

Incorporating Multimedia Learning Platform and Materials in ESL Classes

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Abstract: Secondary language learning is compulsory for students of all levels in Hong Kong. The most common second language is English. With the help of multi-media learning materials/platform, diversity is added to the course and thus stimulate the motivation of students. Also, it is an effective method to cater the different abilities of students. This paper investigates the possibility of incorporating these materials in the second language classes for tertiary students.

The e-learning platform is used for administration of courses (e.g., uploading teaching materials or collecting assignments). The platform also provides other functions such as creating groups for discussion, access to virtual learning centre, retrieving useful materials for self-learning or designing pop quizzes for review of topics. These functions enable learning beyond classroom.

Multimedia learning platform aside, using multimedia learning materials are useful for engaging students in class. With the advancement in technology, students are skillful in accessing information online. By utilizing their skill in this area, it is a very effective way to engage students in learning.

The feedback from students is generally positive. The learning platform is an effective way in extending learning beyond classroom. Students can engage in self-learning even when classes are over. It is also a useful way for teachers to keep checking the learning progress of students. Students also welcome the introduction of multimedia learning materials. The materials add variety to their normal ESL classes. Their interest in this subject is stimulated.

Key words: multimedia based education, computerized educational platform, ESL learning

1. Introduction

Multimedia is widely used in the education sector nowadays. It is part of our everyday lives and it is an essential method of teaching. This paper investigates into the effectiveness of incorporating multimedia learning platform and materials in ESL (English as a second language) classes. The background of the study is in Hong Kong, while most students take English as the second language they study at school.

2. Background of Students in Hong Kong

Many students perceive English as a challenging subject. In fact, the English ability of Hong Kong students is always under criticism. According to the statistical report issued by the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority in Hong Kong — the authority which is in charge of the public examination taken by all

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secondary students in Hong Kong — nearly 30% of students score level 2 or lower in the English Language examination (Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority, 2016). Since the minimum language entry requirement for the tertiary sector is level 3 or above, scoring level 2 or lower means not attaining the minimum entry requirement for an undergraduate program. Some students are rejected from the tertiary sector solely because of their unsatisfactory result in the English language subject. There is an urgent need for schools to cater the needs of these students.

3. The Need for Using Multimedia

When students learn, they process information about what they see and hear. Research has shown that students internalize information better when they can visualize information, instead of just hearing it (Mayer, 2005). Pictures and animations could be incorporated into multimedia learning, while traditional lecture and textbook only present information in form of words. With pictures added to text, students will be able to learn more effectively.

4. Encourage Interaction

Incorporating multimedia materials is a way to encourage students' interaction towards learning. Traditional lectures are done with textbook and the teacher's explanation. The communication channel is often one-way, with the teacher doing most of the talking. Little interaction between students and teacher occurs in class.

The availability of the multimedia platform enables more interaction between teachers and students. Students at our college are all linked to the centralized multimedia platform called MOODLE. The platform serves different functions. Basic functions include uploading teaching materials prior to classes for students to retrieve, distributing assignment or posting notices. Apart from these, there are other functions which encourage learning outside classrooms.

Forums could be created by the teacher for discussion outside the classroom. These forums enable discussion of the subject knowledge beyond a classroom context. Without direct face-to-face contact with the teacher, some students find it less intimidating for them to raise questions. Teachers could answer the queries without the need to wait for another lecture session. It is a convenient way for providing consultation to students. These forums could also encourage learning among peers, since students under the same group could view and participate in the discussion of a certain topic. Exchange between peers is also an important part of learning because "Collaborative learning is based on the belief that a learner constructs his/her own knowledge by his/her own experience and prior knowledge, rather than the belief that knowledge is transmitted from someone else to the learner" (Lee, 2003).

5. Self-learning

The access to multimedia platform enables self-learning for students. According to the model suggested by Fee (Fee, 2009), self-managed e-learning is one of the five models of e-learning. It is an important aspect which provides learners with materials they could retrieve according to their pace and interest.

The self-learning activities vary in nature and levels to suit different needs of students. One of the functions

of MOODLE is the virtual learning centre. The virtual learning centre is packed with activities which may not be included in regular classes for students to choose from. Activities include audio visual materials like songs and movies, on-line exercises, and worksheets which are tailored for different disciplines.

The centre aims at developing students into an active dependent learner and students are free to set their own schedule for learning according to their preferences and abilities. The platform motivates students to learn outside classroom. They are free to set their learning objectives.

This arrangement is beneficial to students, according to Fee, in a number of ways (Fee, 2009). Students have greater control on what they would like to learn. They can choose the resources which they think would have the most powerful input to their studies. With the ability to control the pace of their studies, it is believed that this kind of learning could stimulate students' interest.

6. Altering Traditional Medium of Learning

With the help of multimedia learning platform, we are able to make changes to the traditional learning pattern with the introduction of new mode of learning. Flipped classroom is a popular medium of instruction and it will not be successful without the availability of multimedia learning.

With a flipped classroom, students are furnished with information about the class prior to class time. Teachers could upload teaching materials to multimedia learning platform for students to familiarize with themselves before they come to class. When students attend class, instead of having the teacher to lecture students on a certain topic, the class time is spent on activities related to the learning topic. These activities serve as a way to help students to internalize what they have learnt. Also, it is a good way for teachers to check on the understanding of students.

The impact of this learning method is positive. It greatly increases students' engagement in class (Zainuddin & Halili, 2016). In traditional classroom, class time is spent on teacher's talk. The lecture of the teacher is one way. With flipped classroom, teachers could instruct and clarify the lecture topic before class, with the help of multimedia learning platform, and focus on activities in class. The aim of the lecture is not about transmitting knowledge. Instead, class time is used on activities which could test students' ability in the application of their knowledge.

7. Utilization the Rich, Ready-made Online Materials online for Instruction Medium

Teachers can often utilize the various materials online as their teaching materials in class. Even though these materials may not be as systematically arranged as the materials presented in textbook, proper tailoring of these materials could be an effective way of engaging students in class.

In one of the writing classes students are asked to write a newspaper article regarding one of the recent real-life social event happened in Hong Kong. Instead of telling them right away the elements needed in writing a proper news article, they are asked to search for relevant reports about the incident on different platforms, including formal news/newspaper website and the social media. Students are eager to search for the coverage of the incident especially about the ones presented in the social media and they are especially intrigued by the comments left by different readers on the platforms. By comparing the differences in content of these coverages, the teacher can instruct students on the proper elements they need to have for constructing a newspaper article.

The activity is a successful utilization of the rich media sources as materials for instruction. The benefit of using this as a class activity is that teachers can view these online materials with students at the same time. Guidance could be given to them on how to screen and perceive these various online materials, so to guide them on differentiating accurate and inaccurate information on line (Larry, 2010). This skill is important for students' further learning.

8. Students' Feedback on Multimedia Learning

Students in general have positive feedback regarding the usage of multimedia resources in the classes. Their opinion is reflected in the student evaluation done at the end of the semester. From the comments written by the students, most of them agree that the materials could stimulate their interest and it is a good complement to the textbook and notes they have in class.

9. Limitations of Incorporating Multimedia Materials

Even though the feedback is generally positive, incorporating multimedia resources in class requires more preparation time for teachers. Since the teacher is not adopting a textbook, tailored materials are used for different classes. Teachers need to spend extra time in screening suitable materials for different groups.

Whether we are adopting the flipped classroom structure, or promoting the self-learning platform to students, we have the assumption that students are active learners who would utilize their time outside the classroom to manage their learning. However, in reality, it is very difficult for teachers to keep track of their progress when they are required to learn on their own. There is a possibility that a flipped classroom method would be unsuccessful because students do not familiarize themselves with the materials before class or students do not participate actively on self-learning platform and there is no way teachers could monitor their progress in this aspect.

Even though multimedia platform introduces various possibilities into the class, the role of the teacher could not be underestimated. The teacher still plays the most crucial role of the design and delivery of the class. Computer aided learning will not be successful if 'skilled administration of teaching and learning using technology' is absent (Muralikrishnan & Sanjayan, 2009). Since students' abilities vary in different classes, teachers still need to adjust the materials and pace of teaching. It is impossible for any multimedia learning platform to take over the role of the teacher.

Multimedia information should be presented in an optimum level. Too much of such information will result in information overload and still will not be able to integrate the information and internalize it in long run (SEG research, 2008). It is because our brain has limited capacity in processing information, the overflow of information will cause the confusion of students. Teachers should be aware of this aspect when they plan their classes.

10. Conclusion

Multimedia learning plays a crucial role in modern education. Different researches have acknowledged the effectiveness of the role of multimedia. With proper tailoring of materials, using multimedia platform and materials in class will surely enhance the motivation of students.

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