygotsky shared many of Piaget's views on child development, he was more interested in the social and collaborative aspects of learning (Jacot, Noren, & Berge, 2014). Unlike the importance attributed to the individual in the learning process, for Vygotsky it is social life which is primary in the learning process. In fact, he postulated that it was not possible to separate learning from its social context (Vygotsky, 1978). For Fogarty (1999) "Vygotsky's theory suggests that one learns first through a social setting of person to person interactions and then personally through an internalization process that leads to

deep understanding" (p. 5). Based on this paradigm, social context plays a fundamental role in the process of knowledge construction. Students' in-class discussion of their findings establishes the social context. Discovery learning and social constructivism, put together, suggest kinds of active learning such as "authentic, inquiry-based, exploratory, experiential and collaborative learning" that are all common distinctive features of classrooms conducted in flipped fashion (Jacot, Noren, & Berge, 2014, p. 24).

Technological Advancements

Advances in technology, as a running movement, undoubtedly, have affected the education system in one way or another throughout history. The printing press in the 1400s, the electronic telegraph in the 1830s, the wireless radio in the 1800s, television in the 1920s, computers in the 1940s, the internet in the 1960s and the World Wide Web in the 1990s are the turning points that have changed the face of education (Bishop & Verleger, 2013).

However, the last event, the World Wide Web, "has changed things so fundamentally that there is absolutely no going back" (Prensky, 2011, p. 1). Its impact on instructional systems has been so immense that it has been considered as "one of the major vehicles propelling technology-based learning" (Jacot, Noren, & Berge, 2014, p. 24). Nowadays, students have been surrounded by videogames, digital music players, video cams, cell phones, and all the other toys and tools of the digital age (Prensky, 2001). In fact, ownership of different electronic devices such as smartphones, tablets along with the easy accessibility of the World Wide Web have offered new possibilities and new educational resources both to teachers and students.

Thus, the educational administrators should provide teachers with these professional tools and teachers, in turn, should be encouraged to make practical uses of technology-based tools and devices in their classrooms.

EFL and Flipped Instruction

The application of flipped instruction in EFL teaching has been a subject of inquiry by some researchers both qualitatively and quantitatively. Exploring students' and teachers' perceptions of flipped instruction was the main theme of qualitative research studies while quantitative studies focused on measuring the practical effects of this kind of instruction on different language skills.

Flipped instruction has been employed initially in major academic content areas such as science, math and the social sciences (Spino & Trego, 2015). Generally, these studies have indicated the positive effects of flipped instruction. For instance, Bergman and Sam, the originators of this instruction, (as cited in Jacot, Noren, & Berge, 2014) recorded their classroom lectures and posted them online so that their students could access them online whenever it was convenient. Later on, they reported that the students in the flipped classroom interacted more in the class.

Comparing flipped classrooms with team-based learning in prosthodontic education, Nishigawa, Omoto, Hayama, Okura, Tajima, Suzuki and Matsuka, (2016) concluded that there was no statistical difference in dental students' final course scores between flipped instruction and team-based learning. However, they indicated that both styles were more highly effective than traditional styles.

Focusing on teachers' perceptions, Angelini (2016) conducted a qualitative study on teacher trainee students' perceptions of flipped instruction. Based on the participants' qualitatively-collected comments, the researcher concluded that the successful implementation of flipped instruction depended "mainly on two factors: students' commitment to self-study and teachers' training and dedication to innovation" (p. 5).

Hao (2016) conducted a survey study on undergraduate students majoring in education. The study aimed at gathering the students' perspectives on the flipped classrooms they experienced for an entire

semester. As they reported, approximately 60% of the students expressed their agreement with the idea of flipped classrooms. However, only 39% agreed that this style of instruction met their learning needs.

In the same vein, Basel (2015) and Roach (2014) focused on students' perceptions towards flipped learning. The results of these two studies indicated that both teachers and students had positive perceptions about the use of the flipped classroom as an integral part of face-to-face courses.

Exploring the benefits of flipped instruction, Chen, Wu, and Marek (2016) used the flipped learning model and designed a holistic oral training course that included extensive online written and verbal communication for learning English idioms. The results of the study indicated that flipped instruction increased the participants' motivation and their idiomatic knowledge.

In another experimental study, Leis, Cooke, and Tohei (2015) compared two English composition courses offered to Japanese EFL students. One of the courses was taught in traditional style while the other employed flipped instruction. The results of the study revealed that students engaging in flipped instruction spent significantly higher number of class hours for classroom preparation. Moreover, their writing proficiency significantly improved compared to those students taught in traditional classes.

Jehma (2016) implemented flipped instruction in teaching a compulsory course on English language for freshmen EFL students. The students were asked to interact with the posted video content before the class through www.classstart.org designed by the teacher. In the classroom, the students were asked to discuss any related topics. Later on, they were asked to write a composition in the class. Based on the results of a course evaluation administered at the end of the semester, the researcher reported that the students showed improvement in their English writing performance.

All in all, the reviewed literature indicates that EFL instructors have started to view flipped instruction as a viable method for teaching language skills. However, what is missing in the literature is any serious study on teaching oral interpretation courses through flipped instruction.

Oral Interpretation Course (OIC)

English Translation studies is a four-year BA course offered at some Iranian universities. Besides, taking some core courses, the students must also take professional courses on translation. The Oral Interpretation course is one of these professional courses offered to senior students of translation studies. This course is much more demanding than other preparatory courses and is usually offered in the first semesters as it demands more advanced linguistic skills and cognitive strategies than other offered courses.

Linguistically, EFL would-be interpreters have to render speech from one language into another verbally. They should have a good oral command of both languages being spoken, such as slang, catchphrases, and cultural terminology (Grebenshchikova, 2012). For Ming-Xu (2012) "Oral Interpretation as an advanced communicative skill does not only involve application of linguistic knowledge and cognitive competence but also involves psychological factors, such as tension, apprehension" (p. 1536). Of course, the feelings of anxiety and tension are not limited to oral interpretation courses. In fact, they "are commonly expressed by second/foreign language learners in learning to speak a second/foreign language and considered to exert a potentially negative and detrimental effect on communication in the target language" (Tanveer, 2007, p. iii).

Considering oral interpretation as a kind of social performance, some EFL students who are potentially supposed to act as interpreters are suffering from a fear of public speaking which is a very common form of social phobia. Due to this phobia, these students experience considerable personal distress, frustration and depression during the training sessions (Pertaub, Slater, & Barker, 2002).

Pedagogically, taking a traditional approach to teaching oral interpretation courses has added further complexities to the issue. Due to the teacher-centered nature of this approach in which teachers are the sole information providers through direct and face-to-face instruction, the students are less motivated to venture far from what they are presented in their classrooms.

The demanding nature of the Oral Interpretation course along with the other documented records of EFL students, such as their poor command of English, lack of sufficient cultural knowledge and lack of theoretical and pedagogical guidance have made the would-be oral interpreters not as qualified as they should be (Ming-Xu, 2012). To address the problem, this report aims at applying a new pedagogy, flipped instruction, to help EFL students achieve the expected qualifications in their oral interpretation courses. In particular, the present study aims at addressing the following research question with its respective hypothesis:

RQ: To what extent does the flipped instruction help EFL students improve their oral interpretation performance?

H₀: Flipped instruction does not help EFL students improve their oral interpretation performance.

Method

Design and Research Procedures

The present study aimed at measuring the effects of flipped instruction on EFL students' oral interpretation performance. To this end, a quasi-experimental design was used. Thus, instruction method was the independent variable and the students' oral performance was the dependent variable. The independent variable, instruction method, was operationally defined as either choosing flipped instruction or traditional instruction. The dependent variable, students' oral interpretation performance, was defined as students' performance on the final oral exam of the course which was evaluated with the rubric presented in Appendix A.

Students taking their Oral Interpretation course in the second semester of 2014 were involved in the present study. During the two initial class sessions, all the students were taught the basics of Oral Interpretation as suggested by Nolan (2005). This included issues such as note-taking, style, word order, register and figures of speech. After going through these basics, the students in class A, the traditional cycle, were presented with a short (5-10 min.) English authentic track out of a pool of 18 tracks retrieved from internet sources. The instructor played each track and stopped it every one/two minutes asking one of the students to do the interpretation based on his/her notes. No feedback was provided by the teacher at this time. This cycle went on till the track was covered. In six sessions, however, the track could not be covered due to class time limitations. In such classes, the students were asked to do the rest of the track at home and underline any problem they encountered. These problems were discussed in the next session. To make sure that students would keep on working on the assigned tracks in the following session, the students were asked to raise their points of view on the last track. Later on, a new track was played and the same procedure was followed.

In the flipped instruction, however, learning initially started at home with students working on the tracks posted by the teacher. Before they embarked on the oral interpretation, the students were asked to do their best to understand the track content be it any unfamiliar lexical, structural and conceptual items mostly through browsing the internet or consulting any available resources. The students were also asked to jot down the problems they encountered in comprehending the track. Having come up with an almost fair understanding of the track, the students then started watching the track and taking notes. This was followed by doing the oral interpretation in the classroom.

Classroom procedures in flipped instruction were rather different from the traditional classroom. The instructor started the class not by lecturing but by raising questions to make sure that the students had already worked on the posted tracks. This was an opportunity for the students to share their findings and even problems on the raised points. This, in turn, changed the class into a collaborative setting in which the students were actively discussing their opinions reviewing the track indirectly. The role of the instructor here was both dealing with the thorny linguistic/non-linguistic issues, where input from the

teacher is perceived to be more efficient than students' self-study at home and coordinating students' points of view.

Having established a certain level of track comprehension through this collaborative phase, the instructor played the track asking the students to take notes. Most of the class time then was spent on the act of the oral interpretation. That is, the instructor played the track and interrupted it at certain intervals based on topic/sentence completion, nominating the students to interpret the track. It was assumed that, in this way of instruction, the students did not have to go through feelings of anxiety or embarrassment as they had already spent time at home working on the track. Moreover, all students had the opportunity to participate in the act of oral interpretation. The last part of the class was devoted to introducing the new track. The instructor gave a very brief description of the track followed by providing students instructions on how to access the track.

Participants

This study was carried out with 39 participants in two intact classes. Each class was assigned to an instructional condition namely Flipped Instruction (FI) class ($n = 18$) and traditional instruction (TI) class ($n = 21$). The balance between male and female students was approximately the same. All participants were advanced EFL students majoring in English Translation Studies at Islamic Azad University, Urmia branch. All the participants were native speakers of Azerbaijani.

Scoring Method and Data Analysis

A rubric for grading students' oral interpretation performance was developed by the researcher (Appendix A). It was based on the interpretation skills namely fluency, self-confidence, and note-taking (Kornakov, 2000). These skills were included in the rubric under four main categories as Interpretation, Delivery, Voice volume and Note-taking. The first category, Interpretation, addressed the issue of content accuracy. The second category, Delivery, as an index for self-confidence, focused on the level of interpreters' anxiety. Interpreters' voice volume was the third category. The last criterion for grading the interpreters' performance was Note-taking. To minimize the subjectivity of the scoring, an inter-rater scoring procedure was used. Two raters, the researcher and his colleague, scored the students' oral performance on each of the mentioned categories, ranging from 2 to 5. The full score for each participant was 20. To determine the reliability between the scorings of the two raters and the effects of Flipped Instruction on students' oral interpretation performance Pearson correlation reliability test and *t*-test for independent samples were run respectively. As for validity of the rubric, all categories were reviewed by three of the researcher's colleagues. Based on their comments, the content of the third and the fourth categories were modified to accommodate requested changes.

Results

Inter-rater Reliability of Students' Obtained Scores on Their Oral Interpretation Performance

Two raters, the researcher and his colleague, evaluated the students' oral interpretations based on the rubric illustrated in Appendix A. Thus, it was of importance to check the reliability of the assigned scores by the two raters. To this end, Pearson correlation reliability test was used. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics related to the assigned scores.

TABLE 1
Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Interpretation 1	13.4103	2.75984	39
Interpretation 2	12.8974	2.72218	39

As indicated in Table 1, the obtained alpha was .76. The mean scores of the first and the second raters for students' oral interpretation performance were 13.41 and 12.89 respectively, with a standard deviation of 2.75 and 2.72.

Table 2 presents the inter-rater reliability of the students' obtained scores on their oral interpretation performances.

TABLE 2.
Inter-rater Reliability of Students' Obtained Scores

		Interpretation1	Interpration2
Interpretation 1	Pearson Correlation	1	.769
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	39	39
Interpretation 2	Pearson Correlation	.769**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	39	39

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

As presented in Table 2, the correlation value of .769 indicated a close correlation between the assigned scores of the two raters.

Testing the Hypothesis of the Study

Table 3 presents the mean differences between the two groups.

TABLE 3
Group Statistics

	Instruction	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Interpretation1	Traditional Instruction	21	12.2857	2.02837	.44263
	Flipped Instruction	18	14.7222	2.96659	.69923

As Table 3 indicates, students in the Flipped Instruction group got higher scores ($M= 14.72$) compared with the scores of the students in the Traditional Instruction group ($M= 12.28$). Even their standard deviations were lower than the FI group.

To test the hypothesis of the study, an independent samples t-test was run testing whether there was a statistically significant difference in the mean scores for the two groups. That is, whether students who received Flipped Instruction and those who received Traditional Instruction differed significantly in their oral interpretation performance. Table 4 presents the results.

TABLE 4.
t-test for Independent Samples (Testing the Hypothesis of the Study)

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Interpretation1	Equal variances assumed	1.942	.172	-3.030	37	.004	-2.43651	.80414	-4.06586	-.80716
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.944	29.348	.006	-2.43651	.82755	-4.12817	-.74484

Considering the obtained results ($t = -3.030$, $df = 37$, $p = .004 < \alpha = .05$), it can be claimed that using Flipped Instruction did have a statistically significant effect on students' oral interpretation performance thereby rejecting the null hypothesis of the study.

Conclusion

To keep up with new instructional technologies, some EFL instructors have recently opted for flipped instruction for teaching basic language skills. Generally, revealing the EFL teachers' and students' positive perceptions on flipped instruction, the findings of these studies indicated that through employing this pedagogical method, it is possible to enhance students' linguistic performances. Findings of the study revealed that this methodology did help the students enhance their oral interpretation performances.

Furthermore, flipped instruction, as witnessed by the researcher himself, radically affected the learning teaching processes. First, it developed a collaborative learning setting in which the students shared their findings with each other. Secondly, flipped instruction made the students come to believe that they are accountable for their own learning. Thirdly, this method of teaching, as perceived by the researcher, helped the students develop their individual learning styles, something that has already been pointed out as "self-paced learning" (Roach, 2014, p. 76). Finally, as the students got engaged fully at home working on the posted tracks, they managed to fully engage in the act of oral presentations in the classroom.

However, a word of caution needs to be raised. Flipped instruction should be taken as a complement and not as a substitute to traditional teaching (Roach, 2014) as in some educational settings such as some rural areas it is obviously not feasible to expect instructors to opt for this kind of instruction before furnishing the setting with the required online facilities.

The Author

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Appendix

Rubric for Grading Oral Interpretation Performance

	Below Expectation	Needs Improvement	Satisfactory	Exceeds Expectations	Score
Interpretation	The interpretation is inaccurate or overly general. The audience is unlikely to comprehend the interpretation. (2)	The interpretation is sometimes incomplete. The audience may comprehend some parts but they are unlikely to get full comprehension. (3)	The interpretation is generally accurate and reasonably complete. The audience is likely to get a fair comprehension. (4)	The interpretation is accurate and comprehensive. The audience fully comprehends the interpretation. (5)	
Delivery	The interpreter appears anxious and uncomfortable and reads notes rather than doing the interpretation. There is no eye-contact with the audience. (2)	The interpreter occasionally appears anxious or uncomfortable, and may occasionally read notes rather than doing the interpretation. The interpreter tries to establish eye-contact with the audience. (3)	The interpreter is generally relaxed and comfortable. There is a good balance between note-reading and interpretation. The interpreter has established a fairly good eye-contact with the audience. (4)	The interpreter is professional, relaxed and comfortable. He is interacting very effectively with the audience. (5)	
Voice volume	The interpreter hardly can be heard. (2)	The interpreter starts initially with a normal volume fading into non-normal one. (3)	The interpreter generally speaks with a satisfactory volume. (4)	The interpreter is in a very good command of his voice volume. (5)	
Note-taking	The notes consist of full sentences. (2)	The notes consist of phrases and words. (3)	The notes consist of abbreviations and symbols. (4)	The notes consist of abbreviations and symbols with topic shift markers. (5)	
Total Score:					