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Learner-generated materials in a flipped pronunciation class: A sequential explanatory mixed-methods study

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ABSTRACT

As a relatively popular practice in recent years, the flipped learning model moves traditional lecturing outside the class, yet it might prove challenging to find appropriate in-class activities that promote research, active learning and higher-order thinking skills. This study attempts to investigate if learner-generated materials could promote active and inquiry-based learning in such a class and help develop positive attitudes towards flipped learning in general. It also seeks to understand the role, perceived value and ease of using authoring tools used to build learning materials in facilitating inquiry-based active learning in the classroom. It adopts a sequential explanatory mixed-methods research design, in which 40 intermediate Turkish learners of English studied various topics in phonetics and phonology by creating learning materials in teams. The analysis of the data from a post-instruction survey and follow-up interviews with 8 participants imply that learner-generated materials produced using user-friendly authoring tools seem to be a good option for learners to get involved in research in a flipped class. The findings also revealed that although the learners reported mostly positive attitudes and that the higher and lower scorers (Moodle Scores) viewed the flipped learning model almost equally valuable, the higher scorers talked more positively about how the course was delivered. However, as the findings indicated, radical changes introduced by both the use of the flipped model itself and new software and a lesson sequence based on thinking, production and research might constitute a major challenge for students that are accustomed to traditional methods.

1. Introduction

Pronunciation has been marginalized within applied linguistics due to various reasons including but not limited to the difficulty of integrating it into regular teaching (Celce-Murcia, Brinton, & Goodwin, 1996; Silveira, 2002), the impact of the communicative language teaching which placed emphasis on fluency and intelligibility (Levis & LeVelle, 2010), lack of a meaningful relationship between instruction and success in pronunciation (Purcell & Suter, 1980; Yule & Macdonald, 1994). A more recent trend in pronunciation instruction has been to establish a balance between accuracy versus fluency (and native-likeness) and the teaching of segmental versus supra-segmental elements (See Bakla & Demirezen for an overview). Another dimension of the recent focus on pronunciation instruction has been computer-assisted pronunciation teaching (CAPT) software and web sites. Thanks to such software, learners are able to gain access to a wide variety of such digital materials as podcasts, movies, dictionaries and audios and videos though it was relatively difficult to access authentic materials to improve pronunciation until quite recently (Fouz-González, 2015). In addition, they are able to produce such materials themselves due to user-friendly technologies when they are provided with

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enough training, guidance and time. Globally considered, both research and practice have taken interest in the use of technology in pronunciation instruction (Mompean, 2015).

Moving lecturing out of class to open up room for interaction, production, discussion and so forth could be possible when the class is inverted. In this respect, supported by affordances of technology, flipped learning is a paradigm shift that incorporates blended and hybrid learning as one of the promising practices in education. Although commonly referred to as "flipped learning," there are various terms that teachers use to refer to this innovative movement, such as "inverted learning" or "blended learning," "reverse instruction," "inverted classroom," and "24/7 classroom (Bergmann & Sams, 2012). Webb, Doman, and Pusey (2014) define flipped learning as "a pedagogical model which involves inversing the way that instruction is presented and homework is accomplished" (p. 54). That is, while learners in a traditional classroom do homework at home and learn the new subject at school, those in a flipped classroom learn the new subject at home by studying written material and watching videos, and they get involved in active learning through teacher-led instructional activities in the classroom. Higher education has had to invest on flipped learning within the blended learning paradigm as a more technological alternative to traditional education (O'Flaherty & Phillips, 2015) to keep pace with very rapid developments in education and to discover the best instructional practices (Crews & Butterfield, 2014). Nowadays, flipped learning is becoming more and more prevalent, particularly in the US (Mok, 2014; Stuntz, 2012), and it is changing the dynamics of traditional classrooms.

This model provides a more interactive learning environment within the classroom (Flipped Learning Network, 2014; Flynn, 2015; Halili, Abdul Razak, & Zainuddin, 2015) and helps students get involved in activities that entail deeper cognitive involvement, more interaction with peers and increased levels of collaboration (Burch, 2013). Moreover, there is room for inquiry-based learning, active learning and peer-learning in a flipped classroom (Danker, 2015), and teachers individualize learning by transferring learning to individual context from the class by using technological tools (Hamdan, McKnight, McKnight, & Arfstrom, 2013, p. 4). Activities in flipped learning environments are also associated with various pedagogical tools, such as inquiry-based learning, universal design for teaching and learning, blended learning, and online learning, reverse instruction by using podcasts, screencasts, Web 2.0 tools, and inquiry-based tasks (Bennett et al., 2011, para. 8).

However, changing the order of homework and lecture hardly suffices if classroom procedures are similar to those in a conventional one. This is because class time should be allocated for learner-centered activities based on what students do before coming to class, rather than traditional teacher-centered lectures (Moffett & Mill, 2014, p. 415). This view is in line with Talbert's (2015) in making a distinction a distinction between inverted classrooms and inverted learning. That is, a teacher might invert the classroom, yet inverted learning might not exist as simply moving the lectures outside the class hours will hardly be enough; transforming the class hours using active learning strategies is obviously essential. Therefore, teachers have to reconsider the nature of teaching and homework (Becker, 2013). More generally, both teachers and students have to "flip the way they fundamentally view education" (Webb et al., 2014, p. 54).

Teachers have to come up with useful in-class practices that could possibly help them with this relatively challenging task. An apparently viable option might be the use of learner-generated materials. The rationale for this choice is that learners could benefit from being producers of materials rather than being mere consumers (Cockrum, 2013; Engin, 2014). They are more likely to answer those questions prepared by their peers rather than by the teacher or experts. This is because cognitive, linguistic or cultural barriers are lowered when students exchange information with their peers who usually share similar characteristics with respect to language proficiency, world knowledge, age and so forth. Furthermore, peer-generated materials might help students learn within their zone of proximal development, which is defined as "the space between what the individual can accomplish independently and what he or she can do with assistance" (Fulcher & Davidson, 2007, p. 27). Moreover, students show increased levels of motivation to create higher quality work (Dowling, 2013). Therefore, they can create content and share them with peers by using a plethora of digital technologies, and they can evaluate each other's work (Flipped Classroom Field Guide, n.d.). According to Apple and Kikuchi (2007), digital materials prepared by students are learner-centered, motivating and enjoyable in addition to being able to promote self-reliance and independent learning. In this context, the present study aims to investigate whether such materials could be of help in establishing an inquiry-based active learning environment in a flipped class.

2. Literature review

As the present study attempts to investigate the use of digital learning materials produced by learners in a flipped pronunciation class, this section provides an overview of the flipped learning paradigm and goes on to discuss learner-generated materials by incorporating related research findings. In addition, it elaborates on the term 'digital literacy' because being able to use ICT is a key issue in both of these topics.

2.1. Flipped learning

A few recent studies have found that flipped learning motivates students to take responsibility of their own learning, increases their participation and engagement (Bell, 2015; Danker, 2015; Helgevold & Moen, 2015) and improves learner responsibility and language use (Stuntz, 2012). However, Jensen, Kummer, and Godoy (2015) reported that although flipped learning increased the sense of purpose in the students in doing assignments to get prepared for the forthcoming class rather than doing follow-up activities. This stronger sense of purpose did not have a positive impact on the completion rates of the assignments. Another benefit is that peer instruction might motivate students to do research on the Internet. For example, in a study by Engin (2014), the participants began to do a significant amount of research as the learner-centered nature of flipped learning facilitated this, and they became more skillful at