

## Action Research on Video Course

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### Abstract

This Action Research examines through the students' reflections on the Video Course at the School of English and International Studies and the School of Law at the Beijing Foreign Studies University in order to observe whether the course objectives designed primarily in 2000 as an innovation have been achieved and whether the students still have the potentials untapped so that the researcher may find out what the teachers can intervene to improve the course and to tap as much as possible the students' potentials. Since in this study the students' reflections serve as the major avenue for us to find out our performances, the methods of the preliminary group interview, the questionnaire, and the formal interview are applied. It is found out that the course objectives have mostly been achieved, but there is still room to be improved. Students have potentials left untapped so that they wish to have more challenging readings, tasks and assignments.

**Key Words:** Action Research, Video Course, Beijing Foreign Studies University

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Researches related to video course have been done overseas and in China

Overseas researches can be summarized in several aspects. Studies on the use of video in second language acquisition have been proved effective, for students are put in natural settings which encourage motivation in learning (EngIn, 2002; Jeng et al, 2009; Tschirner, 2001; White et al, 2000). Videos can also assist students to learn culture by Herron et al (2002). One study specifically examines what visual elements do to learners when they are exposed to videotexts and the outcome is positive. They go beyond merely 'supporting' verbal elements, and serve as integral resources to comprehension (Gruba, 2004).

In China, studies have been done to investigate different aspects of video course which have been incorporated in university curriculum in the past 10 years.

Zhu (1997) studies the selection of films for the course. In her view, classical films should be offered such as *Sound of Music*, *Casablanca*, *Gandhi*, *On Golden Pond*, *Gone with the Wind*, and *Jane Eyre* which not only provide vivid and impressive language, but also help students learn history, politics, culture, and other aspects of the English countries. The language and length of films should also be considered according to the students' level. Films that are adapted from famous literary works are mostly favored. Other studies explore the film language. Film language not only help students learn linguistic knowledge, but also help develop their critical thinking. Students present themselves critically through oral presentation on movie themes and characters and through critical essay writing on chosen topics (Wang & Ren, 2002). The theoretical foundation is studied that following the principles of communication, and attaching importance to the supervision of learning process is crucial (Zhang, 2004). Both Zhang (2004) and Cui (2004) examine teaching practice of English audio-visual course. They have agreed that teaching should be student-oriented, and cooperative instruction and group work are effective methods to stimulate learners' motive and activity, and they also help to increase their confidence to improve language competence. In addition, Zhao's thesis (2006) studies the feasibility and advantages of using film as a way to teach intercultural communication to advanced English majors in China in order to develop the students' intercultural communication competence.

## **1.2 Researches on action research**

According to McNiff (1993:15), action research is a form of research that enables teachers to develop their understanding on their own practices and to turn their practices into their own research. The major focus of Action Research is on concrete and practical issues of immediate concern to particular social groups or communities. It is conducted in naturally occurring settings, primarily using methods common to qualitative research (Nunan, 1990; Mckernan, 1996). Nunan (1990:18) argues that "action research fulfils basic research requirements in that it encompasses a researchable question/issue, date and interpretive analysis". The following common features are considered to characterize action research: "1. Action research is contextual, small-scale and localized – it identifies and investigates problems within a specific situation; 2. It is evaluative and reflective as it aims to bring about change and improvement in practice; 3. It is participatory as it provides for collaborative investigation by teams of colleagues, practitioners and researchers; 4. Changes in practice are based on the collection of information or data which provides the impetus for change" (Burns, 1999, p.30). One example of action research is chosen to show in diagram its general process (See Figure 1).

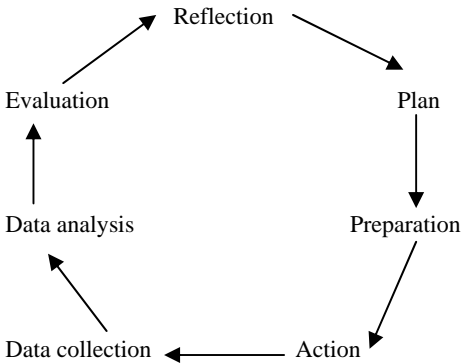


Fig. 1 The process of teaching reflection (Pollard, 2001:14)

Action research is strongly supported by researchers in various studies (Baumfield et al, 2008; Dadds and Hart, 2001; Hopkin, 2002; Dowling and Brown, 2010; Kember, 2000). They believe that action research can especially increase the educational quality enhancement and teachers are in vital and ideal roles in action research. Lawrence Stenhouse (1975: 69) describes the ideal role of the teacher like this:

Good teachers are necessarily autonomous in professional judgment. They do not need to be told what to do. They are not professionally the dependants of researchers or superintendents, of innovators or supervisors. This does not mean that they do not welcome access to ideas created by other people at other places or in other times. Nor do they reject advice, consultancy or support. But they do know that ideas and people are not of much real use until they are digested to the point where they are subject to the teacher's own judgment. In short, it is the task of all educationalists outside the classroom to serve the teachers; for only teachers are in the position to create good teaching.

When Kember (2000: 24) discusses the nature of action research on social practice, it states that "In most cases it involves the direct interaction of teachers and groups of students. Then it should surely look towards research derived from a humanistic position, in the most general sense of the term." The students therefore become keenly significant in the entire research and its outcome. It is described in the book *Action research in the classroom* "You can learn so much yourself from just listening to what the students have to say" (Baumfield et al, 2008, p.1).

The following researches are some of the action researches done to improve either the school development, a particular course, teaching methodology, or teacher development.

In Ball's study (2009), a handwritten annotation on the margin of students' essays is introduced to follow the institutional audit within a UK university. Action research is conducted to identify its strength and weakness. Findings show that words or telegraphic signs that stand alone in the margins of a student essay can be seen as abstract signs to the novice reader and need contextualizing. If there is a negative tone in the markers' annotation it can be detected by the student and interpreted as unhelpful or disparaging. Improving annotations and good practice guidelines are offered at the end. The study by Herington and Weaven (2008) presents an action

research approach to exploring methods of improving the learning styles and outcomes of first year university students within large class environments. It is found out that simply motivating students to participate in class activities does not necessarily alter their overall learning styles and a single course intervention is not enough to improve students' deep learning. However, there is some evidence that student-centered and self-regulated learning results in a more positive learning experience for both students and teachers. Two researches prove that action research plays a significant role in teacher development for it encourages continued learning and professional growth since it is designed as a collaborative process involving teachers and researchers (Vogrinc and Zuljan, 2009; Kitchen and Stevens, 2008). Carpenter and Cooper (2009) contextualize their research in multicultural urban school in Auckland New Zealand with the aim to raise the achievement of Maori students. Their outcome aids their student learning as well as teaching in that school. The study of Preble and Taylor (2009) "School climate through students' eyes" explores the positive and negative climate of school and its association to student achievement. It is involving students in the research process. The result is helpful for the school district to make further improvement in their policies. Another action research in English listening teaching is done by Wang (2006) who tries to find the problems systematically and aimed to improve teaching in listening comprehension class.

## **2. The present study**

This study attempts to examine the students' reflections on the Video Course at the School of English and International Studies and the School of Law at the Beijing Foreign Studies University in order to observe whether the course objectives designed primarily in the year 2000 as an innovation have been achieved and to find out their potentials untapped so that we may think what teachers can intervene to further improve the course and to tap as much as possible the students' potentials.

For action research, methods to carry it out may include class observation, interview, questionnaire, video recording, field notes, teaching plan, and students' presentation to name just a few. Since in this study the students' reflections serve as the major avenue for us to find out our performances, the methods of questionnaire and interview for data collection are applied, while questionnaire is good to protect the privacy of the participants and to ensure participants respond honestly (Dornyei, 2010) and interview allows obtaining more thorough responses.

Questionnaire, as a research tool, was treated here as a qualitative concern in which open format and closed format were applied. Open format questions are good for soliciting subjective data and the variety of responses should be wider and more truly reflect the opinions of the respondents and this increases the likelihood of the researcher's receiving unexpected and insightful suggestions while closed format questions make it easier to calculate percentage and filter out the useless and extreme answers that might occur in open format questions (Dornyei, 2010). In our questionnaire, some mixtures of formats or I call it semi-closed format,

were tried, giving a list of options, with the final option of “other” followed by a space for respondents to fill in other alternatives. To maintain the interest of respondents and to make the respondents think more, four different kinds of question formats were used, Likert Scale and Semantic differential, Dichotomous, and Multiple (Galloway, A Workbook).<sup>1</sup> According to the research objectives, the questions were designed in five sections to obtain necessary information, and the questions in each section followed either a sequence of the entire learning process of prep-class, in class and post-class activities in the course or a coverage of the three major learning contents, Movie, TV and Project, which made it possible for the researchers to seek the full information of every aspect of the course. A total of 33 questions were involved in the questionnaire.

The interview was designed as a complementing research since some answers in the questionnaire did not fully or thoroughly reflect students’ thoughts and ideas, so the interview was a further step to learn about student’s opinion on certain points left to be investigated at a greater extend. The questions for the interview followed the same sections as the questionnaire did only with the first section left out for the answers in this section in the questionnaire were all definite. There was no need for further questioning. The questions for the interview were designed in a table format where the first column stated the thing the researcher wants to know, the second column direct questions and the third clarifying questions and prompts. The structured interview questions helped the researcher and the informants in questioning and in providing answers with a sure direction. A total of 9 questions were involved.

For a surer and fuller understanding of students’ concerns in the course, a group interview was conducted in advance as the preliminary investigation before the formal research has started.

### **2.1 Purpose and significance**

The Video Course has been reformed since the year 2000 and it has been innovated through the years and until 2006 it was chosen as the refined quality course universitywide. The new textbook corresponding with the course was published in 2006 and has been used for 2 years up to now. Some general assessments on the course from the students have been asked but not in a systematic way or in depth. Whether the course is meeting the requirements of the students as well as the time remains a concern for the researchers and this action research is vital for assessing and evaluating our basic objectives, contents and requirements. The study tried to answer two major questions: one, whether the course conducted right now achieves our original purpose; two, what the students’ potentials are and what the teachers can intervene in the whole process of teaching and learning. The purpose of the study was to improve as much as possible the course to satisfy the needs of our students.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.tardis.ed.ac.uk/~kate/qmcweb/qcont.htm>

## **2.2 Method**

### **2.2.1 Participants**

A total of 89 participants were involved in the task of doing the questionnaire. The students come from four classes of grade 2005, two classes from the School of English and International Studies majoring in Oral Interpretation and Translation respectively and two from the School of Law majoring in law at the Beijing Foreign Studies University. These four classes took the Video Course in fall 2007 and were taught by the same professor.

### **2.2.2 Informants**

For the preliminary group interview, only 4 students from class 2, the translation class, were chosen as the representatives, three girls and one boy.

For the formal interview, three from each class were chosen to form the total of 12 representatives, three boys and 9 girls altogether.

### **2.2.3 Materials**

For the group interview, no specific questions were provided, only the tape recorder was set to record the whole process of the interview. Causal conversation was carried on among the 4 students and the researcher.

The questionnaire had a total of 33 questions concerning the five main sections and 3 additional questions about the students' personal information in an additional section. The five sections were Section I Culture and Other Disciplines containing 5 questions, Section II Student's Ability and Potential containing 13 questions, Section III Teacher's Guidance containing 4 questions, Section IV Textbook containing 7 questions and Section V Student's Gain containing 4 questions.

The interview involved totally 9 questions with 3 in Section II, 1 in Section III, 3 in Section IV and 2 in Section V. Both the questionnaire and the interview questions were written in Chinese for clarity.

## **2.3 Procedures**

The group interview was conducted from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. on Nov. 20, 2007 in Room 104 in English Dept. It was an unstructured interview without prefixed questions, which allowed the students talking freely, but the researcher had the overall direction in mind, so that she was kind of following as well as leading the students at the same time in their conversation and this gave rise to a more equal balance in the research relationship. The whole process was recorded while every student provided more information than the researcher had expected and also some surprising information that the researcher never thought about, which proved that the unstructured interview allowed the emergence of the themes and topics which may not have been anticipated when the investigation began (Burns, 1999) and the final result was satisfactory offering enough clues of what the students cared about in this course and for the researcher to frame her questions for the next research, the questionnaire survey.

To make sure that all students participated in the research, the researcher chose the time when the four classes had Video class to distribute the questionnaires. The four classes fell on four different times, Class Two in SEIS, at 8 to 10 am Dec. 17, Class One in SEIS at 10 to 12 am Dec. 19, Class One in SL at 8 to 10 am Dec. 24 and Class Two in SL at 10-12 am Dec. 26, 2007. The questionnaires in each class were distributed at the beginning of the class after the researcher explained the purpose of the research and the requirements of doing the questionnaire. Since it was the controlled procedure, the task took approximately 15 minutes in each class and, all the questionnaires were valid and collected together at that time by the researcher.

The formal one-to-one interview was conducted from 5:30 to 8:30 pm on Dec. 27 when Prof. A interviewed 6 students in R308 and Prof. B interviewed another 6 students in R309. As planned, each student would take approximately 30 minutes to answer the 9 structured questions posed by the researcher. Before the interview with each student, s/he was given a Consent Form to fill to make sure s/he did it voluntarily and the data s/he offered would remain confidential. The 12 students were randomly arranged to sit either in R308 or in R309 and they come from both SEIS and SL and they were told before hand to come at the specific time and the site scheduled for them. To each student, the researcher explained clearly the purpose of this research and the function of this complementary interview and the student understood precisely what s/he was expected of. The students were informed that their voice would be recorded for later analysis and reflection, not for any other purposes. For each question, the researcher asked the direct questions first and allowed the students to answer, if the researcher found the student did not quite understand or had no more idea to offer, the researcher posed the clarifying questions and prompts to inspire s/he, then the student usually found more to add. 9 questions were asked altogether while 9 answers were obtained from 12 students whose contributions were highly appreciated and valued and who were all rewarded with some gifts from the researchers at the end of the interview.

### **3. Results**

#### **3.1 The group interview**

The preliminary group interview yielded aspects of concerns including expected and unexpected. The issues raised from this interview assisted the researcher a great deal in designing the questionnaire. Instead of going through details of the two hours talk, the researcher would mention and summarize the major points generated from it only. The first point was on the principles for choosing the movies. They believed that movies with themes less or rarely talked about in other courses and in previous years should be chosen, for some movies though classical, but were discussed for times in different courses in different years in that students lost interest and enthusiasm; they also believed some challenging movies like *American Beauty* and *The Hours* should be selected because the quality of being hard to understand challenged the mentality and their potentials which gave them a very good feeling

of tackling problems, overcoming difficulties and growing up. The second point was on potential of the students who most of time felt thirsty for knowledge, ideas and inspiration, however, they could not be well fed by the teachers because the amount and the quality of the assignments, the textbook readings, and the requirements of the tasks in class were relatively easier or lower than their affective and intellectual needs. They would rather read original works in literature, politics, philosophy and psychology which provided them with more logical thinking and broader range of knowledge. The third point was on their performance in class activity. Some students preferred to remain silent in class rather than expressing themselves freely. It was not due to their language inadequacy or lack of will or reluctance to participate, it was in fact their choice of psyche. They felt that then and there they would rather contemplate than speaking out their feeling and emotion and they would rather communicate with the audience or readers with their heart. They needed to be understood, forgiven and left free to think and apperceive. The fourth point was on teachers' way of thinking and way of teaching which they believed was already outdated, and the fact was that teachers still treated them as children instead of adults and capable individuals who actually expected the teachers to give assignments and tasks at a level high enough for them to jump a little to reach. The teachers were in desperate need to catch with the time in thinking, teaching, and attitude toward students. The fifth point was on the textbook in which some items needed to be innovated and changed. The second part, the factual questions could be replaced by some comprehensive ones, more challenging and more comprehensive questions, or questions concerning detailed actions or emotions. Besides, some aesthetic aspects of the movies were expected to be included besides the theme or conflict research items. These are the five major points summed up from the talk. After studying their focuses of attention, the researcher designed the questionnaire as such.

### **3.2 The questionnaire**

A total of 89 questionnaires were collected. The raw data is presented in Appendix B, and the description and analysis of the results are as follows.

#### **Section I Culture and Other Disciplines**

This section summarizes the issues of the students' general attitude toward culture and other disciplines. The results are shown in Table 1.



**Table 1** Students' general attitude toward culture and other disciplines<sup>2</sup>

Items	A		B		C		D		E	
	N <sup>3</sup>	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1	73	82.0	15	16.9	1	1.1	0	0		
2	52	58.4	32	36.0	5	5.6	0	0		
3	58	65.2	29	32.6	2	2.2	0	0		
4	8	9.0	26	29.2	31	34.8	24	27.0	0	0
5	65	73.0	23	25.9	1	1.1	0	0		

(See Appendix A for the wording of the items)

In Table 1, Item 1 shows that 88 respondents (98.9%) agreed that culture was reflected in movies, and Item 2 shows that 84 respondents (94.4%) believed that TV programs offered more information other than culture, such as the fields of economics, finance, politics and environment. There were 87 (97.8%) respondents who wanted to know about the fields other than culture (see Item 3). As for the ratio between culture and other fields that should be included in this course, 9% of the respondents wanted 80/20, 29.2% of the respondents wanted 70/30, 34.8% wanted 60/40, and 27% wanted 50/50 (see Item 4). From Item 5, 88 (98.9%) respondents considered that both movies and TV programs were good media to learn a foreign language.

As a result, it is agreed that movie was a window to learn culture. It revealed clearly that the great majority of the students had the need to know more about knowledge in other disciplines besides culture which was mainly presented in movies. Therefore, the percentage (34.8%: 60/40) shows that TV programs, as major sources of the information or other disciplines were very necessary, and more TV programs should be added in the course.

## Section II Student's Ability and Potential

In this section, the items intend to seek the student's abilities and potentials in the course.

In Table 2, it can be seen that only 23 (25.8%) respondents (choosing A and B) expressed that they needed help when they prepared the in-class presentations, 35 (39.3%) (choosing C) considered that they seldom needed help, and 31 (34.8%) (choosing D) declared that they didn't need any help (see Item 6). As for the time used for the preparation of presentations, 25 (28.1%) respondents could finish within 2-4 hours and 43 (48.3%) could finish within 4-6 hours (see Item 7).

2 For the convenience of analysis, the numbers of the category "NOE (no opinion expressed)" are not included in the tables. They can be found in Appendix B.

3 "N" represents number, and "%" represents the percentage of the number in the total of 89 students.

**Table 2** Abilities and potentials in pre-class research

Items	A		B		C		D		E	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
6	9	10.1	14	15.7	35	39.3	31	34.8		
7	25	28.1	43	48.3	16	18.0	3	3.4	1	1.1
8	43	48.3	37	41.6	8	9.0	1	1.1		
9	29	32.6	43	48.3	16	18.0	1	1.1		

(See Appendix A for the wording of the items)

As is shown in Item 8 and 9, 80 (89.9%) respondents believed that they had potential for this course, and 72 (80.9%) believed that the reading of the original works could enhance this potential. This shows that the great majority of students are ready to learn and think in an upper level, which is more difficult and in a larger variety.

**Table 3** On forms of class activities to cultivate students' critical thinking and improve their language

Items	A		B		C		D		E	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
10	16	18.0	9	10.1	58	65.2	5	5.6	0	0
11	10	11.2	51	57.3	22	24.7	6	6.7		
12	22	24.7	48	53.9	16	18.0	3	3.4		
13	25	28.1	39	43.8	29	32.6	46	51.7	4	4.5
14 <sup>4</sup>	41	46.1	26	29.2	14	15.7	2	2.2	0	0
15	39	43.8	48	53.9						

(See Appendix A. for the wording of the items)

Table 3 shows the respondents' choices on the forms of the class activities. What can be seen from Item10 is that 65.2% of the respondents (choosing C) preferred the groups of four in discussion and 18.0% preferred the discussion of the whole class. So, most respondents felt more comfortable to discuss with their classmates in smaller groups and they could inspire each other.

Item 11 is meant to know weather writing down one question on a piece of paper before raising that question orally can help the students' thinking process. The results show that 57.3% of the respondents (choosing B) felt that this method offered some help, and 24.7% (choosing C) felt it offered less than some.

<sup>4</sup> For the convenience of analysis, in item 14, we use A to E in stead of 5-1 to represent the degree of agreement (5 means strongly agree and 1 means strongly disagree). The same is true for items 16, 17, 23, 24, 26, 27 and 30.

The result of Item 12 shows that 53.9% (choosing B) felt strongly that 4-student group discussion helped their critical thinking, and 24.7% felt very strongly the class discussion helped their critical thinking.

As for the activities to improve further their language expression beside group discussion (see Item 13), the result shows that in-class presentation (D) had the support of the majority (51.7%); role play (B) took the second place (43.8%); then, presentation mixed with movie excerpts (C) (32.6%) and individual recitation of excerpts (A) (28.1%).

On how the class can be better conducted and what can be changed, some opinions were given. 53.9% said the class now was good enough and 43.8% wanted to make small changes. For instance, more time should be given to students, the time of presentations should be limited to 3 minutes each person strictly, and reading activities could be added in class.

**Table 4** Activities and potentials in written assignments

Items	A		B		C		D		E	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
16	9	10.1	12	13.4	59	66.3	7	7.9	2	2.2
17	1	1.1	13	14.6	58	65.2	16	18.0	1	1.1
18	35	39.3	46	51.7	5	5.6	1	1.1	2	2.2

(See Appendix A. for the wording of the items)

Table 4 shows the students' abilities and potential on the assignments. In Item 16, 66.3% of them (choosing 3) felt that the quantity of the written assignments was appropriate, and in Item 17, 65.2% (choosing 3) believed that the degree of difficulty of the written assignments was proper. 18.0% (choosing 2) felt the degree of difficulty was a little lower than their ability. As for the length of the academic papers as written assignments, 90% of them (choosing A & B) wanted to write 4 pages. The current requirement of academic paper is 2 pages, so they still have potentials to be tapped.

Item 14 intends to find out whether the Interview Project could help them enhance the abilities of language use, communication, innovation and team spirit in. As a result, the majority (75.3%) of the respondents (choosing A & B) tended to strongly and very strongly agree that it could, which showed that they had the awareness of cultivating their abilities from different perspectives.

To summarize, from the results of this section, it is believed that the majority of the students have potential in this course, and they have the need to have various forms of class activities to encourage them to form logical and critical thinking and improve their language efficiently.

### Section III Teacher's Guidance

Teacher's guidance is an important aspect of the classroom teaching. This section intends to know students' opinion about whether the present guidance from different aspects is helpful or not.

**Table 5** Teacher’s guidance

Items	A		B		C		D	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
19	34	38.2	55	61.8				
20	14	15.7	49	55.1	19	21.3	7	7.9
21	9	10.1	50	56.2	25	28.1	5	5.6
22	15	16.9	42	47.2	28	31.5	4	4.5

(See Appendix A. for the wording of the items)

For the pre-class research (see Item 19), 61.8% of the respondents declared that they didn’t need guidance. For those who wanted guidance (38.2%), they needed a variety of help, for instance, background information or websites, research direction, some limits on themes and recommended references.

It is clear that most students are autonomous in the pre-class research and have the abilities and the potentials, but there are still quite a few who are accustomed to wait for the instructors to offer detailed guidance. Therefore, teacher’s guidance for pre-class research is still necessary and as least some background information and the methods of analysis should be offered.

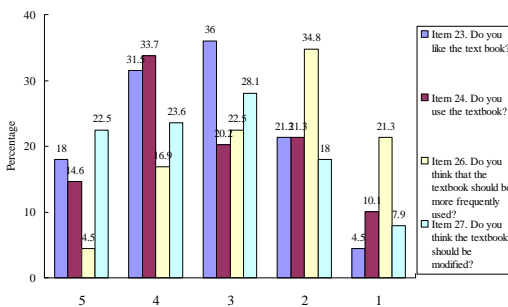
In Items 20 and 21, 70.8% respondents (choosing A & B) believed that teacher’s in-class participation and guidance were efficient, and 56.2% (choosing B) considered that the introduction of research methods during the classes was fairly helpful, while 28.1% (choosing C) not very helpful.

There are 47.2% of the respondents (choosing B) who felt that the feedbacks of the written assignments by the teachers were fairly helpful (see Item 22) and 31.5% (choosing C) not very helpful.

The results of this section show that teacher’s guidance is necessary at each stage and there is still room for the teacher to improve at pre-class, in-class and post-class stages.

**Section IV Textbook**

**Figure 1** Summary of the results of Items 23, 24, 26 and 27.

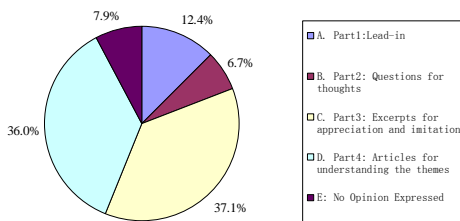


This section is meant to find out how helpful the textbook is and how it can be revised. Items

23, 24, 26 and 27 illustrate respectively the degrees of agreement on (1) whether the students like the textbook (Item 23); (2) whether they use the textbook (Item 24); (3) whether the textbook should be used more frequently (Item 26) and (4) whether the textbook should be improved (Item 27). They are vividly shown in Chart 1. Item 23 shows that 36% respondents liked the textbook at a moderate degree; 31.5% liked it, 18% liked it very much. 21.3% felt it OK and 4% don't like it. In Item 24, 20.2% of the students used the textbook at a moderate level; 33.7% used the textbook often, 14.6% quite often; 21.3% used it sometimes and 10.4% seldom use it. Item 26 shows that 22.5% felt it OK to use it more in class, 16.9% necessary, and 4.5% believed that it was very necessary; 34.8% felt that it was not very necessary to use the textbook more frequently in class, and 21.3% considered not necessary at all. Item 27 shows that 28.1% felt that it was necessary to modify the textbook at a moderate level; 23.6% considered necessary to modify and 22.5% very necessary to modify; 18% believed that it was not very necessary and 7.9% felt it was not necessary at all.

To summarize, this section shows that the textbook is very helpful since around 85% of the students like them, and 65% used them. 55% of the students don't think that it is necessary to use the textbook in class, indicating that students have already read them before class and got the idea. Students wish that the textbook can be modified to cater for their higher affective and intellectual need since the percentage for this wish is as high as 73%.

**Figure 2** Summary of the results of Item 25



Items 25, 28 and 29 give us an idea of how the students wish to modify the textbook. Item 25 (See Figure 2) shows that 37.1% respondents liked the third part of the textbook (Excerpts for Appreciation and Imitation); 36.0% liked the fourth part (Articles for Understanding the Themes), 12.4% liked the first part (Lead-in); and the second part (Questions for Thoughts) only got the support rate of 6.7%. It tells us that the second part should be modified so that it can offer helps more efficiently. The results got from Item 28 further prove what is shown in item 25, as it can be seen that 49.4% of them believed that the second part should be improved. 29.2% of them wanted the fourth part to be modified. 14% the first part and only 7% wished the third part, Excerpts for Appreciation and Imitation to be modified.

Item 29 shows the recommended movies from the respondents. The students wrote more than 50 names of American and European movies. Appendix C is a list of 20 most frequently mentioned movies. As it is revealed from the list, most of the movies are newer than the ones in

the textbook which are more traditional and classical. Although some are commercial blockbusters, such as Mummy Return, others are quite enlightening in various themes. In fact, there are also movies that are not familiar to the teachers. Therefore, it is necessary to consider the students' affective need for updated movies that can arouse their interests in thinking and taking part in the discussions.

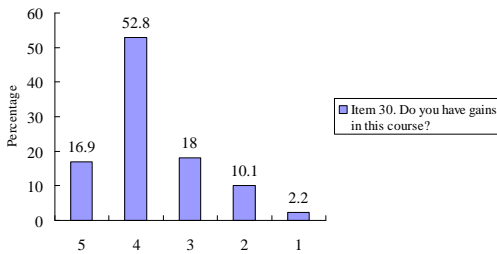
It is revealed from 25, 28 and 29 that students wanted to have those simple, easy, and old parts modified and have those challenging and new parts kept. Their affective and intellectual needs are surely needed to be further satisfied.

### Section V Student's Gains

This section intends to find out the students' gains in this course.

Item 30 shows the level of their gains. 15 (16.9%) had gains at level 5, 47 (52.8%) had gains at level 4, 16 (18%) had gains at level 3, 9 (10.1%) at level 2, and only 2 (2.2%) at level 1. It is clear that the majority of the students have gained a lot from the course.

**Figure 3 Gains in the course**



Items 31 and 32 continue to probe what gains they have got. The first 6 gains in Items 31 turned out to be the same as in Item 32, so only the gains in Item 32 were listed in Table 6 for convenience and clarity.

**Table 6 Biggest gains in the course**

Biggest gains	N	%
Competence in appreciating movie arts	33	37.1
Knowledge about western culture	29	32.6
Language skills	23	25.8
Competence in communication and team spirit	19	21.3
Competence in deeper understanding about social problems and life	17	19.1
Competence in critical thinking	12	13.5

Table 6 shows that the students have gained a lot in different aspects in the video course. Except for the fourth gain, all the other gains, including Competence in appreciating movie arts (37.1%), Knowledge about western culture (32.6%), Language skills (25.8%), Competence in deeper understanding about social problems and life (19.1%) and Competence in critical

thinking (13.5%), were closely associated with the movies.

There were 19 (21.3%) respondents who mentioned Competence of communication and team spirit. It is assumed that the Project (Information Interview) may have offered great opportunities for the gains. This result was proved further by the responses in the formal interview.

TV programs concerning other disciplines didn't seem to help much since the respondents didn't mention specifically. Therefore, maybe the percentage among the entire course is too small, therefore the effect was not obvious.

At last, one more question was asked hoping to learn from the respondents what other aspects they wanted to include in the course.

**Figure 4 Aspects to be included**

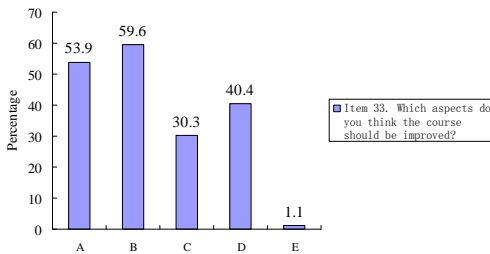


Figure 4 shows that the methods of movie analysis (B) got the support rate of 59.6%; movie aesthetics (A) got 53.9%; then, 40.4% of them wished to be informed more knowledge in other disciplines besides culture, 30.3% wished their language to be further refined.

Generally speaking, the objectives of the video course have been reached to a great extent. However, there are still things that could be added for improvement in order to tap further the potential of the students. Methods of movie analysis are of academic learning, and movie aesthetics is philosophical, which demonstrate the higher demand of the students' intellectual level. Wishing to learn more knowledge in disciplines other than culture indicates the students' desire of going beyond the familiar field and touch the unknown. Hoping to further refine their language is their everlasting pursuit.

### 3.3 The formal interview

It is promised in the Consent Form that the informants' names remain anonymous and the data confidential. Therefore, the coding is necessary and important. Since there were 12 informants and for the clarity of who they were, the researcher simply arranged them as S1, S2, till S12, with S as student and the number as sequence starting from the first student in R308 to the last one in R309. However, no informant was mentioned specifically in analysis. Only the pattern is described since the pattern is more important than who produces that statement.

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The researcher follows the five sections in which she observes each informant's responses and finds out a pattern in 12 informants' responses for each question. By the end of each section, there is a summary for that particular section.

### **Section I Culture and Other Disciplines**

This section is omitted in the interview for the results from the questionnaire are definite that needs no further questioning.

### **Section II Student's Ability and Potential**

#### **Question 1<sup>5</sup>: On student's general potential**

Yes. All 12 informants agreed they still had potentials. Their potentials showed in aspects of class interaction, analyzing themes, and acting, so that they wished more class hours could be provided and systematic critical theories could be introduced. As for the reading of original works as a way to dig their potentials, 9 students believed it was a good idea to read and it was very helpful, but they worried that it cost a large amount of time. 3 other students did not agree. They either thought it was not relevant to this course or not necessary to do so.

#### **Question 2: On student's critical thinking**

This question intends to find out how the teacher may help students create critical thinking especially in class and what kind of classroom activities may mostly do so. To create an atmosphere for student's critical thinking, 8 informants agreed on 4-student group discussion believing that the group members could concentrate on the topic, inspire each other and feel relaxed, but they also emphasized that first of all the students should have their own thinking, their own research before they came to the class and participated in the activities however the class was organized. 2 informants suggested debating between 2 students like what they did in sophomore year where the two students argued intensively while at the same time practiced their language and logical thinking. One informant said that 4-student group discussion often turned out to be an aimless chat and she believed the whole class discussion was more systematic and meaningful because the teacher provided a clear direction and a clue on points necessary to be thought about. She suggested the two kinds should be combined. One other informant thought that 2 or 4-student group discussion was limited on ideas.

#### **Question 3: On student's language proficiency**

This question intends to investigate how the students' language proficiency can be improved in class. And all 12 informants agreed strongly on reciting and performing classical excerpts the language in which was of high quality and of value that would help the students tremendously in elevating their language level. 8 informants emphasized that presentation was a very effective way to improve their language proficiency for they needed to think carefully about the proper words they used, the way of presenting and the logic in presenting. One informant also stressed on after-class reading, the reading of books of ideas and meanings. In a long run, the

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<sup>5</sup> For the specific questions in each section, refer to Appendix D.



language could be improved.

In sum, the students do have potentials. Reading original works is suggested and agreed by most informants as a good idea to tap their potentials. They also hope that class hours can be increased to 2 hours per week rather than 2 hours every other week right now so that they can fully perform their potentials in class. Their critical thinking is cultivated now, however, it can be more so if 4-student group discussion is often applied. For their language proficiency, reciting and performing the chosen excerpts and doing presentation are strongly recommended.

### **Section III Teacher's Guidance**

#### **Question 4: On teacher's intervention**

They generally thought that the teacher did a good job providing an open and relaxing atmosphere, encouraging students to talk and to talk freely. They believed that this was very important and the teacher should continue to do so. 10 informants especially pointed out that the teacher was a facilitator who was in charge of the whole class, and who gave most time to the students and who was steering the direction of the questions and inspiring them to probe deeper. The guidance of the teacher in class was important not only for a better understanding of the movie, but also for the cultivation of the students' personality asserted by one informant. 2 other informants suggested some ways to get everybody involved into the discussion. One more suggestion from almost all informants was that the class hours need to be increased if this course was intended to conduct better.

In sum, the teacher's guidance in class is very important not only for a better understanding of the movie but also for the cultivation of the students' personality.

### **Section IV Textbook**

#### **Question 5: On textbook's evaluation and renovation**

9 informants loved the excerpts in Part III and the notes on them which they believed were very helpful in understanding the themes and improving the language. One informant said it was good but did not matter that much to her. For the lead-in part, 3 students typically liked this part. They said this part though short stated very clearly the main idea of the movie and you could grasp the idea in an instance. Again 9 informants extremely liked the essays in Part IV which could broaden their perspectives and deepened their understanding and one said that could also assist their essay writing, for instance the writing of response or academic papers. One informant suggested some essays from Chinese perspectives could be added besides those western writers' works and even some students' work could be included for our students to learn. 9 informants felt that the questions in Part II were too many and most of them were about facts which the students had no interest to go over because they could easily understand those points. They said the last few questions were usually concerning the deep meanings of the movies and they could be left there while other questions could be got rid of. Only 2 informants thought they could serve as a guideline when the students could not find the focuses themselves. Besides, the critical theories on movies were expected to be included for these theories were

very important tools for analyzing the movies academically and systematically.

**Question 6: On student's affective need**

12 informants all said they liked modern classical movies which were hard to be comprehended especially when you watch it for the first time, but those movies made you think more and desire to find out what they implied underneath, for instance *The Hours*, *American Beauty*, *Pride and Prejudice*, and *Crash*. 8 informants said that movies that have been watched several times and were very old should be taken away from the list like *Dead Poets Society*, *The Graduate*, *Kramer vs. Kramer*, and *Shawshank Redemption*. However, 3 informants said they liked all the movies among which classical movies were instructional though not very stimulating and the modern ones were difficult but challenging. Two informants suggested some TV series and musicals like *The Desperate Housewives* and *Cat*. Musicals are of more aesthetic value and its language is poetically beautiful. Due to the different interests of the informants, some other movies were also recommended like *Schindler's List*, *Rain Man*, and *Pianist*. They all said that they liked those modern movies which are close to their lives and to their tastes.

**Question 7: On interests in other disciplines**

12 informants believed the percentage of TV programs could be higher and they recommended the program like *Discovery* in which some history and culture are well welcomed, and they were interested in politics, law, environment, finance, social ethics, university students' life and problems, and their rights protection. Besides the subjects they were interested in, 3 informants respectively recommended the websites where they could get some up to date programs. One of them was Ted website where they may find the top scientists or governmental officials or other VIP giving presentations on various subjects; one suggested they could select from the Pulitzer Prize programs of that year, for instance the best TV program of the year 2006.

In sum, the definite responses on 3 parts of the unit structure in the textbook deserve our attention. 9 positive responses on the excerpt in Part III and 9 positive responses on the essays in Part IV confirmed that they were both perfect items and very helpful information in improving the language and broadening their views and perspectives. 9 negative responses on questions in Part II proved that the factual questions in it urgently needed to be reduced leaving only some comprehensive ones as the probes. On students' affective need, all said they liked modern classical movies which have certain level of difficulties, but make them think more and those movies are close to their life and tastes. They all have interests on other disciplines, so they wish to have more TV programs added to the course.

**Section V Student's gain**

**Question 8: On student's biggest gains**

12 informants all admitted that they learned so much from the movies especially they learned how to watch, how to think, how to analyze and particularly they have formed the habit of thinking at a deeper level and knowing precisely what is important and needs to be carefully

observed and thought about. The meanings sought from the movies taught them so much on life and enriched their own experiences and understanding in society. 4 informants said they improved their language proficiency for sure. 3 informants particularly mentioned the project, the opportunity for social practice. They loved it so much. They cultivated their ability of cooperation, overcoming difficulties, communication and team spirit. It was extremely meaningful and it was a precious experience since they never had this kind of opportunity anytime in their university life. They valued it highly. 2 other informants said they started to appreciate the movie as a special artistic form.

#### **Question 9: On more aspects to be improved**

2 informants believed the class hours should be extended to 2 hours a week instead of 2 hours in every other week so that many more activities could be arranged. 4 informants suggested that more percentage of TV programs could be added in the course and more subjects could be introduced to students who wished to extend their knowledge in various disciplines. 2 informants said again that new movies should be selected and those old ones could be listed there just for reference but not for major discussions. 3 informants suggested that students be given one opportunity to choose their favorite movies to discuss, which could motivate them a great deal in producing an excellent presentation and warm discussion in class. 3 informants stressed that the teacher should be stricter with the students and assign more compulsory assignments. 2 other informants strongly suggested book reading assignments for the benefits of gaining ideas for discussion and the writing of response and academic papers.

In sum, 12 informants said their biggest gain was that through studying movies, they've learned how to watch, how to think, how to analyze the movies, especially form a good habit of thinking at a deeper level. The next gain put forward by 4 informants was the improvement of their language proficiency. The next one agreed by 3 informants was comprehensive abilities brought by the project, the abilities of communication, cooperation, overcoming difficulties, and team spirit. They loved this project so much that they valued it highly since this was the only chance ever experienced in their university life. The last one said by 2 informants was that they started to appreciate movie as an artistic form.

The informants at last made additional suggestions for the course: offer more class hours, the higher percentage of TV programs, one opportunity for students to choose a movie, some new movies, and more reading assignments and finally, suggested the teacher should be stricter with the students.

#### **4. Discussion and reflection**

This part answers the two questions raised at the beginning of the research: 1. Have we achieved our objectives? 2. What are the students' potentials and what else can the teacher intervene? Since the questionnaire and interview are complementing to each other, so the results from each section in two kinds of data are complementing to each other as well. Therefore, the analysis combines two kinds of data together and follows two lines, first, sorting

out those points that answer the first question, and second, summarizing the points that answer the second question. When these two questions are answered, the reflections from this action research are naturally presented.

From Section I, Item 14 in Section II (Questionnaire) and Section V, it can be seen clearly that the objectives of the course have mostly been achieved. It is believed that movie is a window to cultures and watching and discussing movies in class cultivate students' critical thinking and language expressions. They have gained competence in appreciating movie arts, knowledge about western cultures, competence in applying language skills, competence in deeper understanding about social problems and life and competence in critical thinking. All these competences are closely related to the movie learning and analyzing. So movies as the course content provide necessary conditions to such gains. The students all love the Project, the social practice, very much, believing that it could help them enhance the abilities of the use of language, the abilities of communication, cooperation, overcoming difficulties, and team spirit. This Project is meant to cultivate these abilities of the students in the first place. It is now confirmed that the students need this kind of training and practice and the project does offer the chance. From the gains and students' suggestion for more TV programs, it is seen that this objective of providing knowledge in other disciplines through TV is not achieved yet and it is clear too that the students still have the need and desire to know more like politics, law, economics, environment, university students' life and their rights protection to increase the knowledge and to broaden their views.

Looking at the students' potentials and suggestions, it is clear what the teacher may intervene. It is generally learned that the students have potentials in aspects of probing issues at a deeper level, interaction with other students in classroom discussion, critical thinking in Q and A, and language use. This discussion follows the sequence of pre-class, in-class and post-class activities and the textbook innovation. The first thing that needs to be done is to increase the total class hours, for without this precondition, other efforts will easily be put in vain. For pre-class, the reading of original works, a good idea to elevate students' level of language appreciation, logical thinking, and understanding of social problems and solutions, can be selectively added. Also some information of background knowledge, research direction and method of analysis can be provided to the students to make sure that everything is under their control. For in-class, 4-student group discussion should be the most frequently applied method for the cultivation of their critical thinking and inspiration to each other. Besides, the tasks for the students to recite and perform the excerpts should be assigned, which is strongly believed to improve their language expressions. Presentation is a very good way to practice language expression and logical thinking, so it will be kept as it is and the teacher needs to make certain the time limits for each presentation. Sometimes, some video episodes may be viewed together to draw the attention of all the students for a better discussion and appreciation. As suggested by some, the teacher may introduce systematically movie critical theories to equip the students in academic analysis and writing. For post-class, writing assignment is still a good idea to systematic analysis and thinking, only more pages should be allowed for academic papers since

some students have the potentials to write more. As for the textbook, the questions in Part II should be largely reduced and more comprehensive questions should be raised to help the students probe into issues in more depth. The movie selections may include more modern classical ones, difficult but meaningful, and new ones closer to their life and taste, in order to cater for the students' intellectual and affective needs. More TV programs can be chosen and made it accessible to the students. At last, as some students suggest, a certain time in class can be given to movie aesthetics explanation and also sometimes one chance for the students to choose a movie to analyze can be given in the whole semester. They must be very excited to perform the task.

## **5. Conclusion**

This study applies the model of action research to observe the students' reflection on the course, and what the teacher can intervene to improve the course. Tools of preliminary group interview, questionnaire and formal interview were used to collect data. From the result of the preliminary interview, five sections of questions were designed in the questionnaire to see the students' specific opinions of the course. Following the questionnaire, 9 questions were further created for the formal interview to complement the questionnaire.

After the examination of the three kinds of data, the findings tell us the students' opinions and suggestions for the course improvement and textbook innovation, from which it is seen that the objectives of the course have been mostly achieved. The students have gained a lot, such as competence in appreciating movie arts, knowledge about western culture, language skill, competence in communication and team spirit, competence in deeper understanding about social problems and life, and competence in critical thinking.

It is also found that the students' have great potentials in aspects of probing issues at a deeper level, interaction with other students in classroom discussion, critical thinking in Q and A, and language use. According to students' suggestions, more class hours should be arranged for this course as the precondition for other interventions. The major interventions are as follows: the reading of original works, the more use of group discussion, recitation of the excerpts, the introduction of critical theories, the allowing of more pages for written assignments, and the selection of more modern classical movies and more TV programs of various disciplines.

The limitations of the study are as such. First, the questionnaire was not tested through the pilot research due to the time limit. Therefore, several questions were found not designed perfectly. Second, for the selection of the interviewees, these 12 informants were not able to be chosen according to different levels of their language proficiency as it should be. Third, since one professor taught this course to these informants, she should have been avoided as an interviewer. Fourth, as for the interview, the researchers were not very professional in asking questions and the training among the researchers on the course was not enough. When the next research needs to be done, the limitations mentioned above might be avoided.

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