

An Alternative Teaching Tool: Video Clips for Teaching the English Writing Skill

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Abstract

Video films are considered by traditional teachers as just light entertainments. They have technical difficulties associated with using them in the language classroom. However, these days, language teachers recognize the potential of the video films as a language teaching aid. They take advantage of the video films for teaching all four skills. The content of the film provides the opportunities for language practice. Moreover, language can be used to explore the content. In Myanmar, where English as a foreign language is actively used only in the classroom, video films offer excellent language exposure to students outside the classroom. Videos make language learning enjoyable and fun. They motivate both the students and the teachers. The presenter explores the possibilities of utilizing the video clips for language teaching at tertiary level. Several video clips are selected and the content-based approach is used to teach first year students at the University of Computer Studies, Panglong. The video clips are used not only to teach language but also to release it from the students repertoire. The tasks are carefully planned beforehand and the students' knowledge of the vocabulary and topic are checked. Several tasks such as video review, alternative ending, and summary writing are given. It is found that although there are some obstacles to surmount, video clips are a welcome addition to the repertoire of language teaching aids.

Keywords: *video clips, content-based approach, language teaching aid, tertiary level students, exposure*

1. Introduction

Writing is a skill which needs great efforts on the part of both teachers and students. The author explores several techniques of teaching the writing skill and finds that teaching writing through video

clips is intriguing. She therefore delves into theoretical background and gives practical suggestions to improve the writing of computer university students in this paper.

2. The Nature of Writing Skill

Writing is a visual form of communication and it is also considered as a productive skill because the writer not only creates new language but also interprets existing information. Nunan (2003) states that writing is an intellectual activity of finding the ideas and thinking about the way to express and arrange them into a statement and paragraph that is clear to be understood by the people [1]. According to Sokolik (2003), writing is a combination of process and product. The process refers to the act of gathering ideas or the steps we take when we produce a piece of writing whereas the product is known as a final piece of writing [2]. For second language learners, it is one of the important skills because they are able to make the valuable investment in their future studies by mastering this skill. By learning the writing skill, the learners will get knowledge on how to write effectively, how to express ideas, how to share their thoughts with anyone else through writing. It is also an extension of both speaking and listening skills.

3. Factors Hindering the Development of the Writing Skill

Doing writing activities needs a lot of time and the teachers have to finish teaching lessons according to the lecture plan within the periods given. Therefore, in classrooms of Computer Universities, the learners rarely have chance to practice the writing skill and it is done as part of reading and grammar exercises. The writing skill is also a skill which is least liked by the learners. In addition, the exam system prevents them from creative writing skill because in the exam the learners only need to write 250 words essay and a short paragraph, which encourages memorization and

plagiarism. Besides, having large classrooms which fail to provide the learners with a good environment for practicing the writing skill results in poor development of this skill. In addition to these factors, we need to consider another factor which is lack of motivation for learning the writing skill.

4. The Problems Faced by Teachers and Learners in Teaching Writing

Every language teacher knows that teaching writing skill is a challenging job because of the requirements of careful preparations with a variety of teaching methods, teaching aids and activities for lessons to make the learners interested in them. In the class, time spent for this skill is very limited, which makes both the teachers and the learners face the problems in teaching and learning the writing skill. The following are the problems faced by teachers and learners.

4.1 Lack of Vocabulary

This problem frequently occurs during the class activities and it is hard for the teachers to deal with it. Although all learners may not have such problem, it creates a limitation for them in writing even a short sentence.

Solutions: The teachers should find out the way to help the learners by using available tools around them and let them use appropriate dictionaries during the activities. Before the activities, words related to the topic should be taught by using the mind maps, etc. To improve their vocabulary, they should be provided with a rich variety of language experiences.

4.2 Grammar Problem

In writing, how to organize a paragraph and ideas are determined by grammar. When writing, the learners need to consider all the grammar structures such as subject-verb agreement, tenses, pronouns, articles, prepositions and sentence structures. The common grammar mistakes they are used to making are the use of tenses, articles, prepositions and sentence structures.

Solutions: when teaching grammar, the teachers should explain grammar structures carefully. In some cases, the mother tongue is required to help the learners in grammar. Using good realistic examples is vital in teaching grammar. These examples should be chosen from authentic material such as

advertisements, movies, songs which can make them easily memorable. The learners should be taught a variety of grammar exercises by using activities so that the grammar structures can be used in more interesting and realistic ways.

4.3 Lack of Motivation

In writing class, the teachers have difficulty motivating the learners because most of them are not interested in learning writing. It is because they think that the writing skill is the most complicated skill which requires grammar structures, a lot of vocabulary and ideas to make a paragraph or even a sentence readable.

Solutions: If the learners know sufficient words and grammar structures, they will be interested in learning this skill. In addition, when they have knowledge and ideas about the topic, they will actively participate in the writing activities. Therefore, the teacher should give them the topics and ask them to find facts about them from any kinds of sources beforehand and plan the lessons based on the topic given and the previous grammar lessons. Teaching writing skill is also integrated with teaching reading skill. At the end of the reading class, the teachers can ask them to write a short paragraph about the passage. If they have already learned ideas, appropriate words, and sentence structures from the passage, they will easily write and be interested in doing writing lessons

5. The Role of Video Technology in Teaching Language

Activities based learning is an effective way for encouraging learners' motivation. Therefore, the teacher should use a variety of teaching aids to create the best activities to meet the learners' needs. Today, technology becomes part of our everyday life and it is brought into the language classrooms as the teaching aids. Among these teaching aids, video technology is the most effective method for our learners because video material is more motivating than the other forms of authentic material. Bringing video material into the classrooms gives the learners several advantages such as stimulating their proactivity, high motivation and an enjoyable learning environment. It also provides the learners with the real language situation to enhance learning outcomes, and topics and ideas to discuss.

To learn English, it is not just important for students to read, write and say English words. It is essential that they are exposed to a wide range of

usages and styles. Video clips in the classroom provide that opportunity. Cultural awareness of the target language plays a vital role in learning that language. Nothing helps students learn a language more than engaging them in the culture. The more they care about the culture, the more they care about learning the language. The better they come to understand the culture, the more they will begin to understand the language. Therefore, video material is an essential tool for the learners of English because teaching English with video materials combines English learning with the acquisition of social and cultural knowledge of the language.

Learning is not linear. It is impossible for students to learn English if they are just receiving the information in the exact same form all the time. Doing activities with video clips in the classroom exposes to the students to a variety of realistic scenarios. In watching and listening these videos, students are able to fully understand when and how words and phrases are properly used.

Along with well-produced lesson plans, reading practice, writing activities and other in-class exercises, video clips are a great addition to help improve students' comprehension skill. Watching video clips works as an additional means to receive information. As video clips often have a consistent story-line throughout, students are better able to understand and complex material. However, it is important to choose the topics based on learners' interests and their level of English proficiency in order to use videos in the classrooms.

6. Procedure of Using Video Clips in Teaching Writing Skill

When the teacher prepares lessons by using video clips, the following procedures must be considered.

6.1 Pre – Teaching Session

This session is always needed for the learners before an activity. It is said that this session is a brainstorming session to make the learners' ideas work well. It is also called as warm up activity to start the class lesson. In this session, the teacher usually writes down the topic of the clip on the whiteboard or shows the learners a picture based on the topic and asks them to predict about the clip and detailed instructions are given to the students to the exercises.

6.2 Whilst – Teaching Session

This is the main step of teaching – learning process. In this session, the teacher plays the clip and the students carefully watch the clips and do the exercise based on the activity chosen. The teacher observes the class whether they are following the instruction. She assists them if necessary while doing their work.

6.3 Post – Teaching Session

This is the last activity in teaching learning process. Reviewing the material, explanation about the task and correcting the students' work are included in this process. This session helps the teacher plan the next lessons for the learners' needs.

7. Methods of Teaching Writing Skill through Video Clips

Knowing that video clips are effective tools to enhance learners' learning outcomes, they are brought into the classrooms of the University of Computer Studies, Panglong to teach First Year students the writing Skill. The students practice two types of writing, narrative writing and descriptive writing, with the help of video clips in the classrooms. The video Clips used are selected from VOA learning English, Discovery Channel and YouTube. Short video clips are used to let the students practice the writing skill so that they cannot be bored with learning this skill.

7.1 Question and Answer

This activity is an individual activity which is easy but useful. It is used to encourage the students to be interested in learning the writing skill through video clips at the very first stage of practicing this skill. In this activity, the students are asked to focus on the actions and what the speaker is saying in the video clip. Before watching the clip, they are taught the new words which are used in it. After watching it, they are given the questions related to it and asked to write down the answers. Finally, the clip is played again to check their answers. According to grammatical mistakes found in their answers, the teacher plans lessons for next grammar class.

7.2 What Happens Next?

This activity is comparable to the Question and Answer activity. Instead of having students answer the questions why watching the video, they should predict

what will come next after the brief showing. This can be done by way of writing down their answers. If the clip has a clear ending without any room for prediction, the teacher can stop the clip a minute early and have the students guess what will come next. Then she can play the rest of the video to see if they are right.

7.3 Video Clips and Questions

Another way to use video to encourage student thinking is students watching a short video clips and then writing questions about the clips. Students form pairs, exchange their questions, answer their partners' questions. They then exchange papers again and score their partners' answers. As students are writing questions for real audience, this activity leads to better questions. Students may also be more careful in answering the questions because they are aware that a fellow student will be grading them. This activity can be used for teaching students about different levels of thinking such as the difference between literal and interpretive questions.

7.4 Alternative Endings

To do this activity, a video clip is stopped some minutes early before the ending. The students are asked to watch the clip and write down their prediction about the ending. This activity enhances their creative thinking. Then they are put into groups of two so that they can share their predictions with each other. Any ideas about the ending are accepted. After that the rest of the clip is played to let them know the endings.

7.5 Video Review

In this activity, the students watch and listen to a video clip which mentions the beautiful places around the world. They are asked to choose 5 places and write about these places and find out what and why they think the most beautiful place is. Then the teacher arranges the class into group of two and let them discuss with each other about the places. They can agree or disagree with each other. They are also asked to write about some beautiful places which are not mentioned in the video. Before doing this activity, they are taught words used to describe the places. This activity is used for practicing descriptive writing and integrated with the speaking skill. It also improves the students' knowledge of the world.

7.6 Summary

In this activity, the students are asked to watch a video and to write the summary of what has happened in it. Before doing this activity, they are taught how to write the summary writing, and new words and grammar structures which are used in the summary. This is individual work and is used for narrative writing.

7.7 Split Viewing

This activity is described in some detail below. From the language point of view, it can help practicing narrative tenses. This lesson uses the scene from a war film. The students have a lot to observe in the scene. This activity consists of four main stages and a follow up stage.

In the pre-viewing task, the students are asked to answer the following questions in pairs: Have you ever seen any war films? Did you like them? Why? Why not? Describe one of the battle scenes.

In the while-viewing task, the class is split into two groups, one group will watch and listen to the scene; the other will only listen. Those who watch are asked to observe what happens, making notes if necessary, and be ready to explain to the others what happened; the others are told to listen to the action and write a few questions about what they can hear but cannot see. Then the video clip is played.

In the post-viewing task, each group of students is given the appropriate role-play card. They will need some time to complete the task. After they have finished they are ready to do the role-play.

In the last stage of role-play, students work in pairs and conduct the interview; one journalist and one eyewitness. They continue doing the role-play, changing partners until each journalist has interviewed all the eyewitnesses. This can allow for the teacher to correct deviation from the procedure if necessary.

A good follow-up to this exercise is a writing exercise which involves all the students writing a letter to their families telling of the horrific events. The instruction to the students for the activity is as follows.

You work for NBC radio. You have been sent to the battle scene just after the horrific attack by enemy planes. You need to get an exclusive story from some of the eyewitnesses for the folks back home. You have received this telegram from NBC. It contains the questions they want to ask. Unfortunately during the panic they have been written in the wrong order. Order them before you do the interviews and add two more of your own.

- doing/ you/ the planes/ were/ what/ arrived/when ?
- planes/ were/ how/ there/ many?
- bomb explode/ did/ hear/ the/ first/ you?
- where/ you/ exploded/ when/ were/ the bombs?
- do/ did/ what/ you?
- see/ what/ you/ did?

7.8 Back to Screen

This is a variation of split viewing technique. The teacher selects a short engaging video clips and then divides the class into pairs. One group faces the screen and the other has their back to it. Then after turning off the sound, the teacher begins playing the video. The students who can see the screen tell the other students what is happening. After a few minutes the students change the places. After that, the pair write the chronological sequence of what happened. This is shared with another group and discuss as the whole class. Finally, all participants watch the clip together, with sounds.

7.9 Character Descriptions

Before a film clip is played, the teacher writes on the board the names of all the characters in the film and gives the students a brief explanation of each character. Then each of the students is asked to pick a character based on these descriptions. While doing this activity, they are told to pay attention to their character and take notes on who they are and what they do. Finally, they are asked to write one to two paragraphs about their character. To facilitate their writing, the following starter questions can be asked to the students.

- What is your character's name?
- What is their job?
- Where do they live?
- What are their goals?
- Are they in a relationship? If so, with whom?

For advanced students, the teacher can make this into the bigger project by asking them to prepare a presentation, doing research on the character and the actors that represent the character.

While the students are doing these activities, the teacher is going around the class to observe their work and help them if required. The teacher corrects their mistakes and explains these mistakes to the class after the activities. According to their needs, the teacher plans the next lessons.

8. The Problems with Using Video Clips in The Classrooms

Although there are many benefits of using video technology in the language classrooms, there are some difficulties using videos as teaching aids. The main problem is that the teachers have to spend much more preparation time to choose appropriate video clips to meet the students' needs.

As multimedia lessons delivered via video need computers, projectors and other electronic devices, the teachers need to prepare the classroom to be equipped with such devices before using videos as a teaching aid. Another barrier is the limited availability of free educational videos. Not having reliable electricity also affects teaching-learning environment with video technology if the projector is used in the classroom. In addition, some students who do not prefer learning language through videos show negative attitude in the class. There are two possible dangers that may appear if the video is used purely as a vehicle for a language. The first one is overlooking the visual clues that the students may spot. Therefore, visuality is an important aspect. The second pitfall is keeping the focus on language and not on the message. It is very useful to take advantage of the strong theme of the video film. The theme can be discussed in writing or verbally.

9. Suggestions for Using Video Clips in Teaching Writing Skill

The following is some suggestions which are needed to take into account while the video clips are applied in teaching the writing skill.

- Make sure that the multimedia appliances such as projector, cable and sound system are ready to be used before the class. If these appliances are not available in the class, ask the students to bring their laptops into the class.
- Select short videos so that the students will not be bored with learning and an active learning environment can be created.
- Select appropriate video clips with non-violent scenes.
- Select videos depending on the students' interests, prior knowledge and level of English.
- Select videos which reflect real life situations.
- Select videos which provide the students with new knowledge of the target language.

- Effectively manage the class to ensure that the students are able to actively participate in the class work.

10. Findings

To find out how much video technology is effective for teaching the students the writing skill, the traditional methods like giving them worksheet and topics to write about are sometimes used. It is found that they are more interested in learning this skill when video clips are used. They are able to generate better ideas of the topics when they practice this skill with video clips. Most of them say that learning the writing skill with video technology is easy and enjoyable. After watching the clips, they are more confident to start their work. It is also observed that the classroom environment becomes more active.

On the other hand, when practicing the writing skill with conventional method, they seem to be bored and less motivated. They spend longer time to finish their writing because they think that the teaching material fail to stimulate their writing ability. In addition, it is found that the students don't show positive attitude towards practicing this language skill in the class.

11. Conclusion

Writing is the most important skill in language learning because if the students master this skill, they are able to master all of the other language skills. But for the learner, they are not interested in learning this skill and they think that it is difficult to generate ideas, organize ideas into their writing and concentrate on it in the class. Bringing video technology into the writing class helps overcome these difficulties. It can be used

as a stimulus to improve students' motivation and confidence in learning this skill. These motivation and confidence encourage the students to produce better ideas and organize these ideas into the paragraph while practicing the writing skill. It is concluded that the development of the students' writing skill can obviously be seen if videos are used in the classroom as a teaching aid.

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