The Enhancement of Student Learning Engagement in EFL Speaking Flipped Classrooms

Linling Zhong *

School of Educational Studies, Universiti Sains Malaysia, 11800 USM Pulau Pinang, Malaysia

* Corresponding Author Email: zhonglinling9@gmail.com

Abstract. Student learning engagement plays an essential role in learning, and it is a valuable factor for effective learning. Meanwhile, in English as a foreign language (EFL), speaking is one of the critical competencies for students. Scholars and educators are looking for a breakthrough to effectively improve student learning engagement and EFL speaking. With the advancement of information and communication technologies developing, the flipped classroom is a new tendency in today's education and has been proven to be effective. The application of flipped classrooms is the field of study in which this work looks to make a breakthrough. Nevertheless, little research has been undertaken to consider student learning engagement in EFL speaking flipped classrooms rigorously. Furthermore, no review studies have given the task of clarifying the interrelationships between student learning engagement and EFL speaking flipped classrooms enough attention. Therefore, based on this background, this review aims to review and explore the enhancement of EFL speaking flipped classrooms on student learning engagement, highlighting the positive connection between these valuable constructs. Finally, practical ramifications and directions for students, instructors, and course developers interested in implementing flipped classrooms to improve student learning engagement and EFL speaking are presented.

Keywords: Student Learning Engagement; English as a Foreign Language; Speaking; Flipped Classroom; Education.

1. Introduction

Student learning engagement is precious and valuable to students (Furrer et al., 2014). It refers to the extent of students’ active involvement and participation in a learning activity, both inside and outside the classroom (Kuh et al., 2011; Frydenberg et al., 2005; Saha, 2016). It has been the center of attention lately due to the arrival of positive psychology (Wang et al., 2021), which is a direct way of learning and a strong forecaster of students’ learning. Therefore, effective student learning engagement promotes students to understand the learning content better and produce academic achievement and progress (Jang et al., 2012; Skinner & Pitzer, 2012).

Meanwhile, Education in English as a foreign language (EFL) has become a must for most people who want to pursue numerous opportunities in various fields, particularly in the global marketplace (Abdullah et al., 2021). More specifically, one of the most crucial abilities for measuring a learner's ability to utilize the language effectively is EFL speaking (Abdullah et al., 2019). As a result, mastery of EFL speaking has gained prominence and has become a top focus for most instructors and students (Abdullah et al., 2021).

Despite the importance of student learning engagement and EFL speaking, according to a survey, only 60% of students feel engaged at school, and only 48% think that what they are learning in school will help them outside of school (Youth Truth Survey, 2017). This low student learning engagement in the education process, in general, is an indication of what instructors’ experience on a local level within their classrooms (Chen et al., 2016). Furthermore, according to surveys done in universities and colleges, there are also currently issues with students’ EFL speaking performance in classrooms (Gan, 2013; Shen, 2013; Xie, 2020), and many students still have issues when they are exposed to EFL speaking situations (Abdullah et al., 2021). The traditional lecture-oriented courses are still the norm in EFL education courses (Aghaei, 2020). Students regularly deal with some problems,
including low speaking fluency and lack of engagement (Shi et al., 2017; Sun & Yuan, 2018; Xie, 2020), because of the teacher-centered classroom environment, limited opportunities to practice, and teachers’ negative feedback in the classrooms (Li et al., 2022).

Therefore, there is an urgent need for instructors to transition from conventional classrooms to student-centered classrooms to enhance student learning engagement and EFL speaking performance. This modification is necessary to keep pace with the advancement of information and communication technologies (Ehlers, 2019). In recent years, the improvement of computer technology has created various forms of support for learners (Sun & Yang, 2015). It also becomes essential in the sustainable development of education (Carrión-Martínez et al., 2020). The application of flipped classrooms is the field of study in which this work seeks to make a breakthrough.

The flipped classroom refers to the practice of subverting the traditional classroom, in which instructional content is video recorded and assigned as homework (Guo, 2019). Students must self-learn a large amount of information before class (Lestari, 2021). The face-to-face class time is then spent integrating knowledge through active learning exercises and synthesis-based activities such as peer collaboration and discussion (Bergmann & Sams 2012; Bishop & Verleger 2013). Hitherto, scholars are concerned about student learning engagement and EFL speaking in flipped classrooms. Studies have shown that students positively perceive the flipped classroom (Liu, 2017), and it will influence students’ learning process and outcomes (Bernacki et al., 2020). It can effectively enhance EFL classroom efficiency as a novel classroom mode (Gilboy et al., 2015) and effectively support speaking language learning and teaching (Sun & Yang, 2015). Meanwhile, student learning engagement plays an essential role in flipped classrooms (Awidi & Paynter, 2019), and there is enough evidence in the literature to suggest that language learners’ learning engagement is a crucial element in learning a language communicatively (Amiryousefi, 2019). The interplay between student learning engagement and flipped language classrooms has been noted.

In the context of EFL speaking flipped classroom, which offers students peer-assisted interactive learning in a dynamic learning atmosphere (Chen et al., 2017), student learning engagement can occur on more platforms, including in-class activities and out-of-class activities (Cho et al., 2021; Fisher et al., 2021). Compared with the traditional classrooms, flipped classrooms offer more opportunities for students to ask questions and increase students’ peer interaction so that the learning engagement is enhanced accordingly (Chuang et al., 2018; Chyr et al., 2017; Clark, 2015; McLaughlin et al., 2013; Moore et al., 2014; Muir & Geiger, 2016; Roehl et al., 2013), as well as academic achievement (Zainuddin & Halili, 2016).

Hitherto, considerable attention has been given to the research on student learning engagement and flipped classrooms and previous researchers and scholars had explored students' perception of the flipped classroom, including the influence of flipped classrooms on student learning engagement (Butt, 2014; Enfield, 2013; Gilboy et al., 2015; Simpson & Richards, 2015). Nevertheless, the majority of relevant research has been done from a macro perspective using quantitative and mixed methods, debating the factors that influence student learning engagement in general flipped classrooms, and comparing the differences in student learning engagement between traditional and flipped classrooms (Elmaadaway, 2018; Lai et al., 2021; Subramaniam & Muniany, 2019).

Little research has so far been undertaken to consider student learning engagement in EFL speaking flipped classrooms rigorously. Furthermore, there have been no review studies that have looked at these constructs and provided light on the inner associations between student learning engagement and EFL speaking flipped classrooms. In line with this claim, this review aims to address this gap based on this background, highlighting the positive interrelationships between these valuable constructs. More specifically, the study presents research findings on enhancing student learning engagement in an EFL speaking flipped classroom, which is an essential supplement to the existing literature. It has integral enlightenment for improving student learning engagement and EFL speaking, which may help researchers develop investigational instruments to conduct in-depth studies.
2. Definition of Student Learning Engagement

The definition of student learning engagement commonly used is “time and energy students invest in educationally purposeful activities” (Kuh et al., 2011). It is a dynamic process in which students are exposed to learning activities (Frydenberg et al., 2005). It also refers to students’ psychological input, especially their attention, interest, participation, and efforts in the process of learning (Chen et al., 2016).

Students understand learning materials and build classroom interaction through learning engagement (Remmen & Frøyland, 2014), which means that specific learning results will be produced once student learning engagement occurs. Effective student learning engagement can make students better understand the learning content and obtain high-level learning results (Chi & Wylie, 2014; Rassuli, 2012).

According to the literature, most studies include three dimensions of student learning engagement: behavioral engagement, cognitive engagement, and emotional engagement (Chen et al., 2016; Fredricks et al., 2004). Behavioral engagement refers to students’ engagement in learning and academic tasks, including the behaviors in the classroom and the behaviors of pre-class learning; cognitive engagement refers to self-regulation, the learning strategies used by the students in the learning process; emotional engagement means students’ emotional experience in the classroom activities, including interest, boredom, and anxiety (Fredricks et al., 2004; Chen et al., 2016; Skinner et al., 2008). The three dimensions affect each other (Skinner et al., 2008). For example, when students' behavioral engagement increases, it will lead to deep-seated cognitive engagement. In addition, classroom activities also affect student learning engagement. The classroom needs student learning engagement to be meaningful so that students can enjoy the experience in the learning process (Uçar & Sungur, 2017).

3. The Practice of Flipped Classrooms on Student Learning Engagement

The flipped classroom is an innovative pedagogy method in which students complete homework and input material before the class to devote more in-class time to discussions, projects, and other forms of meaningful interactions (Gasmi & Thomas, 2017; Li & Zhang, 2016), which has gained significant attention of many researchers (LaFee, 2013). As early as the end of the twentieth century, instructors started to use flipped classrooms to solve the problem of low-class engagement (Chen et al., 2016), since EFL learners tend to be inactive in English class (Li & Tseng, 2019).

Several studies have explored the influence of flipped classrooms on EFL students and concluded that it motivates students for communication interaction (Arslan, 2020). Student learning engagement in the in-class activities of flipped classrooms will affect their overall learning performance (Li & Tseng, 2019). By comparing evaluations of previous, traditional classrooms and flipped classrooms, the researchers discovered increased student learning engagement with the flipped classrooms (Gilboy et al., 2015; McLaughlin et al., 2014; Smallhorn, 2017).

In addition, previous studies examined the effects of an EFL flipped classroom and found that students had a higher perception of learning engagement than the traditional classroom students (Hung, 2015). It could inspire students to experience more innovation and cooperative learning, then actively engage in learning activities. Additionally, flipped classroom offers students more opportunities for interaction and communication, which encourage students to combine previous knowledge and experience to solve problems, and thus enhance the EFL speaking and student learning engagement (Chen et al., 2016; Choe & Seong, 2016; Li & Zhang, 2016).

4. Interrelationships among Student Learning Engagement, EFL Speaking and Flipped Classrooms

When discussing the factors affecting student learning engagement, the classroom is the external influencing factor, which includes course content, classroom interaction, and technical support. In
many cases, due to the monotonous ambiance of classrooms, where there is less interaction between teachers and students, students attend class with little show of engagement (Xu, 2012). Enhancing student learning engagement is an important topic that must be adequately handled because it has a major impact on students' academic progress (Enfield, 2013).

At present, empirical studies indicated that the flipped classroom could improve the student learning engagement (Hung, 2015), because it involves more classroom interaction and technical support (Gasmi & Thomas, 2017). Students are encouraged to learn through contact in EFL courses, and technology facilitates this interaction while also assisting students in constructing their comprehension of content (Pifarré& Li, 2012). In the EFL flipped classroom, more engagement will help students improve their speaking performance (Chen et al., 2016).

Taken together, in an EFL speaking flipped classroom, active student learning involvement is critical to the teaching and learning process (Chen et al., 2016). Students' behavioral and cognitive engagement is linked to the amount of time and effort they put into practice, interact, and participate in each learning session both inside and outside of the flipped classroom, and students with high emotional engagement will be motivated to improve their speaking performance in the flipped classroom (Chen et al., 2016; Tiana & Rahayuningsih, 2022).

5. Conclusion and Implication

To conclude, the primary purpose of this study was to provide fresh insights for any parties concerned with the research field of student learning engagement in EFL speaking flipped classrooms. The three constructs, namely, student learning engagement, EFL speaking, and flipped classrooms, were explained in detail. Furthermore, empirical evidence was used to illuminate the complex relationship between the constructs. From the literature reviewed, it can be inferred that student learning engagement is enhanced in EFL speaking flipped classrooms, which includes behavioral engagement, cognitive engagement, and emotional engagement. Factors that cause such enhancement can be the effectiveness of flipped classrooms on student learning engagement and interaction and cooperation in flipped classrooms (Fung et al., 2021; O’Flaherty & Phillips, 2015; Zainuddin & Halili, 2016). However, facets such as behavioral, cognitive, and emotional engagement, which can predominantly regulate learners’ engagement utilizing tasks and activities (Amiryousefi, 2019), can be investigated separately and deserve further exploration, and further research could look at student learning engagement from the perspective of the relationship among the three dimensions.

This finding is enlightening to instructors in educational institutions and encourages EFL educators to apply flipped classrooms to practice teaching and guidance, to enhance student learning interaction and EFL speaking. Especially now that the Covid-19 pandemic is going around worldwide, EFL classrooms should adapt to this new online pedagogy and pay attention to EFL learners’ acceptance and learning engagement of flipped classrooms. Furthermore, this study has important implications for educational experts and course developers concerning how to design the EFL speaking flipped classrooms to enhance student learning engagement. In the future, long-term studies using qualitative approaches to student learning engagement and EFL flipped classrooms should be conducted.

References


Bergmann, J., & Sams, A. (2012). Flip your classroom: Reach every student in every class every day. International Society for Technology in Education.


Bergmann, J., & Sams, A. (2012). Flip your classroom: Reach every student in every class every day. International Society for Technology in Education.


