Blending Face-to-Face Communication and Video Blogging in Acquiring Public Speaking Skills

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ABSTRACT
Blended learning is a unique approach that 'blends' face-to-face classroom teaching with suitable use of technology or online resources. The online materials are part of the input or supplements for a language classroom. This paper aims to report on a study conducted on a group of 12 Diploma students, who studied public speaking as a component of their English language course. The purposes of the study are to identify the effectiveness of using technology, namely, video blog, in developing public speaking skills among the participants and to determine their perception on 'blending' face-to-face communication and video blog for learning public speaking skills. Data for the study were collected using questionnaire, blog entries, online reflection and semi structured interviews. Results of the study revealed that the participants have positive perception towards blending face-to-face communication and video blogging in acquiring public speaking skills. The findings also indicated that the incorporation of video blog is effective in developing their public speaking skills. Therefore, it can be concluded that blended learning method incorporating video blog and face-to-face instruction can be efficiently adapted in acquiring public speaking skills among students.

Keywords: blended learning; video blogging; face-to-face communication

INTRODUCTION

Many higher education institutes are adapting e-learning approaches that encourage independent learning among students. The vast usage of electronic devices such as hand phones and computers enable learners to easily accustom to the new approach as technology is inseparable from the young generation (Cakir, 2006). Cakir (2010) believes that, to stimulate learning and encourage students' involvement in a foreign language learning, the educator has to incorporate technology that blends well with the learning situation (authentic learning), which are interactive and related to their daily lifestyle. Therefore, blending of face-to-face communication involving classroom teaching, discussion and evaluation with online technology, helps to enhance students' language acquisition as it provides flexible learning method (Dziuban, Hartman & Moskal, 2004).

Problem Statement
Present students are generally not motivated and interested in the traditional method of learning within the closed classroom, where speaking is mostly done by the teacher and the students resort to reading their written text in the speaking class (Knowles, Holton & Swanson, 2005). The rapid development of technology has changed students' perception on learning. They prefer interactive and less teacher intrusion method of learning. This view is also supported by Warschauer and Kern (2000), who consider the shift of teaching and learning process in the current education system from the chalk and board to technology based (computer) is essential as students are far advanced in online based learning that inevitably show positive result in their language proficiency.

Aim and Objectives
The research aims to identify the effectiveness of blending face-to-face teaching and technological tool; video blog, in enhancing the students' public speaking skills, while implicitly encouraging learner-centred approach. In addition, emphasis on the selection of appropriate material, in this case, authentic video for the blog is equally important to make the video blogging comprehensible.

The objectives of the study are:
a) to identify the effectiveness of using video blog in developing public speaking skills
b) to determine students' perception about blending face-to-face learning and video blog for learning public speaking among students.

Significance of Study
From this study, language educators, especially those teaching speaking skills will be able to obtain an insight of students' involvement and perception towards video blogging. The findings enable language teachers to identify the effectiveness of blended learning using video blog in teaching public speaking for students. Furthermore, they can also identify students' learning

styles, their interest in blogging and difficulties they may face in this approach. The outcome of the research will help in designing the right method of teaching public speaking skills with authentic materials for students.

Scope of Study

The study on blending face to face communication and video blog in acquiring public speaking skills focuses mainly on the Diploma in Hotel Management students in one of the private institutes in Johor Bahru. The study focuses on public speaking skills of these learners which are facilitated with blended learning method. The aim of the method is to promote fluency in speaking through blended learning which will be applicable in their professional setting.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review for this study focuses on face-to-face communication, learner-centredness, and the use of technology and online resources in language teaching that formulates the concept of blended learning for refining public speaking skills.

Face-to-face Communication

In face-to-face (F2F) communication, the teacher verbally gives the lesson input for understanding of the course matter and the students respond to any questions posed by the teacher or promptly clear their doubts on a lesson in the classroom itself (Ginns & Ellis, 2007). It has become a common teaching approach practised by many language teachers for data input, which is normally done in a classroom. Similarly, for this study, the students learn the basic skills of public speaking in class and further their understanding through online learning.

Learner-Centred Approach

Learner-centred approach refers to a learning or teaching method that puts the learner at the centre, which contrasts with the conventional-learning (cf. MacHemer et al, 2007, p.9; Boyer, 1990). According to O'Neill, Moore and McMullin (2005), it is a paradigm shift that relocates learners' role from a mere listener in the traditional chalk and talk method to an active participant in the classroom. Learners are given the freedom to understand a lesson or work out solutions on their own or with peers. Here, the teacher functions only as the facilitator while the students work collaboratively to improve their speaking skills.

Technology in Language Teaching

Technology in language teaching has been used by many language teachers around the world in the recent past (Haley & Austin, 2004). Using technology in language teaching can be constructive because it promotes interactive use of language through collaborative learning and good use of materials (Sharma & Barrett, 2007). Besides, Sharma and Barrett (2007) have also listed webpages, wikis, blogs, E-learning sites and VLE such as Moodle as some easily available online resources for generating language learning materials. Their interactive nature is conducive for learning speaking.

Using Authentic Video in Blogs for Teaching Speaking

Authentic video refers to familiar programmes that are "normally viewed at cinemas, on TV, DVDs, feature films, documentaries, commercials and game shows" (Sherman, p.1, 2003). The teacher may consider using them if the visuals are deemed relevant and useful for language teaching. YouTube is undeniably the most popular online video uploader that can be used for language learning. It can be incorporated in blended learning to substitute verbal input by the teacher to make the class more interactive (Ataei, 2012). The videos can be used for teaching speaking where students are able to view the visuals while listening to the speech. YouTube encourages positive learning attitude if it is incorporated in classroom teaching to supplement language learning, especially speaking. Subsequently, the availability of blogs that incorporate videos (vlog) has made them a sought after learning tool for both teachers and students because of its usefulness and credibility. They make language learning both informative and fun. Sharma and Barrett (2007) describe blog as an efficient tool in language learning because of the way it is chronologically arranged for easy archive and freedom in independent learning through posting of various comments, photos, audios and videos.

Blended Learning

Blended learning is a new paradigm in education that blends face-to-face (F2F) traditional classroom teaching with appropriate use of technology or online resources (Sharma & Barrett, 2007; Ginns & Ellis, 2007; Shih, 2010). It is a new approach in language teaching, which allows students to explore the learning process virtually as a continuation to F2F learning session. Subsequently, a student is able to enhance their language learning even after classroom sessions.

Public Speaking Skills

Speaking in English is often considered as a challenge by L2 learners for they lack the sense of belonging toward the language (Haley & Austin, 2004). In their opinion, it is a lifeless language that is needed to be acquired in order to fulfil the requirements of their study. Furthermore, their lack of confidence, exposure toward the use of the language and anxiety of making mistake hinder them from even trying to understand spoken part of the English language (Abdul Rahman, 2010; Shih, 2010). Public speaking is defined by Sellnow (2003) as a "transactional communication" between the speaker and the listener to form shared meaning. Shih (2010) pointed out that their apprehension or deficiency in fluency arises due to the unawareness on the proper skills needed for producing speeches for public speaking. Hence, a proper planning in speech delivery is essential in forming comprehensible output.

METHODOLOGY

Fifteen students enrolled in a Diploma in Hotel Management course attended a blended mode of instruction involving a combination of F2F learning in the classroom and video blogging activities in the learning of public speaking skills. The collection of data was carried out over 4 weeks, from week 2 to week 5 of their 14-week academic session. The primary method of inquiry in this study was questionnaire, blog entries, written reflection and semi structured interview which were a part of mix method design. These instruments were used to evaluate the

research objectives: the effectiveness of video blogging, and students' perception toward this method in acquiring public speaking skills. Results of pre and post questionnaire on students' perception of learning by blending F2F communication and video blogging were supported by the blog entries, reflections and interviews. The questionnaire was used in pre and post-treatment while the blog entries on written reflection and interview were conducted after the treatment in week 5. The questionnaire which uses quantitative approach consists of two parts: Part 1: pre-treatment questions and Part 2: post-treatment questions. Part 1 contains demographic questions about the participants, their preferences and participation in English language learning and also their insight on their language skills. Part 2 is an online questionnaire on students' perception and participation in blended learning using face-to-face communication and video blogging. In the study, the lecturer developed a blog of which in it 3 videos related to public speaking skills obtained from YouTube were uploaded. Students were required to view them and comment or discuss about the three videos with their peers on the blog (blog entries) over a period of three weeks. At the end of the treatment, students had to deliver a public speech in class, respond to the post-treatment questionnaire and write their reflection on blended learning approach in the given template on the blog. Interviews were conducted as a post-treatment activity to substantiate the results of the reflection and questionnaire.

Flow of treatment

Week	Treatment	Instrument	Remark
Week 1	**F2F:** Speech writing class Input on language, content, transitional words and format were given. Task: Speech writing **Vlog**: Video1 – Input on speech writing skilsl.	Pre-treatment Questionnaire Blog entries	Lecturer informed students about vlog and invited them to join the blogging group. Once their request was accepted, students viewed the video to complete their task. Students discussed about the video among themselves using the comment column.
Week 2	**F2F:** 1. Discussion on speech writing. 2. Summarising of written text to extract main points for slide presentation. Task: PowerPoint slide preparation. **Vlog**: Video 2: Tips on presentation	Blog entries	Students prepared PowerPoint slide.
Week 3	**F2F:** Speech delivery do's and don'ts Input on tone, body language, gesture, eye-contact, etc. Task: Practise speech delivery. **Vlog**: Video 3 – Students view a good and bad presentation and make comparisons. The discussion is used as a guide to prepare for their presentation.	Blog entries	Students practised speech delivery and prepared for their presentation.
Week 4	**F2F:** Students present their public speech in class. **Vlog:** Students write their reflection and complete the questionnaire.	Post-treatment questionnaire Reflection Interview	3 random students were interviewed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The result reveals the students view on the effectiveness of using video blog and their perception of this blended learning approach in developing public speaking skills. In the initial stage of the study students were asked on their most challenging component of the English language learning and almost all of them agreed that speaking is the most challenging component. This is because speaking is a quintessential skill that helps to build a good rapport between the customers and the hotel (Mohd Nor, 2008).

Effectiveness of using vlog in developing public speaking skills
After the treatment, more than half of the students gave very promising reviews about video blog. 91.7% of the students enjoyed the content of the video while 75% of the students agreed that they could easily access the video blog and liked the quality of the videos. The blog application that allows discussions to take place on its platform enables students to comment or discuss on the content of the video in order to complete a task (Shih, 2010). 66.7% of the students could understand the content of the video and agreed that they could help to improve their speaking ability. However, only 58.3% of the students had issues accessing the video blog due to network problems and they need to have a gmail© account in order to use the blog. In terms of the use of the video blog, the students agreed that the interactive videos were comprehensible and they helped improve their speaking skills. They improved their speaking skills and incidentally enhanced their other language skills as proposed by Cakir (2011) who maintained that "this stimulated less rigid acquisition of the other language skills". However, the students highlighted three main concerns in the treatment:
1) the speakers in the video were too fast,
2) network problem interrupted their video blogging and
3) F2F communication must be carried out as part of their learning to clarify their doubts.

Since the speakers in the videos are native speakers, students had some problems understanding the speech. However, repeated viewing of the videos may enable the students to authentically acquire the culture and accent of the speakers (Cakir, 2006; Harmer, 2006 and Sherman, 2003). In short, students find the video blog applications and blogging as part of their learning very enjoyable and interesting. They also highlighted the feasibility of the blog applications enables them to study at their own pace.

Students' perception about blending F2F learning and video blog
After the treatment, students had a very positive outlook on blended learning. 58.3% of them agreed that they understood better through this approach while 91.7% see positive improvement in their public speaking skills compared to their post-treatment result which was 66.7%. Initially, only 41.7% of the students thought that this approach would assist them in completing their homework. However, after the treatment, 66.7% students felt that the discussion helped them with their homework. 75% of the students said this approach helped in their speaking error correction while a little over 90% strongly agreed that they have more freedom in learning through this blended learning approach. This showed that the students were very positive on the

blended learning approach that integrated learner-centredness in this face-to-face communication and video blog learning to develop their public speaking skills.

In general the students were anxious of their speaking competency because this skill is a necessity in the hotel line; lacking in it should be addressed as early as possible. Hoteliers may feel intimidated or deprived from promotions if their speaking skill is full of flaws (Hsu, 2011). The students' initial apprehension of this approach changed at the end of the treatment. It is due to their appreciation of the effectiveness of the technological tool in acquiring public speaking skills (Bonk & Cunningham, 1998). The students also preferred interactive learning that incorporates classroom teaching and collaborative learning with proper technological tools. They showed great interest in using the internet to supplement their language learning. This approach promoted collaborative learning for homework discussion and error correction which can be done in their convenient time with their friends. Hence, they find this approach very useful and effective in learning the skills of public speaking as they are not pressured to learning within the classroom. As agreed by Shih (2010), blending face-to-face communication with video based blogs help foster cooperative learning that provides students with wide range of opportunities to enhance their public speaking skills in their future professional setting. They were motivated to learn more and acquire the innate ability to upgrade themselves in their public speaking. Furthermore, the videos accommodated most of their learning needs when they were blended with the F2F communication.

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Although the research was successfully carried out as planned, there were some limitations that appeared in the study. However recommendations are suggested to overcome the limitations. Firstly, the small sample size in the study did not represent the entire population. With a bigger number of participants more relevant data could be collected to supplement the findings.
Secondly, due to time constrain, the lesson was limited to only one skill and topic. Given more time, it could have been expanded to several topics or other language and speaking skills. Thirdly, the focus of the study was limited to students' perception of blended learning and the effectiveness of video blogging. It would be useful if the students' improvement in public speaking was also tested through evaluation of their speech output. Finally, for this blog usage, students had to create a gmail account which is seen as a limitation. Hence, application of video blogs could be included in other online platforms like Facebook and Moodle. Moreover, learner autonomy in the treatment encouraged students to suggest for interactive language games and more sample videos in the blog. In fact, they showed interest in sharing information that can be done by uploading notes or videos of their choice.

All these suggestions clearly indicate that students can improve their speaking skills to achieve acceptable competency level through blending of F2F communication and online learning approach. Furthermore, the freedom to use online platform like video blog nurtures cooperative and less apprehensive lifelong learning.

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