

The effectiveness of using Flipped Classroom Approach to teach adjectives to Malaysian Year 4 Chinese ESL learners

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the effectiveness of using Flipped Classroom Approach to teach adjectives for Malaysian Year 4 Chinese ESL learners. It is also designed to examine Malaysian Year 4 Chinese ESL learners' perceptions towards Flipped Classroom Approach. An experimental and control group which consisted of 10 Malaysian Year 4 Chinese ESL learners respectively in Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan X were formed to be the research participants in this study. This intervention focused on the experimental group using Edmodo to acquire input before the lesson, whereby the control group followed the traditional classroom approach. The study aimed to investigate the differences of both experimental and control groups' performance after learning adjectives with different approaches. The quasi-experimental study used several instruments to collect the data, namely pre- and post- tests as well as questionnaire. Based on the findings, there is a significant difference among the experimental group participants in learning adjectives with Flipped Classroom Approach compared to traditional teaching approach. The Flipped Classroom Approach is effective to grasp knowledge during face-to-face lesson as participants had acquired the relevant input online before the lesson. This study has provided the findings and relevant information for policymakers, teachers, parents and pupils on the implementation of Flipped Classroom Approach in a Malaysian primary ESL classroom. Nonetheless, the results are pertaining to the given context and yet to be generalised.

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

Introduction

Grammar is the means to understand how language works (Saaristo, 2015). It 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 (Brown, 2015). Thus, grammatical knowledge plays an important role to an ESL learner in order to speak a language to some degree of proficiency and say what he or she really wants to say as found by Cotter (2005). Yet, there is a growing concern about the level of English proficiency among Malaysian ESL learners. Research found that many of them do not seem to be able to attain reasonable English literacy even after learning English in school for more than 11 years (Naginder, 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 hold low English literacy levels and they have to face various cultural and linguistic challenges while acquiring English language in Malaysia. They 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 bring the pupils into boredom and therefore demotivate them in learning adjectives as they

are playing the role of passive recipients instead of active learners in teacher-centred classroom (Rocca, as cited in Alireza Memari Hanjani & Li, 2017).

Hence, it is important to identify the effective grammar teaching method in Malaysian primary ESL classroom to enhance the learners' grammatical competence (Ganapathy, Shuib, Gunasegaran & Azizan, 2016). It is suggested that the English language teaching approach has to be reformed from a traditional "teacher-centred" one to a more collaborative and interactive style in order to provide Malaysian ESL learners a livelier and more interesting learning process (Ganapathy et al., 2016). In conjunction with pupil-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).

This pedagogical concept has been examined worldwide and results show that it brings positive impact to the teaching and learning processes (Butt, 2014; Fulmerfelt & Green, 2013; Pang & Yap, 2014). However, research on the Flipped Classroom Approach in Malaysian primary school settings are limited as stated by Mukherjee and Pillai (2013). For this reason, a quasi-experiment on using Flipped Classroom Approach to teach adjectives in Malaysian Year 4 Chinese intermediate ESL learners has been proposed in this study.

Literature review

Overview of Flipped Classroom Approach

Flipped Classroom Approach underlies the idea that the lectures and explanations will be done in their home instead of in the school, while they will accomplish what was previously treated as homework in the classroom (Bergman & Sams, 2012). This approach has been further explained by Bergman and Sams (2012) as below:

Clearly, the class is centered around the students and not the teacher. Students are responsible for viewing the videos and asking appropriate questions. The teacher is simply there to provide expert feedback. The students are responsible for completing and sharing their work. Because a solution guide is available, students are motivated to learn, not just to complete the assignments in a rote manner. Students are responsible for making appropriate use of the resident expert to help them understand the concepts. The role of the teacher in the classroom is to help students, not to deliver information. (pp. 16-17)

In other words, there is a shift between the pupils' and teachers' roles, whereby the pupils take the responsibility of their own learning and teachers are accountable to provide guidance and assistance so that the pupils will be able to understand the particular content knowledge effectively. Figure 1 below depicted the differences between traditional classroom approach and Flipped Classroom Approach visualised by Dove and Dove (2015).

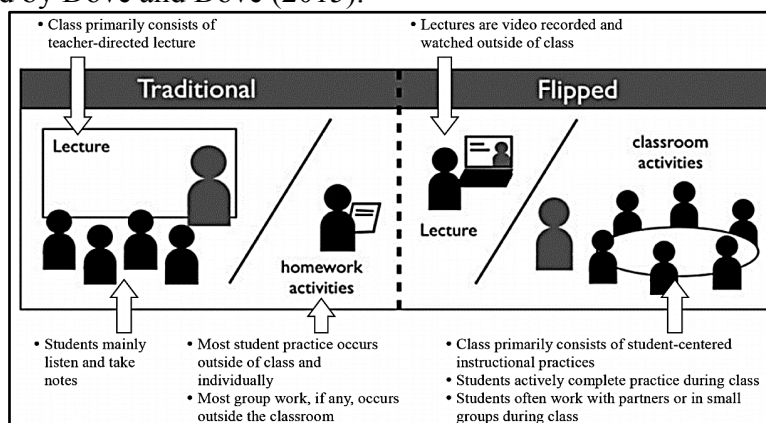


Figure 1. A comparison of the traditional classroom and the flipped classroom approaches.
(Dove & Dove, 2015, p. 169)

Research on Flipped Classroom Approach

Most of the previous studies on Flipped Classroom Approach focus on the pupils' achievement and show that the approach develops pupils' English language performance and proficiency levels. Research done by Farina Nozakiah Tazijan, Che Haslina Abdullah, Noorliza Zainol, Syuhirdy Mat Noor and Noorsa Riza Johar (2017) on a group of ESL learners in MARA University of Technology (UiTM) Penang, found that Flipped Classroom Approach has a positive impact on the ESL learners. 65.8% students agree that they have improved in their overall language performance while another 19.05% of the students strongly agree respectively. They found themselves to participate more actively and feel motivated to speak in class. McLaughlin, White, Khanova and Yuriev (2016) found that Flipped Classroom Approach promotes pupils to acquire the input independently and discuss the acquired input with their peers critically, despite that completing the pre-lesson task might be one of the barriers while implementing the approach. Also, Pudis's (2017) study on Flipped Classroom Approach towards 120 Malaysian University English Test (MUET) candidates shows that most of the learners were keen to learn grammar through flipped classroom as opposed to traditional grammar classroom. A total of 66.6% of the participants agree or strongly agree that flipped classroom has improved their understanding of grammar. In other studies such as Han (2015) and Kang (2015) which exploited Flipped Classroom Approach in other English language areas, the findings show that the approach may develop students' confidence as well as oral fluency skills. Flipped Classroom Approach also allows teachers to fulfil each learner's learning need by having one-on-one interaction via online learning platform as a teacher feels challenging to assist every learner in a large ESL classroom (Muldrow, 2013).

Likewise, in another study, Snowden (2012) found that there is no difference between the students' achievement in the traditional and flipped classroom. Some of the learners perceive that live lectures are more effective than video instruction itself (Ramlogan, Raman & Sweet, 2014; Wilson & Sipe, 2014) and they are not used to the approach which differ with what they had before (Butzler, 2016; Schultz, Duffield, Rasmussen & Wageman, 2014). The findings are relevant to Johnson and Renner's (2012) results which argued that not all topics can be taught via Flipped Classroom Approach. According to (Maruli & Wayan, as cited in Salmiza Saleh & Afik Aziz, 2012), there are some teachers who prefer to be "tradition-bearers" by employing a more traditional classroom approach during the teaching and learning processes which restricts their learners to develop their potentials and thinking abilities as it demands less effort, less creative thinking and less time-consuming compared to Flipped Classroom Approach.

Furthermore, even though the teachers were aware of the benefits of Flipped Classroom Approach, there were some students in the flipped classrooms who did not fully access the online materials due to lack of facilities, and this caused the implementation and a longer time in solving the obstacles while practising Flipped Classroom Approach (Siti Zuraidah Md Osman, Rozinah Jamaludin & Nur Eliza Mokhtar, 2014). Apart from that, learner's self-discipline also become one of the barriers to effective implementation of Flipped Classroom Approach as they are required to commit to the full responsibility that Flipped Classroom Approach requires (Hao, 2015; Herreid & Schiller, 2012) by accessing the materials and completing the pre-lesson task before the lesson (McLaughlin et al., 2016).

To sum up, it is believed that Flipped Classroom Approach is operational with positive impact in the ESL classrooms, yet the implementation of this approach in Malaysian primary ESL classroom settings is still limited. Therefore, this study was carried out to investigate the effectiveness of Flipped Classroom Approach to teach adjectives for Malaysian Year 4 Chinese ESL learners as well as their perceptions towards Flipped Classroom Approach.

Methodology

Research Design

Pre-test–Post-test Non-equivalent Group Design which is under quasi-experimental research design was adopted in this study to evaluate and compare the scores across conditions to determine whether one group demonstrated a bigger improvement in knowledge of fractions than another (Lodico, Spaulding and Voegtle, 2010) in which the respondents who are unequal, balanced or share similar characteristic cannot be randomly assigned (**Chua, 2016**).

Purpose of the Research

This study aims to investigate the effectiveness of using Flipped Classroom Approach in teaching English adjectives to Malaysian Year 4 Chinese ESL learners and also to identify their perceptions towards Flipped Classroom Approach. In particular, the study seeks to address the following research questions.

1. Are there any significant differences between the experimental and control groups in mastering adjectives by using Flipped Classroom Approach?
2. What are the Malaysian Year 4 Chinese ESL learners’ perceptions towards Flipped Classroom Approach?

Research Participants

The participants for this research are Year 4 Chinese ESL learners from SJK(C) X, Skudai. 20 participants aged 10 were selected and divided into experimental and control groups randomly to receive different interventions. Construction of a reasonably similar control group is key and the matching methods described in the previous module may be used to help ensure the external validity of the research (Campbell & Stanley, 2015). The participants whom are in the same level will be streamed to two different groups to ensure the similarity of English proficiency level among both experimental and control group participants.

Data Collection Procedure

Before the treatment session, both experimental and control groups completed a pre-test to measure both group participants’ mastery level of adjectives before and after treatment (Creswell, 2015). Then, the experimental and control groups were taught adjectives in two different types of instructions. This grammatical item was chosen from KSSR English Year 4 textbook syllabus (Yoong, Lee & Kanagamani, 2013). The procedure of intervention for experimental group had been visualised as shown in Figure 2 below.

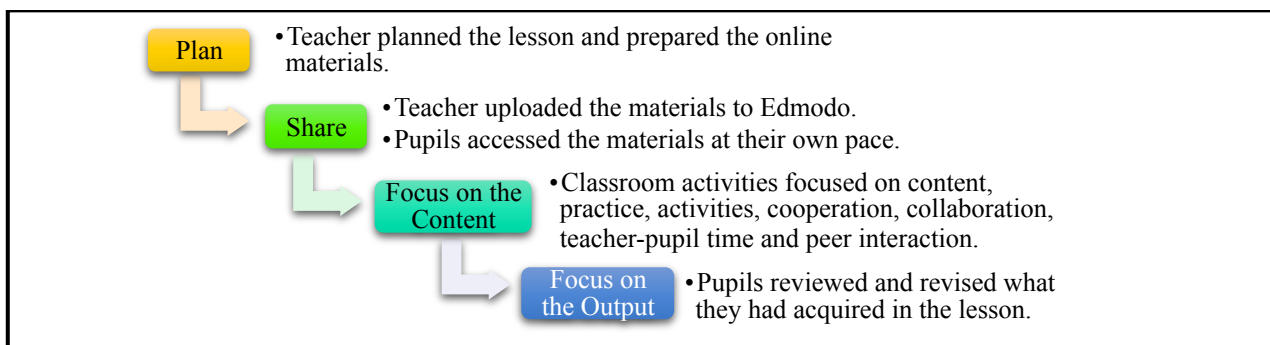


Figure 2. “Flipping the class” procedure, adapted from Demirel (2016, p. 111)

The first and maybe the most vital step of the process is planning the lesson and preparing the relevant online materials before the classroom time 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 is the participants accessing the materials at their own pace in a free and relaxed manner, which means they accessed the materials whenever they wanted to, so long as they accomplished the assigned task before the lesson. The face-to-face class was allocated for activities which practises their higher order thinking skills. In focusing the content, the 21st century “4Cs” skills namely critical and creative thinking, communication and collaboration skills were emphasised in which the participants communicated 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 them for reviewing and revising the knowledge they had acquired throughout the lesson.

On the other hand, the control group will learn the adjectives in traditional classroom approach with the “Presentation-Practice-Production” structure. It is a deductive and traditional classroom approach which the teacher presents in the target language and then gives pupils the opportunity to practise it through very controlled activities, and pupils 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 will be given a post-test after the intervention, and the experimental group participants were given a questionnaire to be completed 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. The findings of this study are discussed and presented in order of the two research questions.

RQ1: Are there any significant differences between the experimental and control groups in mastering adjectives by using Flipped Classroom Approach?

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.

Table 1

Participants' pre-test and post-test scores and the margin of improvement

Participant	Experimental Group			Participant	Control Group		
	Pre-test (%)	Post-Test (%)	Margin of Improvement (%)		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
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The participants' achievement was further analysed by calculating the mean and standard of pre-test and post-test, as well as the sum of margin of improvement for both groups.

Table 2

Mean and standard deviation of participants' scores and the margin of improvement

Group	Mean		Standard Deviation		Margin of Improvement
	Pre-test (%)	Post-test (%)	Pre-test	Post-test	
Experimental	64.5	92.5	13.50	7.83	+280
Control	9.5	25	10.11	20.98	+155

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 implies 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 showed that the experimental group participants' scores lied between 80 and 100 which is higher than the pre-test's mean that is 64.5. This means that Flipped Classroom approach has significant effect on the learners' mastery of adjectives.

On the other hand, the control group participants' pre-test mean value was 9.5 while the post-test gained by them was 25 so the mean difference is 15.5. However, in comparison, the standard deviation of the control group declined as the standard deviation for the post-test is 20.98 and far from the mean as compared to the pre-test that is 10.11. The increase of mean score test as well as the standard deviation of pre-test and post-test indicated that traditional classroom approach had some effects on the learners' mastery level of adjectives as shown in the margin of improvement which is +155, yet it has only some effects on their achievements compared to Flipped Classroom Approach.

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 are 280 and 155 respectively. Nonetheless, the post-test results show that the experimental group's mean score was higher than that of the control group, which indicates that adopting Flipped Classroom Approach is effective in enhancing their grammar knowledge as found by Kang (2015) and Han (2015) who had done the research on Flipped Classroom Approach in other cultural and educational contexts.

According to the data tabulated in Table 1, it shows that all participants have improved their scores by receiving Flipped Classroom Approach to learn English adjectives; this indicates that learners who are learning English grammar under Flipped Classroom Approach was able to effectively apply the acquired grammatical rules as found by Pudin (2017). This proved that the learners can comprehend the content better by flipping their learning process as found by Homma (2015) because Flipped Classroom Approach requires learners to independently devote their own time and effort to utilise various resources for their ungraded task (Han, 2015).

In contrast, the control group participants have not fully acquired the English adjectives as one-third of participants had a decline in their pre-test and post-test scores. However, two-thirds of participants have improved their mastery level of adjectives. Yet, the scores were lower than the experimental group participants. Research shows that the traditional teaching practices, which have an inclination towards a teacher-centred teaching, tend to adopt a one-way 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 pupils and demotivate them in learning adjectives as they are playing the role as passive recipients instead of active learners in teacher-centred classrooms (Rocca, 2010, as cited in Alireza Memari Hanjani & Li, 2017).

RQ2: 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 given to 10 pupils in the experimental group to answer the second research question of this study and the results are shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3

Malaysian Year 4 ESL learners' perceptions towards Flipped Classroom Approach

No.	Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not sure	Agree	Strongly Agree	Weighted Average
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	4.3
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	4.2
3	I am interested to acquire English adjectives in Flipped Classroom Approach.	0.00% 0	20.00% 2	0.00% 0	40.00% 4	40.00% 4	4.0
4	I like to learn at home and do the "homework" in the classroom.	20.00% 2	10.00% 1	20.00% 2	40.00% 4	10.00% 1	3.1
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	4.5
6	Flipped Classroom Approach encourages me to work with my classmates actively.	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	40.00% 4	60.00% 6	4.6
7	I contacted with my teacher more often in Flipped Classroom Approach.	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	10.00% 1	30.00% 3	60.00% 6	4.5
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	3.9
9	I needed academic and technical assistance in Flipped Classroom Approach.	20.00% 2	40.00% 4	0.00% 0	10.00% 1	30.00% 3	2.9
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	4.7

The 10 items in the questionnaire aimed to identify the experimental groups' perceptions on Flipped Classroom Approach. Item 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 8 and 10 addressed general Flipped Classroom Approach application, while Item 4, 5, and 9 were posed to examine how they felt about being in a self-paced classroom.

Participants' general perceptions on Flipped Classroom Approach application

Based on the findings from the questionnaire, it is found that all participants have positive perceptions towards Flipped Classroom Approach in learning English adjectives as the participants strongly agree (mode=7) that they preferred learning English adjectives via Flipped Classroom Approach compared to traditional classroom approach with a weighted average of 4.7. Most of the participants also agree (mode=7) or strongly agree that Flipped Classroom Approach is more engaging than the lessons they had before. The learners spent more time using the target language while they are in classroom activity under Flipped Classroom Approach as found by Farina Nozakiah Tazijan et al. (2017). Their findings were also agreed by the participants that this approach encourages them to work with their classmates actively (mode=6). Discussions can take place in the well-suited flipped classroom environment as they will be being engaged, applying knowledge and sharing thoughts to one another (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 able to apply the knowledge obtained via Flipped Classroom Approach into real life settings.

Another recurring finding from the questionnaire is whether Flipped Classroom Approach promotes rapport among teacher and learners. 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. It is common that a teacher finds difficult in helping each learner in an ESL classroom of at least 30 pupils as found by Muldrow (2013). Hence, incorporating Flipped Classroom Approach in teaching adjectives may fulfil each learner's individual needs during one-on-one interaction via Flipped Classroom Approach (Muldrow, 2013).

Participants' perceptions about being in a self-paced classroom

The learners might face certain obstacles when they receive instructions via Flipped Classroom Approach as it differs from what they used to have before (Butzler, 2016). Therefore, sufficient guidance should be provided to learners for a pleasurable 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 (Siti Zuraidah Md Osman et al., 2014) in which they might not be able to access the materials provided by the researcher. Engin (2014) states that the support of a teacher plays a role for learners when they are carrying out various projects that Flipped Classroom Approach requires in order to accomplish the tasks assigned by the teacher on the online portal flawlessly.

On the other hand, there is a weighted average of 4.5 out of 5 in Item 5, which 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). This finding is also relevant to the findings of Bergmann and Sams (2012) in which they found that using educational videos as one of the instructional methods in Flipped Classroom Approach saved the teachers' time and effort in explaining the input for a couple of times, and the learners are allowed to repeat accessing the materials provided by the teacher at their own pace to enhance their understanding.

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 to learn at home and do the "homework" in the classroom. This finding is supported by Hao (2015) that not all learners are able to commit to the full responsibility that Flipped Classroom Approach requires. There are studies which show that the pupils did not get used to the routine of Flipped Classroom Approach (Schultz et al., 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

pupils to complete the pre-lesson task is highly likely to be one of the challenges while implementing this approach in a Malaysian ESL classroom settings.

For the answer to the second research question in this study, it can be interpreted from the findings of questionnaire that most learners perceived that Flipped Classroom Approach enhanced their English adjectives learning as they were able to communicate with their peers and teacher to resolve their inquiries while interpreting the online input as well as accomplishing the meaningful classroom tasks with their classmates. Nonetheless, some of the learners might not get used to the routine of learning at home and completing the “homework” in the classroom. Also, they might need necessary academic and technical assistance in Flipped Classroom Approach to complete the tasks assigned by the teacher.

Conclusion

It is vital to note 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. Furthermore, the findings indicated that most of the learners hold positive perceptions towards Flipped Classroom Approach as it provides a platform for them to communicate and collaborate with their peers and help them to enhance their mastery of adjectives 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. Therefore, more studies are recommended to be carried out by researchers to discover how Flipped Classroom Approach can be employed effectively in other aspects in the Malaysian Primary ESL classroom context.

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