

THE USE OF VIDEOS IN EFL CLASSROOM: A REVOLUTION

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ABSTRACT

This article presents different views, methods, approaches and suggestions of English teachers, professionals, and teaching experts on the importance of the use of the videos in the EFL classroom. It deals how videos can stimulate the learning process, motivate and provide authentic varied language; bring variety and flexibility to the language classroom by extending the range of teaching techniques and resources, helping students to develop all four communicative skills in the acquisition of communication in English. This paper attempts to showcase relevant methodology and suggestions that would provide the new techniques in the acquisition of communication by using videos in EFL classroom.

KEYWORDS: Methodology, Pedagogical Aids, Technology, Videos in EFL Classrooms, Visual and Audio Stimuli

INTRODUCTION

“... Learning is a process of discovery, information process and expression.”

(Pachler and Field, 2001:251)

In this article the use of videos in the EFL classroom as pedagogical aids is discussed. The advent, proliferation and the availability of new technologies such as digital videos, computers, cameras, internet etc., appears to compliment recent innovative approaches to language teaching. The use of videos is widespread in the modern days as videos are compatible with computers.

Technology and language learning are not new. This way of thinking has been around for about 50 years. Though video and other multimedia have been around since late 1960s, it is the recent drop in costs that have made these kinds of materials a practical possibility in a wide variety of classrooms. As a result more and more EFL teachers started using these tools as media of instruction. This article presents how the videos can be effectively used, how to get started using videos, how to get students involved in working with videos, and the methodology to be followed while using videos.

In a foreign language education, teaching with videos have proved especially useful for various reasons. Primarily, the video materials provide students with the opportunity to experience the target language in a natural context. Secondly, the use of video materials creates opportunity for the students to observe and participate more actively while maximizing the use of several cognitive skills.

Since 1990s up till the present time, when videos became widely available as teaching resources, EFL researchers and educators (Lonergan, 1984; Allan, 1985; Cambre, 1992; Terrell, 1993) have asserted the importance of incorporating video materials in the learning of language. Some believe that “videos expose students to authentic materials and to voices, dialects, and registers other than the teacher's and provide cultural contexts for that FL” (Chung & Huang, 1998, p. 553).

Furthermore, according to Stempleski (1987), an authentic video is “a rich and exciting source of video software for EFL/ESL classes” (Stempleski, 1987, p. 3). Therefore, the case for employing videos for an integrated language skills approach and for teaching after the communicative approach cannot be turned down. Therefore EFL teachers have the responsibility to provide students with certain skills that would allow them to succeed in their studies. Teachers should enable students acquire skills and knowledge in English, and be able to articulate that knowledge in English.

Carefully selected videos in the hands of English teachers can become an oasis of target language which is particularly useful in imparting different skills. Hence, English teachers need to help students make a connection between what they are learning in a classroom and application of the same in real life or real world situations. This is an example how multimedia instruction using videos can be effective tool in teaching English.

Conventional speaking textbooks provide wonderful activities for students. However, they are not always enough for the simple fact that students’ attention will often waiver in the classroom. Furthermore, some of the material found in EFL textbooks are dry and lack the variety and authenticity of real-world conversations. In order to overcome such obstacles, EFL instructors need something more, something that can stimulate students and get them motivated to participate in the classroom activities. Using video clips as a conversational medium can help instructors facilitate and make the students acquire the needed skills.

METHODOLOGY

Use of Videos in the Classroom

Using new technologies simply because they are available at a cheaper cost is not a good rationale. In determining whether and when to use videos is a consideration. Teachers should be aware of the impact and the principles of learning process while using the videos in their classroom.

The use of videos in the classroom has several effects and impacts. Teachers who use instructional videos report that their students retain more language related information. Students in their class understand lexis, grammar items, conversations and other concepts more rapidly and are more enthusiastic about what they are learning. With videos as one component in a thoughtful lesson plan, students often make new connections between curriculum topics, and discover links between these topics and the world outside the classroom.

The use of videos in EFL classroom has the following advantages. They can breathe meaning and life into almost in every lesson.

Videos are uniquely suited to:

- Provide a common experience for all students
- Take students on impossible field trips--inside the human body, or off to Shakespeare’s plays, or the USA
- Reach learners with a variety of learning styles, especially visual learners, and students with a variety of information acquisition styles
- Promote critical viewing skills and media awareness
- Generate interest and stimulate imagination
- Illustrate complex, abstract concepts through animated, 3-D images

- Engage students in problem-solving and investigative activities
- Offer a different perspective or another approach to a topic
- Help students practice media literacy and critical viewing skills
- Connect students with a faraway place like the UK or Canada
- Bring great literature, plays, music, or important scenes from literary history into the room
- Take students around the globe, to meet new people and hear their ideas
- Enhance self-respect and break down social stereotypes
- Stimulate the development of critical thinking skills
- Provide a common experience for students to discuss
- Equalize educational opportunities
- Begin to dismantle social stereotypes

There are a number of good reasons to use videos in classrooms. According to Johnston (1999), videos combine visual and audio stimuli. They provide context for learning. Stempleski (1992) viewed that for English language learners, videos have the added benefit of providing real language and cultural information. The main benefits of videos are that they can be controlled. They can be stopped, paused, repeated etc. They can be presented to a group of students, to individuals, or for self study. As Bello (1990) said videos allow learners to see facial expressions and body language at the same time as they hear the stress, intonation, and rhythm of the language. Videos are stimulating to learners. They catch the attention of learners very quickly. Furthermore, using authentic videos in the classroom can provide opportunities for learners to evaluate a medium that they use in their daily life (Stempleski, 1992).

Nowadays instructional videos for English language development have been created for use in classrooms. Such instructional video aids have additional advantages. They have already been evaluated for language, content, and length, and many instructional videos are packaged as multimedia resources that include student workbooks, teacher guides, video transcripts, and audiotapes (Stempleski, 1992).

Usage of videos, some view that it is a lazy medium. They feel that videos provide little challenges for the mind and spoon-feed the mind with sounds and sights, thereby providing little room for one's imagination to thrive.

Well, if I were you, reading this article so far, (assuming that someone did!) I might have asked, "Ok, partner, so how do we make this lazy medium a useful classroom tool?" Well then, let us (try to) see how to achieve this. Lots of ideas come to mind. How about turning of sound and asking students to create the dialogue from a scene? Or how about, getting one part of the class to watch and describe to the others? Yes! How about simply using a freeze frame technique where you watch and pause when it gets very interesting, then ask your students a number of questions about what happens next?

In this respect, there are many other aspects to EFL teaching using videos. Let us look at all the aspects in the use of videos in EFL classroom.

Working with Videos

My work over six years in India and seventeen years in Oman has brought me into thinking heavily about the role of videos in language instruction. Even more so now with my work with the Ministry of Manpower, Sultanate of Oman, I saw the power of videos while teaching technical English to my trainees. For instance, I am able to show 3-D video clips of machines and motors while explaining the new lexis. The inner parts of a machine (e.g. piston rings, cam-shaft) cannot be seen with the naked eyes when you look at a machine. Here comes the role of videos in teaching English. Therefore one has to admit the fact that videos have brought a revolution in teaching English. I wouldn't go so far as Chris Anderson of TED who says we are in the midst of something as transformative as the Gutenberg revolution. But I will say, as an EFL instructor, it feels so!

Videos have universal appeal across cultures. Moreover, they provide students with authentic situations in which the English language is used. There are a variety of ways EFL instructors use videos in the class. Some use them in order to promote listening comprehension in the classroom while others may use video clips to work on grammar such as adjectives and adverbs. In this article, instructors learn different ways of using video clips in the classroom in imparting skills in general.

Pre-Class Preparation

The first step in using videos in the classroom is to find one that is appropriate. Several factors are to be kept in mind, such as content, appeal, length etc. while choosing a video clip. Here are a few questions instructors should be asking themselves when choosing an appropriate video clip: a) Is the content suitable for the students? b) Does the content appeal to the students? c) Is the length of the clip too long? If these questions are pricking your mind, then it is a better option to try and innovate for yourself. Just bear in mind the following.

- Choose the video according to the students' abilities and according to your own course objectives and teaching methodologies. Remember to be careful about the content of the video. Content suitable for students and the appeal of the video virtually speak for themselves.
- The length of the video clip should be not shorter than three minutes and not longer than six minutes. Clips shorter than three minutes may not provide enough substance for the lesson to be taught. Besides clips more than six minutes in length may be too challenging for students. Lengthy videos will inundate students with so much language content that they may begin to experience anxiety or feel stress, emotions which will easily hinder the language learning process.
- Determine what kind of video to use in the classroom (e.g. comedy, drama, action movie, grammar, conversation etc.), and then search popular video sites such as YouTube.com or Google videos for the video clips. In these sites, video clips are abundant and are easily accessible in the classroom.
- Care should be taken when choosing a video clip. It should suite to the level of the students. The content of the video should not be too easy or too challenging. It should be moderate and a little above standard.
- Create a worksheet that has sections in which students can jot down ideas that will later be used, once the content is chosen. At the bottom of the worksheet, a few lines should be added so that students can write a short narrative. Once the worksheet is completed and sufficient copies have been made, the instructor is now ready for class.

Pre-Viewing Activities

When the class starts, instructors should make sure to place the students into small groups based on the number of the students. The size of each group can vary according to the size of the class and other factors taking into consideration. Before viewing the video the instructor can prepare his students by posing questions to predict or identify the most or least relevant lexis list based on the lesson topic or title. He can give a gist task. He can direct students to focus attention on certain events, people, or problems. He can discuss the title and predict the content. The teacher should focus on achieving learners' own prior knowledge of the topic and review or present key vocabulary. One way to do this is to assign a reading activity based on the same theme of the video clip. Another way could be to show a clip without sound. Then discuss and write a possible dialogue. Think of other alternatives if you can.

The other options could be teachers can distribute the worksheets. Next, the video clip is briefly introduced. Instructors need to be careful to not give away what is happening in the clip. If they do so, the curiosity in the students is lost. In addition, the students will not have much to watch, listen, write and later narrate. It is a better option to simply inform the students of what they are about to do and the name of the video. That would be fine.

Presentation or Viewing

Once the students have been addressed, the instructor plays the video clip with the volume muted or volume on according to his own lesson objectives of that particular lesson. Teacher has to make sure that learners get enough time to read the worksheets before the clip is played. While watching the clip, students are to write down, on the worksheets, what they see in the clip. The clip can be repeated if the situation demands. Consider the following points while conducting the video lesson. They are as followed:

- Never play a video without giving an introduction. Lead-in activity or a gist task before playing the video would be bandy. Set a suitable context unless there is a good reason for not doing so.
- Let the video do the work. Never explain the content what the video says.
- Don't play a video clip for too long without stopping.
- Be ready to take any unexpected challenges. Be sensitive and realistic as to what students can be expected to memorize.
- Introduce simple tasks on short segments in the beginning and then lead into more difficult or challenging tasks in nature.
- Be ready to adapt suitable techniques for lesson building. Be ready to give tasks in reading, speaking or according to the aims and objectives of that particular lesson.
- Take care in choosing the segments and programmes that relate to the topics or literary or technical works already taught in the class, rather than making a video of a self-contained unit.
- Make a video option as an integral part of your curriculum design rather than an independent piece of work. Treat a video option as a change of pace from the normal routine.
- Devise a progression of preparation, presentation, and expansion activities. Create a whole class lesson plan that

uses three to six minutes of video clip of class in conducting variety of activities. Create a ten-minute activity of any skill that uses one minute of video clip.

- Focus on lively activities that steal the attention of students in selected skills and elements.
- It is important that instructors be actively engaged in the class and the lesson. Additionally, the instructors act as though what they just saw was the most amazing thing alive! As the video clip has been played, the instructor can ask students questions regarding the clip. For example: What did you see in the video clip? What was happening? What emotions, do you think, the actors felt?

As students take a few minutes to discuss, students are instructed to write a small narrative or complete the worksheets. This is where the lesson can get very interesting for the students. Instructors can give variety of tasks for students. Creativity is what matters most. A choice to either write the narrative in third person format, or, first person format should students wish to imagine they are the actor or actress in the video clip could be other option. The video can be played again without sound or with sound on.

Post Viewing or Expansion

Post viewing tasks are to be planned carefully. After the video clip has been played, teacher may give time for discussion or completion of the given worksheets. Students can be asked to come up with a narrative for the video clip. While students are writing, instructor can walk around and assist as necessary. When the groups have completed their narratives, instructor can choose a group to narrate the video clip. The video clip is played again, this time, with students narrating while the video clip is being played. It is preferable if each student from the group had a chance to read a few lines of the narrative, however, it may be difficult if the class is too large especially in the Indian school or college system where the classes are usually large. Regardless of class size, each group has a turn to narrate. Once all groups have had a chance to narrate, instructor concludes the lesson with a round of praise. Appreciation of the students' participation boosts the enthusiasm and they will participate in a better manner in the next video lesson.

Post viewing or expansion has to be carefully planned as emphasized above. A few ideas are worth noting in this regard. These can even be given as homework.

- Write about a character in the video or video clips watched during the lesson.
- Complete a cross-word puzzle using the lexis that was given in the lesson or that was presented in the video clips.
- Complete the dialogues or compose similar dialogues or write a narration of the video clip watched.
- Give a critical review of the video clip.
- Act out a scene from the video clip.
- Research and report on related topics via group efforts.
- Use the transcript to note linguistic features, technical terms, word formation, or syntax.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

How can we get students involved in working with videos?

In order to successfully complete a lesson using videos the following points are to be considered. They are as followed:

- Use videos that will connect the problems and issues of their own lives to the activities of the classroom.
- Select suitable materials and activities that have equal components of entertainment and edification.
- Identify sub-segments of videos that are brief enough to eliminate memory and retention problems of the learners.
- Try to avoid open-ended tasks that demand retelling of long sequences and that motivate only a few exceptionally talented students while frustrating the average and below average students.
- Use structured speaking activities based on printed guides or frequent freeze-frame or replay in order to allow even the weakest student to move from listening or viewing to speaking.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, I would be pleased to accept the fact that videos in the EFL classroom allow learners to have access to rich body of knowledge, and move from listening to speaking or writing. Videos generate interest and stimulate imagination. They connect students with far away places and stimulate imagination. Videos also stimulate development of skills. They help the language learners to hear the language within a visible context. Our brains are hard wired for the pictures, the visual, and language learning will benefit from this gigantic shift in the way humans learn (by video as opposed to books).

So far in this article, the uses of videos in the EFL classroom are discussed at length and breadth. The above said guidelines should stimulate your work and pave way to use videos in language teaching. I have been following them in my language teaching for quite a long time successfully. These guidelines are not meant to be prescriptive, but provocative. They are ideas, suggestions, perspectives, fragments of a larger universe of possibilities. So you can pass on these suggestions for the good of teaching community. Such act of kindness is heartily welcomed.

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