

School Name Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX

Course Name Spanish Elementary Review

Course Format Hybrid, flipped classroom

Key Results

One hundred percent of instructors teaching the flipped method report that the quality of students' communication skills has improved and that they have seen a noticeable increase in student engagement and communication during class time. Ninety-five percent of instructors would elect to continue teaching the flipped model.

Submitted by

Marta Tecedor Cabrero, Director of lower-level Spanish courses

Course materials

Unidos, Guzmán, Lapuerta, and Liskin-Gasparro; MySpanishLab

About the Course

Texas Tech University is a public research university with more than 33,000 students. Students in the College of Arts and Sciences need six credits of language courses (sophomore level or above) to graduate; a student enrolling in the first-year sequence will have a total requirement of 11–16 hours of language instruction. Annual enrollment in elementary and intermediate Spanish is between 1500–2000 students with 20 students per section. As of fall 2014, there are 100 students majoring in Spanish and 320 minoring in Spanish.

Challenges and Goals

When I arrived at Texas Tech in the fall of 2013, I was informed that the instructional approach in the elementary and intermediate courses was not working. A communicative method was in place, but instructors were struggling to implement instruction that engaged students in learning of language. Thanks to my time as a PhD student at the University of Iowa, I had experience redesigning a curriculum and teaching with the flipped model. I spearheaded the flipped classroom approach with *Unidos* and MySpanishLab in fall 2013 for these key reasons:

- to increase communication in the classroom;
- to teach grammar with a functional/inductive approach;
- to help instructors adopt and change the way they were approaching instruction;
- to provide pedagogical continuity between the elementary and intermediate courses.

A secondary goal of the redesign was to improve the student experience in elementary and intermediate Spanish so that we might increase the number of students minoring and majoring in Spanish. Finally, I wanted to promote learning autonomy, one major advantage of teaching with the flipped method, while providing appropriate training for both students and instructors.

Implementation

Working with the coordinators for elementary and intermediate Spanish, we first flipped the classroom in our Spanish Elementary Review course. This five-credit, one-semester review is designed for students who have ideally had at least two years of high school Spanish. We cover chapter *preliminar* through Chapter 4 in *Unidos*. Class is held three hours each week and there is no designated lab time.

In the flipped classroom format, students work on grammar structures and vocabulary topics in MySpanishLab before coming to class. We set clear expectations that students must take responsibility for studying and learning the basic rules of grammar, tenses, and verb endings. The instructor then reviews the assigned material at the beginning of class, allowing the balance of class time to be devoted to students actively communicating in Spanish and using their knowledge from pre-class work.

“With this new format, I do not teach grammar concepts but instead focus on making sure that the students are practicing what they learned in the online platform and using those skills to communicate effectively. I am also teaching culture which was difficult to do with the old methodology since we did not have enough time.”

—Instructor

“One of the reasons why I would continue teaching with this model is simply because the students have exponentially more opportunities to express themselves in the target language. Further, the environment of the class is much more social, which improves the dynamic of the class, allowing the students to increase their confidence and diminish the anxiety that comes with speaking in a foreign language.”

—Instructor

For each vocabulary or grammar topic, we assign graded and non-graded activities in MySpanishLab that are due at midnight the night before class. Non-graded activities include: interactive presentations, vocabulary tutorials, grammar tutorials, and Amplifire Dynamic Study Modules. Graded work includes Apply activities (maximum of four, per topic, per day), comprehension-based *Piénsalo* activities, two listening and two reading activities per chapter, games, and a practice test. If there are more than four activities, we select those that contain listening and/or have more than a binary choice such as true/false. Extra MySpanishLab activities are used later in the week as review of that week’s topic. Students are allowed three attempts to achieve their highest score on MySpanishLab homework.

Students are given five vocabulary quizzes during the semester. Each quiz evaluates students’ knowledge of the corresponding chapter’s vocabulary, which is taken from the vocabulary section in *Unidos* and the vocabulary tutorials in MySpanishLab for that chapter.

Although students start learning grammar in MySpanishLab, we sometimes do short reflective activities in-class for more difficult grammar points. If students need additional help, we encourage them to take advantage of virtual or face-to-face office hours, as long as they have done their homework first.

The instructor experience

In order for instructors to be successful implementing the flipped classroom, they must be thoroughly prepared for the shift to becoming a “communication facilitator.” Without coaching, they will continue to teach the way they always have and/or ignore the new form. We have developed a thorough training program to assist with the transition. Before the semester begins, we have individual instructor meetings to talk about teaching the flipped method with *Unidos*. When instructors know how the material has been explained to students, they can better use class time. We also prepare them for class by providing all necessary classroom materials with instructions and PowerPoint slides that incorporate a road map of each chapter and a brief review of the material. Instructors are also coached on how to approach office hours and are provided semi-structured interview scripts.

Over the course of the semester, we have one team meeting each week to discuss how things are going and to answer questions. We let instructors know that they can create their

own course materials as soon as they respect the philosophy of the program. Ongoing training includes:

- Coaching instructors on how to use MySpanishLab’s infinite resources in a balanced way.
- Teaching instructors how to coach students in the new flipped classroom format.
- Talking about the links between MySpanishLab activities, in-class activities, and assessment.
- Discussing study strategies, skill strategies (listening and reading), and test-taking strategies.
- Practicing development of in-class activities.
- Training instructors how to grade oral and writing activities for consistency and to minimize grade inflation using real examples.

“The students liked the energy this method brings to the class—they have no time to be bored. If the class is fun and constantly keeps them active they tend to remember more and learn better.”

—Instructor

Assessments

15 percent	Chapter exams (3)
15 percent	Final oral exam
15 percent	Final written exam (includes listening assessment, writing assessment, reading comprehension)
10 percent	Participation (12)
10 percent	MySpanishLab assignments
10 percent	Vocabulary quizzes (5)
10 percent	In-class oral activities (2)
10 percent	Writing activities (2)
5 percent	Midterm oral exam

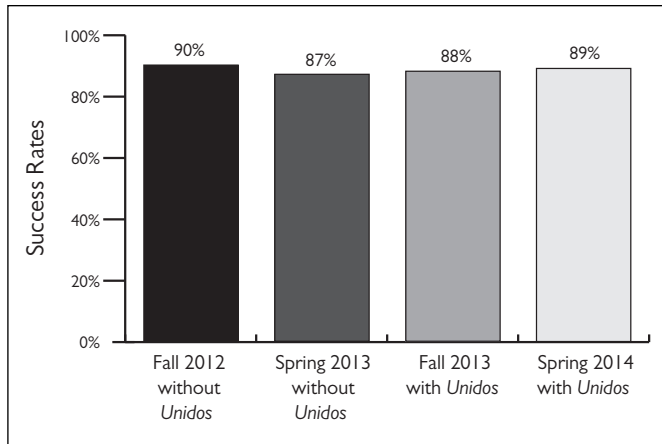


Figure 1. Percent of Students Receiving Final Course Grade of A, B, or C: Fall 2012, (n=371); Spring 2013 (n=481); Fall 2013 (n=446); Spring 2014 (n=419).

Benefits

This computer-enhanced course with MySpanishLab offers the following advantages:

- **Self-pacing.** Students can take the time they need to do the online portion of the course as long as assignments are completed before the deadlines.
- **Immediate feedback.** The computer grades electronic homework exercises instantly, tells students which items or activities are wrong, and makes suggestions on what to study before attempting the exercise again.
- **Opportunity for improvement.** The program is designed so students can attempt the exercises/activities as many as three times in order to earn their desired grade. The students who do the work in advance (and take advantage of the system) do better on their first try. My sense is that students who get closer to 100 percent on their first attempt are the students who are studying correctly.
- **Easy access.** Students can do online assignments from any computer with Internet access.

“I tell students that this method requires them to be more active in their learning and that they have to take a proactive approach to be successful and learn. I encourage them to come see me during my office hours to keep the lines of communication open at all times.”

—Instructor

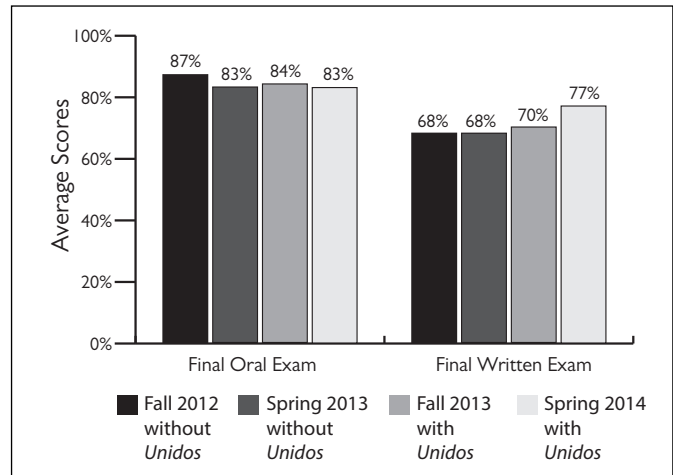


Figure 2. Final Oral Exam and Final Written Exam Scores: Fall 2012 (n=371), Spring 2013, (n=481). Fall 2013 (n=446), Spring 2014 (n=419).

Results and Data

Qualitatively we are seeing very positive feedback from an anonymous instructor survey that was answered by all twenty instructors teaching the redesigned course over the summer of 2014. The following percentages reflect instructor’s perceptions since the transition to *Unidos* and the flipped classroom in Elementary Spanish:

- 100 percent of instructors agree that “the quality of students’ communication skills has improved.”
- 100 percent of instructors have noticed an increase in student engagement/communication during class time.
- 95 percent of instructors say, “If given the choice, I would continue teaching with the flipped classroom model.”
- 90 percent of instructors agree that they “can now use classroom time more effectively.”
- 73 percent of instructors say “students exhibit more confidence speaking in the classroom.”
- 93 percent of instructors perceive an improvement in students’ speaking abilities.
- 73 percent of instructors perceive an improvement in students’ listening abilities.
- 57 percent of instructors perceive an improvement in students’ writing abilities.
- 53 percent of instructors perceive an improvement in students’ reading abilities.
- 50 percent of instructors think “students’ reactions to the new ‘flipped classroom’ format have been positive.” (25 percent of instructors reported “no change.”)

While our initial focus has been on evaluating instructors' response and perceptions of the flipped model, we have also begun to collect and study results of student scores. Figures 1 and 2 show success rates and final exam scores from our first year of implementation. The initial end-of-year results show a modest pattern of improvement in success rates and a pattern of growth from first to second semester. These scores represent comparisons of different student cohorts from only one year of implementation and are therefore inconclusive. Our expectation is that we will see increased gains over time and we look forward to studying these results with more detailed analysis, collecting data on student perceptions of the model as they advance through successive levels, and investigating how the switch to a flipped classroom will impact program enrollment as well as the number of students choosing to minor or major in Spanish.

“Overall I think this method helps to improve students’ oral, speaking and listening abilities. However it is important to work on their expectations. Many of them want to get an A without doing the work.”

—Instructor

The Student Experience

Students have an orientation to MySpanishLab on the first day of class, but this is not enough. The instructor must continue to coach students on how to be successful throughout the semester. We cannot assume that the flipped classroom method is implicit. Students are not used to studying in advance of class time, and as a result, we have seen a huge increase of students coming to office hours.

It's very common for students to get high scores on their MySpanishLab homework, but not on their chapter exams. Our goal is to coach them through the process of thinking about how they can be successful in the course. We might ask, “How are you studying?” only to learn that the student is getting help on the homework from a friend. More often, however, the student doesn't know why they're doing poorly. When we ask to see their notes and they don't have any to show us, that is a telling sign.

It is typical for students to prepare for the next day of class at close to midnight the night before. Many students work part- or full-time jobs and they watch the interactive presentation in MySpanishLab, but they don't read the textbook. We have found that it is important to ask the student, “What are you going to do to get an A?”

Office hours are important to help students understand the importance of studying, writing, and reflecting. Instructors don't always want to tell their students how to study well, but the reality is that many need to be told, even if they are in college. For the majority of students, this extra coaching has been helpful.

Conclusion

Following our first semester of flipping Elementary Spanish Review, we flipped the next two levels of Spanish. We launched Intermediate Spanish 1 with *Unidos* (chapters 5–8) in spring 2014 and Intermediate Spanish 2 with *Unidos* (chapters 9–12) in summer 2014. Both of these courses are 3-credit hours each, taught face-to-face.

After one year of implementation, our initial results provide clear evidence of positive perceptions from instructors. Overall, instructors report satisfaction with the flipped model. Developing a flipped classroom method takes time and effort. Instructors must be acclimated and students must be prepared to succeed in this different culture of learning. Although we did experience some road bumps at first (we lacked comprehensive training in spring 2014), with persistence and determination, we feel we are succeeding with the new model. Over the next couple years, we look forward to seeing how switching to the flipped classroom impacts overall enrollment and the number of Spanish minors/majors in the program.

“Students come to class prepared. They have studied verb conjugations and grammar and are ready to engage in speaking activities. It takes them less time to understand what I explain in class.”

—Instructor