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Vodcast as Instruction Material in Teaching Listening and Speaking Skills

Dr. G. Shaik Abdul Wahab
Zaheer Abdul Ghafoor.Y.A

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English Liberated from Classroom Learning

Information Technology has already made its presence felt in the field of English language teaching and learning in India. Today many schools, colleges and other specialized institutions boast of possessing language laboratories and smart classrooms to enhance the teaching of English. In addition to that, personal computers, mobile phones, iPads, tablets and laptops have entered the remotest corners of the country with inbuilt software for learning English. In fact, teaching and learning of English, if desired, can come out of the confines of the

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Dr. G. Shaik Abdul Wahab and Zaheer Abdul Ghafoor.Y.A

Vodcast as Instruction Material in Teaching Listening and Speaking Skills

372

classroom by using technology. This extension in the process of teaching and learning English has created immense opportunity to the learner to acquire the language in a manner which is more flexible and user friendly.

Vodcast for Language Learning

One recent addition to this expansion of technology in English language teaching is the advent of the vodcast, which is a video file that is distributed through the internet. Vod is an acronym for ‘video on demand’ that can be played either on a mobile device, personal computer or laptops. Unlike a podcast which has only audio, vodcast contains both audio and video content. This enables the learner to connect visuals to the audio.

What Is Vodcast?

Vodcast is an inexpensive digital content for the English language classroom. There are many benefits of using vodcast in the classroom. The major advantages include:

- The students get the opportunity to listen and watch the video content of the classroom instruction material multiple times till desired learning occurs.
- The students who were absent for a class on a particular day can download the classroom vodcast material and watch it according to their convenience. As a result, the students do not miss out any valuable classroom instruction.
- Vodcasts replace passive learning with active participation of the students in the classroom.
- Vodcast provides content creators (teachers) the opportunity to create and use relevant and engaging teaching materials.
- Students can themselves create their class presentation using audio and visual tools and share it with other classmates using a video sharing site.

Teaching Listening and Speaking Skills Using Vodcast

The need to teach listening skills cannot be ignored in schools and colleges. Listening competency is an important aspect of acquiring proficiency in language. Listening activities help

the learner to listen to various accents of people from different sources which can be proper models to enhance pronunciation and can have good effect in the language learning process.

Listening can be taught by using vodcasts. One of the ways to practice listening skills is to provide students with questions prior to watching the video, and then asking them to answer after watching the video. This enables the students to comprehend the information that is presented orally. By providing students with questions related to the video played, there is an opportunity for them to code and decode the language.

As a Listening Tool

Vodcast as a listening tool enhances the listening experience of students. The settings, actions, emotions and gestures that the students observe in a video clip provide an important visual stimulus for language production and practice.

The current practice predominantly gives emphasis only to the teaching of vocabulary and grammar in the language classes. In spite of learning vocabulary and basic grammar, students still find it difficult to speak English. The students must be given a chance to listen and practice language inside and outside the classroom. In order to overcome this obstacle, vodcast can be incorporated in the classroom to teach listening effectively. The students should be provided with situations where they can use technology to learn speaking and listening. Vodcast can be used to teach listening to students who neither have the opportunity to speak and listen to English outside their classrooms, nor read English from their textbooks. In some cases the teacher uses the vernacular (regional language) to teach English. This hiatus in learning can be filled up by vodcast in providing the students an opportunity to practice language in a supportive learning environment.

Latest Learning Materials through Vodcast

Vodcasts can provide the latest learning materials which are more engaging than course books and lectures. They offer a variety of options and provide situations which are similar to life outside the classroom such as:

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Dr. G. Shaik Abdul Wahab and Zaheer Abdul Ghafoor.Y.A

Vodcast as Instruction Material in Teaching Listening and Speaking Skills

374

- describing people/things/places
- discussing current affairs
- expressing ideas

Helping with Accuracy and Fluency

The objective of teaching speaking is to make the students achieve accuracy and fluency of the target language. Accuracy refers to not making mistakes in grammar, vocabulary or pronunciation during speech. Fluent speakers of the language do not worry about making mistakes.

Media and Media Literacy

The current information age requires teachers to be familiar with media and media literacy. Thoman (2003) opines that media literacy has an influential role in educational programmes. Media can be integrated into language lessons in a variety of ways by developing activities based on radio programmes, television shows, newspapers and videos.

Integrating vodcasts into lessons can create appealing visuals and special interactive environment in the language classrooms. Cundell (2008, 17) notes, “One of the most powerful ways that video can be integrated into courses is for the visual representation they provide for learners on otherwise abstract concepts.” Teaching English through vodcast allows teachers to be creative when designing language lessons.

Mayer (2002) has defined video as a kind of multimedia material consisting of verbal and non-verbal representations displaying simultaneous images, narration and on screen text. Vodcasting is multifaceted as the students and the teachers can create and share the videos with others. Video-sharing services allow users to upload the vodcast to free online video-sharing servers. A great advantage of vodcast is that it provides authentic language because most of the programs are made for the native speakers, in that sense it provides authentic language input (Katchen, 2002).

The Role of Teachers Is Still Very Important!

Just as in many English teaching situations, the teachers play a key role in using vodcast as an aid for language teaching for they have the prime responsibility of creating a successful language learning environment. The teachers should be aware that vodcast should never be considered as a medium which rivals or overshadows them, but it is a useful aid for instruction. That is, vodcast cannot replace the teacher because it can only be used to teach things which are recorded on. One cannot ignore the fact that sometimes vodcast can be ineffective without the teachers, because it is they who enable the students to comprehend what they watch and listen by using some different communicative techniques.

Teacher's Role

In using the vodcast, the teacher can be a controller, an assessor, an organiser, a prompter and a participant in this method of instruction. The teacher controls the activities of the students in the class while they are watching the vodcast. The teacher is also an assessor when assessing the students' works.

In this process the teacher should wait until the end of the activity and then evaluate the students' outputs. The teacher should be a good organiser in teaching the foreign language through vodcast, and should know exactly what leads to success in learning and teaching of the language. The teachers need to provide only useful information and avoid confusing instructions to the learners so that they do not waste time in the learning process. The teacher should clearly explain to the students what they are going to watch in the vodcast and the activities (tasks) which follow.

In this activity, the role of a teacher includes that of a prompter, because when there is silent viewing in the classroom or when the learners are confused about what to do next, the teacher is expected to encourage students to participate. The teacher is also a participant while teaching a foreign language through vodcast. The teacher should be aware of the details of the materials which are to be taught before the activity so that there can be effective time management and it can make the students feel comfortable and facilitate learning. Taking into

consideration these factors in mind, the teacher should encourage active viewing in the classroom and facilitate successful language learning. In addition to that, the teacher should develop a plan for each vodcast program and encourage active viewing of the students. To aid comprehension, the teacher should prepare viewing guides which are easy and relevant to the language level of the students.

Viewing Techniques

Harmer (2007) suggests a variety of viewing techniques when using films and videos in listening activities including:

- Silent viewing (playing the video without the sound)
- Freeze framing (freezing the picture and asking the students what they think will happen next)
- Partial viewing (covering most of the screen with a piece of paper)
- Picture or speech (half the class watches the video while the other half faces away)
- Subtitled films (students see and hear the English language)

Video Adding Variety to Teaching

Video adds variety to the teaching learning environment and has a special appeal especially with visual learners. According to Alessi and Trolip “the strength of video in teaching lies in the fact that it can take many forms such as a soundless demonstration of a procedure, cartoons, an unseen narrator describing the activity seen in the video, dramatic plays, interviews, and teaching documentaries among others. Videos also provide a common experience for immense learning through discussion. Video can be engaging, entertaining and thought provoking”(Alessi and Trollip, 2001).

Sherman (2003) mentions several strong reasons why teachers can use authentic videos in teaching-learning process. Videos facilitate understanding of the oral language; provide variety of discourses or expressions in terms of speakers, kinds of expression, setting, and so on. They help language learners understand the aspects of oral English language. In addition, as language model, authentic video provides plenty samples of accents, vocabulary, grammar, syntax and

discourses. In this context, Vodcast can be a learning model that enables learners to select and use target language accurately. It can also be used to learn culture especially that of the English speaking country and shows how people converse, take attitude and think about something. Alternate video forms (vodcast) provides an authentic representation of language use other than movies, TV shows and even commercials that can be helpful in teaching non-native English speakers .Vodcast is a valuable and possibly underused classroom tool.

Limitations of Vodcast

The primary disadvantage of vodcast is that the bandwidth and space requirements of the file sizes are very large to store; the larger the video files, the greater the network demand and download time as well as extensive upload time to the video site. Creating high-quality video content requires significant investment of time and money. In many cases, quality equipment may create a hardship for the students since vodcast is a new but growing technology.

For mid-quality vodcasts, it is still necessary in the educational environment to use satisfactory webcam and camera equipment. Faculty and students who are not tech savvy may have initial confusion of how to create a vodcast and upload to the video-sharing sites. In addition, faculty has no way of controlling student accessing inappropriate videos from the video sharing site. There are also copyright issues to be taken into consideration.

To Sum UP

To sum up, vodcast can motivate students to enhance their listening and speaking skills. Using images and moving pictures enable educators to achieve the desired goal in acquiring listening and speaking skills. Vodcast can emerge as an effective language tool in the class which can support common learning goals.

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Dr. G. Shaik Abdul Wahab
Associate Professor of English
The New College
Chennai 600014
Tamilnadu
India
awengnew@yahoo.com

Zaheer Abdul Ghafoor.Y.A
Assistant Professor of English
Chennai 600014
Tamilnadu
India
zgzaheer@gmail.com