

THE WUWEI OF THE FLIPPED CLASSROOM: RETHINKING LEARNER AUTONOMY IN MODERN LITERATURE EDUCATION

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Abstract: In this study, I propose a groundbreaking philosophical-methodological approach by integrating the Daoist concepts of *Wuwei* (non-action/effortless action) and *Qiwu* (equality of things) into the flipped classroom model within modern literature education. Drawing upon empirical pedagogical data from my own master's thesis regarding the instruction of canonical 11th-grade modern Vietnamese short stories (*Chí Phèo*, *Chữ người tử tù*, *Hai đứa trẻ*), this paper redefines the essence of self-study capacity and learner autonomy. Rather than treating the flipped classroom as a purely digital mechanism for grade optimization, I interpret this model through the ontological lens of the *Daodejing*. The educator practices *Wuwei er wu bu wei* (acting through non-action)—intentionally receding into the background to cultivate an invisible, nourishing pedagogical space via pre-designed digital courseware, thereby yielding the center of the pedagogical stage to the learners' spontaneous self-actualization. My empirical findings demonstrate that when liberated from the traditional instructor's dogmatic intervention and discursive imposition, students not only exhibit profound development in literary argumentative text-creation skills but also attain a state of *Ziran* (spontaneity) in artistic and literary appreciation. Consequently, this study inaugurates a new horizon in academic discourse, demonstrating that the synthesis of ancient Eastern philosophy and contemporary educational technology not only optimizes pedagogical efficacy but fundamentally emancipates the learner's subjecthood in contemporary humanities education.

Keywords: *Wuwei; Flipped Classroom; Learner Autonomy; Literature Pedagogy; Daoist Pedagogy.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Contemporary literature education in Vietnam is undergoing a paradigm shift of historical proportions under the implementation of the 2018 General Education Curriculum, moving resolutely from a rigid, knowledge-transmission model toward a holistic framework aimed at developing learners' intrinsic qualities and competencies (Ministry of Education and Training, 2018). Within this emergent epistemic structure, the capacity for self-study is heralded as a core competency, serving as the ontological key that empowers individuals to acquire knowledge independently and sustain personal sovereignty in an ever-fluctuating world. My methodological research has vividly demonstrated the viability of the Flipped Classroom model by migrating foundational instructional materials and video lectures to digital platforms prior to formal class hours (Nguyen, 2022). This procedural inversion transforms the physical classroom into an intensive deliberative space, enabling students to autonomously decode the sophisticated aesthetics of canonical modern Vietnamese short stories, such as Nam Cao's *Chí Phèo*, Nguyễn Tuân's *Chữ người tử tù*, and Thạch Lam's *Hai đứa trẻ*. Nevertheless, the preponderance of contemporary pedagogical discourses surrounding the flipped classroom remains heavily mechanistic, overemphasizing technical execution and Web 2.0 tools while marginalizing the learner's inner consciousness and spontaneous self-generation. To bridge this theoretical lacuna, I advocate for a philosophical return to classical Daoist thought—specifically the concepts of *Wuwei* (effortless action) and *Ziran* (spontaneity)—to establish a novel ontological foundation for learner autonomy in literary education.

In the lexicon of Daoist philosophy, *Wuwei* is by no means synonymous with inertia, passivity, or fatalistic abdication; rather, it denotes aligning action with the objective, natural flow of reality, characterized by the absence of artificial coercion and dogmatic interference (Slingerland, 2003). As Laozi famously encapsulated in the *Daodejing*: "The Sage manages affairs via non-action, and practices the teaching without words." When projected onto the contemporary pedagogical landscape, this spirit resonates profoundly with the core tenets of the flipped classroom. In the classical pedagogical paradigm, the teacher acts as an omniscient sovereign, imposing a monological discourse upon the student body and reducing the study of literature to passive, rote transcription. Conversely, my deployment of the flipped classroom empowers the educator to execute a form of "pedagogical *wuwei*." The instructor recedes behind the curtain, concealing their absolute authority by archiving lecture videos and learning rubrics beforehand, thereby allowing students to freely construct knowledge at their own cognitive pace within their private environments. Consequently, face-to-face classroom hours are emancipated from doctrinal lecturing, mutating instead into a flexible "empty space" (*Wu*) wherein collaborative knowledge and critical inquiry spontaneously blossom through the unforced interaction of learning subjects (Bergmann & Sams, 2012).

When instructing modern short stories through this philosophical prism, the intrinsic beauty of literary art is liberated from the shackles of standardized answer keys. Guided self-study enables students to enter into a genuine, uncoerced dialogue with the text, absorbing Thạch Lam's humanistic depth or Nguyễn Tuân's aesthetic philosophy in its most organic form. At this juncture, learner autonomy reaches a state of self-becoming and self-transformation, elevating student cognition far beyond rudimentary comprehension into the realm of authentic critical creativity. As Kohn (1993) famously argued, genuine learner autonomy manifests only when the mechanisms of external control and institutional imposition are dissolved, allowing intrinsic motivation to sustain lifelong learning. Viewed through the Daoist gaze, the flipped classroom model I implemented represents a sublime metamorphosis from "artificial education" (*youwei jiaoyu*) to "effortless education" (*wuwei jiaoyu*). By conducting a rigorous analysis of the qualitative and quantitative indices embedded within my empirical framework, this paper contends that the zenith of modern educational technology lies not in rigid technical engineering, but in its supreme capacity to actualize the Daoist ideal of absolute learner autonomy within the contemporary academy.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

A global and domestic literature review reveals a robust yet fragmented development across two distinct domains: contemporary pedagogical technology and ancient applied philosophy. In the wave of global educational reform, the Flipped Classroom model has been extensively researched as a paradigm designed to optimize face-to-face interactive hours and catalyze learner proactivity (Abeysekera & Dawson, 2015). Western scholars emphasize that migrating conceptual lectures to out-of-class digital environments empowers learners to self-regulate their cognitive pacing, thereby establishing a prerequisite for profound collaborative inquiry during in-class hours (Bergmann & Sams, 2012). In Vietnam, this pedagogical inversion has been aggressively assimilated since the inauguration of the 2018 General Education Curriculum, marking a monumental epistemic shift from content-based instruction to competency-based education. Within this shifting paradigm, the empirical endeavor of Nguyen (2022) pioneered the implementation of the flipped classroom model within the context of 11th-grade modern Vietnamese short stories, demonstrating its profound efficacy in elevating students' literary argumentative prose and fostering self-study capabilities.

Nevertheless, an ontological investigation into the nature of self-study uncovers a critical theoretical bottleneck: the preponderance of contemporary flipped classroom frameworks remains confined within a technocratic and mechanistic gaze. Flipped learning is frequently reduced to the automated completion of tasks on Learning Management Systems (LMS) under the panoptic, high-pressure surveillance of the instructor (Amreshi et al., 2019). This inadvertently engenders a pedagogical paradox wherein the students' "autonomy" is merely a manufactured behavior manipulated by calculated, artificial (*youwei*) digital constraints. To resolve this philosophical crisis, an emergent cohort of contemporary literature is turning toward Eastern wisdom to secure an

emancipatory ontological anchor. Daoist philosophy, particularly its latent pedagogical resonance, has begun to be excavated by international educational theorists as a radical alternative to Western authoritarian, monological models of schooling (Confait, 2016). However, a direct structural synthesis between the technological infrastructure of the flipped classroom and the spontaneous, self-generating ontology of Daoism—specifically within the specialized realm of literary aesthetics—remains entirely unmapped. Consequently, while this study inherits the rigorous empirical dataset from the work of Nguyen (2022), it executes a conceptual leap by evaluating the flipped model through the Daoist gaze to redefine the student's inner freedom of aesthetic reception.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework of this inquiry is anchored in the ontological convergence between two foundational categories of Daoist philosophy—*Wuwei* (effortless action) and *Qiwu* (the equality of things)—and the pedagogical mechanics of the flipped classroom within literary spaces. The essence of *Wuwei* in Laozi's philosophy is by no means an endorsement of absolute inertia or nihilistic passivity; rather, it signifies the attainment of supreme efficacy by aligning action with the natural orientation of reality, consciously expunging artificial coercion and dogmatic imposition (Slingerland, 2003). Within the architectural matrix of the flipped classroom implemented in my research, the principle of *Wuwei* transfigures the instructor's role from an omniscient sovereign of monological discourse into an invisible yet nourishing presence. By meticulously designing streamlined video lectures and learning matrices that enable students to independently seize knowledge within their private domains (Nguyen, 2022), the educator executes a pedagogical withdrawal. This strategic retreat liberates the classroom from oppressive traditional power hierarchies, cultivating a flexible "empty space" (*Wu*) wherein the learner's intrinsic motivation spontaneously awakens (Kohn, 1993).

Complementing *Wuwei*, Zhuangzi's principle of *Qiwu* provides a critical epistemological foundation for pluralistic literary reception. *Qiwu* dissolves all artificial dualistic boundaries and conventional prejudices, asserting the absolute ontological equality of all entities within the cosmic totality of the Dao (Chuang Tzu, 1968). When operationalized during the face-to-face collaborative dialogues of the flipped short story classroom, *Qiwu* serves as the philosophical guardian for the students' discursive multiplicity. The literary text ceases to be a hermetically sealed repository containing a singular, authorized truth dictated by the instructor; instead, it mutates into an open aesthetic field. Students are empowered to engage in authentic dialogue, unveiling highly individualized, and even iconoclastic interpretations regarding the existential conditions of characters in *Chí Phèo* or *Hai đứa trẻ*, provided they sustain logical argumentation (Nguyen, 2022). This epistemic freedom resonates perfectly with contemporary Reader-Response Theory, which stipulates that the text's meaning is only actualized through the uncoerced horizon of the reader's reception (Iser, 1978). Ergo, the synthesis of *Wuwei* and *Qiwu* within the flipped model transcends mere methodological adjustment; it represents a sublime transformation toward a "Daoist Pedagogy"—a sacred space where the study of literature culminates in a state of *Xiaoyao* (carefree wandering), characterized by absolute inner freedom and authentic autonomy.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study deploys a mixed-methods research methodology to cultivate a rigorous epistemological dialogue between quantitative empirical evidence and qualitative philosophical interpretation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The foundational empirical data is inherited and critically analyzed from my own pedagogical experimental research (Nguyen, 2022), which was executed within a secondary school setting utilizing a cohort of 11th-grade students engaged in the study of modern Vietnamese short stories. The experimental trajectory was bifurcated into two rigorous phases: an asynchronous out-of-class phase (where students autonomously navigated video lectures and analytic rubrics via digital platforms) and a synchronous in-class phase (characterized by collaborative peer-group dynamics, aesthetic debates, and the creation of argumentative texts). To evaluate the evolution of self-study capacity and subject-specific competencies, the research utilized a comprehensive matrix of product-assessment rubrics coupled with post-test instruments designed according to standardized metrics (Nguyen, 2022).

Regarding data analysis, quantitative indices (examination scores, engagement frequencies, task completion percentages) were computed using mathematical statistics to validate the superior efficacy of the flipped model over the conventional lecture-centric paradigm (Fraenkel et al., 2012). However, to transcend the mechanical limitations of numerical data, this study places paramount emphasis on Discourse Analysis and Phenomenological Analysis to interpret qualitative artifacts, including classroom dialogue transcriptions, creative textual products, and student self-reflective journals (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). This interpretive approach enables me to delve into the learners' inner consciousness, decoding how students autonomously construct meaning and achieve aesthetic sovereignty when the instructor's dogmatic authority is dissolved in accordance with the Daoist spirit. This seamless integration between the precision of modern experimental pedagogy and the interpretive depth of religious philosophy constitutes the methodological keystone that ensures the ultimate validity and academic reliability of the entire study (Tashakkori & Creswell, 2007).

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

5.1. Quantitative Evidence: The Efficiency of Pedagogical Inversion

The quantitative empirical findings garnered from my research (Nguyen, 2022) provide unequivocal validation regarding the profound enhancement of subject-specific competencies and literary argumentative text-creation skills among students subjected to the flipped classroom model compared to those in the conventional lecture-centric control group. The mathematical statistical indices, including mean scores, standard deviations, and p-values, transcend the mere presentation of a pedagogical experiment's technical efficiency; at a deeper epistemic level, they signify a momentous epistemological emancipation (Abeysekera & Dawson, 2015). The empirical score distribution derived from assessments evaluating argumentative essays on modern short stories reveals a significant quantitative lacuna: the experimental group (G2) exhibited a demonstrably higher proportion of excellent grades alongside exceptional homogeneity in density distribution (Nguyen, 2022). Within the framework of Daoist philosophy, this quantitative ascendancy is by no means interpreted as a mechanical byproduct of institutional coercion, academic pressure, or behaviorist compliance techniques that frequently dominate Western industrial models of education (Kohn, 1993). On the contrary, it serves as empirical validation that when *youwei* (artificial/coercive) constraints—specifically the instructor's discursive hegemony and monological knowledge-infusion—are intentionally expunged, the learners' innate capacity for self-study and original intellect spontaneously awakens, flourishes, and self-actualizes (Slingerland, 2003).

Within the operational architecture of the flipped matrix I established, the digital courseware, pre-archived instructional videos, and guided self-study matrices accessed by students prior to formal class hours serve as the pedagogical instantiation of the *Dao* (Nguyen, 2022). Just as the *Dao* gives birth to all things without possessing them and guides them without claiming merit, this digital repository exists in serene, invisible silence within the cyber-infrastructure, refraining from vocal dictation yet harboring the essential conceptual nutrients required to sustain the cognitive trajectory. This is the ultimate operationalization of the principle of "*Bu yan zhi jiao*" (teaching without words) articulated within the *Daodejing* (Laozi, 1993). When students self-regulate their cognitive pacing, freely rewinding lecture videos within their subjective spaces to master foundational literary contexts (Nguyen, 2022), they embed themselves within an organic, self-generating process of knowledge acquisition. This metamorphosis from passive transcription to proactive knowledge architecture demonstrates that learner autonomy cannot be mechanically externalized or enforced via behaviorist directives; rather, it is unlocked only when the educator cultivates a deliberate, pedagogical "empty space" (*Wu*) (Confait, 2016). The superior quantitative performance of the flipped cohort is the tangible manifestation of *De* (virtue/potency)—the uncorrupted intrinsic nature and capability of each individual learner, fully nourished and unleashed when insulated from oppressive educational paradigms (Zheng, 2018).

5.2. Qualitative Interpretation: *Wuwei* and the Liberation of Aesthetic Freedom

Transcending the boundaries of mechanical statistics, the philosophical depth and humanistic resonance of this inquiry are truly illuminated through discourse analysis and phenomenological evaluation of the qualitative artifacts generated during synchronous in-class dialogic sessions (Denzin

& Lincoln, 2018). When the educator abdicates the authoritarian pulpit and renounces the mantle of an omniscient, monological sovereign, a unique pedagogical phenomenon occurs: the classroom does not lapse into the cognitive chaos or directional vacuum feared by conservative pedagogues; instead, it organically re-establishes a state of cosmic spontaneity and harmony equivalent to the concept of *Ziran* in Lao-Zhuang philosophy (Chuang Tzu, 1968). At this juncture, the instructor actualizes the zenith of administrative wisdom: "*Wuwei er wu bu wei*" (acting through non-action). By deliberately refraining from dogmatic intervention and the imposition of standardized analytical rubrics (Nguyen, 2022), the teacher liberates the student's consciousness, allowing collaborative dialogue and critical inquiry to blossom within an authentic topography of liberty (Biesta, 2010).

The operationalization of Zhuangzi's principle of *Qiwu* (the equality of things) within the literary classroom serves as the definitive antidote to the symbolic violence of the standardized "answer key." *Qiwu* asserts the absolute ontological equality of all cosmic entities and interpretive discourses (Chuang Tzu, 1968). When implemented in the study of canonical modern Vietnamese short stories, this philosophy transfigures the classroom into a polyphonic aesthetic domain where each student's interpretive resonance is afforded equal ontological weight, harmonizing beautifully with contemporary Reader-Response Theory (Iser, 1978). Empirical discourse artifacts gathered from debates surrounding Nam Cao's *Chí Phèo* demonstrate that students are no longer shackled by a mechanistic, vulgar sociological gaze that reduces the character to a mere byproduct of feudal class friction (Nguyen, 2022). Instead, they autonomously pierce the veil of alienation to touch the uncorrupted primordial nature—the state of *Pu* (the uncarved block) in classical Daoism (Slingerland, 2003)—hidden deep within Chí Phèo's fractured soul, catalyzed by the profound simplicity of Thị Nở's onion porridge. Similarly, when navigating Thạch Lam's *Hai đứa trẻ*, the students' psychological resonance with the district town's encroaching shadows and the passing night train is no longer a simulated emotion mirrored from the instructor, but an authentic awakening of subjecthood—a liberating journey of *Xiaoyao* (carefree wandering) wherein the aesthetic consciousness transcends its immediate socio-historical confinement (Nguyen, 2022). This discursive emancipation confirms that the ultimate telos of literary pedagogy is to return the text to the reader, allowing the student's inner voice to achieve its most sacred, absolute autonomy (Kohn, 1993).

5.3. Toward a "Daoist Pedagogy": Moving Beyond the Technocratic Trap

The ontological convergence between the flipped classroom model, grounded in my empirical pedagogical data (Nguyen, 2022), and Lao-Zhuang philosophy transcends mere methodological optimization, pivoting resolutely toward the expansion of theoretical horizons to inaugurate a novel paradigm: "Daoist Pedagogy." Within the contemporary academic landscape, Western flipped learning frameworks predominantly succumb to the technocratic trap and an exaggerated fetishism of digital engineering (Amreshi et al., 2019). Education is increasingly reduced to a mechanical, algorithmic operation wherein students' asynchronous learning activities are relentlessly monitored via AI surveillance, big data tracking, and aggressive institutional compliance matrices. This excessive technocratic enforcement inadvertently plunges the flipped classroom into a novel state of *youwei* (artificial/coercive intervention), wherein authentic learner autonomy is subverted into a programmed behavior manipulated by the hidden structures of digital authority (Confait, 2016). Conversely, my inquiry contends that the genuine zenith of the flipped classroom resides not in technocratic sophistication, but in its profound emancipatory potential. Once the symbolic violence of monological instruction is dissolved, digital technology merely serves as a "raft" used to cross the river; after students have autonomously seized foundational knowledge within their subjective domains, this technological vehicle must be relinquished to grant uncoerced space for spiritual self-generation (Nguyen, 2022).

By deeply integrating ancient Eastern wisdom, Daoist Pedagogy redefines the ultimate *telos* of literary education—not as the mere accumulation of quantitative metrics or adherence to rigid institutional assessments, but as the attainment of *Xiaoyao* (carefree wandering), representing absolute inner freedom and existential subjecthood within the aesthetic consciousness (Chuang Tzu, 1968). Within this state of pedagogical *Xiaoyao*, the study of literature is liberated from all forms of systemic coercion, institutional discipline, and bureaucratic pressures (Kohn, 1993). Students navigate the artistic

universes of modern short stories as a free pilgrimage of the soul, entering into an uncoerced dialogue with the text, independently questioning, constructing meaning, and assuming absolute responsibility for their unique cognitive trajectories (Nguyen, 2022). Intrinsic motivation, at this juncture, is sustained neither by external rewards nor punitive mechanisms, but flows organically from the profound love of beauty and the existential pursuit of truth embedded within literature (Biesta, 2010). When the educator practices pedagogical withdrawal, they restore the learner's sacred right to err, to self-correct, and to experience the world independently, allowing the subject to find its authentic alignment (Slingerland, 2003). Daoist Pedagogy thus emerges as a profound philosophical resolution to the spiritual crisis of modern education, transfiguring the classroom from a technocratic factory into an emancipatory sanctuary where human beings are returned to their most primordial, natural state of being (Zheng, 2018).

6. CONCLUSION

This interdisciplinary inquiry, synthesizing modern educational methodology with ancient Eastern philosophy, arrives at a crucial conceptual crystallization, validating the empirical viability and profound humanistic depth of integrating Daoist thought into the flipped classroom within literature education. Through a comprehensive re-evaluation of the quantitative and qualitative empirical datasets derived from my master's thesis (Nguyen, 2022), this paper has conclusively demonstrated that the flipped classroom model does more than merely optimize cognitive performance indices and textual creation skills; more fundamentally, it provides the ideal structural topography to liberate and actualize authentic learner autonomy. When the educator embodies the spirit of *Wuwei* (effortless action) by migrating structural courseware and video lectures to digital environments, enabling students to master foundational contexts asynchronously prior to formal hours (Nguyen, 2022), the traditional apparatus of pedagogical oppression is effectively dismantled. The face-to-face classroom is thus transfigured into an open aesthetic field wherein the principle of *Qiwu* (the equality of things) is unconditionally honored, allowing students' pluralistic interpretations of canonical modern short stories like *Chí Phèo*, *Chữ người tử tù*, and *Hai đứa trẻ* to blossom without being suffocated by pre-determined, standardized analytical answers (Iser, 1978).

The scholarly contribution of this study transcends conventional pedagogical adjustments, presenting a radical ontological proposal for contemporary humanities education. The paper delivers a rigorous critique of the technocratic trap paralyzing modern Western flipped learning frameworks, where educational technology is weaponized to establish subtle networks of behavioral control, shackling the student's inner consciousness (Amreshi et al., 2019). Conversely, returning to the wisdom of Lao-Zhuang illuminates a "Daoist Pedagogy" paradigm whose ultimate destination is to elevate the learner into a state of absolute academic freedom, characterized by *Xiaoyao* (Chuang Tzu, 1968). Viewed through this philosophical gaze, literary education ceases to be a mechanistic skill-training apparatus serving utilitarian demands; rather, it mutates into a sacred process of self-awakening that nurtures and unleashes the primordial, natural spontaneity (*Ziran*) inherent within each human soul (Slingerland, 2003). Within the specific context of Vietnam's implementation of the 2018 General Education Curriculum, this study not only reaffirms the pragmatic validity of the original empirical framework (Nguyen, 2022) but also carves a promising path for international educational theorists: mobilizing ancient philosophical wisdom to heal and restore the spiritual fragmentation wrought by modern technocracy within the contemporary academy (Zheng, 2018).

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