# Using Flipped Classroom Approach to Teach Adjectives for Malaysian Year 4 Chinese ESL Learners

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#### ABSTRACT

This study was aimed at investigating the effectiveness of using Flipped Classroom Approach to teach adjectives to Malaysian Year 4 Chinese ESL learners. It was also designed to examine Malaysian Year 4 Chinese ESL learners' perceptions towards Flipped Classroom Approach. Two classes with 10 Year 4 Chinese ESL learners in Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan X were chosen as the research samples to form the experimental and control groups of this study. This intervention focused on the experimental group using Edmodo to acquire input before the lesson, while the control group followed the traditional classroom approach. This quasi-experimental research used several instruments to collect the data namely pre- and post- tests as well as questionnaires. The results showed that there was a difference in the test scores after the experimental group participants learned adjectives using the Flipped Classroom Approach as compared to the traditional teaching approach. The learners found it more effective to grasp knowledge during face-to-face lesson as they had acquired the relevant input online before the lesson. This study has provided insights for Malaysian primary ESL teachers to implement Flipped Classroom Approach in their classroom settings.

# KEYWORDS: Flipped Classroom Approach, traditional classroom approach, adjectives, Chinese ESL learners

#### Introduction

Grammar is the means to understand how language works (Saaristo, 2015). Brown (2015) indicates that grammar gives the learner the tool to talk about language by providing a terminology, a system of classification, and by making him or her aware of the basic pattern of English sentences. Therefore, mastering grammatical knowledge is vital for an individual to be able to speak a language to some degree of proficiency and say what he or she really wants to say (Cotter, 2007). Nevertheless, there is a growing concern about the level of English proficiency among learners in Malaysia as studies have shown that Malaysian learners do not seem to be able to attain reasonable English literacy even after learning English in school for more than 11 years (Naginder, 2006, as cited in Normazidah Che Musa, Koo & Hazita Azman, 2012).

According to Melor Md Yunus, Ainil Sulaiman, Mohd Hasrul Kamarulzaman and Noriah Mohd Ishak (2013), Malaysian primary ESL learners struggle with low levels of English literacy and they have to deal with various cultural and linguistic challenges in their efforts to master the language. During the process of English learning, learners mostly face difficulties

in using adjectives as they mostly think in and use the pattern of their first language (L1) rather than the second language (L2) (Omar, 2012). It is believed that teacher-centred approaches that are still widely used in Malaysian classroom settings such as chalk-and-talk drill method will bore the learners and demotivate them in learning adjectives as they play the role as passive recipients instead of active learners in teacher-centred classroom (Rocca, 2010, as cited in Alireza Memari Hanjani & Li, 2017).

Therefore, it is essential to identify the right teaching method to deliver effective grammar lessons in Malaysian primary ESL classroom to enhance their grammatical competence (Ganapathy, Shuib, Gunasegaran & Azizan, 2016). Ganapathy et al. (2016) suggests that the English language teaching approach has to be shifted from a traditional "teacher-centred" to a more collaborative and interactive style so that the learning process will be livelier and more interesting. In relation to the concept of learner-centred learning, flipped classroom approach has been given due attention as an effective approach of pupil-centred learning for 21st century learners (Azlina A. Rahman, Hasnah Mohamed, Baharuddin Aris & Norasykin Mohd Said, 2015).

A large number of research have proven that this pedagogical concept is workable and it brings positive impact to the teaching and learning processes (Butt, 2014; Fulmerfelt & Green, 2013; Pang & Yap, 2014). However, research on flipped classroom approach in Malaysian primary school settings is limited as stated by Mukherjee and Pillai (2013). Therefore, this study was expected to investigate the effectiveness of Flipped Classroom Approach to teach adjectives to Malaysian Year 4 Chinese ESL learners as well as their perceptions towards Flipped Classroom Approach. In particular, the study seeks to address the following research questions.

- 1. Is there any difference between the test scores of experimental and control group in mastering adjectives?
- 2. What are the Malaysian Year 4 Chinese ESL learners' perceptions towards Flipped Classroom Approach?

## Literature review

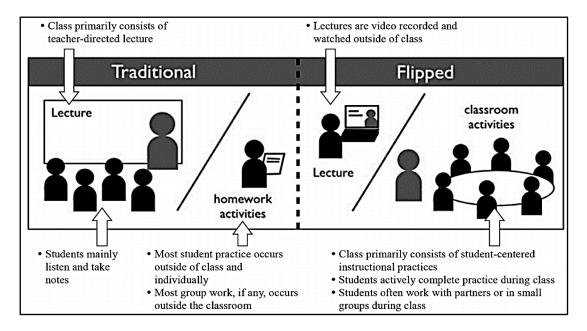
## Concept of Flipped Classroom Approach

The Flipped Classroom Approach refers to the idea that the lectures and explanations would no longer be done in class but at home, leaving what was previously treated as homework to be done during the class time (Bergman & Sams, 2012).

This concept was popularised by two rural secondary teachers of Chemistry, Jonathan Bergmann and Arron Sams in 2007 (Hamdan, McKnight, McKnight & Arfstrom, 2013; Siegle, 2014). Sams and Bergmann created the method of flip teaching as a response to the large amount of learner absences that resulted from the far distances their learners had to travel for school-related sports and activities (Bergmann & Sams, 2012, p. 3), and there were other learners who had trouble with certain concepts which hindered homework completion until they received help in class the next day (Logan, 2015). Therefore, they used videos to record lectures, demonstrations, and presentations that they decided to post on YouTube for learners to view (Hamdan et al., 2013; Siegle, 2014). This motivated a number of other

researchers to conduct more research on this approach and found it workable in classroom settings. However, Bergmann and Sams did not claim to have invented the method. It was initially invented by Maureen Lage, Glenn Platt and Michael Treglia, but it was not popularised as YouTube was yet to flourish and video sharing was not in place yet at that point of time (Goss, 2014).

In Flipped Classroom Approach, the roles of learners as well as teachers have been shifted, where the learners take the responsibility of their own learning and teachers are accountable to provide guidance and assistance so that the learners will be able to understand the particular content knowledge effectively. Figure 1 below depicts the differences between traditional classroom approach and Flipped Classroom Approach as visualised by Dove and Dove (2015).



*Figure 1.* A comparison between the traditional classroom and the flipped classroom approaches (Dove and Dove, 2015, p. 169)

## Previous Research Findings

Generally, previous studies on Flipped Classroom Approach had given focus on learners' achievement. Most studies found that this approach positively affects learners' performance and proficiency levels in various areas of English language. Bergmann and Sams (2012) found that Flipped Classroom Approach is beneficial in engaging learners' interest, from previously bored, restless, or unfocused to very engaged and play the role as active learners" (p. 26). A research by Farina Nozakiah Tazijan, Che Haslina Abdullah, Noorliza Zainol, Syuhirdy Mat Noor and Noorsa Riza Johar (2017) towards a group of ESL learners in MARA University of Technology (UiTM) Penang, Malaysia found that Flipped Classroom Approach had also positively impacted the ESL learners as they became more active and were easily motivated to speak in class. 65.8% and 19.05% of the learners agreed and strongly agreed respectively that they had improved in their overall language performance and skills. Jehan Mahmoud El-Bassuony (2016) on the other hand, conducted a research on secondary school learners to examine the effectiveness of Flipped Classroom Approach in developing their speaking and writing skills. The results revealed that the highest level of improvement was obtained by underachievers in the experimental group; 80.8% on grammatical performance in writing

followed by their normal peers 66.86%. In addition, Flipped Classroom Approach was utilised to develop the learners' other competencies in the English language, such as oral fluency, grammar and vocabulary. The results illustrate that the learners had improved in those areas, as well as in their self-esteem (Han, 2015; Hsieh, Wu & Marek, 2017). Pudin (2017) study was set out to explore the effects of Flipped Classroom Approach in a grammar classroom. The perceptions of 120 learners on higher Malaysian University English Test (MUET) were explored to study its effectiveness and feasibility. This was achieved through a questionnaire which was then analysed. The analysis of the findings showed that most of the learners were keen to learn grammar through flipped classroom as opposed to traditional grammar classroom. 66.6% of the participants agreed or strongly agreed that flipped classroom did improve their understanding of grammar.

However, Snowden's (2012) findings showed no significant difference between learner perception and achievement in the traditional and flipped learning experience. Mason, Shuman and Cook (2013) found that there was no difference in perception between the flipped classroom approach and traditional classroom approach. Instead, live lectures seem to be more effective than video instruction itself (Ramlogan, Raman & Sweet, 2014; Wilson & Sipe, 2014). These findings are relevant to Johnson and Renner's (2012) results which argue that traditional methods still needs to be adopted because not all topics can be practised in the flipped classroom environment. Furthermore, Siti Zuraidah Md Osman, Rozinah Jamaludin and Nur Eliza Mokhtar (2014) realised that some learners in flipped classroom did not fully access the online materials, which has caused teachers to spend more time on problem solving in the flipped classroom as compared to the traditional class. They also felt that although there was lack of facilities, the flipped class can still be implemented (Siti Zuraidah Md Osman et al., 2014).

To sum up, the previous research findings have shown that Flipped Classroom Approach is workable with positive impact in the ESL classrooms, yet the implementation of this approach in Malaysian primary ESL classroom settings is fairly limited.

## Methodology

### Research Design

A quasi-experimental research design, sometimes called the "pre-post intervention" or "beforeafter intervention" study design was adopted in this study to efficiently evaluate the effectiveness of a programme where respondents who are unequal, balanced or share similar characteristic cannot be randomly assigned (Chua, 2016). Lodico, Spaulding and Voegtle (2010) found that a quasi-experimental design is one of the strongest designs for drawing conclusions about cause and effect which is relevant to this study's first research question.

### **Research Participants**

The participants in this research were Year 4 Chinese ESL learners from SJK© X, Skudai. A sample of 20 participants aged 10, were selected and divided into experimental and control groups: Flipped Classroom Approach and traditional classroom approach. The sample size was small as only two classes with of 10 pupils were chosen. Therefore, the researcher has ensured both experimental and control group participants' English proficiency level is similar.

## Data Collection Procedure

Before the treatment session, a pre-test designed by the researcher was implemented for both experimental and control groups. This is intended to measure both group participants' mastery level of adjectives before and after treatment (Creswell, 2015). During the implementation of the research process, both experimental and control groups studied adjectives using two different approaches. This grammatical item was chosen from KSSR English Year 4 textbook syllabus (Yoong, Lee & Kanagamani., 2013). The procedure of intervention for experimental group was adapted from Demirel's (2016) 'flipping the class' procedure as shown in Figure 2 below.

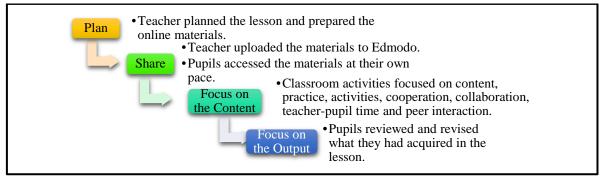


Figure 2. "Flipping the class" procedure, adapted from Demirel (2016, p. 111)

Perhaps the vital step of the process was planning for the lesson and preparing relevant online materials before class to get the researcher and the participants ready for the process. Teacher uploaded the materials to Edmodo, an online learning portal, through which the teacher integrated technology into learning. The next step was for the participants to access the materials at their own pace in a free and relaxed manner as long as they accomplished the assigned task before the lesson. After that, the face-to-face class was allocated for activities which allow them to utilise their higher order thinking skills. In focusing on the content, the 21<sup>st</sup> century "4Cs" skills namely critical and creative thinking, communication and collaborated for getting some ideas and output. These skills may assist them in comprehending and mastering the grammatical knowledge. At the end of the procedure, the classroom activity focused on their output or language production to provide a platform for reviewing and revising the knowledge they had acquired throughout the lesson.

Meanwhile, the control group learned the adjectives using a traditional classroom approach of the "Presentation-Practice-Production" structure. It is a deductive and traditional classroom approach where teacher presents in the target language and allows learners to practise it through very controlled activities, and learners are given the opportunity to practise the target language in free practice activities which bring in other language elements at the final stage of the lesson (British Council, 2006). Both groups were given a post-test after the intervention, and the experimental group participants were given a questionnaire to obtain their perception towards the intervention.

## **Results and discussion**

The data collected using pre-test and post-test and the questionnaires were analysed quantitatively. Their results are discussed below. The findings of this study are presented in order of the two research questions.

*Research Question 1: Is there any difference between the test scores of the experimental and control group in mastering adjectives?* 

In order to answer this study's first research question, the 20 participants in both groups had done the pre-test followed by the intervention and finally the post-test to identify whether there was any difference in their mastery level by receiving different types of instructions. The items analysed were the pre-test and post-test scores as well as the margin of improvement. Table 1 shows the pre-test and post-test scores obtained by each participant and the margin of improvement.

	Experimental Group				Control Group			
Participant	Pre- test (%)	Post- Test (%)	Margin of Improvement (%)	Participant	Pre- test (%)	Post- Test (%)	Margin of Improvement (%)	
1	70	100	+30	1	25	20	-5	
2	65	100	+35	2	0	10	+10	
3	75	95	+20	3	5	50	+45	
4	50	80	+30	4	0	30	+30	
5	75	95	+20	5	0	20	+20	
6	85	100	+15	6	25	20	-5	
7	60	90	+30	7	0	20	+20	
8	50	80	+30	8	20	50	+30	
9	75	100	+25	9	5	25	+20	
10	40	85	+45	10	15	5	-10	

*Table 1.* Participants' pre-test and post-test scores and the margin of improvement

The participants' achievement was further analysed by calculating the mean and standard deviation of the pre-test and post-test, as well as the sum of margin of both ropus' improvement.

Table 2. Mean and standard deviation of participants' scores

C	Μ	ean	Standard Deviation		
Group	Pre-test (%)	Post-test (%)	Pre-test	Post-test	
Experimental	64.5	92.5	13.50	7.83	
Control	9.5	25	10.11	20.98	

Based on the findings tabulated in Table 1 and 2, the achievement of experimental group had improved as the mean score increased from 64.5 to 92.5. The mean difference was 28 which implying that there was a significant effect on the learners' mastery level of adjectives when flipped classroom approach was used during the intervention. The standard deviation of the post-test was 7.83 and it shows that the experimental group participants' scores were between 80 and 100 which is higher than the pre-test's mean that is 64.5. This means that flipped classroom approach has an effect on learners' mastery of adjectives.

adjectives.

Based on the findings above, it can be interpreted that both flipped classroom approach and traditional classroom approach have developed the learners' mastery level of English adjectives in which both experimental and control groups have positive margin of improvement which were 280 and 155 respectively. Nonetheless, the post-test results show that adopting flipped classroom approach appears to play a role in enhancing their knowledge of adjectives as the mean score of the experimental group was higher than that of the control group. This is consistent with the findings of studies in other cultural and educational contexts such as Kang (2015) and Han (2015), whose studies found that the flipped classroom approach improved learners' grammar knowledge when compared to other instructional methods.

traditional classroom approach also had some effects on the learners' mastery level of

According to the data tabulated in Table 1, it shows that all participants have improved their scores by involving in the lesson using flipped classroom approach to learn English adjectives; this indicates that learners who are learning English grammar under flipped classroom approach may overcome the difficulty of applying the learned grammar rules while practising English, as found by Al-Hamlan and Baniabdelrahman (2015). This proves that flipping their learning enables them to better comprehend the content. This is supported by Homma (2015) who found that learners independently devoted time and effort to finding the technological learning tools and resources they needed to expose themselves to English for their ungraded task (Han, 2015).

In contrast, the control group participants have not fully acquired the English adjectives as onethird of participants showed a decline in their pre-test and post-test scores. However, there were two-thirds of the participants who improved their mastery level of adjectives. Yet, the scores were lower than the experimental group participants. Studies show that the traditional teaching practices, which have an inclination towards a teacher-centred teaching, tend to adopt a oneway communication, and have been proven a failure when it comes to developing learners' thinking abilities as well as exploiting their true potential (Maruli & Wayan, as cited in Salmiza Saleh & Afik Aziz, 2012). Thus, teacher-centred approaches that are still widely used in Malaysian classroom settings such as chalk-and-talk drill method will bore the learners and demotivate them in learning adjectives as they are playing the role as passive recipients instead of active learners in teacher-centred classroom (Rocca, 2010, as cited in Alireza Memari Hanjani & Li, 2017).

Research Question 2: What are the Malaysian Year 4 ESL learners' perceptions towards Flipped Classroom Approach?

A set of questionnaire adapted from Bell (2015) and Johnson (2013) were distributed to 10 learners in the experimental group to answer the second research question of this study. The results are shown in Table 3 below.

No.	Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not sure	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	Flipped Classroom Approach is more engaging than the lessons I had before.	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	70.00% 7	30.00% 3
2	Flipped Classroom Approach has improved my mastery of adjectives.	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	10.00% 1	60.00% 6	30.00% 3
3	I am more motivated to learn English adjectives in Flipped Classroom Approach.	0.00%	20.00% 2	0.00%	40.00% 4	40.00% 4
4	I like the routine of reading the materials at home and then doing activities about them in class.	20.00% 2	10.00% 1	20.00% 2	40.00% 4	10.00% 1
5	I could study at my own pace in Flipped Classroom Approach.	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	50.00% 5	50.00% 5
6	Flipped Classroom Approach encourages me to work with my classmates actively.	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	40.00% 4	60.00% 6
7	I contacted with my teacher more often in Flipped Classroom Approach.	0.00%	0.00%	10.00% 1	30.00% 3	60.00% 6
8	I was able to apply what I have learnt in the Flipped Classroom Approach into real life settings.	0.00% 0	20.00% 2	0.00% 0	50.00% 5	30.00% 3
9	I needed academic and technical assistance in Flipped Classroom Approach.	20.00% 2	40.00% 4	0.00%	10.00% 1	30.00% 3
10	Overall, I prefer learning English adjectives via Flipped Classroom Approach compared to traditional approach.	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	30.00% 3	70.00% 7

Table 3. Malaysian Year 4 ESL learners' perceptions towards Flipped Classroom Approach

There were seven items assessing on learners' general perceptions of the Flipped Classroom Approach. Item 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 8 and 10 addressed general Flipped Classroom Approach application. In addition, there were three items in this questionnaire which examined how learners felt about being in a classroom that was self-paced, namely Item 4, 5 and 9.

## Participants' general perceptions on Flipped Classroom Approach application

Based on the findings from the questionnaire, it was found that all participants had positive perceptions towards Flipped Classroom Approach in learning English adjectives as the participants strongly agreed (mode=7) that they preferred learning English adjectives via Flipped Classroom Approach as compared to traditional classroom approach. Most of the participants also agreed (mode=7) or strongly agreed that Flipped Classroom Approach is more engaging than the lessons they had before. When utilizing Flipped Classroom Approach in a language classroom, some of the authors (Hung, 2015; Mehring, 2016) noted that more time was spent using the target language during the in-class activity. The participants also agreed that this approach encourages them to work with their classmates actively (mode=6). Marks (2015) notes that a flipped classroom improves discussion during the in-class activity, This is

in line with the aim of the English language. Moreover, flipped classroom creates well-suited environments where discussions can take place as the in-class activities aim at all learners being engaged, applying concepts and sharing ideas (McLaughlin et al., 2016). This classroom environment results in the effective application of the grammar knowledge into real life settings as shown in Item 8 whereby 80% of participants find themselves are able to apply the knowledge obtained via Flipped Classroom Approach into real life settings.

Another recurring finding from the questionnaire was the discussion about whether Flipped Classroom Approach enhances teacher and learner relations due to allowing more time for learners' individual needs. Based on the finding in Item 7, it is found that there were 30% and 60% of participants agreed or strongly agreed respectively that they contacted their teacher more often by Flipped Classroom Approach. Muldrow (2013) proposes that a teacher finds difficult in helping each learner in an ESL classroom of at least 30 learners at the same time. Hence, incorporating Flipped Classroom Approach in teaching may allow more one-on-one time for each learner's individual needs, which correlates with the rationale behind the method (Muldrow, 2013).

## Participants' perceptions about being in a classroom that was self-paced

Despite increased learner engagement, the transition from passive to active learning, as well as the transition from a teacher-centred to learner-centred environment are factors that some of the sources note as obstacles for the learners when utilizing Flipped Classroom Approach (Butzler, 2016; McLaughlin et al., 2014). Consequently, learners will need guidance in a flipped classroom in order to give successful outcome. There were 30% of participants who strongly agreed that they needed academic and technical assistance throughout the intervention of Flipped Classroom Approach. The research participants' lack of literacy in technology at home might become one of the barriers (Nielsen, 2012) in which they might not be able to access the materials provided by the researcher. Engin (2014) states that learners must have the support of a teacher when carrying out various projects that Flipped Classroom Approach requires in order to accomplish the tasks assigned by the teacher on the online portal flawlessly.

One of the important features found when applying Flipped Classroom Approach is the increase in responsibility that learners gradually learned to take for their own learning at their own pace (Ali & Säberg, 2016). This led to learners being involved in their own learning as well as adjusting the learning to fit their own needs (Hung, 2014; Muldrow, 2013). Item 5 shows that all participants in the experimental group agreed and strongly agreed that were able to study at their own pace in Flipped Classroom Approach. This result indicates that Flipped Classroom Approach has promoted learners' empowerment, development, and ability to learn independently or at their own pace (McLaughlin et al., 2016; Galway et al., 2014). This finding is also relevant to the findings of Muldrow (2013) and Gudenrath (2014) in which they find that using educational videos as one of the instructional methods in Flipped Classroom Approach saved the teachers' time from having to explain the same content over and over again, and also allowed learners to access the materials again at their own pace.

However, since this approach differs from the lessons the learners had before, there were 50% of them strongly disagree, disagree or unsure whether they like the routine of reading the materials at home and then doing activities about them in class. This finding is supported by Hao (2015) that not all learners are ready for the responsibility that the approach requires. There are studies which show that the learners did not get used to the routine of Flipped Classroom Approach (Schultz, Duffield, Rasmussen & Wageman, 2014). The learners were not self-

disciplined to complete the required homework and came to class unprepared (Herreid & Schiller, 2012). Therefore, McLaughlin et al. (2016) states that having learners do the pre-work in order for the in-class activity to be as beneficial as possible is one of the challenges of implementing this approach in classroom settings.

To answer the second research question, it can be interpreted from the findings of questionnaire that most learners responded positively that Flipped Classroom Approach supported their learning. Learners found that they had further opportunities to communicate with their classmates and teacher, finish their homework in class, and to engage in meaningful classroom activities. Nonetheless, some of the learners were not used to the routine of reading the materials at home and then doing activities about them in class. Also, they might need necessary academic and technical assistance in Flipped Classroom Approach to complete the tasks assigned by the teacher.

## Conclusion

It is important to mention that the results of the study are limited by the sample size, the characteristics of the subjects, the length of the study and the selected grammatical item used in the study. Within these limitations, it can be concluded that Flipped Classroom Approach is effective in developing Malaysian Year 4 Chinese ESL learners' mastery level of English adjectives. These results support the indicators of success Flipped Classroom Approach studies revealed in other contexts. This study also found that learners hold positive perceptions towards the Flipped Classroom Approach as it gave them more opportunities to communicate and collaborate with their peers and helped them to support their understanding of the lesson by accessing the online materials on Edmodo. To sum up, the results of the study can provide the basis for many other treatments based on Flipped Classroom Approach to develop different skills in different language learning contexts in the Malaysian Primary ESL classroom. It is hoped that this research has given a clearer view on the implementation of Flipped Classroom Approach to develop more effective and attractive teaching and learning activities in order to enhance ESL learners' adjective learning.

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