

CZECH LANGUAGE COURSE FOR FOREIGNERS AT THE TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY OF LIBEREC – FLIPPED CLASSROOM APPROACH REVISITED

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Abstract

This article gives brief feedback on the application of a flipped classroom approach to the Czech language course for foreigners within the summer semester 2022/2023 at the Technical University of Liberec. It is generally known that the flipped classroom approach is an instructional strategy that involves reversing the traditional roles of in-class lectures and homework. It can offer many potential benefits, such as an active way of learning, enhanced student engagement, and immediate feedback. However, not all subjects or topics may be suitable for the flipped approach, and it may not be the best fit for every teacher or student. Additionally, access to technology and resources outside the classroom can be a potential challenge for some students. In the article, the author first briefly describes the flipped classroom method and then shows its advantages and disadvantages. Finally, the example of the implementation of the flipped classroom method in the Czech language course for foreigners is given and analyzed together with a brief survey of opinions on the flipped classroom method.

Keywords

Technical University of Liberec; Czech language course; Flipped classroom; Challenge; Advantages; Disadvantages.

Introduction

Within the framework of the CroBoLearn project [1], Czech and German university teachers were trained in a relatively innovative and modern method of teaching a foreign language, the so-called flipped classroom approach, as well as utilizing various applications for online teaching. This brief article attempts to contemplate its meaning and its use for teaching Czech to ERASMUS students at the Technical University of Liberec (further TUL). Moreover, it shows one specific example of a flipped classroom method used in teaching Czech to foreigners within the academic year of 2022/2023.

1 Flipped Classroom Approach

The flipped classroom approach can be traced back to various educators and researchers over the years. However, the term “flipped classroom”, as we know and use it today, was popularized by two chemistry teachers, Jonathan Bergmann and Aaron Sams in 2007 [2]. It involves reversing the traditional roles of in-class lectures and homework. In a flipped classroom, students engage with instructional content, such as watching pre-recorded video lectures or reading materials, outside of the classroom before attending class sessions. They

also have to prepare a set of questions or comments related to the topic of the lesson. Thus, a teacher is not a primary source of information in the class but serves more as a facilitator, guide, and mentor in the learning process. With this method, there is more space for group or pair work or discussion where students can apply their pre-taught knowledge in the class. The development of new technologies has significantly influenced the effectiveness of this method, such as creating digital content, online access, real-time tracking of students' progress, and others.

1.1 Flipped Classroom Approach – Role of a Teacher

As mentioned above, the role of a teacher in the learning process is redefined as that of a facilitator and guide rather than a sole provider of information [2]. It must be emphasized that teachers in a flipped classroom become active coordinators of engagement and interaction. They curate and create content that students deal with before class, allowing in-class time to be dedicated to questions, interactive activities, discussions, and deeper explorations of concepts. This shift enables teachers to focus on individual student needs, provide timely feedback, foster critical thinking, and promote collaborative learning. Thus, a more dynamic and student-centred learning environment is established. As Bergmann and Sams claim [2], this model teaches students to take responsibility for their own learning, however, at the same time strengthening the teacher-student relationship. A teacher knows their students better as a result of spending more time with them individually, so, even the failing student can have the support they need. The key points elaborating on the role of a teacher in the flipped classroom may be, for example, creating quality learning materials for students to engage in before the class. This can include videos, readings, quizzes, or interactive exercises. To sum up, the role of a teacher being the primary information provider shifts to becoming a facilitator of deeper understanding, critical thinking, and active participation.

1.2 Flipped Classroom Approach – Role of a Student

The role of a student in a flipped classroom approach undergoes a transformation from passive recipients of information to active participants and, therefore, co-creators of their learning experience. It empowers students to engage with a course content in a more self-directed and collaborative manner. Here are some roles students take on while learning via a flipped classroom method. First, students have to take responsibility for their learning by studying pre-class materials before attending the class. Students, then, are in the center of the learning process. They have to prepare questions to which they do not know the answer [2], and they look for additional resources to deepen their understanding of the topic discussed in the class and also according to their interests. During in-class sessions, students actively participate in group discussions and pair work that enables them to exchange ideas and learn from each other. They may apply their theoretical knowledge to real scenarios. This also bridges the gap between theory and real-world application. Students benefit from immediate feedback provided by the teacher and their peers during the class activities. In a certain way, they also can play the role of a teacher helping other classmates understand the topic. Finally, students can reflect on their learning progress, and via using various online platforms, they develop their technological literacy.

2 Advantages and Disadvantages of Flipped Classroom Approach – Brief Insight

The following part briefly summarizes the benefits and drawbacks of a flipped classroom approach based on various studies and articles [3], [4], [5], [6], [7].

One of the most significant advantages is the promotion of active learning. Students deal with pre-class materials at their own pace so that in the class, they devote time to discussions and

hands-on activities [3]. The scientists assert that this dynamic engagement enhances comprehension and retaining of information [2]. They can access online materials anytime, anywhere, reviewing the content repeatedly. Students can also focus on areas where they need more help. Instead of memorizing, they adopt high-order thinking skills [4]. The flipped classroom model optimizes class time. Routine content delivery is moved outside the classroom. With the development of multimedia and new digital technologies, students have more motivation to study, primarily if they can engage in polls or online forum discussions. In conclusion, this approach places a student at the center of the learning process.

On the other hand, using a flipped classroom approach needs careful planning and consideration. The following are the main challenges found. Access to technology is one of the main drawbacks of this approach. Even if it may seem rather pointless, nowadays, not all students may have equal access to technology and high-speed internet for the required out-of-class online homework. Some students may struggle with time management, especially at university, where they have competing commitments in other major subjects. Another disadvantage may be a lack of self-discipline [5] and the freedom of choice when and how to study. From the perspective of a teacher, preparing high-quality content for a flipped classroom may be time-consuming and requires careful planning. If the quality of pre-class materials is low or if students do not engage with them, the effectiveness of such an approach may be compromised [6]. Finally, yet importantly, both students and teachers might resist shifting from traditional teaching methods. Mainly students accustomed to passive learning can find active engagement initially uncomfortable [7].

In conclusion, there are numerous benefits, including increased engagement, individualized learning, and critical thinking development. However, other mentioned challenges, such as initial resistance, time management, or reduced content coverage, should be considered.

3 Flipped Classroom Method in CREK Course at the Technical University of Liberec

The following sub-sections first describe research objectives and methods that lead to the further analysis of the flipped classroom approach in the Czech language course for foreigners (further CREK course), organized by the Technical University of Liberec every semester. Moreover, the CREK course is introduced together with the participants. Then, the experimental use of the flipped classroom approach in the CREK course for one of the class topics, *Orientation in the city*, is described and analyzed. Finally, a brief survey of students' opinions on the flipped classroom method is introduced and evaluated. The research results are discussed.

3.1 Research Objectives

The intended research was mainly based on the question of whether the flipped classroom method functions for the CREK course, whether students are able to study Czech language independently outside the classroom, and what possible obstacles/disadvantages or advantages of this approach can be. The aim was to determine how students perceive the flipped classroom approach described below and whether they find it beneficial for learning the Czech language.

3.2 Research Methods

In order to carry out this research and verify the suitability of utilizing the flipped classroom method in the classes of Czech language for foreigners, a brief questionnaire was given to students at the end of the course in the summer semester 2022/23. There were 11 questions in

the survey. The full text can be provided upon request. A more thorough evaluation of the questionnaire can be found below in Sub-section 3.6, together with the research results.

3.3 CREK Course Introduced

CREK course is organized as a one-semester language course for ERASMUS students who come to study from different parts of the world at the Technical University of Liberec. The time allocation is one lesson (i.e. 90 minutes) per week. At the end of the semester/course, students may nearly reach the A1 level of the Common European Reference Framework for Languages. The teaching materials include the course book *Čeština Expres 1* by Lída Holá [8], which is a student book carefully selected after some years of testing various other materials. The topics covered during the semester include *Introducing myself*, *Orientation in the city*, and *Food and Drink*. It also gives a basic idea of pronunciation, numerals, and grammar. The knowledge of conjugation of basic verbs to be, to do, and to have is required. The lessons are mainly oriented at speaking activities in pairs or smaller groups, interactive role-plays, listening, and reading on the beginner level with broad teacher support.

3.4 Participants and Context

The participants of the CREK course are international students coming under the auspices of the ERASMUS program. Last semester, in the academic year 2022/2023, the students attending the courses came from the following countries: Turkey, France, Poland, Spain, Austria, Portugal, Germany and Taiwan. The number of students in one course is 15. There are usually two courses, i.e. 30 students in total. The students who attend the course have no or minimum knowledge of Czech. It is also important to mention that they are not all from Slavonic language background, which may also cause difficulties in self-learning. Moreover, the students study at different TUL faculties such as Architecture, Pedagogy, Textile, Mechatronics, Mechanical Engineering or Economics.

3.5 Testing Flipped Classroom Method in CREK Course

The flipped classroom method has been applied for many years, however, mainly in the classes of natural sciences when students had to watch short videos or read scientific articles [2]. The following section discusses the advantages and disadvantages of using this method in learning Czech as a foreign language. First, it describes the flipped classroom method for teaching *Orientation in the city of Liberec* and the types of exercises utilized. In the meantime, the suitability of using such a method is discussed, mainly referring to the above-mentioned facts in Section 2. The flipped classroom was divided into three stages: Orientation in the city: self-learning – preparation stage, in-class activities, and after-class activity.

3.5.1 Orientation in the City - Self-learning – Preparation Stage

The aim of the whole unit was to acquaint students with the places in the city in Czech, giving directions and asking the way. In the self-learning stage as a home study, students were asked to find five or seven Czech words they could see around and that were related to places in the city. They were supposed to put them in a shared dictionary in e-learning. For example, *banka*, *kolej*, *ulice*, *zastávka*, *obchod*, etc. The idea was to collect a set of words that students may learn, refer to and then use in further lessons. In total, it was assumed that there would be approximately 150 words. At first, it seemed a very good idea; however, later on, there appeared to be a problem with technology, sharing, and connection. The majority of students could not enter the dictionary at the same time, which caused delays and troubles. In the end, there were collected only 50 words. The solution is to find another way, application, where and how to collect and store vocabulary. Still, it must be emphasized that this activity was

quite successful; the students learned the words anyway and had fun looking for them. The self-learning stage also included crosswords in LearningApp.com and H5P in Moodle. Students were asked to fill in the crosswords either with the help of definitions or with the help of letters. Students later reported that the LearningApps.com crosswords was very useful. However, they faced troubles with diacritics on their keyboard (č, š, ž, ř) – Taiwanese and even other nationalities. Without the correct diacritics, however, the application could not let them continue the exercise. The H5P crosswords were not friendly for self-study either since they changed their shape and words every time students opened them. It appeared to be chaotic, and it was later used successfully as a whole class activity in the lesson.

3.5.2 Orientation in the City – In-class Activities

In this section, students were given several activities where they could work in pairs of smaller groups, which they really enjoyed the most in the classes of Czech. The initial activity was a quiz that counted on the student's previous knowledge of basic vocabulary on the places in the city. The quiz was created in Moodle; it was based on true/false questions about Liberec. Individual teams or pairs of students competed and used their knowledge from previous lessons or the self-study stage. They could have a map of Liberec. Some examples of questions are as follows:

Example 1

<i>Liberec není město.</i>	<i>ANO/NE</i>
<i>Ještěd je restaurace a hora.</i>	<i>ANO/NE</i>
<i>V Liberci nejsou tramvaje.</i>	<i>ANO/NE</i>
<i>Koleje Harcov jsou daleko od centra.</i>	<i>ANO/NE</i>

Then, students had another task in pairs. They received a short text in Czech. It was an instruction on how to get from one place to another in the city of Liberec. Some words were underlined. Students had to find the underlined words in the map and had to answer the questions inside the text. Furthermore, they were asked to determine the prepositions in the text and role-play it.

Example 2

Uprostřed náměstí E. Beneše je kašna. Naproti kašně je radnice. Kdo je Edvard Beneš? Vpravo od radnice, asi pět minut pěšky, je divadlo. Je to historická budova. Pošta je naproti divadlu. Musíme jít 3 minuty pěšky přes most a jsme vedle knihovny. Potom musíme jít ulicí Rumjancevova a první ulicí doprava. Jak se jmenuje ulice? Kde jsme?

In both activities, the students co-operated and worked in pairs or smaller groups. Slavonic-language students helped the non-Slavonic language students. Overall, the students demonstrated remarkable performance in the class with high effectiveness.

3.5.3 Orientation in the City – After-class Activity

As an after-class activity, students were given listening from e-learning as homework. These were three short dialogues in Czech on the topic of asking and giving the way in the city. While listening, students had to answer various simple questions, such as *Co hledá turistka?*, *Kde je hotel Diplomat?*. Below is an example of one of the dialogues that students were able to comprehend.

Example of one of the short dialogues

Turistka: *Prosím Vás, kde je hotel Diplomat?*

Pán: *Diplomat? To je blízko. Vidíte ten bílý dům? Tam vedle restaurace.*
 Turistka: *Kde? Aha, vidím.*
 Pán: *Hm, tak to je ten hotel.*

Even though this after-class activity might have seemed rather easy, taking into account that students have already gone through a lot of practice in vocab and speaking, in the end, they had trouble answering correctly outside the class and catching up with the listening. They preferred doing this exercise in the class with the teacher's straight feedback. Similarly, they favored a gap-fill exercise on Liberec, which was primarily intended as an after-class home-study activity. Again, they rather cooperated in smaller groups or pairs, helping one another and sharing the vocabulary. The most favored activity, however, remained an authentic walk around the Liberec city center where students had to fulfil different tasks such as asking random passers-by the way, writing numbers, drawing pictures of buildings, and other activities. Afterwards, it was followed by the whole class feedback. In the questionnaire, this was the most mentioned activity that students appreciated.

3.6 Qualitative and Quantitative Evaluation of Students' Opinion on the Flipped Classroom Method

As mentioned in Section 3.2 Research Methods, at the end of the semester, students were given a brief questionnaire as feedback on the flipped classroom method. Among others, the intention was to find out whether students were satisfied with the class layout of Slavonic and non-Slavonic students. The further aim was to find out how students perceive the usage of the flipped classroom approach and whether they find it useful for learning the Czech language. There were 11 questions. The full text of the questionnaire can be provided upon request. The following are selected questions asked:

Question 1: *Can you see any advantages/disadvantages of having different nationalities (Slavonic vs. non-Slavonic) in one class?*

Question 2: *Would you like to do more homework?*

Question 3: *Which tasks and what stages in "Orienting in the city" were the most challenging for you and why?*

Question 4: *What did you miss/like the most in the classes?*

Question 5: *How often did you use the book Čestina Expres for home study?*

In Table 1 we can see that both groups of students unanimously supported the idea of mixed nationalities in the class, Slavonic or non-Slavonic. In their answers, especially the Taiwanese, were grateful for the help from Polish students.

Tab. 1: *Quantitative evaluation of Question 1 and Question 2*

	Turkey		Taiwan		Poland		Other		TOTAL	
	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO
Question 1	11	0	6	0	7	0	6	0	30	0
Question 2	2	9	4	2	4	3	3	3	13	17

Source: *Author's own research*

As far as Question 2 is concerned, 13 students would support more homework. However, the other group of students would claim it was sufficient. In their own words, they learned a majority of vocabulary in the class, where they could also talk in Czech. Outside, they were unsure and afraid to talk that much.

Qualitative research directed at the flipped classroom method revealed that the most challenging part of acquiring the topic of *Orientation in the city* was the primary self-learning stage. As many as 82% of students had difficulties with technology, 56% with the crosswords and filling in the letters – their keyboards were different. On the contrary, all students agreed that in-class activities in groups or pairs with a teacher's guidance were the most rewarding for them, together with an after-class outdoor activity in the Liberec city center mentioned above. This also gained 100% success. An interesting message arose from questions regarding the use of the textbook as a supportive tool for home study. As many as 73% of students admitted they did not use the book for home study at all. They worked with e-learning instead, where they could find other alternative exercises.

Conclusions

Successful implementation of the flipped classroom approach requires thoughtful planning, ongoing evaluation, and adaptation to address the specific needs of students in the subject matter.

The experimentation with the flipped classroom approach within the context of the CREK course at the TUL has gained diverse outcomes, highlighting both promising possibilities and notable challenges. At its core, tailored to ERASMUS students, this course functions as a slight immersion into the Czech language and culture. The diversity of students brings richness, both linguistic and cultural. This heterogeneity poses a unique instructional challenge, requiring an approach that ensures effective learning for all, regardless of their native language or prior linguistic knowledge. Incorporating the flipped classroom methodology into this environment implies students engaging with online resources autonomously before class sessions. As it was found out, this pre-class stage of learning still needs to be adjusted. However, the transition from digital resources to the teacher's guidance in the class is pivotal, as it appeared from the questionnaire.

Direct teacher feedback and real-time clarification hold an irreplaceable value, which cannot be overlooked or underestimated. The flipped classroom model shows potential in this multicultural and multilingual educational setting. However, it demands continual refinement, technological integration, and pedagogical expertise. The ultimate goal is to achieve a synergy between digital resources, students' home study possibilities, and teachers' support and guidance in the class. This will make the entire learning process more efficient and coherent.

Literature

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KURZ ČEŠTINY PRO CIZINCE NA TECHNICKÉ UNIVERZITĚ V LIBERCI – PŘEZKOUMÁNÍ METODY OBRÁCENÉ TŘÍDY

Tento článek se zamýšlí nad aplikací metody převrácené třídy na kurz češtiny pro cizince (dále CREK kurz) v letním semestru 2022/23 na Technické univerzitě v Liberci. Je obecně známo, že přístup převrácené třídy je výukovou strategií, která zahrnuje obrácení tradičních rolí výuky ve třídě a domácích úkolů. Nabízí mnoho potenciálních výhod, jako je aktivní způsob učení, větší zapojení studentů, okamžitá zpětná vazba. Ne všechny předměty nebo témata se však pro převrácený přístup hodí a nemusí být také nejvhodnější pro každého učitele nebo studenta. Navíc přístup k technologiím a zdrojům mimo třídu může být pro některé studenty potenciálním problémem. V článku autorka nejprve stručně popisuje metodu převrácené třídy, poté ukazuje její výhody a nevýhody. Nakonec je uveden a analyzován příklad implementace metody převrácené třídy v CREK kurzu spolu se stručným vyhodnocením dotazníku názorů studentů kurzu češtiny na metodu převrácené třídy i na kurz samotný.

TSSCHECHISCHKURS FÜR AUSLÄNDER AN DER TECHNISCHEN UNIVERSITÄT LIBEREC – EINE UNTERSUCHUNG DER METHODE EINER UMGEKEHRTEN KLASSE

Dieser Artikel beschäftigt sich mit der Anwendung der Methode der umgedrehten Klasse im Tschechischkurs für Ausländer (weiter CREK-Kurs) im Sommersemester 2022/23 an der Technischen Universität Liberec (weiter TUL). Es ist allgemein bekannt, dass es sich beim Ansatz einer umgedrehten Klasse um eine Unterrichtsstrategie handelt, welche die Umkehrung der traditionellen Rollen des Unterrichts in der Klasse und bei den Hausaufgaben beinhaltet. Sie bietet viele potenzielle Vorteile wie z. B. eine aktive Lernweise, eine größere Einbindung der Studenten sowie eine sofortige Rückmeldung. Allerdings eignen sich nicht alle Fächer und Themen für den umgedrehten Ansatz, und auch nicht jeder Student oder Lehrer muss sich davon angesprochen fühlen. Zudem kann der Zugang zu den Technologien und den Quellen außerhalb der Klasse für so manchen Studenten ein potenzielles Problem darstellen. In diesem Beitrag beschreibt die Autorin zunächst kurz die Methode der umgekehrten Klasse und weist anschließend deren Vor- und Nachteile auf. Am Schluss wird ein Beispiel der Implementierung der Methode der umgekehrten Klasse im CREK-Kurs angeführt und analysiert. Dazu dient eine kurze Auswertung eines Fragebogens über die Meinungen der Studenten des Tschechischkurses zur Methode der umgekehrten Klasse sowie zum Kurs selbst.

KURS JĘZYKA CZESKIEGO DLA OBCOKRAJOWCÓW NA UNIWERSYTECIE TECHNICZNYM W LIBERCU – ANALIZA METODY ODWRÓCONEJ KLASY

Niniejszy artykuł analizuje zastosowanie metody odwróconej klasy w kursie języka czeskiego dla obcokrajowców (kurs CREK) w semestrze letnim 2022/23 na Uniwersytecie Technicznym w Libercu (TUL). Powszechnie wiadomo, że odwrócona klasa to strategia nauczania, która polega na odwróceniu tradycyjnych ról nauczania w klasie i pracy domowej. Oferuje wiele potencjalnych korzyści, takich jak aktywny sposób nauczania, większe zaangażowanie studentów, natychmiastowa informacja zwrotna. Jednak nie wszystkie przedmioty lub tematy nadają się do odwróconego podejścia, ponadto nie muszą być najlepszym rozwiązaniem dla każdego nauczyciela lub studenta. Ponadto dostęp do technologii i zasobów poza klasą może stanowić dla niektórych studentów potencjalny problem. W artykule autorka najpierw krótko opisuje metodę odwróconej klasy, a następnie przedstawia jej zalety i wady. Na koniec przedstawiono i przeanalizowano przykład wdrożenia metody odwróconej klasy w kursie CREK, wraz z krótką oceną ankiety badającej opinie studentów kursu języka czeskiego na temat metody odwróconej klasy i kursu jako takiego.