

THE USE OF MULTIMEDIA AND ITS IMPACT ON BANGLADESHI EFL LEARNERS AT TERTIARY LEVEL

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Abstract

As 21st century is the era of modern technologies with different aspects, it offers us to make the best use of them. After tape recorder and overhead projector (OHP), multimedia has become an important part of language classroom facilities for its unique and effective application in delivering and learning lesson. Although in many parts of Bangladesh, a South Asian developing country, where English enjoys the status of a foreign language, the use of multimedia in teaching and learning is viewed as a matter of luxury. However, nowadays the usefulness and the necessity of it are well recognized by the academics as well as the government. The study aims to focus on the difference between a traditional classroom void of multimedia and multimedia equipped classrooms at university level by explaining how multimedia support the students with enhanced opportunity to interact with diverse texts that give them more in-depth comprehension of the subject. It also focuses on audio-visual advantage of multimedia on the students' English language learning. The study has followed a qualitative method to get an in-depth understanding of the impact of using multimedia in an English language classroom at tertiary level. For this purpose, the data have been collected from two different sources. Firstly, from students' written response to an open ended question as to their comparative experience of learning lessons with and without multimedia facilities; and secondly, through observation of English language classes at a private university of Dhaka, the capital city of Bangladesh. The discussion of the study is limited to the use of multimedia in English language classroom using cartoons, images and music with a view to enhance students' skills in academic writing, critical analysis of image and critical appreciation of music. For this purpose, cartoons in English language, images from Google and music from You Tube have got focused discussion in this paper.

Keywords: Multimedia, EFL classroom, cartoon, tertiary level, English language teaching

INTRODUCTION

21st century being the era of many modern and sophisticated technologies different fields offers us to make the best use of these technologies. After tape recorder and overhead projector (OHP), multimedia has become an important part of language classrooms for its effective and wonderful role in delivering and learning lessons.

Though in some parts of Bangladesh, South Asian developing country, where English is in the status of a foreign language, the use of multimedia in teaching and learning is still viewed as a matter of luxury, the demand for and the necessity of using multimedia for teaching purposes are well recognized by the academicians as well as by the Government.

This study focuses on the use of multimedia in the process of teaching and learning language skills at tertiary level and how it helps students improve their English language skills and fulfill their academic needs. In addition, the study also aims to analyze the difference between a traditional classroom void of multimedia facilities and multimedia classrooms with multimedia practices at university level by explaining how multimedia classrooms support students with opportunities to interact with diverse texts that give them more in-depth comprehension of the subject. Moreover, the research also recommends that by using multimedia, the teachers will be able to provide students with more opportunities to

communicate with others, and thus can make the class more interactive and participatory.

LITERATURE REVIEW

At the very beginning of literature review, revisiting the perceptions of the classroom technology, multimedia around which the study has mainly evolved may be useful. According to Vaughan (2006), multimedia is a combination of text, graphic, animation, audio, and video which are everything we can see and hear in our daily life. Multimedia also refers to the uses of computer technology to create, store and experience multimedia content (Singh, 2007). The application of multimedia plays a crucial role in education, ranging from school to tertiary level.

Multimedia is defined as the combination of various digital media types such as text, images, sound and video, into an integrated multi-sensory interactive application or presentation to convey a message or information to an audience. In other words, multimedia means “an individual or a small group using a computer to interact with information that is represented in several media, by repeatedly selecting what to see and hear next” (Agnew, Kellerman and Meyer, 1996).

Highlighting the multiple use of multimedia, Reisman (1994) described multimedia as a ray of “computer-driven interactive communication system, which create, store, transmit and retrieve, textual, graphic and auditory networks of information. Besides, multimedia has also been interpreted as a combination of data carriers, for example video, CD-ROM, floppy disks, Internet and software in which the possibility for an interactive approach is offered (Smeets, 1996; Jager and Lokman, 1996). At the same time, Fetterman (1997) also viewed multimedia as those resources used for instruction that include one or more media such as graphics, video, animation, image and sound in addition to textual information.

For the purpose of this study, multimedia application was used to teach narrative style through screening cartoons to the

participating students. It is observed that animated cartoon as an authentic material has been considered as an effective tool that assists language learning, mainly, in EFL learning context, as it clarifies abstract concepts and add humor to a topic (Abuzahra et al., 2016).

Referring to the impacts of the use of multimedia, Penfield and Roberts (1959) argue that students’ integrative motivation is encouraged by using cartoon films in language classroom. Moreover, they have also identified that teaching practices in the classroom through cartoons also support them to improve second language acquisition.

In addition, Keogh and Naylor (1996) believe that in the language classroom, cartoon as an educational tool can have an immediate impact on classroom teaching. For this reason, they have recommended the teachers for the purposeful use of cartoons in the classroom. They have also argued that cartoon, as a second language learning tool, serves several developments such as, a shift from negatively-worded to positively-worded statements and a transfer from usage of single alternatives to multiple alternatives.

Projection of cartoons using multimedia in foreign language classrooms provides diverse pedagogical advantages. According to Clark (2000), cartoon film, as a source of authentic language, facilitates teachers to engage students, attract their attention, creates a non-threatening atmosphere to present information, and at the same time, it has the potential to enhance critical thinking processes and discussion skills.

Highlighting cartoon as a source of authentic language input for EFL classrooms, Sarko (2008) argues that use of authentic materials in the language classroom supports learners to use the language meaningfully both in and outside of the classroom. Nunan (1999) also reconfirms recognizing that in motivating language learners to correlate the content and subject matters to their life, exposure to authentic language material is necessary. It also helps them to build the

interconnections between knowledge they get in language classroom and real world outside the classroom setting (Abuzahra et al., 2016).

Additionally, Rule (2008) highlights that the use of animated cartoon is an effective technique for sharing cultural perspectives. Lin et al. (2004) also confirm that presentations of animated cartoons in classroom facilitate understanding knowledge which has a superior effect under specific conditions. Animated cartoon can also improve students' comprehension of various subject matters or that of distinct cultural backgrounds (Abuzahra et al., 2016).

Moreover, cartoon films also can help the students to get the immediate meaning of language in the classroom. Pointing to multi-layer benefit of using cartoons in English language classes, Canning-Wilson (2000) notes that cartoon films are beneficial not only for clarifying messages, but they also enable learners to have immediate understanding of a language point in a positive way. In addition to that, Lin et al. (2004) state that computer-animated pictures are more effective in assisting student's retention of complex knowledge or structures than recalling information that students build from classical instruction.

Focusing on the pedagogical significance of using cartoon, which is better utilized through multimedia, Danan (2004) has emphasized on the pedagogical impact of audiovisual materials in language classroom and he asserts that cartoon films can be used as a powerful tool in foreign language classroom for several reasons. The first reason is it helps improve students' listening comprehension skills. Then, it also facilitates the learning process by visualizing knowledge that students hear immediately. Furthermore, it develops cognitive abilities by generating deeper understanding of knowledge (Abuzahra et al., 2016).

Like cartoons and animated cartoon films, music and song also nurture language growth. For infants, music and language are so intermingled that "an awareness of music

is critical to a baby's language development and even helps to cement the bond between infant and mother" (Deutsch 2010, 37). Research at the Infant Learning Lab at the University of Wisconsin suggests that "infants learn more quickly from sung speech than from spoken speech" (McGowan, 2008). Also, we know that the exaggerated vocal inflections known as "motherese," a musical, singsong way of speaking used by mothers in all cultures, assist children's transition into understanding language. As Deutsch explains, "the boundary between speech and song can be very fragile" (Deutsch 2010, 37). The process of learning begins with curiosity, which is piqued by experiencing an art form; this curiosity creates motivation and interest and leads to heightened attention, and when we are in that alert state of heightened attention, new learning occurs (Posner et al., 2008). As music is motivating, it allows the mind to "train attention" and sets these learning processes in motion. By creating heightened attention in a class by using music a language teacher can create an atmosphere more conducive to learning. In addition, music offers special benefits for those learning a new language. Listening to songs and singing is a natural and enjoyable way to practice new sounds, words, and phrases. In fact, learning a song or musical instrument is analogous in many ways to learning a language. By using music and lyrics students are required to employ a repertoire of specific sounds, learn new patterns and rules, and master the 'syntax' of songs and compositions. As musicians become more proficient, they—like language learners—make ever-closer approximations of the target sounds until they reach a level of ease and enjoyment, or "fluency." Some forms of music, such as pop songs, work especially well for teaching English language learners (ELLs), because, pop songs have the magic combination of high-frequency words, repeated often, and the use of first and second person. As a result, listeners feel personally and emotionally involved with the songs (Murphey, 1990).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Constructivism as an approach does not only enable students to learn, but it also enhances students' order thinking skills. Constructivism allows students construct knowledge by encouraging them to connect prior experiences to further new concepts that they elicit from a social learning context (Abuzahra et al., 2016). In relation to cartoon usage in language classroom from a constructivist point of view, cartoon is intended as a starting point to enhance group discussions in order to derive new concepts, because cartoon represents habitual daily life. As a result, students can easily combine cartoon content and animated pictures with their similar experiences in real life situation. In other words, teacher needs to encourage students to generate ideas towards the cartoon film in the classroom. Students are stimulated to debate by asking proactive questions and they are permitted to collaboratively interact until they produce their own knowledge and share their ideas with others. During this process, the instructor will be a facilitator who motivates students to think, reflect, express ideas and discover knowledge by themselves. Successful application of constructivist approach in language classroom will not be beneficial enough to improve students' language performance, unless instructors select an appropriate cartoon film which is completely integrated to the learning material (Abuzahra et al., 2016).

Piaget, the founder of the constructivism, argues in his theory that humans can generate their knowledge and meaning by interaction between their own experiences and ideas. When an individual is exposed to new experience, he or she filters the concepts through a mental structural process (Schemata) which correlates an individual's previous knowledge, perspectives or beliefs with new concepts he gets (Phillips, 2000). In this case, cartoons help the students to integrate the new idea by providing them the mental structural process.

Although Vygotsky's (as cited in Rice & Wilson 1999) socio-cultural theory possibly gives the most credence at the children's cultural background and their interactions with peers which probably has its significance on the child's overall zone proximal development (ZPD), the theory is also relevant in the case of EFL learners. He believes that cultural and social perspectives have an influence on the child's mental development (Abuzahra et al., 2016). In addition, Vygotsky's theory (1978) correlates the fact that cartoons enable learners to socially interact which helps in the cognitive process of language learning. Similarly, it is also observed in this study that the participants, who were EFL learners, were very much interested in learning narrative paragraph through Indian English cartoons, because the socio-cultural aspects are almost similar to Bangladeshi ones.

However, a numerous factors affect successful acquisition of second or foreign language. Gardner's socio-economic model (1982) identifies various factors which are interrelated within the process of learning a second language. According to Gardner these include, "the social and cultural milieu, age, attitude, etc., the setting or context in which learning takes, individual learner differences such as motivation and place. Cartoons, if used carefully, can cater for most of the factors. Children are particularly interested in cartoons. Rate and success of second language acquisition are strongly influenced by the age of the learner" (Abuzahra et al., 2016).

METHODOLOGY

This study focuses on the use of multimedia at tertiary levels in Bangladesh, and the impacts of its audio-visual facilities on the students' learning outcome in English language classrooms. The research has followed a qualitative method to get an in-depth understanding of the impact of using multimedia in an English language classroom at tertiary level. For this purpose, the data have been collected from two different sources. Firstly, the data was collected

through a written response to an open ended question as how differently they view their experiences of learning in classrooms with and without multimedia facilities. Forty six students of studying Basic English, Compositions and Communication Skills and Advanced Reading and Writing courses at a leading private university situated in the capital city of Bangladesh, Dhaka, were the participants of this study. The participants were asked to write their experiences of learning in classes with and without multimedia and internet facilities. The students from several departments gave written response to an open ended question that sought a comparative account of their experiences of attending English classes with and without multimedia facilities. Secondly, these classes were also observed with a purposefully prepared observation check list.

The focus of the study is limited to the teaching of essay writing, critical analysis of image and critical appreciation of music. For this purpose, cartoons in English language, images from Google and music from You Tube have been used for discussion.

DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

There are a number of categories and genres to notice in our everyday life and among them 'cartoon' is grabbing the spot of an effective language learning medium significantly. 'Cartoon' is helpful in English language acquisition along with the compulsory reading courses. It actually does not replace the original reading materials but works as an additional factor in second language acquisition. This study in its discussion has identified that the discourse created by the cartoons has a great impact among the language learners. Along with teaching vocabulary and contextualized acquisition, it also lets the learner experience about different genres and the hidden discourse within the cartoons.

For the purpose of this research, a strategy was followed for last three semesters (Summer 2018, Fall 2018 and Spring 2019) and the strategy is starting the selected language classes with soft music and diary

writing. Every morning and afternoon language classes, the students start the class with diary writing for practicing freehand writing and pre-writing task. The observation that goes in line with the comments made by the students that they feel very free and enthusiastic to write something they want to write for themselves. Moreover, while writing, listening to music gives them an opportunity to settle down psychologically and to get ready for the main lesson, which is *only* possible with the support of multimedia.

Students of Basic English course are also told to write paragraphs with outline. In some lessons they were instructed to describe and comment on the music they listen to in the class. Similarly, the students of Compositions and Communications Skills are told to write reaction paper on music they listen to together in the class. In their write-ups it is observed that the students feel excited and motivated to complete their writing task through listening to music instead of traditional system, completing the task through verbal instruction. In Advanced Reading and Writing course, students are instructed to write critical appreciation of a text and to make them realize that text does not only mean printed materials, and text can stand for music or an image, they are to listen to a music or observe an image critically through multimedia application, and then complete the writing task. Such kind of music and image analysis from You Tube and Google to enhance EFL learners' writings skill is only possible through multimedia application.

Multimedia application not only makes English language lessons easy through audio support, it also plays an important role by providing visual support. At least two human senses work together.

In many lessons of the *Basic English* and *Composition and Communication* skills, cartoons and short films were played to teach writing narratives, reaction papers and summary. It is observed that when the teacher taught these topics and instructed them to do the writing tasks in the traditional mode, the students were showing negative gesture and

posture and feeling reluctant to follow the instruction. On the contrary, when the same participants were asked to do the similar task after watching task related cartoons and short films, they were quite active to perform the task.

Three of the participating students – *Faisal*, *Sohana* and *Shemanto* (pseudonyms) think that multimedia and internet make the learning process easier and faster. Likewise, *Mirajur* thinks that students can gather latest information about education by using them and also can understand the topics better and properly. Not only they get to know about educational aspects, *Tanvir* thinks, they can also gather knowledge about different things. They can even search for solutions to their problems through internet, he mentions. Moreover, *Mukshitur* opines multimedia and internet make the class interesting. Similarly, according to *Arpita*, they get pleasure by listening to music and by seeing pictures. *Shahanaz* also observes that this process of learning is interesting because they can listen to the soft music while doing class which actually refreshes their mind. *Redwan* adds, pictures help them make instant sentences. To talk more about the positive impact of using cartoon and music through multimedia application, *Tasnim*, *Redwan* and *Humaira* are convinced that music helps them to remove their boredom.

Referring to other positive influences of screening cartoons, short films utilizing multimedia technology, *Jannatul* thinks it enhances their thinking ability because they are able to see things practically, and *Nasiruzzaman* and *Abu Zafor* also think that multimedia and internet have made things easier for them to understand. They can easily relate to their topic. In line with them, *Reenia* and *Zubair* have noted that they can improve their English skills. Again, *Mahfizul* said that they get to learn new things. According to *Fahim*, it facilitates them to understand the modern method of teaching and learning. For *Farhanul*, it is more effective than the traditional way of teaching because it makes the lesson attractive to the students, and thus their boredom is reduced.

Making it a point, *Sumaiya* finds multimedia useful for their presentation, . In a similar tone, *Shahanaz* thinks “learning through internet and multimedia is motivational.” It helps them to concentrate on the class points, as voiced by *Sadman*, *Hafizur* and *Abu Zafor*. *Abu Zafor* also thinks that they can gather ‘a vast knowledge within a short period of time’. Again, *Wasiqul* talks about the added advantages of viewing something through multimedia projector and remarks that by watching things practically in the projector, they can remember things for a long time and can describe things perfectly. They also get to know new words, *Moumita* added. According to *Wasiqul*, multimedia and internet can bring desired variation in the class and facilitate the students to connect well with the studies. Lastly, *Jannatul* claims that because of the multimedia and internet the communication gap between teachers and students can be reduced.

On the contrary, some negative issues have been raised about the use of multimedia. The main disadvantages of using multimedia are that the use of multimedia is not always cost effective, it requires special maintenance and sometime technology misbehaves at crucial time like at the time of submitting assignment. Additionally, the sound and vision, quality of the copies or home-produced materials may not be ideal. Another important issue in this case is that the teacher should be well-trained on using, connecting and explaining the digital materials with main topics of the course. Failure to use multimedia may cause boredom and purposeless for students (Çakir, 2006). A few of the participants point out that electricity outage, the danger of inappropriate sites in the internet are intimidating, and they feel that book is safer and more reliable.

Being aware of the intimidating factors, some of the participants have suggested that precautionary measures can be taken to mitigate the problems that arise from the use of internet. In this study, it is also observed that with the help of multimedia, teachers have found it very easy to motivate the EFL learners to comprehend the target lesson or

topic in a more dynamic way rather than in a traditional method.

To conclude, we may feel not reject the benefit that the modern technology has to offer. As long as we are to encourage and motivate student learning, develop their language skills, more specifically in the target language (English), and enhance students' learning outcome, we should use multimedia to utilize relevant materials, and we should be more judicious while we use them. Having good reasons, language course instructors should use the multimedia technologies as a means for changing and improving traditional teaching practices, especially in the EFL context, like Bangladesh.

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