Classroom video project: an investigation on students’ perception

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Abstract

This paper is a preliminary research to understand students’ perception on the implementation of video projects into the English language classroom. Data was contributed by thirty-five foundation students from a private university in Selangor. During the beginning of the semester, the participants were assigned to create a short, teenage-themed video clip with the students themselves as the principal actors. Window Movie Maker was used to edit the raw video shot using camcorders. Upon completion of the video project, the students submitted a reflection journal entry to the blog – The English Learning Voyage. These responses were analyzed qualitatively and categorized into four themes: 1) Implementation of the video project; 2) Obstacles faced during the production; 3) Level of satisfaction upon completion of the video; 4) Elements that led to the success of the video project; and 5) Relevance of video project to language learning.

Keywords: Classroom video project, language learning materials, cooperative learning, confidence-building, online journal;

1. Introduction

Videos inevitably surround our lives. With the aid of Wireless network services (WiFi) and the burgeoning production of smartphones and tablets such as android tablets and iPad, the acts of capturing and sharing videos on social networks i.e. Facebook, Twitter are just a ‘touch’ away and has never been so easy. LeBaron (1981) believed that learners in this era are more exposed to and dominated by videos as compare to their counterparts in the yesteryears. With classrooms well-furnished with technology gadgets such as computers, LCD projector, overhead screen as well as the availability of Window Movie Maker and iMovie which are tied in with the personal computer and laptop operating system, inaccessibility is no longer a valid excuse for teachers to shy away from technology (Branigan, 2005, Ramos, 2007, Sweeder, 2007 and Alderman and Beyers, 2009). Instead,

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teachers should take full advantage of today’s technology by allowing learners to try their hands out at creating their own ‘film’ with the learners themselves as principal actors in the production (Brown, 2001).

2. Statement of the problem

Videos inevitably surround our lives. With the aid of Wireless network services (WiFi) and the burgeoning production of smartphones and tablets such as android tablets and iPad, the acts of capturing and sharing videos on social networks i.e. Facebook, Twitter are just a ‘touch’ away and has never been so easy. LeBaron (1981) believed that learners in this era are more exposed to and dominated by videos as compare to their counterparts in the yesteryears. With classrooms well-furnished with technology gadgets such as computers, LCD projector, overhead screen as well as the availability of Window Movie Maker and iMovie which are tied in with the personal computer and laptop operating system, inaccessibility is no longer a valid excuse for teachers to shy away from technology (Branigan, 2005, Ramos, 2007, Sweeder, 2007 and Alderman and Beyers, 2009). Instead, teachers should take full advantage of today’s technology by allow learners to try their hands out at creating their own ‘film’ with the learners themselves as principal actors in the production (Brown, 2001).

3. Aim of the study

The study was guided by the researcher’s interest to examine students’ perception on producing a video project for their English assignment through their feedback in their online reflection journal entries.

4. Significance of the study

The research rebuffs the use of video in the language classroom as mere instructional tools. Instead, student video projects should be given equal importance as such projects boost the learners’ confidence and elevate their sense of achievement. As students are personally and actively involved in the stages of the video production, they learn to take ownership of their own learning and gradually develop into autonomous learners. Working in groups to complete the video projects engage learners in cooperative learning in which they will discover more essential communication skills such as negotiation of meaning, decision-making and teamwork. Besides, group video projects is the best way to cater to the different learning styles of a heterogeneous language classroom as there will be roles that accommodate to the needs of each learner.

5. Review of Literature

5.1 Why student video projects?

Material development for the English language classroom has always been aligned with the advancing of technology. Education practitioners are now resorting after teaching and learning materials which are more relevant to the lifestyles and real-life needs of the Gen-Y learners. McCoy (2011) highlighted the preference of today’s learners in utilizing the internet search engines over visiting libraries for learning resources. While popular sites such as YouTube and Facebook do offer instant access to a vast range of video recordings, the excitement of hands-on learning through personal involvement in the video production is an experience which the existing pre-uploaded videos can never offer to our learners.

While students might experience high anxiety level and speech apprehension during the language learning process, engaging students in producing their own video projects allows the entire learning experience to take place in a less threatening environment thus elevating their self-confidence due to the entertaining nature of videos (Bennette, 1988; Kinnaman, 1993; and Clovis 1997). Video projects are usually impossible to be managed by a single individual, thus the project will ‘force’ students of different learning styles to work together in groups.
at the same time, integrate various learning skills so as to achieve their common language goal of producing the video project (Torrence, 1985, and Kaplan, 1986) Besides, video projects also give students a reason to be personally involved in language tasks and take ownership as well as pride in their achievement (Masterman, 1980). Learning to work in a group can be challenging for the students as they might come from different social and language backgrounds. In order to accomplish the video project, students need to engage in countless decision-making, critical thinking and also work cooperatively with their group members to ensure the success of the production.

As students take on creative roles (Portnoy, 1985) while working on authentic, real-life themes in their video, they would be able to practice real-life language not only among themselves but also other users of the language outside the classroom. This could be observed through the interviews which are conducted by the students with the local community in order to gain better understanding on the phenomenon that they want to depict in their video. Language learning can be made more meaningful through video projects as students are exposed to context outside the restrictions of the classroom (Brown and Kegan, 1986, and Wagschal, 1987). Upon completion of the video, peer-critique sessions which are usually carried out after the video-appreciation session would help students to accept feedbacks and criticisms positively. Since videos can be effortlessly stored in CD-ROMs or external hard disks, students can repeatedly access to the video footage to observe the mistakes they have done and subsequently make necessary improvements to their language use.

5.2 Challenges in classroom video production

Video projects do not come without complications. Restrictions such as expenses, scarcity of necessary video-shooting equipments and limited opportunities often impede its implementation in today’s language classrooms. Insufficient competence in computer skills would also impair the smooth-flow of the video project. Unless the language teacher is able to maneuver the equipment and software or collaborate with the IT lecturers, the learners will face a difficult time trying to get the perfect shot and navigate about with the video-editing software (Valmont, 1995; Evans, 1998, and Rudkin, 2004).

In addition, the current emphasis on high stake examinations and the pressure to complete prescribed syllabi impede the execution of classroom movie-making as teachers are answerable to the stakeholders in the education system. Video projects can be time-consuming, thus teachers, especially those teaching examination classes simply cannot afford to fall behind schedule and risk deviating from the curriculum or missing out chapters from the syllabus, thus resulting them to shy away from classroom video projects (Grant, 2007, and Levin, 2010).

6. Methodology and procedure

6.1 Research setting

The study was done in a private university college in Cheras, Selangor. Being part of the teaching team in that institution allowed me the freedom to execute the video project without further objections. Authentic data was able to be collected as the students were at ease with, and trust the researcher since I was their subject lecturer for three semesters.

6.2 Participants and sampling

A non-probability internal sampling technique was utilized to select the participants for this study. The study involved the participation of an intact-class of 35 third-semester students from the Centre for Foundation Studies who were enrolled in the Foundation in Health Sciences programme. Overall, the age range of the participants was between 18 to 20 years old and they were of the intermediate level of proficiency in the English language.
6.3 Instruments

In order to elicit the feedback from the participants, I have constructed a list of questions for them to respond to. Upon completing the video project, the participants were required to submit a reflective journal entry guided by the questions posted on an online blog - http://theenglishlearningvoyage.blogspot.com/ which was initially created to serve as a platform for the students to engage in active online discussions and forums. The following were the questions posted on the blog:

- **Implementation of the video project**
  What was your reaction towards the video assignment when you were first told about it? Did you like the idea that you get to do an assignment which is different from last semester’s? Or were you afraid that you might not be able to manage the assignment?

- **Obstacles faced during the production**
  Was the video shooting session smooth? What were the challenges you faced in terms of setting/location, time, props, costumes etc?

- **Level of satisfaction upon completion of the video project**
  Did your video turn out to be like what you expected? Were you satisfied with your video or did you feel that it could have been better?

- **Elements that led to the success of the video project**
  In your opinion, what was/were the secret(s) behind the success of your video project?

- **Relevance of video project to language learning**
  Did you enjoy yourself during the video production? Was it relevant to what you study? What have you learnt from this assignment (language, confidence, teamwork, computer skills etc)?

7. Data collection

As noted from above, the aim of this study was to elicit the students’ perception, both positive and negative, on their involvement in a video project for their final year English assignment. The responses were collected from a purely qualitative online reflective journal. The following were the feedback mentioned by the students in their journal posts, reported verbatim:

- **Implementation of the video project**
  “When I was in secondary school, my teacher assigned us to do a drama which the title was ‘The Pearl’. I could gain a lot of experiences in this kind of assignment. Thus, I looked forward into the video assignment.”

  “When I was given this video assignment, I was on the bench. I felt the excitement and also was afraid that we could not finish it on time.”

  “When I was first told about the video presentation, I was a bit shock. This was because I did not have any experience on this type of assignment. After given a week to consider it, I thought it was not a bad idea since I do not want to do the same type of presentation again, slide presentation.”

  “We don’t know about others, but we were all hyped up and all excited about this video.”

  “When we were first told about the video assignment, of course I felt excited! First reason was that I’ve always wanted to try something new and different. It’s kind of bored if we are always conducting only presentation in college.”
“My reaction when I was first told about it was like "WOW"...Awesome. Of course I liked the idea. Every semester doing the same thing, standing in front and talking was quite boring.”

“I can’t act!!! That was my reaction when I came to know about this assignment. I don’t want to ruin the whole movie because of my expressionless face.”

“Awesome..! Finally in our last semester, we are going to carry out a video assignment - something that I wanted since before” and that was my reaction when we were assigned to do it.”

“When Miss. Joe suggests us to do this video assignment, I was shocked and afraid of the assignment. Because I never been experiences of this video assignment.”

- **Obstacles faced during the production**
  “We spent about three to four week to complete the shooting video. This was because during shooting process there was some miscommunication among our actors. The challenges that I faced in this video was the splashing the milk on my own face because I personally hate the milk since I was in primary school. There were challenges in dealing with technology in Window Movie Maker. The most frustrated in process of editing video was merged scene with the subtitles.”

  “We spent about 2 weeks to complete the shooting of video. The shooting could be done so quickly if all of our teammate was free at the same time & fully cooperate with the director. In fact, there were a few challenges that we faced when shooting. The first challenge was I would burst into laugh easily. I had to learn to control myself from laughing. The second challenge was the police uniform & accessories.”

  “It took more than a week to shoot the video because we need to prepare the apparatus and costumes needed to shoot the video. The video shooting session were not smooth because we are very nervous and did not have experience in shooting the video. We try a few times only get the best shoot.”

  “The most frustrating part in editing our video was the merging scenes. Yes there were a lot of disagreements but no one voice it out, I just saw through facial expressions.”

  “The video shooting session takes a very long time due to the challenges we faced such as the dialogs were not said according to the script and need to repeat the scene many times and my team members laughing all the time.”

  “The most frustrating part when editing was we never realize that after applying the effects, the subtitles will actually move backward, which means that we need to relocate all the subtitles the second time for the whole video.”

- **Level of satisfaction upon the completion of the video**
  “Yes, the video turn out to what I have expected. I am satisfied with my video. I enjoyed the video production.”

  “My video turned out to be liked what I had expected. I satisfied with my video. I really enjoyed myself during the video production. It was very fun & I could know more about my teammate. They were very nice & I had changed my point of view towards them. I think it relevant to what I study.”
“Yes, I am satisfy with the video because this is the very first time I been exposed to video production, it turned out pretty good as what I was expect.”

- **Elements that led to the success of the video project**
  “The director managed her challenges by being patience and listened to our ideas and also provided her opinions. All of my group members had contributed their ideas in getting a perfect shot. The teamwork was practiced in my group. We managed to help each other during the shooting process. For example, we help each other by teaching the facial expression to each other in different scene.”

“Disagreements seldom occurred during discussion. We would voice out our opinion and listen to others. We also modify our idea to get the best idea. All of us would contribute our ideas to get the perfect shoot.”

“Teamwork was practiced in my group during shooting. We would encourage our teammate in acting some characters.”

“In short, we practiced democratic work-style as well as teamwork.”

“As a leader, I would listen and accept the opinions that group members have given if the idea wasn’t really bad.”

- **Relevance to language learning**
  “I think it was relevant to my study. This is because I can learn the language and computer skills from this video.”

“We learned how to act using English. I learned a lot on this assignment. I became more confidence when giving opinions & ideas. I learn how to cooperate with others when we had different point of views & beliefs.”

“We know how to engage to the public. Also learn to be more confident. Besides that, I enhanced my computer skills. I also get the chance to get the creative side of me out. I learnt not only how to write but also speak confidently from this assignment. At the same time, I learnt about cooperation as well as tolerance. I learnt how to give a different point of view in a proper manner and how to listen and accept other members’ opinion.”

“I feel this is relevant to what I study because it portrays the usage of English in the video production, this will indirectly improve our English language. What I learnt from this assignment is confidence, teamwork but most importantly I learnt was the trust between each other.”

“I enjoyed the video production. From this assignment, I learn the language and teamwork. We were in conversation most of the time yet we had tried to minimize our broken English. We all sacrificed our revision time to complete the task.”

“I had learn a lot during the movie production because I learn how to speak fluently, confidence, how to use the movie maker software, teamwork and acting skills. I like how our movie goes about telling stories related to the outer world, after all our movie was based on true stories. I liked about the concept of our video because it voiced out most of the teenager’s situation in which they couldn’t fulfill their own dream as they need to get a ‘permission’ or receive an ‘judgment’ or ‘consideration’, from their parent.”
“Our movie focuses on women and the hardships they face. I learned about those around me. We called up a few people on research purpose to know more about drug abuse and etc.”

8. Limitation of the study

Some limitations were identified during the study and are listed as below:

- Difficulty in convincing stakeholders (i.e. learners, parents, school and the community) about the relevance of the video projects
- Accessibility of essential video-recording devices and video-editing software
- Incompetency in operating video-recording devices and video-editing software
- Time and money-consuming

9. Conclusion

From the study, I found that my students were generally positive and excited about the video project although initially there were some hesitations due to lack of experience as well as skills in movie-making. Ample input on operating the Windows Movie Maker software before the commencement of the project was found to be crucial and necessary as some participants lamented their frustration particularly during the video-editing process. The video project was able to draw out the students’ creativity in integrating language with computer skills and cooperative learning was practiced when the students learned to tolerate different opinions, negotiate meaning and come to collective decisions. Students also responded that the video project has elevated their self-esteem and they were more willing to express themselves using English. Furthermore, student-created video is a valid and practical way to link language learning to the real life setting outside the language classroom thus education practitioners who wish to engage their students in authentic language learning should consider classroom video projects.

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