

# The impact of the flipped classroom on alleviating EFL students' speaking anxiety

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**Abstract:** In recent years, the flipped classroom is very popular in some cities such as Shanghai and Nanjing. It is a method that improves students' learning ability. In the field of English, flipped classroom is beneficial to EFL students' oral skills, especially to those who have speaking anxiety when they are speaking English. This thesis takes the eleventh-grade students of senior high school in Nanjing City as the research participants, and takes the reading section in Unit 1, Book 2 from Yilin Press as example to apply the flipped classroom method, which combines teaching and learning together, encouraging students to speak more frequently in class and alleviate the speaking anxiety.

In this study, empirical research methods are adapted such as classroom observations, questionnaires, and action research to investigate the influence of the flipped classroom on speaking anxiety. The study reveals that the flipped classroom can alleviate students' speaking anxiety and build their confidence in speaking English. After observing and analyzing high school students' performance in class and their improvement in oral tests grades, teachers are able to adjust the content dynamically in class and alleviate students' speaking anxiety in a targeted manner.

**Keywords:** flipped classroom; speaking anxiety; reading teaching; Senior English

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## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Background of the study

The research takes high school students as research participants. They have mastered about 3000 words and some grammar points such as attributive clauses and non-finite verbs. In their spare time, they have watched a certain number of movies or films, which lays a solid foundation for their speaking skills.

This thesis takes Unit 1, Book 2 from Yilin Press as an example. The passage in reading section is about films and things behind the scenes, which can stimulate students' critical thinking. Students can show their understanding of film and how to appreciate films. Moreover, the contents in reading sections also provide some examples for students to expand the corpus. By teacher's scaffoldings, students can clarify the structure and content of their speaking.

Under the guidance of The English Curriculum Standard for General High School (2017 Edition), English teaching in China has significantly changed from knowledge-centered method to competency-oriented method (Luo 1). And the flipped classroom is a creative method of teaching and can improve students' abilities in language competence, cultural awareness, thinking quality, learning ability (Cui 1). And it can activate students in class and achieve gradual improvement of English abilities (Chen 1).

### 1.2 Aims of the research

Speaking anxiety is common in senior high schools because little attention is paid to the speaking ability in our English class. And also, because of the coming college entrance examination, some students are anxious about their English and don't get their suitable way to learn English. In this research, most of the students claim that they have the speaking anxiety, and some students claim that they are thinking out how to solve this problem.

The purpose of the flipped classroom is to increase opportunities to communicate with each other and show their own opinions in class. This enables teachers to adjust time allocation and offer guidance or scaffolding in a timely manner in class according to the performance of the students, so as to reach a balance between teaching and learning. It is different from the traditional teaching model, which is centered on teaching. Flipped classroom emphasizes the students' center role in classroom and takes the classroom participation, cooperation skills and personalized development into consideration. Secondly, flipped classroom can develop students' interests in learning (Zhang 1), which is crucial to alleviate students' speaking anxiety. By communicating with each other and expressing themselves bravely, students can gain a sense of achievement, and build their confidence and interest in English. Moreover, knowledge can be internalized in the classroom, which can lay a solid foundation for their speaking ability and gain valuable speaking experience, and gradually alleviate the speaking anxiety. By practicing in class, students can clearly know how to use English and accumulate the tips of English speaking.

### 1.3 Significance of the research

Although the teaching method of flipped classroom is used in some cities, but there is little evidence on how the flipped classroom can alleviate the speaking anxiety. And also, speaking anxiety is a common phenomenon in senior high school, but few of teachers pay attention to it and try to solve this severe problem. Language is a tool for us to communicate and express ourselves, so speaking ability is of great importance to the students and teachers should find ways to innovate their teaching method to alleviate students' speaking anxiety.

## 2 Literature Review

In the current research and present situation of English class, speaking anxiety is a common problem in senior high school. Tracing back to its origin, speaking anxiety is a typical kind of foreign language anxiety. So we can analyze the speaking anxiety by drawing lessons from foreign language anxiety. English, as a foreign language in China, is often faced with the problem of lacking chances to utilize it. What's worse, senior high school students have limited time communicating with each other in English, and the English examination pays little attention to the oral skills. These situations make the students do not want to express themselves and when they are using English or communicating in English, they feel nervous, even anxious. It is imperative to find out how to solve the speaking anxiety so as to improve students' English overall abilities.

There are a number of definitions of speaking anxiety, one of which is an apprehension about speaking a target language (Bailemir 1). And speaking anxiety is a kind of negative feeling followed by passive action (Hammad and Ghali 1), affecting language learners' actions and impairing their thinking abilities. And speaking anxiety is a universal fear (Breakey 1). Fear is normally triggered by cognitive influences, emotional influences, and performance influences (Hanifa 1).

Researchers around the world are exploring in this area. There has been a heated discussion about how to alleviate the speaking anxiety and what are the impact factors. Recent research on speaking anxiety has focused on the ways to ease it. The empirical evidence mostly agrees that teachers should adopt some creative ways and activate students in class. Using data from the paper *Causes and Countermeasures of Students' Speaking Anxiety in Comprehensive English Classes*, Ye Shuqin investigated 170 students by questionnaires and analyzed the causes of speaking anxiety from the perspectives of students and teachers. The finding reveals that teachers and students should build a New Model for Integrated English Classroom Speaking Instruction (Ye 1). Following Ye's approach, Li Shan further considered the new model. By comparing with other models, she chose the flipped classroom as the new model and investigate its impact in speaking anxiety (Li 1), which further proves we should adopt the creative ways of teaching and learning so as to redefine the roles of teachers and students. Inspired by her, a number of researchers redirect their field and advance their propositions. And the impact of the flipped classroom on speaking anxiety is valuable in senior high school. These arguments suggest that the positive relationship between the flipped classroom and the speaking anxiety is robust and can be applicable across different samples, context, or measurement approaches.

However, some paper argue that transforming the roles of teachers and students may cause the inefficient classroom, taking flipped classroom as a typical example. They argue that what matters most to alleviate the speaking anxiety is the guidance and scaffoldings offered by the teachers. And how the teachers design the class is critical to alleviate the speaking anxiety (Yang 1).

By analyzing deeply into the difference between these two arguments, the reason behind it lies in the sample criteria, research design and material. Firstly, the sample of Yang's research are middle school students from rural area of Ningxia, who have weak basic English skills. The flipped classroom is such a new teaching and learning model that it imposes high demands on both the teachers and the students. So, it is inefficient when the sample are too weak in English. But Li's sample pool is more inclusive. Moreover, the research design are different. Yang's research is conducted by action research, which is different with that of Li's. Most importantly, the materials of their research are different. Yang researched the samples only from teacher's perspective, but not from companion's perspective. As a result, these differences influence the outcomes of the research. After comparing and discussing the two different arguments, the argument that flipped classroom has positive impact on speaking anxiety is more solid.

### 3 Design frame

The research is conducted by combining quantitative evaluation and action research. The sample of this research are senior high school students from two classes from the same grade. To ensure the accuracy of the research, their English proficiency levels are similar and they are taught by the same teacher. Meanwhile, they share the same learning progress. Before the class, they are asked to finish the same guide paper to ensure the same language material in this English class.

#### 3.1 Quantitative evaluation

In this research, the two classes are taught the same reading part (Unit 1, Book 2 from Yilin Press) but by the different means. Class A conducts their class by means of the flipped classroom, and the Class B are taught by the traditional teaching method. To compare the effect of the flipped classroom on the speaking anxiety, the main evaluation method is quantitative method. They are existing statistics, survey, questionnaire and experiment.

#### 3.2 Action research

During the class, students' actions should be tracked and analyzed to better grasp their mental state. For example, their expressions, their proactiveness in answering questions and their gestures. When samples are expressing themselves, researcher should keep track of the number of pauses in speech and changes in expression in this process. Most importantly, the changes or progress of their actions or performance during the class should be noticed and given positive feedbacks.

### 4 Ethics

To ensure the credibility and scientific validity, this research strictly adheres to academic ethical standards, which is crucial to advance social and academical justice and responsibility.

The ethics of the research underpin the whole process of the research. Before the study, the sample of the research should be analyzed from various perspectives and be located to the accurate English level. Moreover, we should ensure that the topic or the direction of the research is laid on a solid foundation and is able to withstand scrutiny. Most importantly, the research should provide insight into the field and inspire other scholars to further study it.

During research design, the samples must be given clear information about: Firstly, the basic situation and the aims of the research. Secondly, they have the right to withdraw this research during the process, and they can choose whether to be the sample of this research. Thirdly, the data of the research should be confidential. Fourthly, the samples should be informed of the potential risks of the research. Last but not least, the study must provide samples with the contact details and complaint procedures.

During the research, the rights of the samples should be respected and they can withdraw during the research. When the samples have some problems, these problems should be addressed timely. And the statistics of the research should be preserved confidentially.

After the study, the samples of the research should be given proper feedback. Moreover, the process of the research should be carefully reflected on.

## 5 Data collection methods

The research is a double-group experiment and a parallel-group experiment as a whole by comparing the two classes. And also, to ensure the accuracy of the research, the influencing factors are controlled to make it a controlled experiment.

Before the class, existing statistics of the sample are analyzed to gain the current level of the sample. After analyzing these statistics, teachers can locate the English level and adjust the language material. For weaker students, language materials should be provided to them directly, and they should be given more time to practice these language materials before using it. To the students who possess solid English skills, they should be offered with accurate and timely scaffoldings and more chance to express themselves, which can also set examples and offer language materials to the weaker students.

During the class, the samples should be offered enough chances to express themselves on the stage and be tested the progress of their speaking ability and the speaking anxiety by means of some questions in the guide paper. This guide paper serves as a questionnaire which can track their performance during the class.

After class, the sample should complete a survey about their attitude towards English speaking to grasp whether they feel less anxious about speaking and how is the effect of the flipped classroom.

Moreover, by observing the samples and track their actions, the psychological changes can be identified and be transformed into valuable data.

## 6 Data analysis methods

By combining quantitative evaluation and action research, the performance and psychological changes are tracked and transformed into valuable data. To better reveal the relationship between the use of the flipped classroom and the level of the speaking anxiety, we should analyze the data and attribute meaning to them.

Before the research, we can build a linear regression model by SPSS and SAS about the mean, median, standard deviation and range of their previous grades. These models reveal the baseline of the samples, which can be compare with the data after the research.

During the research, the data can be analyzed by independent-samples t-test and correlation analysis. The experimental group and the controlled group can be compared to test whether the flipped classroom has impact on speaking anxiety.

After the research, the regression analysis can be adopted to clarify the magnitude of this impact. The in-depth study such as the length or the participation status of the flipped classroom and the level of the speaking anxiety can be analyzed by the regression analysis.

## 7 Conclusion

At a broader level, this paper was motivated by the observation that the speaking anxiety is a common problem in senior high school and has seriously influenced students' English acquisition. However, the creative teaching and learning model—the flipped classroom, which improves the quantity and quality of the oral interactions can build more relaxed atmosphere for students to communicate and relieve the burden of speaking in public. According to the previous arguments, there are some relationships between the flipped classroom and the speaking anxiety.

To assess this kind of relationship, the dissertation uses various methods such as quantitative evaluation and action research to track the performance and psychological changes of the samples. This paper examined the impact of flipped classroom on speaking anxiety using independent-samples t-test, correlation analysis and regression model.

This study finds that flipped classroom has a positive impact on the speaking anxiety. Evidence and data from this study, together with the current situation of English teaching in senior high schools, leads us to use the flipped classroom creatively as a valuable tool to alleviate the speaking anxiety of the students and improve their English levels.

Although this study has already identified the positive impact of the flipped classroom on speaking anxiety, further research is needed on how to adapt the flipped classroom to the current status in some rural educational institutions to tackle the problem of Yang and accelerate the achievement of educational equality.

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