

The Application of Vlog in Task-Based Language Learning

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Abstract: Computer and internet technology brought about innovative changes of students life especially their leisure time after class. In light of this, the purpose of this study is to explore learners' participation of blog-based language learning in their independent learning in order to suggest a motivated and collaborative environment to communicate. The data for this study were collected through questionnaires and interviews and most importantly, the learners' participation record of tutor blog from 30 second year students in Beijing Wuzi University in China. The questionnaire is designed to analysis learners' computer literacy and their attitude towards vlog as an independent language learning too while they are doing the assigned tasks by teachers. The tutor blog experimental survey is to collect data which reflect learners' participation status when they are told to do so after class. The overall findings of the survey show that the majority of respondents have a positive understanding about vlog-based language learning. Students are willing to finish their tasks and enjoys the sense of achievements. But some of them are less motivated in participating and publishing their ideas in the tutor vlog community, regardless of computer literacy levels. The followed interview shows that this is partly because they are lack of language awareness and communicative skills since they emerged so long in the traditional education system which takes teachers as the only source of knowledge.

Keywords: Vlog, Community Learning, Task-Based Language Learning, Empirical Study

1. Introduction

By allowing for instant publishing and creating a space for dialogue between writer and audience, vlogs are generating interest in education especially in the second language (L2) acquisition. These features derive some of the attentions of Language professionals, however are by now still new to most EFL teachers. Chinese government has allocated more resources to develop computer literacy and issued policies to encourage teachers at each level make use of computer and internet in their teaching practice. Chinese EFL professionals started to look computer and internet as a means to solve the problem of L2 communicating by providing students an authentic and cooperative language environment through internet. But the challenge for EFL practitioner to decide how to apply the use of Information Technology (IT) especially web resources into the existing lesson planning, curriculum to facilitate learning. This paper is to analyse the application of vlog into independent language learning after class. The main purpose lies on Chinese learners' attitude and participation of vlog-based language

learning in their L2 self-study under Chinese context.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Definition of Vlog

vlogs, short for wevlogs, are essentially easily created webpages which are pre-formatted for posting time-stamped writing, pictures, audio files and or video files. vlogs are something very different from a regular webpage since lots of text and very few of the typical webpage decorations and advertisings. But what exactly is a vlog? As the following picture suggests, vlog is very different from from a website, email or online discussion, which bears more personal diary features.

There are so many versions of definitions of vlog. According to Campbell [1] A wevlog (or 'vlog') can be thought of as an online journal that an individual can continuously update with his or her own words, ideas, and thoughts through software that enables one to easily do so. This definition equally states several keywords about vlog,

such as on-line, update, ideas and thoughts, easily, which are generally accepted features of vlog.

The similar description was given by Richardson who claims,

In the most general sense; a vlog is an easily created, easily updateable website that allows an author (or authors) to publish instantly to the Internet connection [2].

With regard to the definition given by Richardson, he put the emphasis on the word 'easily', he takes 'easy to share resources and ideas with a web audience' as the indication of how powerful the vlogs are.

The other definitions of vlog exert the emphasis from the features to the functionalities. The general online consensus appears to be that a wevlog is a website that is updated regularly and organised chronologically according to date, and in reverse order from most recent entry backwards [3].

2.2. History of Vlog

Web vlogging started around 1993 as a forum for the National Center for Supercomputing Applications (NCSA) [3]. Since the enthusiast Jorn Barger decided to rename his 'website', the name 'wevlog' came into use, which is a combination of 'web' and 'vlog'. Since 'vlog' means diary, so wevlog refers to websites that are continuously being updated. And soon after that the name was abbreviated as 'vlog'.

At the early stage back to 2001, vlog is a tool such as Metafilter.org [2], which enables thousands of members post funny or interesting links to a page, and where other people could leave comments about those links just as easily. As the development of vlogs, different vlog providers added more distinctive functions to improve the communication through vlogs which are far more than just publishing personal ideas.

2.3. The Features of Vlog for Language Learning

Since vlogging really began to grow at the turn of the millennium, the numbers of vlogs and the range of topics they touch on seems to have become infinite, and their popularity and accessibility for users of the Internet make them an exciting application for language teachers as they are largely writing-based, and have great capability to support images, audio, and video. An important part of vlogging is linking to other vlogs and commenting on vlogs. Both of these qualities make blogging not only a personal endeavour but also a social endeavour, thus placing vlogs within the group of social networking applications of the internet. vlogs comprise a series of applications as the second generation of web applications.

The features could be various from one vlog provider to another and the EFL-friendly features could be concluded as followings:

2.3.1. Low Cost

This feature makes vlogs an effective language learning tool since the almost zero cost largely encourages students for their participation. The unique nature of low cost have not only affected how students can publish and distribute their work to a wider audience but also how they see themselves as authors.

2.3.2. Easy to Set up

Vlogs can be set up either by a teacher or a student, often at no cost, on a vlogging service. vlogs can be set up for individual students, for a group of students, or for an entire class. The burgeoning interest in vlogging has aroused the interest of ESL/EFL teachers who see vlogging as a simple and low cost way of giving students access to publishing and distributing their writing on the Internet, as a method of providing them with the experience of writing in a digital format, and as a means of discussing issues related to their classroom work and their lives [4].

2.3.3. Permission-free

Vlogs have what is called an open architecture, meaning that they can be viewed, if so desired, by anyone who can access to the Internet. This openness is unlike other forms of asynchronous technologies such as WebCT, which cannot be viewed unless specific permission is given. These types of on-line discussions have been referred to as "gated communities".

Bearing those distinctive features, vlog is considered works well as an independent learning tool. According to Bloch [4], the convenience in setting up vlogs has raised intriguing possibilities for language learning classrooms, to create the first native form of discourse on the Internet.

3. Methodology

Since vlogs as self-study tools are examined in this paper, the main research is carried out in learning behaviour analysis after class. As a college teacher, writer will choose her own university to carry out the case study. Thirty second-year students in this university will participate the one-month program. The program will be guided by the following steps:

3.1. Questionnaire

The questionnaire will be designed to collect some detailed information of the participants' and their general level of computer literacy. The information is collected to analyse the parameters such as age and major of the learners, to what extent, would influence their attitude towards BBL. And most importantly, learners' computer literacy accounts for positive attitude toward BBL and high participation.

3.2. The Experimental Design

Period: the study is planned to be finished within 1 month. with 30 second-year college students (non-English major)

Build up a learning community between teacher and learners through the tutor vlog. Teacher should be the founder of this community by set up her own language teaching vlog. In this vlog different tasks are set to encourage learners' participation. Learners can publish their ideas and comments by resolving the pre-set tasks in this task-based language learning environment. This can act as an online focal point for the class [1], where the teacher assign tasks, analyse and comment on learners' responses, guide them for self-study, and highlight student successes to encourage them for

participation. Therefore, the impact of those motivating factors such as task-based language learning will be examined in the findings discussion.

Sign up: Students will need to sign up for their own vlog accounts. Since the vlogs will be available for public viewing, pseudonyms or nicknames are encouraged to use when signing up. After signing up for the tutor vlog, learners will consider them as a part of the community.

Assign tasks and guide student use their vlogs efficiently. After the creation of a centralized, tutor wevlog with links to all student sites. Lead students to post their videos (teacher set as assignments) on their vlogs and then up-date them frequently, at the same time, encourage them to read friends' vlogs and respond afterward. These activities will contribute a lot to build a vlogs community to communicate effectively.

Analysis of the participation.

Use the record of tutor vlog's visitors to analyse the participation of the learners in the experiment.

3.3. Interview

The investigation will hold after releasing the questionnaires and finishing the experimental survey. The interviewee should be chosen from different groups of learners which has typical reason for non-participating. Compare to the questionnaire, the interview is a more detailed informative analyse, aims to elicit the influential factors which stop learners from participating.

4. Data Analysis

4.1. The Analysis of Task-based Language Learning

The table 1 is a comparison table between task-based topics and material-based topics.

To ascertain any difference in the response of the topics between the two groups, the average number of comments and number of commentors were compared.

Table 1. Comparison between task-based topics and material-based topics.

Topics (task-based)	Comments	Commentors	P
1*	24	18	60
4*	24	20	67
6*	20	16	53
8*	19	15	50
9*	12	12	40
10*	14	12	40
13*	13	10	33
Average	18	14.7	
2	15	13	43
3	21	17	57
5	17	17	57
7	14	8	27
11	11	9	30
12	10	9	30
14	12	8	27
15	9	8	27
Average	13.6	11.1	

The average number of comments in the task-based topic group is 18 while the number of comments in the other group

is 13.6. And the average number of commentors is 14.7 Vs 11.1. The number of comments and commentors in task-based group are considerably higher than the material-based group. The comparison of the two groups indicated that learners prefer to express their ideas based on the motivation of tasks. That is to say, the task-based learning materials attract more attention from learners. The desire to solving problem is a big motivation for learners to publish their opinion and exchange ideas.

4.2. Interviews Analysis

Some students think highly of the new style of learning and teaching while the others give sharply negative opinion. In order to discover the reasons which stop learners from participating, the interview put more efforts on the sources of the negative points from the students. Therefore, the focus has been moved to the teaching method of state schools and universities. Teachers give more than enough emphasis on the acquisition of grammar and vocabulary without giving sufficient direction on the application.

When it comes to the vlog as a learning tool, students think highly of the function offered by vlog providers that the real identities are not necessary, nick name can be used instead, which is the so called 'multiple identities' of users. The digital identities - electronic representations of individuals' help introduce them to each other and control the amount of information transferred. In its broadest sense, the multiple identities are crucial for building and maintaining trust relationships in the community.

The comments given by the students is valuable for analysing the vlog application in language learning, but some of these comments do not go much beyond simple surface-level explanations. Their perspectives showed few instances of deeper understanding of the impact that computer may have on their own educational culture.

5. Discussion of Findings

5.1. The Attitude of Learners Towards Vlog-Based Language Community

According to the situation of the increasing popularity of technology in society, Chinese second language learners would be attracted to vlogs. In other words they have a positive attitude of using vlogs in language learning generally.

The above hypothesis was supported by the results of questionnaire and interviews. The evidences can be listed as follows:

- 1) According to the responses to Question No 4 and No 16 in the questionnaire, Chinese students have some experience of computer and Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL). The participants are at the beginning of their 20s and grown up with computer as part of their lives. They have a good command of computer literacy with ability to handle the online operation smoothly. Also indicated that Chinese learners are generally positive in working with computers in

various activities such as writing texts, using the Internet as it was shown from their answer in the interviews.

- 2) Other questions in the questionnaire all indicate a positive attitude to BBL. 2 of 3 participants think highly of BBL as it is a good way to improve the reading, writing skills and critical thinking. And as shown by questions, even those who are 'Not interested' in BBL still hold that it can be beneficial for language learning.
- 3) The positive attitude was also confirmed by the teachers involved in the sessions where the data was collected.

The convergent quantitative and qualitative data of the study indicated that learners are interested in vlog but some of them are frustrated in their attempts to learn more from CALL. [5, 6]

5.2. Vlog Community and Task-Based Language Teaching

Task-based learning is advantageous to the student because it is more student-centered in this survey. Although the teacher may present language in the instruction of the tasks, the students are free to use what they want. This allows them to use all the language they know, rather than a single construct. Furthermore, as the tasks are supposed to be familiar to the students, students are more likely to be engaged, which may further motivate them in their language learning. The task-driven process offers students more encourage and motivation to use the language they have learned. This point consists with Breen's [7] idea as language tasks can be viewed as a range of work plans, from simple to complex, with the overall purpose of facilitating language learning. The statement of Ellis addressed the same opinion as language points may easily be forgotten after the first encounter; however, if it is subsequently retrieved during a task, then the memory will be strengthened [8, 15].

The results of this survey indicate that this task-based language learning strategy seems more likely to suitable to the advanced language learners. Task-based language learning works well in this experimental survey indicates the same findings as Swanson. There have been criticisms that task-based learning is not appropriate as the foundation of a class for beginners [8].

Others claim that students are only exposed to certain forms of language, and are being neglected of others, such as discussion or debate. Teachers may want to keep these in mind when designing a task-based learning lesson plan. In this experimental survey, the design of the tasks is mainly based on the direction of Ellis as his classification of focused and unfocused tasks. The tasks are used to elicit a particular linguistic feature or to centre on language as task content. As Ellis addressed that the design of a task is seen as potentially determining the kind of language use and opportunities for learning that arise [9].

6. Conclusion

In this study, BBL can be summarized as a rich, useful and interesting resource that provides students a opportunity to

communicate with others to polish their target language skills outside the classroom.

Since this study is carried out during the learners' self-study after class. So the learners' autonomy is fairly stressed. This study offers an indication with the interdependence of teachers and learner autonomy. It is impossible for the Chinese EFL learners move towards autonomic and language aware without any direction and support, while vlog seems to provide an excellent medium for independent learning in this age of information [10, 11].

The results indicated that vlog can be an interesting and communicative tool outside the classroom; however, computer technology is not a panacea [12, 13]. It is still early to reach final findings as vlog-based environment helps greatly in encouraging learners' autonomy, further studies needs to be done. Because of the growing use of computers and mobile phones, more and more questions are asked about the effectiveness of this approach to teaching and learning.

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