

The Use of Multimodal Texts in Teaching English Language Oral Skills

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Abstract The challenge of teaching English to Malaysian tertiary students has become more daunting considering the latest developments in technology. Teachers therefore face the challenges of having to deal with a majority of learners who not only have little confidence or competence in using English language but also lack analytical, critical and creative skills. Hence, teachers can overcome this problem by carrying out language activities that concentrate on the development of multiple literacy skills among learners. This article will demonstrate specifically the ways in which the incorporation of multimodal materials will not only enhance students' English language competency but also their analytical and creative thinking skills. More importantly, this study focuses primarily on techniques and tools to enhance the students' English as a Second Language (ESL) learning achievement and learning satisfaction in the classroom setting. More specifically, the study utilizes the use of various multimodal texts as the teaching and learning approaches that include both auditory and visual modes encompassing video recording, YouTube videos, songs and Adobe voice. Additionally, within the multimodality framework, the students carried out a project in teams and explored authentic multimodal texts. Several interesting trends emerged based on the interpretation of the results. First, students were found to be more proactive and take ownership of their own learning processes. Second, learners were able to use the language in a more critical and creative manner due to the nature of the texts. Third, students were able to develop language

learning skills both individually and in teams.

Keywords Multimodal Texts, English Oral Skills, Critical and Creative Thinking, Leadership Acts, Technology

1. Introduction

In today's language classrooms, teachers can no longer survive by just teaching using chalk and board. Faced with diverse learners with varied backgrounds and literacy skills, teachers find themselves having to grapple with multiple factors just to get the students to open their mouths and be responsive in class activities. Teachers realized that they have to diversify their teaching approaches and learning content based on the students' capabilities, interest and readiness. Teachers need to have the ability to enrich the practices of teaching and learning English language skills to suit students' multiple learning styles. One way of doing this is to apply the use of multimodal texts in classroom teaching and learning. Multimodal texts are texts comprising of more than one kind of meaningful sign or symbol in order to convey the meaning of the text by means of a "synchronization of modes". This means the essence of multimodal texts can be interpreted by putting all the various modes used in the text together. In this case, students can read the multimodal text on a piece of printed paper or on the electronic display such as a computer [1]. A

'text' can also be seen from a multimodal point of view as distinctive modes that will show up in different materialities. For example, a verbal written text can be materialized not as print on paper but also on a computer screen [2].

In this study, 'multimodal texts' refer to texts that are utilized in teaching and learning which exist in multiple forms and content. In addition, the approach of using these multimodal texts is defined in this study as multimodality. We strongly propose that the approach of using multimodality in teaching and learning is effective in enhancing students' achievement. For instance, during English lessons, teachers may incorporate one or some of these teaching aids such as digital media like using PowerPoint or Prezi, video clips taken from YouTube video, music, or even application like Adobe Voice to name a few. The multimodal selection is an effort to develop students' competencies [3]. Multimodal learning can improve students' communicative competencies, cultural understanding and attitudes towards the language [4,5,6]. The teaching techniques using the multimodality method is not only unique and attractive but also creative and students will find them much easier to relate to. Further discussion on this will be covered in the ensuing section.

1.1. Objectives of the Study

The objective of this study is to demonstrate specifically the ways in which the incorporation of multimodal materials will enhance students' competency in the English language as well as their critical and creative thinking skills. More importantly, this study focuses primarily on techniques and tools to enhance the students' English as a Second Language (ESL) or L2 learning achievement and learning satisfaction in the classroom setting. More specifically, the study utilizes the use of various multimodal texts as the teaching and learning approaches that include both auditory and visual modes encompassing video recording, YouTube videos, songs, and Adobe voice. Additionally, within the multimodality framework, the students carried out a project in teams and explored authentic multimodal texts.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Generation Y Learners: The Case for Use of Multimodal Text and Approach

In relation to the group of selected learners or informants chosen for this study, it has been conceived that the present undergraduates at higher learning institution comprised mainly of Generation Y. Generation Y (Gen Y), or also known as the Millennials, can be defined as comprising the generation born in the mid-1980s to 2000. This age range may overlap with the newer generation, Generation Z, which according to observers, refers to those born between

late 2000 until now. However, despite the overlap, the informants in this study are generally categorized as Gen Y since they were all born in the mid-1990s. Gen Y marks the fastest growing age brackets of today's workforce. Generally, Gen Y bears several unique characteristics that differentiate itself from its predecessors, Generation X and Baby Boomers.

In a study done by Yusop and Sumari [7], it was found that Malaysian Gen Y undergraduates generally shared similar traits. They engaged very actively in the social media sites for the purposes of sharing information and educational reasons. According to the researchers, this demonstrated that they were comfortable in using technology in teaching and learning process. They were also found to be aware of and interested in current political and social issues. Based on their findings, Yusop and Sumari [1] posit that "from academic point of view, findings from this study reveal that academics of higher educational institutions should utilize the technologies to communicate with this young generation of students". A country's rise and fall depends on the more youthful era; the era that is of refined quality that can change the world. Therefore, this refined quality youth which is also the future generation will guarantee national growth and excellence [8]. Therefore, this view supports the choice of using multimodal texts with Gen Y learners like in the case of this study.

2.2. The Use of Multimodal Texts in Teaching and Learning

As mentioned earlier, 'multimodal texts' are texts that are utilised in teaching and learning which exist in multiple forms and content. The multimodal approaches mean the use of multiple modes of representation, including animation, verbal instruction, and written text, in order to maximize learners' methods of learning and the critical considerations required when designing and constructing multimodal texts. [9,10]. Students learn more deeply from a combination of words and pictures than from words alone; it is known as the "multimedia effect" [11]. Multimodal learning environments allow instructional elements to be presented in more than one sensory mode (visual, aural, written). Research in language studies found contemporary technologies promote, among others, the combination of different communication modes such as image, sound, written language, and animation. A number of scholars have acknowledged all communication is multimodal [12,13,14]. Materials that are presented in a variety of presentation modes may lead learners to perceive that it is easier to learn and improve attention, thus leading to improved learning performance, in particular for lower-achieving L2 students [10,15].

It can be inferred from the previous section that engineering students are faced with problems with English language proficiency. Having been instructed in the English language for 12 to 13 years and an added 2 credits

of English in their first year at the university, these students still appear to come to a higher education with a command of the language that is far below the required standard. The English language instructors at the Citra Centre, National University of Malaysia often lament about the learners' inability to engage in classroom oral activities due to their lack of language skills. Discussions with language instructors at the Citra Centre also suggest that during the teaching and learning process the students seem to be demotivated. It is thus pertinent to investigate this problem. As instructors of the English language courses, we are aware that the lives of the learners consist of many types of multimodal texts and we are interested to know if they contribute to the learner's language development. More specifically we would like to know if these engineering students who have enrolled in this course find the use of multimodal texts useful in their studies. Based on these researchers, it is espoused that the teachers' use of multimodal approaches that facilitates students to consider critically the multimodal strategies necessary for creating Oral Presentation skills that vary according to audience and purpose.

We propose that the use of multimodal texts improves the effectiveness of the teaching and learning techniques than the traditional way of teaching. Multimodal texts involve the use of multiple and diverse media and ICT to develop dynamic course resources that appeal to different sensory modes and a variety of learning styles [9]. The multimodal texts used include video and audio elements, recorded lecture presentations, interactive audio-enhanced diagrams and simulations, interactive quizzes and graphics.

One strong feature of multimodal texts is their flexibility. Most teachers use various methods in teaching, but each student has his own learning style and preferences. With the use of multimodal texts in teaching and learning, students are able to understand the lessons taught because teachers use various tools and methods to determine the best approach to maximise students' learning. With the availability of these multimodal texts, teachers can diversify their teaching methods. These wide and varied methods will appeal to Gen Y learners who are known to be more selective and already have their own set ways and preferred learning styles. By using multimodal texts, students will be more attentive and vested in their own learning processes. In fact, learners were also found to demonstrate proactive leadership acts that sharpened their leadership skills [16].

Educators have the responsibility to understand multimodal methods, presenting the knowledge and teach students to assess and customize multimodal texts [14]. With this multimodal approach, students can choose their own learning objects or representations, that best suit their preferences based on their dominant learning style [9]. In addition, students' beliefs and learning preferences from the learning process determine the success of acquiring the second language. Students with text understanding were less likely to obtain the second language skills when

compared to others [17]. Consequently, this will enhance their understanding and their ability to digest information through a variety of learning modes.

This is particularly true in the teaching and learning of the English language skills because through video and presentation graphics, teachers are able to teach students without having to do their own demonstration. Not only will the lesson go well but the objectives will also be achieved; and more importantly, students will also have fun in the classroom.

3. Methodology

3.1. The Course and Informants

The course chosen for this study was Workplace Communication 1 (WC1). The workplace communication I course is designed for students who have completed LMCE1012 Academic Communication 1. The course equips students with interpersonal skills both oral and written communication to meet the needs of workplace job requirements. It adopts a learner-centered approach and is interactive in nature. The course equips the students with skills to perform at job interviews, carry out effective group meetings and oral presentations based on project work. The job application and case study components will be carried out via tutorials and self-learning. At the end of the course, students should be able to demonstrate effective skills in managing group meetings, to produce appropriate visual slides for the presentation and to demonstrate good interpersonal skills. WC1 functions as an exit course that provides students with the necessary workplace knowledge and skills as preparation for their industrial training programme and future working needs. WC 1 is offered twice a week. Each lesson is conducted for two hours for the duration of fourteen weeks in a semester. This course comprises two major components, the job application and the Integrated group project components. However, this study will only focus on the latter, the group project component, particularly the Project Oral Presentation task.

Based on the requirements prescribed by the faculty, only Year 2 students from the Faculty of Engineering & Built Environment, National University of Malaysia were required to undergo the compulsory WC1 course which assisted them with their needs for workplace skills. This course is an integrated course where these engineering students from the Architecture department have to carry out the Project work assigned by their Architecture lecturers and the English instructors will give language input and practice particularly for the Integrated Project Oral Presentation skills. All engineering students are required to pass this course as a pre-requisite for their graduation requirements. In this study, the informants comprised 17 second language learners from the Architecture department of the Faculty of Engineering and Built Environment.

Table 1. The 10-stage class room procedure

| Stage | Activity |
|----------|---|
| Stage 1 | INTRODUCTION (Course briefing of the Project and Oral Presentation) In week two of the semester, the teacher conducted the course briefing and introduction to the project. The teacher gave information about the project to ensure that the students understood the various steps that they had to undertake to complete the project. The students were informed that the project was mainly self-learning. The Engineering lecturers would determine the title of the project. The advantages of self-learning were also discussed in class. |
| Stage 2 | INPUT STAGE (Information Search & Self-learning) – Instructor uploaded materials (notes, YouTube link, guideline and information checklist). Next, students searched for relevant information from various sources (printed and digital media). |
| Stage 3 | SOCIALISING STAGE – Teacher divided the class into several small teams and learners discussed criteria of effective presentation skills & Team Discussion (plus video watching of YouTube samples). |
| Stage 4 | SELF-INVENTORY OUTPUT (Self-inventory checklist) - learners came up with self-inventory checklist of oral presentation skills based on students' team discussion. |
| Stage 5 | ORAL OUTPUT 1: Group Oral Presentation Round 1 – video recorded. |
| Stage 6 | REFLECTIVE STAGE – Feedback session based on the Group Oral Presentation Round 1. Teacher used playback of video, Adobe Voice + Self-Inventory & Self-Reflection. |
| Stage 7 | ENRICHMENT STAGE – Based on the students' feedback and comments via self-inventory checklists, the teacher realized that students needed extra activities for confidence-building. Teacher used song activity, "Brave" by Sara Bareilles and short writing to discuss issues related to 'bravery' and 'fear'. |
| Stage 8 | SCAFFOLDING STAGE for the Individual Oral Presentation for Round 2 |
| Stage 9 | MOCK PRACTICE - for Oral Presentation |
| Stage 10 | ORAL OUTPUT 2 (Individual presentation) – video recorded |

3.2. Approach and Methods of Data Collection

This study used an action research approach and the two methods of data collection were students' written feedback and teacher's observation notes. In this study, the procedure involved a 10-stage process. For the purpose of clarity and simplicity the stages are presented in a table as presented in Table 1 above.

It is important to note, however, that when these processes were conducted, the processes involved were not necessarily linear. The teacher repeated certain stages if the learners needed more time to find input or to do practice in preparation for the oral presentation skills. In the following section, the discussion of the findings will be offered.

4. Discussion

The discussion on the findings deals primarily with how these multimodal texts assisted in developing learners' oral skills in a critical and creative manner. Apart from that, the discussion will also discuss how learners' exhibited proactive leadership acts while carrying out the activities conducted.

4.1. Multimodal Texts and Development of English Oral Skills

In the first part of the discussion, the focus will be on how multimodal texts assisted in the development of English oral skills. At the outset, it is important to establish that the main objective of the Integrated Project was to provide a platform where learners would be able to explore, practice and prepare themselves with the required oral and written skills in the workplace context. For the purpose of

this paper, the discussion of the language development will only focus on oral skills.

In this Integrated Project, learners were able to develop their oral skills in a critical and creative manner using the multimodal approach in three ways. First, learners were able to develop awareness of the language of presentation during Stage 2, the Input Stage when they had to gather multimodal texts or materials on relevant language use in presentations. Second, learners were also able to develop familiarization with the needed oral skills during Stage 3, the Socialisation Stage, where learners were familiarised with the language of presentation through team discussion by exploring and comparing the language use and its impact for both informative and persuasive presentations based on multimodal texts. Third, learners were able to develop their oral skills in Stage Four, the Self-Inventory Output Stage, where learners came up with self-inventory checklist of oral presentation skills based on their team discussions. Fourth, learners were also able to develop their oral skills further in Stage 5 and Stage 10, the Oral Output 1 and 2 stages, by applying their knowledge of the language of presentation by practising delivering team presentations and conducting final individual presentations using multimodal texts like Powerpoint or Prezi applications. Fifth, learners were able to develop their oral skills particularly in Stage 6, the Reflective Stage, where learners reviewed the recording of their own and other teams' presentations and evaluated those presentation performances and use of multimodal texts based on the Self-Inventory checklist that the learners themselves created. For the purpose of illustrating some of these findings, three stages will be highlighted in the subsequent section. They are the Input Stage, the Socialising Stage and the Reflective Stage.

4.2. Learners' Written Feedback

4.2.1. The Input Stage

In relation to the above, the supporting evidence was taken from the relevant 17 informants' written feedback. The evidence will illuminate some of the learners' experiences doing the Integrated Project activities. The 17 informants are identified as Learner 1 (L1) to Learner 17 (L17).

The first finding reveals that most informants enjoyed the Second Stage, the Input Stage because they were able to surf the website and find relevant materials for language of presentation. They generally stated that they liked having the freedom to choose materials in 'multi-format' or in other words, multimodal texts,

L 15 "I really like finding materials online. I can use YouTube videos because it got visual and more interesting. I can understand much better because it's multi-format, not just words which can be boring. I can also compare the good and bad presentations."

L 3 "Now I know how to present in a good way. We saw many YouTubes, like good examples, bad examples, and funny examples also. We can also share YouTubes with friends in class. Its more fun watching videos than read notes."

L 12 "I like surfing internet to find examples. I found good websites for presentation skills. We enjoyed showing our classmates the websites and YouTube that we found."

It was found that generally multimodal texts in the form of interactive websites and YouTube videos enabled the teacher to 'break the ice' and offer a fun and stimulating medium to start off the 10-stage processes of socialising learners into the practices of being creative users and creators in their own learning of the language oral skills.

4.2.2. The Socialization Stage

The second finding shows that some informants stated that the team discussion in Stage 3, the Socialisation Stage, helped them practice working collaboratively and autonomously in teams. At the same time, some informants felt that this stage enriched their repertoire of useful and effective language phrases for instance language phrases for linking devices, indicating important points, showing comparisons, presenting data analysis, charts and others.

L 1 "I like my team and working with them. They are great and supportive. I work best alone but I also enjoy working with my friends (team members). I improve my English a lot when I discuss with them. When we practice (for oral presentations) we look at YouTube videos, look at the presentation language and list (Self-Inventory checklist). The list helps me to remember to use link words, catchy words and many others like firstly, next, in addition, the most important idea and other."

Other informants also highlighted that their friends' language and presentation of YouTube video samples were crucial because they were able to compare the findings of their own language input for presentation with other learners and decide on which language skills and phrases were more important than others, particularly for their Integrated Project presentation. One informant indicated that it was through his team discussion that he got to know the importance of using the audience-centred approach in order to make the oral presentation more effective,

L 7 "If we want to make effective presentation it is important to remember using audience-centred approach. Many strategies can apply when using this approach. Firstly, the presenters cannot use 'I' a lot and more 'We' and 'You'. It is also important to have eye contact with audience. We need to smile a lot. We have to be very clear when we present. We must use good format, introduction, body and content. We must use linkers for example, first of all, next, in addition, etc. We can also use humour to get their audience attention. Our body language also must be good, eye contact and hand gestures. The audience will like you."

In addition, another finding also exemplified how multimodal texts assisted in the development of leaders' acts. The Integrated Project and multimodal approach allowed ample opportunities for learners to cultivate leadership acts both individually and in teams. There were many advantages in the use of multimodal texts in enhancing the students' performance and creativity. The students became autonomous learners and demonstrated a lot of responsibilities in planning and managing their Integrated project independently and also in teams. They were able to work collaboratively in the team discussion particularly in developing the items in the Self-Inventory checklist and preparing for their team presentation in Stage 5.

Students were socialized into the practices of team work and also, collaborative and autonomous learning. Based on the teacher's observation, it was found that the collaborative learning promoted the learner-centered approach, which resulted in effective learning among the learners of this study. It was found that the group work comprising four or five members showed positive effect on the students' performance. They learned to find information from the electronic media without much prompting from the teacher/facilitation and they became more responsible in the progress of their integrated project work. The regular meetings among group members helped them to work on the project effectively based on some informants' written feedback. The teacher also noted that as the team members distributed their work, all team members got to play different roles. Each member worked very closely to complete the project and present it in class. Some took more active leadership roles than others. However, it was noted that all members assumed leadership acts that demonstrated good leadership and

good support from the team members. The students were found to be prepared both intellectually and emotionally during the question and answer (Q&A) session in their presentation. Generally, it can be concluded that team work can enhance students' motivation and learning processes. They gained confidence to speak in front of an audience in presenting their project and answering the questions posed at the end of their oral presentations.

4.2.3. The Reflective Stage

The third finding demonstrated the most significant feedback. Informants highlighted the usefulness of Stage 6, the Reflective Stage, where the activity that gave them the opportunity to review the video recordings of their own team presentation and also, presentations made by other teams. While watching the playback of their presentations, they also had to evaluate the performances based on the Self-Inventory checklist that they themselves had developed in Stage 4. Some of the informant's feedbacks include,

"I think the checklist was very good. My team members can check if we do all the skills in the list so we can make good and interesting presentation. I also can check others presentations good or not use the checklist it is very easy to know."

"Now I think I can teach my friends how to present well and use this checklist. Before this I don't know how to present well because I lack confident and I don't know English much to present."

"I can improve my presentations using this checklist. It is very good."

"I really love using this checklist because it can guide me and my members how to make good effective presentation. We can remember easier, what to do and what not to do."

The Reflective Stage allowed learners themselves to engage in multimodal approach in their own process of learning by means of the video playback, the Self-Inventory checklist and the face-to-face interaction learners had with themselves and the teacher.

4.2.4. The Scaffolding Stage

The fourth finding reveals that informants found Stage 8, the Scaffolding Stage, very helpful in refining their Oral presentation for their actual final Individual Integrated Oral Project presentation. Some informants remarked that the discussion session with the teacher facilitated them particularly in the organization and presentation of the content or ideas in the learners' visual aids. Most learners used PowerPoint and some used Prezi as their visual aids. Some learners also used realias.

In the context of oral presentation skill, knowledge of knowing how to design and organize the visual aids layout and presentation is a vital multimodal skill. Each student,

then, has to prepare his or her own slides based on their project topic (as already discussed with their content lecturers) which contain the main points, supporting details and design layouts to the Teacher. Since it was going to be a relatively short presentation, about 6-7 minutes per student, the teacher also stressed the importance of conciseness and brevity. This exercise not only assisted learners' higher order critical and creative thinking skills but also enhance students' metacognitive skills [18,19].

The specific multimodal skills that learners were expected to demonstrate include the ability to use appropriate design layout, font choice, size, colour, data presentations, graphic images, icons, AUTOCAD applications, spacing and others. In other words, students were evaluated on their abilities to transfer their content ideas from linear to non-linear forms in their visual aids. Therefore, in the scaffolding stage, the teacher posed pertinent questions to students based on their prepared visual aids. The students were asked on the effectiveness of their slides design and content. The students were expected to justify on why they had chosen certain layouts, order of content, manner of content presentation and so forth. At the same time, during this stage, the teacher also went through language accuracy and appropriacy of the content in their slides. In short, the session enabled the teacher to check and monitor whether students had thoroughly understood and prepared well for the presentation of their content ideas via visual aids. In general, students were found to have prepared their visual aids well when they had prepared good and orderly slides containing clear main points and supporting details and able to justify why their visual aids were designed in certain ways.

In short, the nature of multimodal texts have enabled learners to explore and utilize texts in multiple and varied forms and content. In those stated stages, learners were able to use multimodal texts to search for relevant information pertaining to oral presentation skills from various sources, both in printed and digital media. Students were also able to use these multimodal texts to discuss the suitability in facilitating them to prepare for their Integrated Project presentations. Based on these sources of multimodal texts, the students were also able to produce other multimodal text such as the Self-Inventory checklist for their own oral presentation evaluation. Additionally, the students were able to review their own video recording, which is also a form of a multimodal text, and compare it with another multimodal text, the Self-Inventory in doing self-evaluation and also evaluation of their friends' presentations.

5. Conclusions

In conclusion, simply applying the typical paper-based resources in L2 language learning context is no longer enough. It is high time that 'common' assumptions about

learners, definition of text and its multiplicity and the practices of teaching and learning were challenged and revolutionized. Hence, as this paper has illustrated, adopting the multimodal texts and approaches will enrich L2 classroom contexts.

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