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THE EFFECT OF THE FLIPPED CLASSROOM ON CHINESE EFL LEARNERS' CULTURAL ESSAY WRITING PERFORMANCE

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ABSTRACT

The capacity to narrate one's own cultural stories is increasingly recognized as essential for global citizenship and intercultural competence. In the Chinese context, this is reflected in a growing emphasis on writing Chinese stories and sharing Chinese culture with the world, which is a competence highly valued by globally minded learners. However, few studies have investigated the role of Chinese cultural factors involved in Chinese EFL learners' writing processes. The purpose of this study is to examine the extent to which the flipped classroom approach improves Chinese EFL learners' cultural essay writing performance and to explore their perceptions of its implementation. To achieve this purpose, a mixed method design was adopted, including pre- and post-tests, questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews. The results of the pre- and post-tests indicated that Chinese EFL learners' cultural writing essay performance had significantly improved in the flipped classroom, particularly in content ($p=0.023^$), organization ($p=0.029^*$), and language use ($p=0.019^*$). Moreover, the questionnaire findings revealed that learners had positive perceptions towards the implementation of the flipped classroom in cultural essay writing ($M=4.207$, "Strongly Agree"). The interview data further supported these findings. Therefore, this study suggests that the flipped classroom has a positive effect on Chinese EFL learners cultural essay writing performance and enhances their motivation to engage in cultural writing. By bridging cultural learning with writing practice, the flipped classroom emerges as a promising approach for cultivating intercultural competence in English language education.*

Keywords: Chinese EFL learners, cultural essay writing performance, flipped classroom,

INTRODUCTION

In today's interconnected world, international cultural exchanges have become increasingly frequent, and the presentation of national cultural soft power has become a strategic choice for many countries in their foreign relations. Sharing China's rich and colorful culture with the world, through the telling of Chinese stories and conveying China's voice, is essential for strengthening international cultural exchange and has become an important step towards global integration and international education. Against a global background that places great importance on enhancing China's national soft power, the question of how to tell Chinese stories to international audiences and convey the spiritual identity and cultural essence of Chinese civilization has become an important area of exploration for teachers, especially in light of national requirements for EFL learners. Consequently, exploring how to write Chinese stories for a global audience has taken on increasing significance.

Telling Chinese stories to convey China's voice is closely linked to writing. However, as Huang (2006) notes, writing is the weakest skill among most students' English abilities. In addition, some studies have shown that an improvement in writing helps to improve listening and speaking skills. Dong (2003) argues that writing not only helps to consolidate language input received through reading and listening materials and promote the internalization of language knowledge, but it also lays a solid foundation for substantial language use. Therefore, the development of English writing competence is of particular importance.

To achieve high scores in college entrance examinations and pass English tests, rote memorization remains a common methodology in Chinese English writing classrooms. Many Chinese students currently accept classroom knowledge passively and are often reluctant to question the reliability of the content taught by their teachers. Thus, in this context, the flipped classroom approach has emerged to provide students with more opportunities for knowledge production and teacher-student interaction by reversing the link between knowledge transfer and knowledge internalization (Deng, 2016), thus offering the possibility of improving the effectiveness of college English writing instruction. Furthermore, Liu (2021) points out that flipped classrooms can align teaching content more closely with students' foreign language learning needs, adhere to the principle of combining theory and practice, and help students understand the social and cultural contexts of English-speaking

countries while clarifying the differences between Chinese and Western cultures.

Although many existing studies on the flipped classroom teaching model have reported positive effects on students' academic performance, most access overall writing skills without providing a strong definition, clear assessment criteria, detailed lesson plans, or sufficient empirical data specifically targeting EFL learners' cultural writing ability. Based on students' overall writing scores, these studies have mainly conducted error analysis and relied on accuracy as the primary assessment method (Zhen & Zhang, 2018). Because of differences in measurement tools and evaluation criteria, comparing EFL learners' writing performance across studies is challenging. Previous studies often lack clarity in their experimental design, particularly regarding how flipped classroom design influences planning and evaluation, and how targeted instructional interventions can be designed to maximize improvement.

Therefore, this study attempts to integrate the cultivation of intercultural competence with English writing instruction. It aims to address the gap in current cultural writing classrooms by analyzing the effectiveness of the flipped classroom model on Chinese EFL learners' cultural essay writing performance and exploring their perceptions of its implementation. Thus, this study proposes two primary objectives: 1) to examine the extent to which the flipped classroom can improve Chinese EFL learners' cultural essay writing performance, and 2) to explore Chinese EFL learners' perceptions of using the flipped classroom to learn cultural essay writing.

The study was conducted to address the following two research questions:

1. To what extent does the flipped classroom improve Chinese EFL learners' cultural essay writing performance?
2. What are Chinese EFL learners' perceptions of the implementation of the flipped classrooms for teaching cultural essay writing?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Flipped Classroom Learning (FCL) emerged in the United States and has been widely applied across various stages of education, supported by educational technologies represented by platforms such as Khan Academy. It is regarded as a promising approach for transforming traditional school education (Hu, 2016). The core concept of FCL is to reverse the learning and instructional aspects of the traditional classroom process. The basic tenet of the

flipped classroom is the advancement of knowledge transfer and the optimization of knowledge internalization brought about by changes in the teaching process (Zhao, 2013). In flipped classrooms, EFL learners acquire new knowledge through independent learning before class, then collaborate with the instructor and peers in class for in-depth discussion, practice, and application.

Fulton (2012) highlights the advantages of the flipped classroom, including collaborative problem-solving, instructors better understanding learners' difficulties and learning styles, efficient and creative use of classroom time, increased learner interest, engagement, and achievement.

Flipped Classroom Teaching Framework

The flipped classroom model has made teaching and learning increasingly student-centered and has promoted deeper learning among students. It reverses the traditional lecture-homework sequence by delivering instructional content online before class and dedicating in-class time to active, collaborative tasks (Bergmann & Sams, 2012). Chung (2013) proposes three core stages of FCL: pre-class, in-class and after-class. In terms of teaching methods, the pre-class stage mainly involves direct instruction and is typically carried out by watching instructional micro-videos to complete learning tasks at the levels of memorization and comprehension. During the in-class learning stage, students work in groups to apply their knowledge and solve complex problems. Activities at this stage may include a brief review of pre-class learning, problem-solving activities, short lectures, individualized learning, group discussions and a summary or assignments for the next class. In the after-class stage, students use technological platforms to evaluate their learning outcomes.

The FCL model is theoretically anchored in constructivism and student-centered learning, aiming to shift the focus from teacher-centered grammar instruction to peer feedback and process-orientated writing practice (Fisher, 2024). Hamdan (2014) identifies four pillars of the flipped classroom: a flexible learning environment that accommodates both collaborative and self-supported learning; a student-centered culture that promotes active knowledge construction; well-designed and differentiated content; and professional teachers who can provide personalized instruction and effectively organize diverse learning.

Previous Studies on the Flipped Classroom in Essay Writing

Numerous studies have highlighted the pedagogical

benefits of FCL. For instance, Sheerah (2022) found that FCL provided students with repeated exposure to input materials outside the classroom, enabling self-paced learning, which in turn frees up class time for targeted writing exercises and immediate teacher feedback. Moreover, Afrilyasanti (2016) found that FCL had positive effects on both students' academic performance and learning attitudes. Rahmani and Zitouni (2022) observed that, during the post-pandemic period, the FC model efficiently promoted learning quality and reinforced learners' adoption of online tools for writing tasks. Han (2022) highlighted the role of FCL in increasing motivation, attitudes, and self-efficacy, while discovering that collaborative in-class activities help mitigate writing apprehension. Moreover, Laachir (2022) pointed out that online modes were associated with lower communication anxiety compared to face-to-face settings. Ekmecki (2017) observed that students appeared happier in flipped writing classrooms, and Sengul (2021) found that students devoted more time to English writing outside of class under the FC model. In addition, Chinese researchers have contributed to this line of inquiry. For example, Qu (2020) reported significant improvements in students' writing proficiency, writing strategies, and independent learning ability. Similarly, Zhen (2019) found that the FC model enhanced college students' metacognitive abilities and writing outcomes. Overall, these studies suggest that the FC model positively effects students' writing development, improving both cultural writing knowledge and learning engagement, and thus provides a solid theoretical and practical foundation for this study.

METHODOLOGY

Guided by the research questions, this study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data to examine learners' learning outcomes, motivation, and learning experiences at a university of foreign languages. A 12-week experimental design was implemented, involving two intact classes of Chinese EFL learners, randomly assigned to an experimental group and a control group. Quantitative data on cultural writing performance of both groups were collected through a pre- and post-tests, enabling comparisons between the two groups. Research questionnaires were also distributed to the two groups. In addition, six Chinese EFL learners were purposefully selected to participate in individual semi-structured interviews to provide in-depth insights into students' perceptions of the flipped classroom and its impact on their cultural writing performance.

Participants and Sampling

The participants were 72 sophomores (aged 18-21) enrolled in a compulsory English cultural writing course for English majors at a university of foreign languages. They were divided into an experimental group ($n = 35$; 29 females and 6 males) and a control group ($n = 37$; 33 females and 4 males). Initial English proficiency, measured by the College English Test (CET) and the NUCEE (the National Unified Colleges Entrance English Examination for entering the university), showed that both groups had comparable writing proficiency before the experiment. The control group followed a more traditional in-class-only model with limited time for discussion and interaction activities, while the experimental group adopted a flipped classroom approach consisting of pre-class, in-class, and post-class phases that integrated critical-thinking activities. Thus, the main difference between the two groups was in the allocation of time for learning activities.

Instruments

This study employed a mixed-methods approach using three primary instruments: a pre-test and post-test, questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews. The writing tests, adapted from the Test for English Majors Band 4 (TEM-4), were used to assess students' English cultural writing before and after the experiment and to evaluate the effectiveness of the FC model. A 30-item Likert-scale questionnaire examined students' perceptions of online learning, in-class learning activities, and overall motivation in cultural essay writing. Additionally, semi-structured interviews conducted with six students and two teachers provided in-depth insights into their experiences with FCL, highlighting both its benefits and the need for clearer guidance and support.

Data Collection Procedures

Quantitative data were collected first, followed by qualitative data. A pre-test cultural essay writing

task was administered in the first week to assess learners' initial performance, and a post-test was conducted in the twelfth week after ten weeks of flipped classroom instruction. Subsequently, an online questionnaire was distributed via the Wenjuanxing platform. All data collection took place during regular class hours.

Data Analysis

Students' pre-test and post-test writing scores were analyzed using SPSS 29.0, with both descriptive and inferential statistics, including independent samples *t*-tests for comparing the two groups' in terms of content development, essay organization, and language use. Writing was assessed based on the TEM-4 writing, which evaluates content quality, organizational coherence, and linguistic accuracy. This rubric reflects an educational shift towards cultivating higher-order intellectual skills, thereby offering a balanced assessment of writing proficiency.

Findings

The Effectiveness of the Flipped Classroom on Chinese EFL Learners' Cultural Essay Writing Performance

The *t*-test analysis showed the effectiveness of the flipped classroom in improving Chinese EFL learners' cultural essay writing performance, particularly in explaining content, organization, and language use. The experimental group's essay writing performance in the flipped classroom increased from 17.02 in the pre-test to 17.64 in the post-test. The *t*-test results ($t = 2.354$, $p = 0.022$) indicated a statistically significant improvement, suggesting that FCL had a positive effect on students' writing performance. The statistical analysis of the pre-test and post-test results for the control group showed that the mean score increased slightly from the pre-test ($M = 16.58$, $SD = 1.45$) to the post-test ($M = 17.15$, $SD = 1.15$), resulting in a mean difference of 0.58. However, the difference was not statistically significant ($t = 1.89$, $p = 0.063$).

Table 1. Pre-test and post-test results of the three areas of writing performance in the experimental group

	Areas of Writing Performance		N	Mean	S.D.	Mean Difference	Standard Deviation	t	df	p
Experimental group	Explaining Content Ability	pretest	35	8.51	0.64	0.31	0.57	2.336	60	0.023*
		posttest	35	8.82	0.44					
	Organizing Ability	pretest	35	2.56	0.19	0.09	0.165	2.234	68	0.029*
		posttest	35	2.64	0.13					
	Using Language Ability	pretest	35	5.95	0.45	0.22	0.395	2.407	59	0.019*
		posttest	35	6.17	0.30					

Regarding individual writing skills, a paired samples *t*-test showed significant gains in content,

organization, and language use in the experimental group (Table 1). Overall, the improvement between

pre-test and post-test mean scores showed a significant difference at the 0.05 significance level,

indicating that the flipped classroom effectively enhanced EFL learners' writing performance.

Table 2. Pre-test and post-test results of three areas of writing performance in the control group

	Areas of Writing Performance		N	Mean	S.D.	Mean Difference	Standard Deviation	t	df	p
Control group	Explaining Content Ability	pretest	37	8.28	0.73	0.29	0.673	1.898	72	0.062
		posttest	37	8.58	0.58					
	Organizing Ability	pretest	37	2.49	0.22	0.09	0.2	2.021	72	0.047*
		posttest	37	2.58	0.17					
	Using Language Ability	pretest	37	5.8	0.51	0.19	0.463	1.809	72	0.075
		posttest	37	5.99	0.40					

* $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$

In contrast, paired-samples *t*-test results for the control group showed limited improvement across the three writing dimensions (Table 2). A statistically significant gain was observed only in organizing ability (pre-test: $M = 2.49$, $SD = 0.22$; post-test: $M = 2.58$, $SD = 0.17$; $t = 2.02$, $p = 0.047$), whereas improvements in explaining content and using language ability were not statistically significant. Overall, these findings indicate that the cultural essay writing performance of the Chinese EFL learners in the control group showed only modest improvement, limited to essay organization.

Overall, by comparing the pre-test and post-test results of the experimental and control groups, the experimental group demonstrated statistically significant improvements across all three dimensions of cultural essay writing, whereas the control group improved significantly in only one. These findings highlight the effectiveness of the flipped classroom intervention for Chinese EFL learners' cultural essay writing performance compared to traditional

methods. These findings support the effectiveness of the flipped classroom model in enhancing Chinese EFL learners' cultural essay writing performance, particularly in content explanation and language use. Thus, the hypothesis that the flipped classroom would improve Chinese EFL learners' cultural essay writing performance is supported.

Learning Perceptions of the Flipped Classroom on Chinese EFL Learners' Cultural Essay Writing

The quantitative findings from the research questionnaire on learner's perceptions of the flipped classroom, together with the qualitative findings from semi-structured interviews with students and teachers, address the second research question. This questionnaire was divided into three domains: online learning, in-class learning, and students' motivation and perceptions of the flipped classroom. Responses were measured using a Likert scale, indicating the level of agreement with each item.

Table 3. Domains of students' perception of online learning in the flipped classroom

	Items	Mean	S.D.	Level
Online Learning in Flipped Classroom				
1	User-friendliness of learning online	4.52	0.71	Strongly Agree
2	Convenience of contacting with classmates online	4.32	0.83	Strongly Agree
3	Active discussions through online platforms	3.40	0.81	Agree
4	User-friendliness of online learning platforms	3.53	0.76	Agree
5	Appropriateness of finding related cultural stories online	3.88	0.82	Agree
6	Systematic task organization	4.35	0.84	Strongly Agree
7	Appropriateness of evaluation through online learning	4.31	0.78	Strongly Agree
8	Comprehensibility of critical writing activities	3.48	0.69	Agree
9	Studying cultural essay writing knowledge of vocabulary	3.49	0.66	Agree
10	Studying cultural essay writing knowledge of grammar	3.78	0.71	Agree
11	Gaining achievement through online learning	4.64	0.75	Strongly Agree
12	Appropriateness of online learning activities	3.40	0.81	Agree

Table 3 shows that the online learning domain showed a high level of student agreement ($M = 3.93$, $SD = 0.76$), indicating positive perceptions of its relevance to cultural essay writing. Students reported

that online resources, discussions, and teachers' evaluations supported their planning, critical thinking, and independent learning.

Table 4. Domains of students' perception towards onsite learning in the flipped classroom

	Items	Mean	S.D.	Level
Onsite Learning in Flipped Classroom				

13	Appropriateness of asking the teacher for advice	3.43	0.69	Agree
14	Appropriateness of onsite learning to practice writing	3.18	0.88	Agree
15	Appropriateness of onsite learning to practice thinking abilities	3.27	0.84	Agree
16	Appropriateness of finding related cultural stories onsite	3.32	0.87	Agree
17	Appropriateness of onsite learning activities	4.16	0.96	Strongly Agree
18	Enjoyment of sharing opinions and critical attitudes in cultural essay writing classrooms	3.05	0.84	Agree
19	Enjoyment of giving peer evaluation to build critical thinking skills in physical classes	3.24	0.87	Agree

The onsite learning domain (Table 4) indicated a positive level of student agreement ($M = 3.38$, $SD = 0.85$), showing satisfactory perceptions of in-class

activities. Students reported that well-organized classroom activities significantly improved their participation and overall learning experience.

Table 5. Domains of students' motivation and outcomes in the flipped classroom

Items		Mean	S.D.	Level
Students' Motivation and Outcomes in Flipped Classroom				
20	Improvement in learning atmosphere	4.69	0.74	Strongly Agree
21	Effective motivation to finish tasks in the flipped classroom	4.57	0.84	Strongly Agree
22	Benefit of solving writing difficulties in the flipped classroom	4.44	0.72	Strongly Agree
23	Benefits of generating new ideas in the flipped classroom	3.83	0.69	Agree
24	Opportunities to express ideas creatively	3.67	0.82	Agree
25	Improvement in ease of learning English writing	4.40	0.80	Strongly Agree
26	Improvement in writing English cultural essays ability	4.59	0.80	Strongly Agree
27	User-friendliness of teacher feedback	3.59	0.82	Agree
28	Improvement in self-learning ability	3.65	0.77	Agree
29	Increase in course interest due to the flipped classroom	4.41	0.70	Strongly Agree
30	Motivating self- confidence in communicating Chinese culture	4.44	0.72	Strongly Agree

Table 5 illustrates that the motivation and outcomes domain showed the highest level of agreement ($M = 4.21$; $SD = 0.77$), reflecting a positive perception of the flipped classroom's impact on students' cultural

essay writing and critical thinking. Students reported increased motivation and engagement due to the student-centered approach.

Table 6. Students' perception towards cultural essay writing in the flipped classroom

Three Domains in The Questionnaire		Mean	S.D.	Level
Online Learning in Flipped Classrooms		3.93	0.76	Agree
Onsite Learning in Flipped Classrooms		3.38	0.85	Agree
Students' Motivation and Perceptions Towards Flipped Classrooms		4.21	0.77	Strongly Agree

According to Table 13, the online learning domain ($M = 3.93$, $SD = 0.763$) and the onsite learning domain ($M = 3.38$, $SD = 0.85$) fell within the "Agree" range, whereas the students' motivation and perceptions domain ($M = 4.21$, $SD = 0.77$) reached the "Strongly Agree" range. These findings reveal that the flipped classroom successfully engaged students, made classes easier to understand, and supported the development of higher-level intercultural abilities through well-structured tasks and evaluations. Overall, Chinese EFL learners held positive perceptions of the flipped classroom and believed that the integration of online and in-class learning improved their English cultural writing performance.

Qualitative Findings from the Semi-structured Interviews

Text analysis was conducted on the semi-structured interviews to present the qualitative findings, illustrating Chinese EFL learners' perceptions of

using the flipped classroom to improve their cultural essay writing skills.

Interview data revealed that held positive perceptions of online learning for cultural essay writing in the flipped classroom. Chinese EFL learners expressed their experiences as a "great way," to "broaden my horizon," "enrich knowledge," and "improve efficiency," suggesting that online learning supported idea generation, vocabulary development and cross-cultural understanding. Furthermore, students believed that FCL improved team cohesion, as one student mentioned, "We can take part in group to discuss easily, which can enhance the team spirit of teamwork." Similarly, a teacher described the flipped approach as "a transformative approach that enhances student engagement and learning efficiency," allowing more classroom time for interactive writing activities. In addition, students reported that the flipped classroom model reserves more in-class time for interactive application, having a significant effect on

their cultural essay writing performance. As one student mentioned, "Sure, my writing ability has improved... the mind-maps in physical classroom inspire me as well for creative ideas on organizing my essay writing," while others highlighted benefits such as clearer organization ("I can represent the center-point quickly") and increased engagement with cultural content ("It is very interesting to study culture essay writing by integrating Chinese tradition..."). Through cross-cultural comparisons, students were guided to reflect on how cultural differences influence narrative logic and thematic expression, helping them avoid cultural bias in their writing.

However, some challenges with the flipped classroom writing approach were identified. One student stated, "Sometimes because of the lack of awareness, I cannot complete our learning task," while another noted, "The lack of enough technical instruction resources ... is also a challenge." Teachers also reported challenges in implementing the flipped classroom. For example, one teacher noted, "Not all students have reliable internet or devices at home, making it difficult for them to engage with pre-class materials," indicating issues with access and self-regulation.

Overall, while the majority of students reported high engagement and satisfaction, these findings offer important guidance for refining flipped classroom practices to further enhance students' cultural writing skills and critical thinking abilities.

DISCUSSION

The following section includes both quantitative and qualitative analyses, situated within relevant theoretical frameworks and previous research related to the two research objectives.

Effectiveness of the Flipped Classroom on Chinese EFL Learners' Cultural Essay Writing Performance

The quantitative data from the t-tests and questionnaires, combined with the qualitative data from semi-structured interviews, are analyzed in this section to examine the effects of the flipped classroom on Chinese EFL learners' cultural essay writing performance.

The t-test analysis demonstrates that the experimental group outperformed the control group in both the ability to explain content and the ability of using language. The mean score improvement for the experimental group was significantly higher than that for the control group ($p < 0.05$). These results demonstrate the effectiveness of the flipped classroom in enhancing students' writing performance, especially for the ability in explaining content and the ability of using language. This

finding aligns with previous studies, such as Afrilyasanti (2016), who demonstrated that the implementation of a flipped classroom in an EFL context had a positive effect on both students' academic performance and learning outcomes. Similarly, Mirzaei (2022) and Shafiee Rad (2021) reported that the flexibility offered by the flipped approach significantly enhances L2 learners' writing skills. In contrast, organizational ability showed significant improvement in both the experimental and control groups, suggesting that this skill may develop naturally through general writing instruction, regardless of the teaching model. According to the writing scoring criteria, organization encompasses fluency, coherence, and essay length. This indicates that organizational ability may develop naturally through general instruction and is not solely dependent on the experimental intervention.

The results further highlight that the experimental intervention was particularly effective for enhancing content development and language use abilities, while both groups benefited similarly in organizational skills. Overall, the consistent pattern of superior performance in the experimental group across all multiple measures supports the effectiveness of the intervention.

Questionnaire results further revealed that students held highly positive perceptions of both online and onsite components in the flipped classroom. Regarding online learning, four items received a "strongly agree" rating, indicating that students found the online platform user-friendly, well-structured, convenient for peer communication, and supported by appropriate evaluation methods. Furthermore, students appreciated the online evaluation. As for onsite learning, six items were rated within the "agree" range, while one item related to the appropriateness of onsite learning activities, was rated as "strongly agree." These results reflect an overall positive reception of onsite learning. During tutoring sessions, the learners were required to address writing issues or problems, guided by the teacher and through interaction with their peers in the flipped classroom. This finding is consistent with the work of Fulton (2012), who emphasized the importance of collaborative problem-solving during in-class activities in FCL, while Ekmekci (2017) reported that students experienced greater satisfaction and happiness in flipped compared to traditional classrooms. Collectively, these findings suggest that the flipped classroom's dual learning environment (online and in-class) is not only functionally effective but also

well-received by EFL learners.

Regarding the qualitative data obtained from semi-structured interviews, most students expressed positive attitudes toward learning cultural essay writing in the flipped classroom. This finding is consistent with Chen (2007), who showed that differentiated instruction increased students' motivation and engagement and enhanced their language proficiency. Furthermore, many students believed that FCL improved their team cohesion. The flipped classroom also helped teachers to create a more supportive and stimulating learning environment that encouraged students to participate actively in the learning process (Shah, 2013). In addition, participants reported that the flipped model increased their attention to learning. Insights from teacher interviews, revealed that the flipped teaching method was perceived as a transformative approach that enhanced both student engagement and learning efficiency. These studies are supported by Hamdan (2014), who argued that the flipped classroom creates a flexible learning environment by accommodating both team-based and self-directed learning, as well as providing flexibility in learning time and assessment practices.

Thus, the flipped classroom integrates the advantages of both online and in-class learning. Students were able to employ diverse forms of evidence in their writing and apply reasoning skills to gain a deeper understanding of the prescribed themes, demonstrating enhanced competence in argumentative writing (Soltanpour & Valizadeh, 2018). Moreover, FCL in cultural essay writing was perceived as engaging and appealing, supported by online videos and materials, systematic task organization, effective evaluation methods, interactive onsite activities, group discussion, and teacher guidance. Similarly, Leis (2015) found this model to be more conducive to promoting students' knowledge of writing and increasing their engagement in learning. In conclusion, the effect of the flipped classroom on Chinese EFL learners' cultural essay writing performance was positive.

Chinese EFL learners' Perceptions of the Flipped Classroom in Cultural Essay Writing

Based on the semi-structured interviews, it was evident most participants strongly agreed on the benefits of the flipped classroom on cultural writing. They emphasized that this teaching model significantly aided their understanding of the essay topics and central ideas, while also facilitating more effective use of the English language in writing. This is supported by Zhao (2013), who described the

flipped classroom as a new teaching model in which the processes of knowledge transfer, absorption, internalization, and migration are reorganized across time and space. In this model, knowledge transfer typically occurs before class through students' self-directed learning. Moreover, the flipped classroom caters to students' individual abilities and preferences. Interview data also revealed that both the online tasks and onsite activities supported not only vocabulary and syntax knowledge but also a deeper understanding of paragraph development and writing styles. This suggests that FCL contributes to both foundational language development and higher-level writing skills.

Moreover, within the FCL model, students reporting feeling more motivated and self-assured in their learning, as the instruction was customized to their learning needs. Students with advanced previews, such as vocabulary and sentence structures, were provided with more challenging writing materials accompanied by difficult comprehension questions, allowing them to explore higher and deeper levels of language proficiency. Findings from the questionnaire further indicated that most participants strongly agreed that through FCL, they can overcome writing difficulties.

Interview data also indicated that participants recognized that the flipped classroom fostered a diverse and supporting learning environment and positively influenced students' awareness and sensitivity toward cultural diversity in their writing. This was achieved by incorporating the advantages of online learning and in-class learning into multicultural materials and diverse perspectives. As a result, students gained a deeper understanding of and respect for different cultures and backgrounds, fostering a more inclusive and culturally sensitive learning environment. Moreover, FCL cultivated students' English thinking in a multi-faceted and multi-channel manner, enabling them to better understand and accept foreign cultural backgrounds, values and social norms while reducing misunderstandings arising from cultural differences. In this regard, Li (2004) emphasized the importance and urgency of developing students' cross-cultural writing abilities.

However, some limitations of FCL were identified. For instance, a few participants reported difficulties in completing pre-class tasks on time, often a result of self-discipline, which limited their engagement in in-class activities. Thus, teacher support and clear guidelines for flipped classrooms are important factors that cannot be overlooked. This is consistent with Cho and Kim (2019), who found that clear

routines and adequate teacher control were essential for successful implementation. Furthermore, Weinstein (2019) emphasized the importance of creating a positive and supportive classroom environment and providing clear behavior expectations.

The effectiveness of the FCL model in improving writing performance depends heavily on how it is implemented. If pre-class materials are overly simplistic or lack interactivity, students may not engage deeply enough to develop higher-order thinking skills. Passive activities, such as watching videos, do not guarantee meaningful learning, as students might fail to internalize key concepts. In this regard, Hamdan (2014) identified key pillars of the flipped classroom, including carefully designed content which is specific and flexible. Moreover, teachers need to distinguish between content suitable for teacher-led learning and content suitable for student-led learning.

The flipped classroom also places higher demands on teachers' instructional competence as they are required to provide personalized teaching, design and organize diverse learning activities and be skilled at promoting their own professional development through reflection. Zhang and Ping (2017) highlighted that flipped classroom teaching promotes teacher-student and student-student interaction through concept-based tasks. Thus, teachers should design interactive pre-class tasks, such as short writing reflection activities, and structure in-class sessions with clear objectives ensuring all students participate in analytical activities in order to provide fuller engagement.

In conclusion, FCL in cultural essay writing, with the principles of independent and cooperative learning, significantly enhances Chinese EFL learners' engagement and motivation by shifting the focus from passive absorption to student-center learning. Its flexibility and accessibility further contribute to its effectiveness. Nevertheless, challenges such as learners' self-discipline and the increased instructional demands highlight areas for improvement. Strategies such as personalized instruction, well-structured and diverse learning activities, clear routines and adequate teacher control are essential for successful implementation. Overall, the flipped classroom represents an effective, engaging, flexible and practical pedagogical approach for Chinese EFL learners' cultural essay writing performance and critical thinking, providing a dynamic teaching model that complements traditional instructional methods.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

Although this study demonstrates the significant positive effects of the flipped classroom on Chinese EFL learners' cultural essay writing performance, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study focused exclusively on Chinese EFL learners, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other groups or situations. Second, the sample size was relatively small ($N = 72$), which may affect the robustness of the results. Third, the 12-week duration of the study may not capture the longer-term effects of the intervention on writing development. Therefore, future research should involve larger and more diverse samples (e.g., students from various disciplines or educational levels) and adopt longitudinal designs to evaluate the sustained impact of the flipped classroom on writing performance and retention.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the extent to which the flipped classroom improves Chinese EFL learners' cultural essay writing performance and to explore their perceptions towards its implementation in writing classrooms. The findings indicate that the flipped classroom demonstrates many potential benefits for EFL learners' cultural essay writing, particularly in the domain of cultural argumentative writing. It also increases students' engagement and motivation in English writing courses. By aligning with its flexible and effective teaching model, the flipped classroom offers a more interactive and enjoyable learning experience. Since the process of teaching writing requires individuals to develop both metacognitive awareness and language competence, the process can be considerably challenging. Therefore, employing the flipped classroom model allows educators to create a more personalized and well-rounded approach to cultural essay writing instruction, thereby enhancing traditional methods and catering to the diverse learning needs of students. Furthermore, this study provides a foundation for future research on the effectiveness of flipped classroom learning in different contexts and with more diverse learner groups. Expanding research to include students from various disciplines and educational levels will further validate its effectiveness. In addition, incorporating feedback from students on technical tools and self-regulated learning can help refine instructional design and enhance the overall educational value of the flipped classroom.

Declaration of AI Use

The authors declare that no AI tools were used in preparation of the manuscript. The authors take full responsibility for the content.

About Author

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