

YouTube as a Platform for an Online Dialogic ESL Teaching and Learning

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ABSTRACT

Having the ability to communicate has been such a crucial aim in the teaching and learning of ESL. Nevertheless, in reaching the target, the ESL context has encountered various issues concerning individual differences. These include learners' personalities, motivation as well as learning styles and strategies. Questions have emerged whether the introverts and the less motivated ESL learners really learn the language, particularly in terms of the ability to communicate using English. It is therefore seen that having a dialogic teaching and learning pedagogical method, which caters to learners' variety is highly required. Being in a technology-equipped epoch, YouTube has been discovered to be such a possible tool to aid learners' dialogic ability. This paper provides an insight on how YouTube could possibly contribute to the enhancement of the ESL teaching and learning hence produce more learners with communicative skill. It therefore discusses how YouTube may be utilized albeit the challenges faced, in the Malaysian ESL teaching and learning context.

Keywords: ESL teaching and learning. Communicative ability. Online dialogue. YouTube

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INTRODUCTION

The increasing demand for English Language literacy and proficiency among Malaysians (Hall, 2015; Melor Md Yunus & Hern, 2011) urges educators of English as a Second Language (ESL) at all levels to become more creative and innovative in the teaching and learning process. This includes the enhancement of ESL among Malaysian higher learning institutions students. In this light, ESL instructors are challenged to make the classes meaningful and practical, besides being fun for learners (Ryan, 2001). Undergoing these challenges, the ESL teaching and learning always worries the instructors as it has to deal with learners' individual differences which encompass learners' aptitude, learning styles and strategies, personalities, motivation and interest (Dornyei, 2005; Hiew, 2012; Nooreiny Maarof & Indira Malani Munusamy, 2015).

According to Muijs and Reynolds (2005), the common scenario portrays that it has always been the assertive students who would benefit more from any ESL classes. Those with high levels of inhibition and shyness normally become less assertive and tend to passively participate in the teaching and learning. This could possibly implicate low proficiency level in the target language, for it is not frequently used and practised by the student-users (Muijs & Reynolds, 2005). The tendency of the students becoming less motivated is worrisome. It is disheartening that the aforementioned passivity and low motivation level among students are still observable in many ESL classes of Malaysian higher learning institutions (Dwee, 2015). This has raised the question of 'what can be done in order to attend to all students, including the less assertive or the introvert ones, in helping them to use English to the maximum thus enhance their English communicative ability?'

The query actually leads to the purpose of this paper that is to postulate the use of dialogic teaching and learning which is believed to be able to cater for diverse learners' need of a communicative ability enhancer (Feito, 2007; Freire, 1998, Harrison, 2006; Wegerif, 2006; Young Joo Kim, 2004). The advancement of technology, specifically - the existence of Web 2.0 sites like YouTube, further aids this dialogic process in becoming an online avenue for learners to communicate with one another using the target language (Ng, 2015). This may result in better facilitation of ESL learning for all learners despite their variety. This paper is anticipated to offer insights on the potential of YouTube in being an online dialogic teaching and learning platform, thus enables the ESL stakeholders such as instructors and learners to practise it. This applies not only to Malaysian setting, yet to other countries where enhancing English communicative ability, or English proficiency at large, is of an alarming matter.

DIALOGIC ESL TEACHING AND LEARNING

"Dialogue is arguably one of the most important components of any learning process" (Webb, Jones, Barker & Schaik, 2004, p. 93) and this includes the ESL context in higher education. The term dialogue, according to Freire (1970, 1997 & 1998), refers to an act of cognition that fulfils the requirement of human character. It has been a nature that people in the world live their lives with and through communication. This view supports the idea of promoting the dialogic approach as a means and an end to the learning process. Enabling a dialogue requires meaningful use of language regardless of whether that dialogue is a face-to-face conversation or not, people

must do so in ways such that others can understand their actions and intentions in the event (Egan-Robertson, 1993, as cited in Skukauskaite & Green, 2004). In line with that, Bakhtin (1986, cited in Wegerif, 2006), earlier stresses how language is essential as it serves as a vital social component in a dialogue.

Within a dialogic setting, Freire (1970, 1993, 1997, 1998) emphasises the equal space between educators and learners in communicating their thoughts. Learners are to learn to co-construct knowledge. The idea of a teacher-centred learning is totally rejected and educators are expected to allow learners to have their thoughts known by others. This is to encourage every single learner to verbalise thoughts, respond to information, enquire and question critically. In a dialogic teaching and learning, it could be seen that the idea of constructivism as promoted by Lev Vygotsky is highly supported and practised (Pritchard and Woolard, 2010; Santrock, 2005).

Besides, it also aims at providing learners a space to learn how to learn (Wegerif, 2006) where they are able to share their problems of learning and communicate suggestions for learning improvement. Dialogue, at the same time, is viewed by Harrison (2009) as a way to improve many skills including language and communication skills in which creativity in language exploitation is of the main dialogue criterion. With such purposes the dialogue has got to offer, an ESL teaching and learning may 'kill more than one birds with one stone' if it is made dialogic.

To orchestrate a dialogue, Spring (1999) suggests that a 'codification' is to be employed. Codification refers to any activity that is used to spark a dialogue. For instance, a codification could be in a form of a photograph, a sketch or a tape recording. In today's world of technology advancement, educators can even benefit from the multimedia sources like slide shows and videos. In fact, the use of video in aiding ESL teaching and learning is very popular among ESL instructors. This codification can be better benefitted through the use of online sources which allow a dialogue to occur.

Discussing dialogue in an ESL classroom setting, the instructor may employ it as to encourage students' optimum use of the target language. Nonetheless, despite the various benefits the dialogue offers, again, 'how can it help those who are less assertive?' YES, it is when the dialogue be made online! Angeli, Valanides and Bonk (2003), for example, study the communication element in a web-based conferencing system known as 'Conferencing on the Web' (COW). Dennen and Wieland (2007), on the other hand, explain the facilitation of online group discourse processes through the use of the discussion boards; while Webb, et al. (2004) earlier report on the use of discussion forums to support online dialogue.

In a nutshell, the three examples (Angeli, Valanides & Bonk, 2003; Dennen & Wieland, 2007; Webb et al., 2004) show the emergence of the online dialogue in facilitating learning. However, none of them discusses the use of online dialogue in the ESL context. Accordingly, this paper intends to invite readers to be enlightened and further dialogue on how YouTube could possibly be utilised in promoting a dialogic ESL teaching and learning.

YOUTUBE AS AN ONLINE DIALOGIC ESL TEACHING AND LEARNING PLATFORM

There are many forms of the Web 2.0 that can be used as a medium for an online dialogic ESL teaching and learning. However, this paper aims to focus on the use of a famous video-sharing site, YouTube, for the videos that it provides serve as immediate codifications for a dialogue to take place.

YouTube, in general, is a well known video sharing website which enables its users to upload, watch, and share videos from all across the world, for free. Founded in 2005, YouTube has been gaining huge popularity among Internet users. Its latest statistics reveal that it has approximately over a billion users and there have been hundreds of millions of hours dedicated to watch the videos (YouTube, 2016). YouTube popularity is also recognised through the ranking of “the 1000 most visited sites on the web” in 2011 by DoubleClick Ad Planner, Google's free research and media planning tool, which acknowledges YouTube as the second most visited website, worldwide (Google, Inc, 2011). Besides its free accessibility online, YouTube's fame is also due to its user-friendly features, which make video searching, watching and sharing experience, easier (Cheng, Dale & Liu, 2007). Generally, YouTube webpage is made of the following features:

- *Search* which enables users to search for various kinds of videos by only typing the keyword of the video they want to watch in the search button and a list of related videos will appear for them to choose.
- *View* which reveals the number of view for a particular video.
- *Related videos* which appear to the right of a video while a video is being viewed.
- *Upload* which is only allowed for registered users. This feature has been recently upgraded to enable the users to edit the quality of their uploaded videos.
- *Subscribe* which enables registered users to subscribe to video from other registered user or users.
- *Comment* which is also allowed to registered users only. Registered users are able to comment on the YouTube video and reply to other comment through the reply button.
- *Channel* which displays a registered user's YouTube profile and activities.
- *Share* which enables YouTube users to share the link of a YouTube video to other people through email or other websites. The link will connect them directly to the video on the YouTube site.
- *Embed* which also allows YouTube users to share YouTube video by embedding the video on other web pages. Unlike share, through embed, YouTube video can be played directly in the website where the video is embedded.

According to Mullen and Wedwick (2008), the YouTube phenomenon was relatively new to educators as well as researchers as they were just starting to discover more of its potentials in the educational field. With today's rapid technological advancement, YouTube has risen to become the biggest and most visited online video sharing website (YouTube, 2016), leading to more interest of its potential for education related purposes (Snelson, 2011). ESL instructors are

no exception to this trend as they are also turning to YouTube as a resource in facilitating ESL teaching and learning (Duffy, 2008; Godwin-Jones, 2007).

With its massive video database, ranging from real-world videos to video clips from “off-air” programmes, ESL instructors have huge opportunities to exploit the variety of videos for dialogic activities by manipulating the issues portrayed in the videos. Moreover, YouTube’s social networking feature provides further avenue for the dialogic activities to be carried out outside of the classroom context, through web experience. According to Marcus and Perez (2007), YouTube’s user-friendly features have encouraged “a new way of asynchronous communication in which users can post videos not only to make them public for critique, but also as a way to express moods, feelings or intentions to an always growing network of friends” (p. 927).

Hence, it is an advantage for ESL instructors that they may benefit from the YouTube’s sophisticated online features in facilitating ESL lessons despite the diverse learner backgrounds.

THE RESEARCH

Objective

The research is a preliminary study generally aimed to explore the ESL instructor’s experience of using YouTube as a resource in aiding ESL teaching and learning. It thus attempted to answer the question ‘What is the ESL instructor’s experience of using YouTube as a resource in aiding ESL teaching and learning?’ The results obtained from this study became an avenue to discover how the ESL teaching and learning can be made dialogic with the use of YouTube.

Participant

In conducting this research, an ESL instructor of a Malaysian higher learning institution (hereafter written as Miss N) was chosen based on the main criterion that she was practising YouTube in facilitating ESL teaching and learning for the enhancement of various language skills. Figure 1 represents the summary of the types of activities that had been conducted by the ESL instructor with the aid of YouTube throughout the one semester duration in one of her ESL classes.

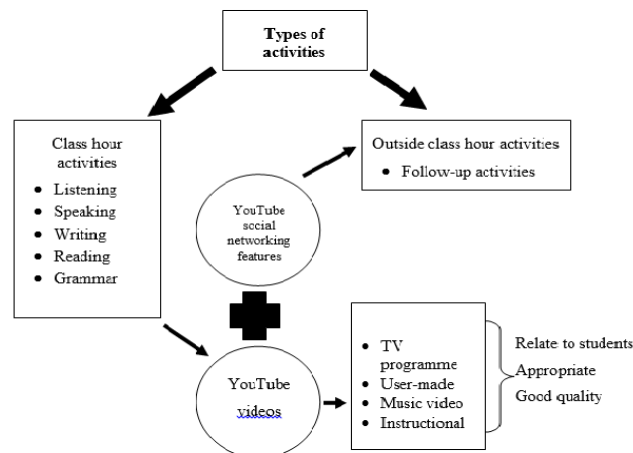


Figure 1. The execution of the lessons using YouTube as a resource

Data Collection and Analysis

As the aim of the research was to explore the ESL instructor's experiences of incorporating YouTube into the English lessons, the data were collected through three qualitative methods which were journal entries, semi-structured interviews and classroom observations.

In preparing the data for detailed analysis, several steps as proposed by Creswell (2003) were implemented which include transcribing, reading and understanding the data, before arranging them into several types. The thematic analysis was then conducted starting with a coding process or data reduction of the meaningful ones by organising them into chunks of different categories. Then, the codes were used to generate descriptions of certain themes which were followed by detailed discussion of the themes including the sub-themes through specific illustrations and quotations. To ensure the understanding of the data presentation and the confidentiality of the participant, a pseudonym was assigned.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The ESL instructor's experience in using YouTube to facilitate ESL teaching and learning is described in four main themes which are lesson execution, perceived learners' language learning impacts, challenges and difficulties and motivation.

In terms of lesson execution, generally, based on the analysis of the interview, classroom observations and the ESL instructor's journal entries, it can be summarised that throughout her experience of using YouTube to facilitate ESL teaching and learning, the ESL instructor has not only brought YouTube into the classroom but also beyond it. The class hour activities conducted involved the use of various types of YouTube videos comprising clips of TV programmes, music videos, instructional videos and even YouTube users' own edited video to enhance the four language skills as well as the learners' grammar understanding. Moreover, through these activities, the ESL instructor is able to implement follow up activities which are fulfilled outside of the class hour.

According to Miss N, these activities enable the learners to experience all the main features of YouTube. As she stated in the interview:

. . . first they have to sign up and they have to log in, and they have to upload their video .
. . they reply to their friend's comments, they reply to my comment, they like, they subscribe, they friend. So basically all [YouTube features].

To illustrate, based on the interview, Miss N gave an example of a grammar activity she had conducted in which, as the follow up activity, the learners were required to watch a YouTube video in the YouTube website by providing them with the website address. The video was a song with lyrics and they had to find all the Pronouns in the lyrics and dialogue them in the next class. In line with Spring (1999), this is an example of codification activity which may spark a dialogue amongst the learners.

Moreover, as observed in one of the researchers' classroom observations, Miss N gave a

task for the learners to visit the YouTube website and find their most favourite English movie trailer and convince her with three reasons why they want to watch the movie by just watching the trailer. Instead of writing them on a piece of paper or discuss them in the next class, Miss N asked the learners to sign up a YouTube account, 'friend' her on her YouTube page and leave comments of the reasons on her YouTube page. This is an example of how an online dialogue may occur in which instructors and learners may benefit from the features that YouTube provides (Cheng, Dale & Liu, 2007).

Apart from that, as observed in one of the classroom observations, Miss N also let her learners experience making video themselves and upload them on YouTube. Based on the journal entry, Miss N explained that the reason behind the group video project was to encourage the learners to use the language. Throughout the classroom observation, the researcher was able to experience observing videos made by the learners which were about promoting polite language. The videos were later uploaded by Miss N on her YouTube page and instead of merely watching the videos on YouTube, all of the learners were required to 'like' and comment on the videos based on the quality, language, and message. In line with Marcus and Perez (2007), the activity has been found to promote dialogue through asynchronous communication using the user-friendly features.

The activities are basically aimed at enabling her ESL learners to experience using YouTube for English learning purposes, on their own. This is basically because through these activities the learners are also able to listen, read, write, and speak dialogically in English using the social networking features of YouTube. Nevertheless, with a plethora of video content available on YouTube, the ESL instructor is also discovered to have selected the videos to be used based on several considerations as suggested by Berlian Nur and Mohamad Jafre (2011) such as the content which is learners' related, appropriate and of good audio and visual quality.

Apart from that, it could be summarised that the ESL instructor has been using YouTube to aid her English lessons for various reasons for instance as attention grabber, as an exposure to authentic English, as a platform for borderless language learning and as lesson filler. However, besides the delivery of language skills being the reasons of YouTube usage, it is uncovered that YouTube is also used as a platform in catering to the learners' individual differences which shows her concern towards the learners especially those who are shy in using English. Furthermore, the reason of YouTube usage includes instilling value added skill and general knowledge specifically in the area of technology, culture, as well as the learners' own creativity. This, in some ways, shows YouTube's capability to be exploited in various ways specifically for ESL teaching and learning while injecting few other educational benefits.

With regard to language learning impacts, the impact as perceived by the ESL instructor are in terms of the learners' attitudes and motivation in which the learners is claimed to become more interested and motivated in learning English through the use of YouTube in the language activities. Apart from that, the ESL instructor asserted that through the incorporation of YouTube in the activities, her learners are able to produce more in speaking and writing using English as well as gaining new words that may help them in exercising dialogue. According to Miss N,

They are [the students] able to produce more. That's okay. That's good enough for me. If they're able to produce that much compared verbally, only yes and no feedback, that is not good. But if you give them options to give feedback and they are able to produce that much, that is good enough. Regardless of the grammatical errors. As long as they use the language. (Interview)

Before this they were not able to speak. But once they have the input, they are able to speak, regardless of the grammatical mistakes and what not. (Interview)

Besides that, it is also found that the ESL instructor has to face numerous challenges and difficulties in using YouTube to aid her English lessons which could be summarised in four main aspects which are slow Internet connection or YouTube restriction, poor multimedia facilities, strenuous lesson planning and learners' unfamiliarity with language authenticity portrayed in the videos used. With such challenges and difficulties encountered, it is interesting to discover that the motivation behind the ESL instructor's continuous usage of YouTube in aiding ESL lessons are her positive attitudes towards the usage, belief on YouTube usefulness in improving English, sense of responsibility as an educator to change the learners' attitudes to like English and perceived ease of use.

RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES IN USING YOUTUBE AS A DIALOGIC TOOL IN ESL TEACHING AND LEARNING

The findings of the current study have been found to provide a platform of practical recommendations for ESL instructors. This is in line with few research which have shown the potentials of YouTube to assist dialogic language teaching and learning specifically in ESL and English as a foreign language (EFL) context – both offline and online. Kelsen (2009), for example, uses YouTube as a source of supplementary materials in teaching EFL learners in a Taiwanese college. Materials from YouTube are used to supplement the textbook, accompanied by a number of activities which include classroom discussion. This classroom dialogue is benefitted from the YouTube's video viewing feature.

Besides that, Hwang (2008) utilises YouTube to help Chinese EFL learners who are majoring in English to distinguish English regional accents and culture in America, British, and Australia. This web based activity, which is conducted inside and outside of the classroom setting, includes activities such as listening comprehension as well as peer discussion using YouTube. The idea reflects one of the purposes of dialogue that is using language to learn about language (Harrison, 2009). This, from a language perspective, highlights the focus of this dialogic activity which is on the form or structure of the language.

On the contrary, Mayora (2009, in Jones & Cuthrell, 2011) exercises YouTube among learners with limited English proficiency by exploring the use of YouTube comment feature. Through this activity, the learners are instructed to respond to certain video content, leading to authentic writing practice and social bonds with other YouTube users. Mayora's strategy illustrates how language can be exploited in order to dialogue the real-world issues. Differing

from Hwang's (2008), Mayora's focus of the dialogue is on the meaning of the language.

Among other YouTube features that can also be of great advantage to dialogic ESL teaching and learning is the video upload. Placing creativity on top, instructors may group the students and assign them to create a role-play dialoguing on the given topic or issue. The role-play is to be audio-visually recorded and later be uploaded into YouTube. Not only the role-play itself is a form of a short dialogue, yet the discussion over the uploaded role-play could be such authentic and meaningful language learning for learners.

All these strategies including the studies of Hwang (2008), Kelsen (2009) and Mayora (2009, in Jones & Cuthrell, 2011) demonstrate YouTube's potential to enhance various language skills including their communicative abilities, especially with positive results shown. This also implies YouTube's ability to spark a dialogue, particularly among ESL learners. However, as to help improve and sustain the dialogue, or to allow the learners to maximise the use of the language, they need to be exposed to Meier's Five Habits of Mind (in Molloy, 2004):

1. Evidence: How do we know what's true and false? What evidence counts? How sure can we be? What makes it credible to us?
2. Viewpoint: How else might this look if we stepped into other shoes? If we were looking at it from a different direction? If we had a different history or expectations?
3. Connections/Cause and Effect: Is there a pattern? Have we seen something like this before? What are the possible consequences?
4. Conjecture: Could it have been otherwise? Supposing that? What if?
5. Relevance: Does it matter? Who cares?

Relating all these aspects to the selected videos would trigger students' high order thinking to develop, thus urge them to express their ideas using language. Of course, the accuracy of the language forms cannot be assured, yet the encouragement for students to communicate their thoughts using English is of utmost crucial. Adding that today's young generation is equipped with sophisticated technology skills and habits (Godwin-Jones, 2009), this practice is indeed appropriate for learners of higher learning institutions.

'TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE': CHALLENGES IN EMPLOYING YOUTUBE FOR ONLINE DIALOGIC ESL TEACHING AND LEARNING

In spite of its potential as a resource to employ dialogic ESL teaching and learning, there are certain challenges that need to be taken into account by ESL instructors. These include issues such as the Internet connection, restriction, video quality, and copyright, as suggested by Berlian Nur and Mohamad Jafre (2011):

- The Internet connection is especially a nuisance when it is slow or worst, absent. This is mainly because high bandwidth capacity is exceptionally crucial to play and view YouTube video, particularly of high quality. Hence, stable Internet connection is of utmost important consideration.

- Restriction imposed by certain learning institutions due to issues such as safety and bandwidth, including in Malaysia, is another challenge that could make YouTube unavailable to employ this practice. Therefore, ESL instructors are bound to look for other alternatives such as using various broadband modems easily available in the market.
- YouTube video quality is also another challenge in using it for the teaching and learning purpose. More time and effort may be required on the ESL instructor's part in choosing video of good visual and audio quality. Nevertheless, with YouTube's huge video database, ESL instructors are provided with numerous choices to be explored.
- Copyright issue is another factor to be highlighted because it may lead to the disappearance of certain videos in YouTube. Thus, it is essential for ESL instructors to regularly check on the YouTube video before using it or have backup plan should the problem occurs while the lesson is in the process.

CONCLUSION

Nowadays, the ability to communicate effectively in English is indeed a necessity among Malaysian university students, particularly for those who are stepping into the career stage. Their capability to dialogue in the language would help them to express their feelings and thoughts efficiently. Hence, this implies ESL instructors' responsibilities to equip them with the skill through various pedagogical methods. Being in a technology-equipped era, ESL instructors are able to benefit from the wonder of the Internet by exploiting the online resources available. YouTube, a leading video sharing website, is found to be such a potential tool to aid learners' dialogic ability, particularly among ESL learners. With YouTube's popularity among Internet users, especially the young generation, its massive video database and web 2.0 features are capable of generating an online dialogic ESL learning environment through numerous activities.

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