Pre-Service Teachers' Task Engagement in Flipped Chinese Language and Culture Learning

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ABSTRACT

The flipped classroom approach is becoming increasingly popular in higher education as a substitute for more conventional teaching methods. This study examines pre-service teachers' task engagement in flipped Chinese language and culture learning by employing three engagement facilitators as a theoretical framework. In this study, 50 American undergraduate pre-service teachers who were enrolled in an ESL methods course learned Chinese language and culture online outside of class and then engaged in practice and collaborative learning under the guidance of an instructor. Surveys, follow-up interviews, focus groups, and student documents were analyzed to explore how pre-service teachers perceived their task engagement in their learning tasks and the reasons for their perceptions. The main findings reveal that students are positively engaged in flipped learning when tasks match their abilities, offer opportunities to set their learning goals, provide instant feedback, and have clear learning goals, instructions, and directions. The results also indicate that a fixed course format, clearly defined learning tasks with step-by-step instructions, and effective assessment were essential in engaging students in learning. Conclusion and implications are generated for flipped instructional design and practice for foreign languages. Finally, limitations and future studies are discussed.

KEYWORDS

Chinese as a Foreign Language, Flipped Learning, Language and Culture Pedagogy, Pre-Service Teachers, Task Engagement

INTRODUCTION

Flipped learning is identified as an instructional strategy in which lectures or other direct instructional materials are delivered outside of class, typically using technology, and students participate in guided hands-on activities (e.g., small-group collaboration, jigsaw) face-to-face in class (Hamdan et al., 2013). This strategy changes the way students learn from the traditional in-class lecture and allows students to learn materials before class and apply the content of the learning materials during class

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(van Alten et al., 2020). Flipped instructional strategies have been widely implemented in lectures and other direct instructional materials delivered outside of class by using technology, and in class where students participate in guided hands-on activities (e.g., small-group collaboration, jigsaw) (Hamdan et al., 2013; Zou et al., 2020). Over the past several decades, flipped learning has emerged as a popular alternative to teacher-centered instruction in the education realm (van Alten et al., 2019), particularly in the foreign language field (Mehring & Leis, 2018). However, simply having students study online and practice in class does not necessarily lead to student task engagement, which is one of the goals of language teaching (Egbert et al., 2021). Furthermore, students may not be engaged in flipped language and culture tasks because language learning involves more cognitive loads of memory, which may result in low interest, decreased academic performance, and negative school experiences, and thus leads to disengagement. Therefore, it is important to explore students' perceived engagement in flipped language learning to understand their actual classroom experience and explore ways to enhance their engagement.

To address these issues, the purpose of this study is to explore how pre-service teachers perceived themselves to be engaged in flipped Chinese learning tasks and what facilitated them to engage in such tasks.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The research literature defines flipped instruction as a student-centered teaching approach that has its foundation in student task engagement (Bergmann & Sams, 2012). Task engagement is a strong predictor of student academic achievement (Egbert et al., 2021; Hiver et al., 2021; Jang et al., 2012). It is closely related to students' learning persistence, interest, and successful learning (Appleton et al., 2008; Chapman et al, 2011; Egbert et al., 2021; Rumberger & Rotermund, 2012; Wang & Degol, 2014). Teachers can enhance student engagement by designing class activities based on task engagement facilitators. This section explores engagement facilitators from theoretical perspectives.

Definition of Task Engagement

All learning is based on tasks; a task designed for language learning should provide learners with the opportunity to acquire and utilize language knowledge and skills to achieve specific learning objectives related to effective communication (Egbert, 2004; Wang et al., 2022). The construct of language task engagement, deeply rooted in the concept of engagement, has recently gained considerable research interest. Literature has defined student task engagement in various ways. Generally, it is defined as students' involvement with their tasks (Meltzer & Hamann, 2005; Lutz et al., 2006). For example, Reeve (2012) explained that task engagement is "the extent of student's active involvement in a learning activity" (p. 150). In line with Reeve, Oga-Baldwin (2019) claimed that task engagement is "visible and invisible actions that learners take toward learning" (p. 9). In a language learning setting, task engagement happens when language learners are involved in completing a language activity even though they are challenged by the class activities (Mohamadi, 2017). This study defines task engagement as the deep involvement that face-to-face or online activities can generate during students doing their tasks.

Task Engagement Facilitators

Task engagement facilitators are the factors that can impact student engagement in tasks and that should be considered in the instructional design (Lam et al., 2012). They are essential in understanding how tasks can engage students in learning (Egbert et al., 2021). Several studies investigate task engagement facilitators in language learning. Wang (2015) proposed five principles to engage students by integrating them into the design of online foreign language and culture curriculum development for teacher education. The five engagement principles are: 1) meeting students' needs; 2) offering opportunities for students to set learning goals; 3) matching the challenges of tasks with students'

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