From Silence to Speech: Animated Videos an Effective Tool for ESL Learners

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ABSTRACT

In India, proficient English speakers can be numbered. Communication plays a major role in the discipline of language learning. The ESL learners gain knowledge on LSRW skills for years yet they are inept with communication skills which is vital for an individual at the present. ESL classrooms are in dire need of new methods to assist the learners in the learning process. The Needs of the learners differ from generation to generation, only if a teacher is updated and copes up with the interest of the young learners' mindset by filling the generation gap between them, they can make a great impact in the teaching and learning process. Language teachers incorporate new teaching tools and techniques to motivate, support and engage the learners to use the language. This paper tries to highlight the importance of materials and material production. Similarly, it shares about using animated videos available on YouTube as a material in the language classroom for better learning.
Keywords: *Materials, Material Production, Animated Videos, Communication Skill, Activities*

Introduction

English occupies a substantial position all over the world, hence developing its communication skills is essential. In the modern era, being effective communicators is the most demanded skill pertaining to any discipline or profession. The term 'Communication' is complex as it deals with conveying the thoughts and emotions of a person with the same feel and content. Even a small error in communication creates a massive drift among people. In India, though the learners are familiar with English from their primary level they are vulnerable in their communication skills. Hence numerous teaching materials and tools are experimented in the language classes to make the teaching-learning process more engaging, entertaining and interesting.

Videos can be considered as the most entertaining and stimulating tool in a language classroom. As authentic video materials as movies, films, operas and songs aids learners' in creating an interesting, challenging, fun and entertaining atmosphere in the classrooms for

developing themselves. Further a language teacher encourages the learners to deconstruct, decode and criticize videos to extend their in-depth thinking and critical views. English movies provide direct, vivid and realistic scenarios to understand the culture and society of English-speaking countries which help the learners to use the language appropriately. Classes with videos has advantages with its sound effects, vivid scenes, dialogues between characters backed up by visual effects to suffice learners' boredom. Time duration acts as an impediment while teaching through video materials and to avoid these teachers opt for short videos. Teachers could begin with aesthetic appreciation, introduction and background of the clip and analyze the plot, theme, genre, main characters and its style of narration. The techniques employed in the film such as pictures, scenes, acoustics, and montage can also be discussed depending upon the time duration of the classes.

General Objectives

- Communication skills of the learners will be enhanced
- The learners will be encouraged to actively participate in the classroom activities

Specific Objectives

The study will help the learners

- to enhance their listening and speaking skills
- to kindle their 21st century skills like critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, cultural competency, Information and media literacy, etc
- to probe through their characters and values
- to engage them in individual and group activities
- to combine education and entertainment for an ecstatic classroom atmosphere
- to reduce their anxiety towards English
- to express their thoughts with simple words and sentences

Need for the study

English is a second official language in India used as a medium of instruction in Government and Educational sectors but Indians still struggle to communicate. This research tries to make use of animated videos as a tool and help the learners become effective communicators.

Review of Literature

Materials support teachers to begin a lesson interesting and to develop the skills of the learners. Tomlinson in the article "Materials Development" (2001) states that "materials achieve impact through novelty, variety, attractive presentation, appealing content and achievable challenge". Materials achieve impact on learners by instigating their curiosity and

interest. It acts as a great support for both the teachers and learners in the process of learning. Animated Videos incorporated as material in language classroom assists learners in acquiring both the language and the culture. Meanwhile it also creates an entertaining, causal and serene atmosphere with its visual effects. Learners' find video lessons more interesting, challenging, and stimulating for developing themselves. And it effortlessly produces better meaning to any context with illustration through pictures and conveys the meaning of countless words and emotions.

Zhaogang Wang (2014) in his article "An Analysis on the Use of Video Materials in College English Teaching in China" exhibits the aims of using video materials in EFL classrooms and the advantages of it on the basis of teaching principles, strategies and techniques. The preparation of various activities for the classes becomes a must as it helps the teacher to take full advantage of the video materials and the learners. Importantly, prior focus should be given on the selection of the movie/ video. With clear procedure and proper goals, the teacher can use movies as an aid for teaching. This can improve the language competence of the learners with the cultural background and aesthetic value. The pros and cons of using videos as teaching aid are also discussed.

Ashvini Joshi (2012) in her article "Multimedia: A Technique in Teaching Process in the Classrooms" brings out multimedia as one of the major aids through which a language learner can develop his language skills as it paves way for interaction and fun between teachers and learners. It mainly focuses on the impact of multimedia in the classroom and the effect of computers and the internet. The interaction with multimedia gives a wider knowledge on the academic vocabulary and language structure. The technology combined with teaching serve as a successful teaching method. Use of Multimedia is a successful way of effective teaching but the point whether it becomes effective or not is in the hands of the teacher.

Solanki D. Shyamlee (2012) in her article "Use of Technology in English Language Teaching and Learning": An Analysis" opines the importance of technology in language teaching. As the modern society is filled with gadgets, technology never deteriorates to provoke interest among the learners for studies, communication and to understand the culture. Meanwhile it also creates problems such as restriction of thinking capacity and loss of communication by over using the gadgets. This paper aims to make the language teachers aware of the ways in which technological aids can be used and the processes that mostly help the learners to motivate themselves to use the language and bring out effective results. Through these technological aids, the classes would be more learner centric.

Shannon Kelly Brown (2010) in his article "Popular films in the EFL classroom: Study of methodology" explores the impact of English-Speaking foreign films in the EFL classroom for teaching vocabulary along with culture to the Japan University Freshmen. It mainly aims to identify vocabulary in connection with the culture and the ways to improve them. The study concludes that teaching culture is not as easy as teaching vocabulary to the learners. Similarly, Ismail Cakir (2006) in his article "The Use of Video as an Audio- Visual Material in Foreign Language Teaching Classroom" has also pointed out the use of video for language teaching with its effective authentic language input.

Materials

Material is an umbrella term that provides diverse concepts in various fields. In teaching, material can be of any form that assists in the learning process. Materials include textbooks, audio and videotapes, maps, graphs, pictures, newspapers, etc. that serve the purpose of teaching and learning. Influential and meaningful teaching materials are assets to teachers and learners. A material prompts the learners to utilize the provided opportunities to communicate in the target language and engage them with content and scope in developing their language. Videos and movie clips as materials assist in developing the communicative competence of an individual. Through these, the learners are made to feel at ease to use simple sentences in the target language and accomplish their tasks.

Types of Materials

Materials are progressed based on the curriculum aims of an institution or an organization in feasible forms concerned with their financial and technological sustainability in the path of developing the learners. Materials are mainly classified as:

- printed materials – books, workbooks, worksheets;
- non-printed materials – cassette, CDs, videos, computer-based sources;
- materials comprising both printed and non-printed sources – self access materials, materials on the internet and
- authentic materials. (materials that are not prepared for classroom purposes such as newspapers, magazines and TV broadcasts).

Aims of Materials

Materials aim at enhancing the learners' knowledge and provide an immense support to the teachers to stimulate responses from the learners. It prompts the learners to utilize the provided opportunities to communicate in the target language. Materials in language teaching aims:

- to have an impact on the learners and boost their self-confidence

- to be relevant and supportive for the learners
- to expose the authentic usage of the target language
- to communicate in target language when opportunities genuinely arise
- to obtain new knowledge with curiosity
- to provoke intellectual, emotional, creative and aesthetic sense of the learners

Material Production

Material production refers to the production of new materials or modifying the existing materials depending upon the needs of the learners. Tomlinson (2001) states material development refers to anything which is done by writers, teachers or learners to provide sources of target language as input. According to Nunan (1988), Material development is dealing with the selection, adaptation and creation of teaching materials. Materials designed with solicitude contribute valuable information for self – evaluation that reflects learners' usage of the target language and their development in the forms and skills of the language. The created materials should yield circumstances where learners interact with each other and engage them in situations outside the classroom. It should be interesting and attractive in promoting curiosity among the learners. The materials should focus on situations where the learners interact with respect to meaning, pronunciation, form, tone and skill of the language.

Principles of Material design

According to Sathya (2017) in her thesis "The Impact of Interactive Course Materials in enhancing English communication skills of the tertiary level learners" opines the principle of material design as follows:

- language learning must be contextualized
- language used is authentic and realistic
- materials must engage the learners
- classroom materials seek audio-visual materials
- materials must deal with spoken and written language
- effective learning material fosters learner autonomy
- materials must be flexible enough to allow individual and contextual differences
- language needs of the learners must engage effectively and cognitively

Materials chosen for the study

The researcher has chosen two animated videos titled "Snack Attack" and "Dustin" from YouTube platform. "Snack Attack" was written and directed by Andrew Cadelago in 2015. The video is about an old lady and a teenager waiting to board the train; meanwhile they engage in a cynical clash over their snack. It is a crisp, value based comical content. It

makes the audience wonder about the perception and prediction one has on other people, similarly questions people's decision making, and problem-solving skills.

"Dustin" is another animated video that revolves around a pug and his new roommate, an automatic cleaning robot. It discloses their love and hate relationship, making people wonder about human life. It was written by Michael Fritzsche, Kristina Jaegar, Andreas Tetz and Nadine Utz. and directed by Kristina Jaeger in 2020. This video discusses values like love, bond, friendship, etc.

These animated videos help the learners to have an easy and clear understanding of the content promoting them to engage in conversations and usage of the language. The chosen videos create an entertaining atmosphere and also a new learning environment. Through these videos the learners not only develop their language skills but also are inculcated with values that are essential for life as videos generally act as an easy and fastest tool to convey the content to the learners.

Description of the Cohorts

The study is focused on the tertiary level students of Holy Cross College, Nagercoil. 64% of the learners are from rural backgrounds. Though they are familiar with English they struggle to use the language or to engage in conversations.

Methodology

A Task Based Language Teaching approach is employed for the classes. Animated Videos "Snack Attack" and "Dustin" are used as teaching materials in the classes and tasks are formed based on the content. The animated video "Snack Attack" through a story of a pug ponders on the human-animal relationships, emotional bond, companionship, rivalry and robots. "Snack Attack" is about the misunderstanding between an elderly woman and a young man provoking the generational gap, human bonding, lack of communication, etc. Both these videos reflect the gap of modern society with the tremendous growth in technology relating to networks and gadgets. It reflects among the youngsters as they transform as tech savvy and alienating themselves from human emotions and bonding.

The tasks assigned to the learners stimulate their Intelligence Quotient, Emotional Quotient and Social Quotient while using the target language. The learners are given an introduction on the videos and a brainstorming session is followed to check the understanding potential. The videos are paused at regular intervals to raise the learners' curiosity and to interpret and guess what its twist or climax is. The learners are engaged in individual or group activities through which they gradually utilize and practice to effectively engage in conversations.

Skills Focused

No skill can be taught in isolation. In these lessons, mainly listening and speaking skills along with other 21st century language skills are focused. Further the learners are motivated to listen for the specific information and to understand the speaker's ideas, opinions, and suggestions. They speak to describe the events that happened, they discuss and express their thoughts, concerns and opinions.

Procedure

The animated videos "Snack Attack" and "Dustin" are watched by the learners twice or thrice on two different days. A quick brainstorming session after each video is carried to test the understanding of the learners. The teacher poses 'wh' questions on the content of the video and similar topics are discussed among the learners. Activities such as role play, discussion, debate, etc. are conducted with reference to the content of the video. They actively utilize the preparation time and use adequate words to express their thoughts and emotions without hesitation.

Findings

The findings of the study are listed below:

- Learners were stimulated and motivated through the animated videos extending the attention span in the classroom
- Learners were confident to indulge in brainstorming activities after prior encouragement and understanding of the content
- The learners were cooperative and innovative as they indulge themselves in role play, discussion and debate activities within a limited time span
- A more relaxed and entertaining atmosphere was created among the learners.
- Learners were trained to work individually and in groups
- Providing space and suggestion for better communication increased the language skills of the learners
- Learners 21st century skills were developed through the activities
- Critical Thinking Skills were fostered by examining the misunderstanding in "Snack Attack" and questioning the events unfolding in "Dustin"
- Creativity skills were honed through verbal conversations in role play activity
- Problem Solving and Information Gap skills were inculcated by analyzing the plot of the animated videos, discussing the different perspectives with individual thoughts
- The general and specific objectives of the research were fulfilled by making the learners participate in the activity and enabling them to communicate in the target language

Conclusion

Communication is a continuous process involving the purpose of informing, expressing and influencing. Teachers have to be extremely creative and lively with materials that are to be used in the classroom. When materials are new and fascinating along with appreciable activities, the learners become more active and participative in class. Meanwhile, learners' lack of confidence and fear of ridicule with time restrictions and in depth insights on the video acts as the major barriers in their communication. Further selecting and screening informative and relatable materials in the classroom by grabbing and withholding the attention of learners without any intervention becomes a major turmoil. Apart from these limitations, videos promote motivation and passion in an individual to excel. Hence, for developing the communication competence it is mandatory to participate in interactions and activities. This research tries to enable the learners as good communicators of English with the aid of animated videos as materials. The learners do not exhibit a massive transformation in communicating but gradual progress is visible. The learners utilize the given opportunities and communicate without hesitation.

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