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A discourse perspective on multimedia training for EFL teachers: Look beyond the critical thinking in academic settings

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ABSTRACT

The development of information and communication technology (ICT) has brought choices of teaching material and delivery techniques. The availability of supporting facilities is a fundamental requirement. The next one deals with the teachers' preparedness related to their attitude toward the technology and the required technical skills to use it. The Foreign Language Training Center of Ahlia University has provided every class with audio-video facilities connected to the Internet; therefore, this study discusses an attempt to facilitate the teachers' familiarity, utilization, and elaboration of multimedia supports in their teaching practices. To begin, a questionnaire was distributed to elicit their attitudes towards video material for teaching English. This could be further categorized into its usefulness, necessities before its application, and potential problems. It was found out that they admitted the positive usefulness of video material and stated some technical problems as potential barriers. A need for training in video material preparation was also identified. A training program was then administered to familiarize the teachers with the hardware and software for video material download, preparation and presentation. As the next step in encouraging the integration of video material in their lessons, Paul Nation's four strands theory (2007) and pre-whilst-post watching stages were adopted to construct classroom activity plans.

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1. Introduction

Being an English teacher in this century, when information and communication technology invades many aspects of life, requires additional literacy aside from teaching expertise and language competence. In situations when papers and pencils, chalk and blackboards, even tape recorders and cassettes become "obsolete" for language practice, teachers then have to seek other alternatives. It is also another challenge for today's teachers to catch up with the students, who are sometimes called the "digital natives". They have been accustomed to Web

2.0 on a daily basis, enabling them to access and exchange multimedia products: text, audio-video, picture, and animated graphics.

This phenomenon surely should be regarded positively as a boost in self-development and endorsement to learn from richer and more global resources. Blogs, wikis, online learning resources, video-sharing sites, social media, and another Web 2.0 products benefit 21st-century learners. Taking this point of view into the context of teaching English as a foreign language, like in Indonesia, authentic and ready-to-use resources and media are getting easier to access. The fundamental question first deals with the availability of supporting facilities. Secondly, it relates to the required skills of using the technology products. These two aspects would be important for the effective application of the material.

This study, therefore, intends to facilitate the teachers' familiarity, utilization, and elaboration of multimedia supports in their teaching practices. To achieve these objectives, a questionnaire was distributed to elicit teachers' attitudes towards video material for teaching English. The questionnaire specifically addressed their perceived usefulness, potential problems of preparing and using it in classes, and necessities prior to its application.

Teachers' attitude towards ICT

This study is founded firstly on the necessity of assessing teachers' attitudes towards ICT for teaching purposes. It is known that teachers' attitudes have been found to be major predictors of the use of new technologies in instructional settings (Almusalam, 2001 in Khan, et al, 2012). Furthermore, Mumtaz (2000) states that teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning with ICT are central to its integration. Hence the successful use of ICT in the classroom largely depends on their attitudes and belief. In fact, it has been suggested that attitudes towards computers affect teachers' use of computers in the classroom and the likelihood of their benefiting from training (Kluever, et al, 1994). Therefore, teachers who have positive attitudes towards ICT itself will be positively disposed towards using it in the classroom (Moseley & Higgins, 1999).

According to Pelgrum (2001), the success of educational innovations depends largely on the skills and knowledge of teachers. Teachers' lack of knowledge and skills is one of the main hindrances to the use of ICT in education, both for developed and underdeveloped countries (Ma mun, & Ta pan, 2009; Pelgrum, 2001; lhmeideh, 2009; Williams 1995 as stated in Khan, et al, 2012). Integrating technology in the curriculum requires knowledge of the subject area, an understanding of how students learn and a level of technical expertise (Morgan 1996). Recognizing the importance of ICT in teaching and learning, its trainings in various forms and degrees, therefore, have been regarded necessary.

Multimedia and language learning

Concerning the use of multimedia for teaching and learning purposes, there are some perceived advantages. Its ability to deliver and combine different modes of input - text, still and moving pictures, and audio - may lead to increased comprehension of such input. It is furthermore stated that comprehensible input is thought to facilitate acquisition (Brett, 1999). In previous studies, Krashen (1985) states that comprehensible input is seen as essential for SLA. The interactive nature

of the multimedia environment, which is able to supply a variety of supplementary learning features, may replicate the processes of negotiation of comprehension found in face-to-face interaction, thought to be beneficial to language learning (Pica, 1994 as stated in Brett, 1999). The multimedia environment also has features which enable on-screen language to be made salient and 'noticed'. It may be that such 'noticing' (Schmidt, 1990 as stated in Brett, 1999) plays a key role in the language which is converted from input to intake. This model of learning through multimedia material, could also be applied in the context of classroom language practice.

Learning media

Working with video and choosing its player compatibility, teachers need to recognize its common file types. These are:

1. 3gp - 3GPP Multimedia File
   The 3rd Generation Partnership Project develops 3GP file format. 3GPP and 3GPP2 are the standards used for creation, delivery and playback of multimedia over 3G high-speed wireless networks. This file format is commonly used by mobile phones that support video capture. 3GP is based on the MPEG-4 standard which was derived from Apple's Quick Time format. VLC media players and players in mobile phones are able to play 3GP files.
2. ASF - Advanced Systems Format File
   ASF or Advanced Systems Format File is developed for Microsoft. This format is used for streaming multimedia files which contains text, graphics, sound, video and animation. ASF files are mostly Windows Media Audio and Windows Media video files. ASF file just specifies the structure of the audio or video stream but not the encoding method. Microsoft Windows Media Player can be used to play .asf files.
3. avi - Audio Video Interleave File
   AVI file format is developed by Microsoft and stores data that can be encoded in a number of different codecs like DivX to encode AVI files. AVI files can be played on multiple players like VLC, Windows Media Player and the player should support the codec in which the file was encoded.
4. mov - Apple Quick Time Movie File
   QuickTime Movie format is developed by Apple. It is a common multimedia format often used for saving movies and other video files that are played on the Internet. Apple Quick Time Players is compatible for this file type.
5. mp4 - MPEG-4Video File
   MPEG-4 file format is a standard developed by the Moving Picture Experts Group which is used in many mobiles and video players (MP4 Players) these days. The MPEG-4 video format uses a separate compression for audio and video tracks. The video is compressed with MPEG-4 video encoding and the audio is compressed using AAC compression. MP4 files can be played using VLC media players.
6. rm - Real Media File
   Real Media is a file format developed by RealNetworks. Real Media contains both video (RealVideo) and audio (RealAudio) information and is usually used for streaming media files over the internet. rm files can be played using the Real Player.
7. vob - DVD Video Object File

VOB file type is mainly associated with 'DVD Video Movie File'. This file type usually contains several streams multiplexed together: video, audio and subtitles. VLC Media Player is compatible to play VOB files.

8. wmv - Windows Media Video File
   Windows Media Video is one of the major video file format that commonly encountered. The Windows Media file contains video encoded with Windows Media Video codec and audio encoded with Windows Media Audio codec. Microsoft Windows Media Player is certainly compatible to play .wmv files.
9. FLV is a "Flash Live Video"file.
   This is a format designed for web playback, offering high rates of compression. It can be played in Flash player or Real Player.

2. Research Methodology

This study was based on the notion that a well-balanced language course is suggested to cover four strands, namely meaning-focus input, language-focus learning, meaning-focused output, and fluency practice (Nation, 2007). He further elaborates that the first strand provides language input for the learners through listening and reading, where the attention is on the ideas and messages conveyed through the language. The second strand relates to deliberate learning of the language items and features. It covers the deliberate attention of the vocabulary, grammar, spelling, and pronunciation, or discourse features. Thirdly, in the meaning focus output, the learners are given opportunities to be exposed to language production in forms of speaking or writing, in which the focus is on conveying ideas and messages to another person. The last strand attempts to facilitate learners 'fluent use of the known language items in the four area of language skills.

Teachers' attitude assessment

There were 5 participants of this training, two male and three female teachers of the Foreign Language Training Center of Ahlia University. They had been teaching for between 2 and 15 years. All admitted to have computers and internet access at home. As they acknowledged in the preliminary assessment, two of them had learned movie editing software before. The rest only acknowledged their familiarity with Microsoft-based programs such as MS Office, MS Excel, and MS PowerPoint.

A questionnaire, 18 items constructed using a Likert scale of 1-5, was distributed to the participants as an attempt to identify their attitude toward video in terms of three aspects. First, related to its usefulness, all of them admitted that this teaching media facilitates the process of language teaching (mean 5), brings variety to language teaching (mean 5), and gives options of teaching techniques (mean 5). Furthermore, they also stated that it enhances students' motivation (mean 4.8), could be used in different stages of teaching (mean 4.6), and could be very effective in improving students' multicultural competence (mean 4). Second, the participants admitted potential problems of the video application for their classes. These deal with less control when the media is used (mean 4.6), worries that it might be a distracter than an aid for the students 'learning (mean 4.6), the participants' feeling of being technophobic and anxious of technical trouble (mean 3.8). Lastly, the participants proposed requirements prior to video use in class, namely technical competence to use it (mean 5) and the need of a training on the media preparation for classroom use (mean 4.4).

These responses portray the participants' positive perception towards the usefulness of video material although some potential problems and requirements of its application for language classes are also admitted.

3. Findings

The training sessions

Based on the questionnaire, the training was conducted. Directed towards two objectives; firstly, it familiarized participants with software to download, convert, and edit video material from streaming media sites. Secondly, it was dedicated to constructing a task planning of the video material. To download the video material, facilities from Real Player and Keepvid.com were chosen. AVC software was used to convert and cut the video files. Then, to enable teachers to add comprehension questions or subtitles, edit the sound, and combine two or more videos, Windows Movie Maker was chosen.

To facilitate the training, every computer had the programs installed and was connected to the internet. Some downloaded videos from YouTube were stored in the hardest anticipate internet breakdown. It is also important to note that technical training requires careful preparation on the hardware, the supporting appliances, and the software. Moreover, the help training assistants' availability of computer back-up was also necessary because technical troubles could take time to fix.

The first session of the training started with downloading video files from streaming sites. YouTube was suggested regarding common familiarity with its interface. The participants did not seem to have a problem accomplishing this task. The next training topics dealt with converting video files and introducing different types of video file extensions. This understanding would help them decide what video format to edit or play. As has been stated earlier, teachers thus can choose a specific media player considering the file compatibility. The training proceeded with techniques of editing the converted video for classroom practice. It covered an overview of the program interface, working panels, and facilities. Then, the participants practiced using the software facilities like giving subtitles, adding questions before or after certain scenes, combining or cutting videos, and editing the sound.

The second session of the training assisted participants in making a task planning of the video they have edited. Using the edited video files, participants were encouraged to list possibilities of the video material inclusion in their lesson. Paul Nation's four strands were suggested as its framework: as the source of language input, as a language focus practice, as means of language production and as a media for language fluency practice.

4. Discussion

The training described in the questionnaire was carefully structured to achieve two primary objectives: to familiarize participants with the technical aspects of downloading, converting, and editing video material, and to guide them in constructing a task plan that incorporates these videos into their teaching practices. These objectives were addressed through two focused sessions, each building upon the skills and knowledge gained in the previous one.

Familiarizing Participants with Video Software

The first goal of the training was to equip teachers with the technical skills necessary for managing video content. The software selected for this purpose—Real Player and Keepvid.com for downloading, AVC software for conversion, and Windows Movie Maker for editing—provided a comprehensive toolkit for manipulating video files. These tools are accessible and user-friendly, which is crucial for teachers who may not have extensive technical expertise. By using Real Player and Keepvid.com, participants learned how to download videos from streaming media sites such as YouTube, a platform that many teachers are already familiar with. This ease of use helped the participants quickly gain confidence in handling these tools.

The second technical skill involved converting video files and understanding the different types of video file extensions. This knowledge is essential because it allows teachers to make informed decisions about which video formats are compatible with the software they are using and the devices available in their classrooms. The conversion process, which was demonstrated and practiced, is a crucial step in ensuring that video files are in a usable format for editing and playing. The session also introduced participants to the basics of editing videos using Windows Movie Maker. Teachers were shown how to add subtitles, insert comprehension questions, and even combine multiple video clips, offering them practical tools to make the videos more interactive and engaging for students.

Constructing a Task Plan for Video Material

The second session of the training focused on helping participants incorporate their edited video material into lesson plans. This phase of the training was crucial for linking the technical skills learned in the first session to pedagogical practices. Teachers were encouraged to brainstorm ways they could use the edited videos in their classrooms. The training introduced Paul Nation's four strands framework, which outlines how videos can serve multiple purposes in language learning: as a source of language input, a language focus practice, a means of language production, and a medium for language fluency practice. This framework provided a structured approach for teachers to consider how video material could be integrated into lessons that promote language acquisition in a meaningful and engaging way.

In particular, using videos as a source of language input can expose students to authentic language use, while also serving as a vehicle for focused practice and production. The ability to insert comprehension questions and subtitles within the video allows teachers to guide students' attention toward specific language features or concepts. Furthermore, incorporating editing features like cutting, combining, and adjusting sound ensures that the video material is tailored to the specific learning objectives of the lesson. This flexibility is a valuable asset for teachers seeking to create dynamic, interactive learning environments.

Technical Considerations and Training Setup

The success of this training was significantly influenced by careful technical preparation. Every computer was equipped with the necessary software, and internet access was ensured to facilitate downloading and streaming of video content. In anticipation of potential internet disruptions, videos were pre-downloaded and stored on the computers. Additionally, the availability of support staff and backup systems played a crucial role in minimizing downtime due to technical issues. This level of preparation underscored the importance of a well-

planned and technically supported training environment, particularly when dealing with technology-dependent tasks like video editing.

Despite the careful preparation, technical difficulties were a potential obstacle throughout the training. The need for quick troubleshooting was evident, as issues such as slow internet connections or software glitches could arise unexpectedly. The training assistants were available to provide immediate support, which helped mitigate delays and kept participants engaged in the learning process. The hands-on practice with the software was crucial in overcoming initial hesitations and ensuring that participants gained confidence in using the tools independently.

5. Conclusion

Video is an option of classroom material and appears to benefit language practice potentially. Teachers' positive attitude towards the media, facilitated by their sufficient technical ability, and supported with their knowledge of relevant teaching techniques, would likely bring more significant impact towards its effective application for English language practice. Teacher training on video material, thus could be directed towards familiarizing them with technical aspects of running the program. Concerning the application of video material, Paul Nation's four strands, combined with stages of video pre/while/post-watching, appear to serve this need sufficiently.

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