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Application of Video Recording in the Language Classroom

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Abstract

Recently, as different kinds of video segments and visual materials have been widely recognized as effective educational tools, using video recording has become an increasingly popular approach in the ELT classroom. This paper first gives a brief explanation of how different video contents and authentic visual materials can be used as learning materials for individual students' own proficient level of language study. It will examine how video recording enhances students' communication skills and generate motivation in the language classroom. The focus is placed on the students' comments and opinions in the learning process as well as both the instructor's and students' assessments carried out at the end of the course. The results showed that, after completing videotaping and evaluation processes, students perceived themselves to have developed their confidence and strength in their own language learning.

1. Introduction

In the language classroom, how to provide students with the feasible and realistic educational settings is an important aspect of improving their language skills. In the class of more than fifteen students, which is often typical in the Japanese language classroom, various approaches have been developed to encourage students to increase their motivation and facilitate their oral presentation. For example, creating "an atmosphere that is mostly student centered" with topics devised by students is an effective way for developing students' speaking and listening skills¹⁾. Another solution to the constraint on Japanese students' successful interactions in the classroom may be to use various student-generated language learning projects. These projects are considered to help students exchange their own ideas with other students and promote their critical thinking skills²⁾. This approach also accommodates students with different backgrounds and learning styles³⁾.

One of the major challenges in enhancing students' skills in communicating with other students is how to connect their existing knowledge and experiences with realistic communication tasks. In Japa-

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nese educational settings, where students are too modest to express their own opinions and lack active engagement in language tasks, this is another important issue to be considered. Instructors should provide students with tasks which are relevant to their everyday contexts.

2. Video clips for language learning

With the recent popularity of online visual resources for learning languages, a wide variety of video sharing sites, such as YouTube, are easily accessible by students. A hundred million videos on YouTube are viewed daily⁴⁾ and these videos, which include TV clips, movie excerpts, as well as amateur-produced video clips, are effective educational and motivational tools. The major advantage of these video clips is that they contain a rich source of authentic examples of everyday English, including various language uses in context and cultural elements of the target language. In combination with these Internet-delivered videos, students are also accustomed to different kinds of educational computer software containing Flash-based exercises⁴⁾. However, there are some major challenges when incorporating these technologies into the language classroom. For example, the scenes are often too short to provide students with appropriate content and context for language learning. Another problem is that the video clips often contain a lot of slangs and grammatical errors. In addition, because of the authenticity in its original context which is designed for entertainment rather than for language learning, not much focus has been placed on examining how to utilize these video clips for achieving specific learning goals and objectives⁴⁾. As a result, students tend to watch these videos passively⁵⁾. In a real communicative setting where a high level of student involvement is required, videos should be devised for students to actively engage in language tasks which encourage them to increase their confidence in communicating with others and develop fluency in the use of the target language.

3. Videotaping for language learning

Videotaping techniques offer numerous opportunities for language learning and they have been regarded as effective methods in various language teaching situations^{6),7),8)}. Implementing videotaping for language learning is not a new innovation. Traditionally, video technologies have been used for conversation practices, role plays, dramas, and presentations in a variety of language learning settings^{3),9)}. There have been a number of articles about the effectiveness of using videos for correcting students' grammar and pronunciation errors by comparing the most recent recordings with previous recordings^{10),11)}. Viewing performances help students increase their 'capacity for replication and identification'²⁾. More recently, students' familiarity with digital videos led instructors to believe that videotaping would enormously benefit students' language improvement. Various studies have explored the

ways in which students develop communication skills, teamwork skills, and essential social skills by using student-produced video performances^{11),12)}. It is also widely acknowledged that by viewing the recordings of their performance, students are encouraged to evaluate their own communication abilities objectively. Although videotaping has been shown to demonstrate positive results, how to maximize the process of video production for students in a language course to develop their own language learning skills has not been fully examined yet²⁾. This is an area worth looking into that has not fully been given much attention under Japanese educational settings. The following sections outline the process of integrating a videotaping project into a language course.

4. Setting up a project

In order to develop effective teaching processes to be implemented in the classroom by using video techniques, the VCSE methods²⁾ were adopted. The primary aims for this project are the following :

- To examine the students' evaluation of videotaping projects during the course.
- To determine the benefits and limitations of using video techniques.

The project described in this paper is a one-year English course for 16 Japanese first year university students. The aim of the course is to improve their English communication skills in 42 lesson hours. Few students had opportunity to use and practice English in real life situations. These students had no experience in using videos as language learning materials. Therefore, the major objective of this project is to encourage students to create effective teaching materials for themselves and explore the use of the target language in various, realistic, everyday situations. The aim of the project is also to promote students' critical thinking skills and to increase their awareness of their language learning through videotaping. The project involves videotaping the students four times and the assessment by the students during the course.

Several weeks before each taping were dedicated to group activities by using a textbook. First of all, students in groups of three or four develop realistic dialogues frequently seen in various situations based on verbal strategies such as common set phrases that emerged in the textbook. The focus was on a number of situations which students were likely to encounter in their daily lives. The topics included 'asking for information', 'giving directions and instructions', and 'making excuses', etc. The instructor left contexts and situations to be determined by students and asked them to create their own dialogues. This helped students maximize their creativity and independence. Although the instructor decided each project theme, students were free to design their own recording as long as they were set

up within the framework of instruction. Students were required to assist each other with the language.

5. Videotaping

At the beginning of this stage, the students watched the best performances of past years' students to have a tangible goal to reach for the project. Preliminary viewing was used for students to get general ideas of video productions and sort out the potential problems that the students might encounter during the taping¹²⁾. Students were then required to brainstorm ideas for taping with other group members until they narrowed their ideas down to the most realistic situation using English. Before the students engaged in the actual taping project, basic expressions were provided once again to give practical assistance to the students. The students were often unable to find appropriate expressions for a certain social context, which led to a lot of preparation before taping. The students' interaction as a group in real communicative settings was videotaped at a studio in the university with a remote video camera. The students were involved in the actual taping process to try to create the most realistic videotaped situation. While the students were videotaped, students' initiatives and spontaneous conversations were highly encouraged. Although short periods of silence were accepted, speaking in Japanese and looking at memos were not allowed. As the course progressed and students got used to the videotaping process, they were encouraged to improvise dialogue without any preparation.



6. Assessment

As a final product of each project, students were required to assess their own performances using an assessment chart. While watching the video, students could see how they interacted with other students in their target language. Students were encouraged to be critical of their own and other groups' work and write an outline for each group presented in the video segment. Students were also asked to transcribe the key sentences and expressions and to find out typical mistakes they made during the conversations. Then, students compared the first and second versions of their performances and shared what they thought and felt about their different presentations. Before the end of each project, students were asked for their suggestions on how to improve the project. For example, the next time the students videotape they can then try to speak more loudly with correct pronunciation and behave more appropriately. This viewing segment can then lead to full discussion about how they could communicate accurately with each other²⁾.

In addition to the assessment chart, students were required to fill out the questionnaire in order for them to understand how performance and presentation had been improved. The rating scale used in the questionnaire was the 10 point Likert scale with 1 representing ‘strongly disagree’ and 10 ‘strongly agree’. In order to attain a mean response for each question, the responses were totaled and averaged. For the purpose of examining any statistically significant differences between the students’ responses, a standard deviation was also attained. The data will be presented in this paper as mean \pm SD.

7. Student feedback and the instructor’s observation

The videos produced by the students were all different and each had its own weaknesses and strengths in terms of language use as well as nonverbal language behavior. The results of the questionnaire indicate that, overall, the students reacted very positively to the projects in both semesters. Table 1 shows the averages (\pm SD) of the students’ responses to the questionnaire in both semesters. As shown in Table1, the students’ ratings in both semesters were very close to each other. With regard to the language skills they had acquired (Question1), almost all of them felt that the projects helped them improve their communication skills. The averages (\pm SD) of this response was 7.75 (\pm 1.29) in the first semester and 7.18 (\pm 1.70) in the second semester. In response to Question 2 and 4,

Table1. Averages of the students’ responses

	First Semester Mean (SD)	Second Semester Mean (SD)
1. The projects helped me improve my communication skills.	7.75 (1.29)	7.18 (1.70)
2. The projects helped me understand how words and expressions behave in different ways for different situations.	7.50 (1.89)	7.05 (1.48)
3. The projects will be useful when I use the target language in a similar international situation in the future.	6.94 (2.04)	6.65 (1.27)
4. The projects assisted me in understanding what kinds of expressions and words are usually used by particular people, in different situations.	7.25 (2.14)	6.82 (1.42)
5. I felt more confident about communicating in the target language.	6.81 (2.07)	7.00 (1.58)
6. I became more aware of the logical flow of conversations.	6.56 (2.09)	6.94 (1.63)
7. I benefited from accomplishing my work as a team and collaborating our feelings and ideas.	7.00 (1.41)	7.59 (1.37)
8. Comparing our videos with other ones made us evaluate objectively what we accomplished.	7.50 (1.75)	7.71 (2.26)
9. The projects were effective in simulating a real conversation in the real world.	7.00 (1.96)	6.65 (1.77)

(N = 16)

students indicated that the projects helped them increase their awareness of how words and expressions were used in different situations. In response to Question 3, students indicated that they felt the project was valuable and found the approaches useful for them to survive in a similar situation in the future. The averages (\pm SD) of this response was 6.94 (\pm 2.04) in the first semester and 6.65 (\pm 1.27) in the second semester. It is important to note that, with regard to understanding and acquiring the expressions and usages through the projects, the students' ratings in the first semester slightly decreased in the second semester.

Question 6 examined student preference for the project as an aid to understanding the logical flow of conversation. Students in the second semester became more aware of the flow of conversation. The averages (\pm SD) of this response was 6.56 (\pm 2.09) in the first semester and 6.94 (\pm 1.63) in the second semester. The students also seemed to continue conversation without silence and realized their pronunciation errors and grammatical mistakes²⁾. In addition, the responses to Question 5 indicated that the project helped students develop confidence in communicating in the target language. The averages (\pm SD) of this response was 6.81 (\pm 2.07) in the first semester and 7.00 (\pm 1.58) in the second semester. This suggests that the students were convinced that repeated videotaping procedures helped them relieve their emotional tensions. Throughout the process of their language learning, the students highly valued the team-based collaborative projects. The averages (\pm SD) of this response was 7.00 (\pm 1.41) in the first semester and 7.59 (\pm 1.37) in the second semester. In both semesters, the majority of students indicated the project helped them evaluate their accomplishment objectively. The averages (\pm SD) of these responses were 7.50 (\pm 1.75) and 7.71 (\pm 2.26) respectively.

8. Benefits and limitations of the project

Throughout the course, students rated the projects highly and commented that they were effective as well as motivating. The results of the questionnaire suggest that there were two major benefits for the students. The first advantage was that the projects provided students with ample opportunities to develop interaction skills such as 'exchanging information' and 'negotiating real understanding'¹³⁾. By video recording four times and comparing their performance and presentation with those of other students, the projects helped students identify their specific language problems and evaluate other students' work critically. They understood how words and expressions worked or didn't work in a particular situation²⁾. In addition, as the course progressed, the projects encouraged students to develop various language skills and communication strategies to get their message across²⁾. For example, they realized how their facial expressions, gestures, and posture were important as nonverbal language behavior¹⁴⁾. This raising awareness process helped students assess their own language learning and rec-

ognize their own progress. Students learned from each other and increased their motivation to do better next time⁸⁾.

The second advantage of the projects included the students' improvement of their overall confidence in communication. The flexible nature of the projects, such as selecting topics and designing each presentation, encouraged students to develop their creativity and actively engage in individual projects. Having students work together in groups also helped them overcome their feelings of shyness and embarrassment, and strengthened their confidence in their use of English. The students' freedom to organize the presentation by themselves was anticipated to provide both advantages and disadvantages for their language learning. However, the students regarded the project as 'a rehearsal for the real world' and, unlike artificial and 'contrived' activities¹⁵⁾, it promoted the students' 'self-expression of the inner world'¹³⁾. For students who are reticent in the classroom, this confidence-building approach is effective in maximizing conversation projects even in a large class.

After completion of the course several limitations also became apparent. One of the problems considered was how students should make the most of the self-reflection process after the taping. The evaluation process was intended to encourage students to consciously examine their work by transcribing key sentences and expressions and identifying inappropriate language use. As the results of the questionnaire suggest, however, the repeated review process didn't convince the students that they had made a considerable progress on their overall communication skills. It is highly doubtful that students felt empowered and fully benefited from the repeated assessment procedures. A further point to bear in mind is the need for a framework in which students can take control of and contribute to their learning process. Although the projects focused on student-centered communication activities with a wide variety of phrases and expressions and the students were given freedom to select topics for conversation, the learning procedures were still controlled by the instructor. Although learner choice is essential to learning in any field, the instructor should determine how a supportive environment can be attained for students to maximize their language learning.

9. Conclusion

This study has shown that the use of video developed by students can positively influence their beliefs and attitudes toward their engagement in communicative interaction. Acquiring successful communication skills and strategies is an important component in the development of meaningful interaction and the elimination of apprehension. Although video production could be integrated with any other language learning areas, encouraging students' involvement in more self-directed projects and providing well supportive learning environment are necessary for future effective implementation.

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