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The effects of applying multimedia in primary English language teaching in China

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Abstract

The main objective of this research was to investigate the effects of applying multimedia in primary English class in China. The main problems are related to how and why multimedia is able to help Chinese primary education students to learn English. Chinese students from primary education are losing their interests on English learning because the English class is considered to be boring for them due to the National University Entrance Examination (NUEE). Therefore, it is urgent for English teachers in China to find a method that not only help their students deal with the examination but also maintain students' interests in learning English. Multimedia is a type of technology which includes videos, tapes, and audio materials in the teaching and learning practices. Here in this paper, the multimedia mainly refers to a teaching approach used by teachers which involves graphics, audio, video, or movies in English class. The results of this investigation indicated that multimedia tends to maintain students' interests, increase vocabulary acquisition, facilitates reading ability of students, and improve students' listening skills. Multimedia is considered to be good to be implemented for English learning. Therefore, schools or educational institutions are expected to provide teachers with opportunities of training with the use of multimedia. In this case, teachers are encouraged to use multimedia to enhance teaching and learning practices.

Keywords: Multimedia, National University Entrance Examination, China's Education

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1. Introduction

Chinese students have contact with English formally when they are in elementary school. And for some of students, they continue to learn English even when they are enrolled in a university, which means English is a compulsory subject in Chinese curriculum. Most of students have to take part in an examination called National University Entrance Examination (NUEE) if they want to be further educated. English, as one of subjects that need to be evaluated in NUEE, is highly valued in Chinese curriculum. Due to this reason, English teaching syllabus is mainly set up for examination. Teachers have to follow the syllabus while teaching in classroom. As the result, students are losing their interests on English learning because the English class is boring for them. However, primary education is a very crucial period for second learners acquiring a second language. Thus, it is urgent for English teacher in China finding a method that not only help their students deal with examination well, but also maintain students' interests in learning English at the same time. It is a common acknowledgement that multimedia teaching, especially using multimedia for English language teaching is helpful in context creation, as well as stimulating students' motivation on English for the purpose of changing the traditional "cramming" teaching method, which may lead to so-called "Dumb English" or "Deaf English" (Yang & Fang, 2008). As the matter of fact, multimedia has already been adopted into education for several years in numbers of countries in the world. But it is not commonly used in Chinese curriculum. Thus, this essay will first identify the meaning of multimedia. This advanced teaching method in education has been increasingly accepted as a means of English language instruction and increasingly English teachers prove that teaching English with multimedia makes the English class more active than the teacher-centered model (Abbas, 2012) and then, the essay will also prove that students gain benefits from multimedia when they engage in three major processes – selecting, organizing, and integrating – of multimedia (Mayer's, 2001) and multimedia will be critically examined in this paper. In particular, it will focus on its advantages

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and disadvantages. The paper will argue that applying multimedia in primary English class is an effective approach for Chinese students learning English. Because it maintains students' interests, increases students' vocabulary acquisition, facilitates reading ability and improves students' listening skills. The essay will be concluded by listing a number of recommendations for practice.

2. Definition of multimedia

Multimedia is defined as various meaning in different literatures. But generally, the term "multimedia" refers primarily to computer applications that include not only text but also other media in digital format (Yang, 1998). Schwartz & Beichner, (1999) defines multimedia as the use of multiple types of media in a presentation (p. 8). In Brooks' (1997) book, he explains multimedia is the "combined use of several media, such as movies, slides, music, and lighting, especially for the purpose of education or entertainment" (p. 17). And Greenlaw & Hepp (1999) claim that multimedia is "information in the form of graphics, audio, video, or movies. A multimedia document contains a media element other than plain text" (p. 44). Another concept is that

multimedia comprises a computer program that includes "text along with at least one of the following: audio or sophisticated sound, music, video, photographs, 3-D graphics, animation, or high-resolution graphics" (Maddux, Johnson, & Willis, 2001, p. 253). All in all, multimedia is a type of technology which includes videos, tapes, audio materials et al. Here in this essay, the multimedia mainly refers to a teaching approach which involves in using graphics, audio, video, or movies in English class.

3. Multimedia in language education

The relationship between multimedia and language education is discussed in different literatures. Most of them tend to support that multimedia plays a positive role in language education, though there are few negative effects may involve in the process of teaching. According to Ciascai & Marchis (2008), there are several objectives in education would be achieved when using multimedia. They point out that using multimedia increases motivation and individualization for learning; in addition, it deepens and facilitates learning, also develops learners' attitudes and cross skills. When it comes to multimedia and language learning, Yang (1998) states that the presentation of combined media creates a learning environment in which attracts language learners to enjoy learning process. Activities engage them in watching, reading, listening, and speaking. This more pleasing learning environment can quickly reduce or even eliminate learners' initial linguistic and psychological obstacles (Yang, 1998). In addition, language learning should be based on certain context, it is not a context free process. multimedia enables teachers and students to interact more and it provide a context for language teaching. Multimedia also build a connection between text and context, which means it combines abstract knowledge with actual objectives. Kramsch & Andersen (1999) clarifies that the role of education, and foreign language education in particular, is precisely to make teaching process visible, the way to make sense of the unique textual and contextual environment offered by multimedia is to be aware of the gap between context and text, that is, between the meanings attributed to the scene by the participants and the meaning pieced together by the teacher. However, multimedia is not always beneficial to language learning, diverse kinds of multimedia are messy. If the multimedia is addressed without any correct principle, it is not efficient. Students cannot learn more about what they really need if unnecessary information cannot be excluded during the learning process. Moreover, not all students learn at the same pace, which means the diversity of students tend to affect their performance in classroom. Ke (2010) points out that Chinese students' inertia, dependence as well as poor collaboration due to long-term traditional classroom teaching and one-child family education (my translation). Although most students have a strong desire to learn English and are willing to accept the new model of teaching, they are used to be "fed" by teachers, so students self-learning ability is poor (Ke, 2010, my translation). Also, Abbas (2012) points out that when learners are not able to control the pace of the presentation they could not learn more, which means the benefits they gain from teachers' use of multimedia is different based on different levels of students.

4. Multimedia in English class in China

The first time that multimedia was introduced in China was in early 1920s by a famous Chinese educator called Xingzhi Tao. According to Ke (2010), there are three stages in China's multimedia English education since the late 70s of last century. First, the initial stage from the late 1970s to mid-1990s, it was the time that model, chart and

audio-visual technology-based projection were addressed into English curriculum. The period from the mid-1990s to the end of the 20th century was the second stage, which is characterized by multimedia computers and large-screen projection systems, at the same time the development of audio-visual English is characterized by audiovisual media and their combination (a variety of media). The third is called deeply development stage (early 21st century), at this stage computer network (LAN, Internet) is characterized by multimedia English education (My translation). Cai & Wu (2003) discusses that the application of multimedia technology into English teaching in China has posed a great challenge to the traditional teacher-centered method, they make an analysis of some significant changes in recent years that necessitate the reform of the traditional methodology. In order to respond the research questions, it is possible to analyse and to investigate why the effective OLMS is important to be implemented in Indonesian higher educations by investigating three main discussions; easy and communicative access, collaborative activity enhancement, and student's interaction facilitation. Moreover, to explore the topics deeper, the points of challenges in implementing OLMS are also included and discussed after elaborating the benefits that students and teachers can get from the implementation. Having analysed this, the ways to counter the challenges are also provided to make sure all issues of OLMS can be fixed.

5. Effects of multimedia in English teaching

Multimedia brings benefits to Chinese students' English learning, firstly, is because it fires students' motivation of learning English and improves students' participants in classroom. Motivation is a vital element that affects students learn a subject well. Interests, as one of the aspects in motivation, affect students' language learning process. Ganapathy (2016) claims that students' motivation and attitude are often linked to the learning of English as second language. It is also the main problem of Chinese students in English learning. Because most of students have to take part in NUÉE, as the result, it causes a misunderstanding among students even among English teachers: they think that the purpose of addressing English in classroom is because of the test. However, learning a language cannot be regarded as a process only for passing test, as the matter of fact, language is a tool of communication. In addition, learning a new language requires students thinking in another way because of the distinct rules in different language system. That is the main aim of setting English in Chinese curriculum. To catch students' interests back, multimedia could be a significant method. Abbas (2012) states that the use of a teacher-controlled multimedia tool increases the amount of communicative discourse in the classroom for both teachers and students. In this multimedia environment, students will become more active and autonomous. Through the attractive pictures, animation or sound, students are able to engage in the language learning effectively. On the one hand, multimedia also enables students to participate actively in classroom and stimulate the desire of English learning. In traditional Chinese English class, teachers tend to take class based on the textbook. When they introduce a new area to students, they rarely insert context at the beginning of the whole class. For example, if the content of a class is about "natural disaster", it may refer to numbers of new words about this topic. At this time, teachers provide several English-speaking videos with English subtitles, it would easily attract students' attention, they might be interested in learning and could be engaged in class. Astleitner & Wiesner (2004) states that attention not only represents something that needs some information-processing resources, but also it analyzes these resources with the working memory. It is claimed that students collaborate with their classmates to solve a problem or complete a project in a relaxing environment, they can learn on their own according to their plans or purposes and teachers can act more as a guide rather than a knowledge-giver (Abbas, 2012). A case study conducted by Ganapathy (2016) investigates the fact that multimedia approach promotes students' motivation in learning English at class it is confirmed that students' perception of multimedia lessons in an English as a second language classroom is described as highly engaging, self-directed, and learner-centered and promotes meaning-making with minimal guidance from the teachers. (Ganapathy, 2016). However, incorrect and excessive use of multimedia might bring negative effects to students. Since learners in primary education school are very young, their attention on learning are easily distracted. For example, some students may be extremely curious about the content of videos when applying videos in class rather than learning itself. Abbas (2012) claims that learning is most effective when interesting and irrelevant information is eliminated because of the brain's limited information processing resources. Thus, teachers, as the main controller in classroom, should chose the resources cautiously. The choice of multimedia course resources should be closely related to the content, identifying the entry point of the contents, and following students' thought (Yang & Fang, 2008).

Secondly, multimedia provides both visual and aural input for students which are the key process of vocabulary acquisition. Vocabulary is the basic element in English learning process, because sentences consist of single words. Vocabulary is also the most crucial part in Chinese English primary education; it is often tested in examination; therefore, English teachers from primary education schools often set up homework which requires students remember several words after class. While, traditional words learning approach is word lists or paired association in which translation are provided with new words (Kim & Gilman, 2008). Teachers in Chinese English class usually read new words before asking students to remember them. The procedure of remembering new words is bald and boring. As the result, students are not willing to remember new English words. Hatch & Brown (1995) identifies that there are five steps in vocabulary acquisition process: (1) having sources for encountering new words; (2) getting a clear image, either visual or auditory or both, of the forms of the new words; (3) learning the meaning of the words; (4) making a strong memory connection between the forms and the meanings of the words; and the last step (5) using the words. It can be noticed that in the second step, vocabulary acquisition should be combined with clear visual or auditory image. However, this process is excluded in traditional English class in China. As the matter of fact, multimedia could help teachers achieve this process, also it enables students to remember new vocabulary easier and more effective. For example, teachers could set up several simple games like filling blank or picture association in power point about new vocabulary for students, those vocabularies need to be chosen based on the glossary list, and then display it on computer in class as the opening of starting the class. A research conducted by Kim & Gilman (2008) proves that the use of multimedia components increases students' English vocabulary learning. Their finds confirm the idea that using visual media is beneficial to vocabulary acquisition and helps increase achievement scores, to be more specific, multimedia allows student to visualize the definition of new words in a more significant method which is not provided in text alone learning environment. Findings in a study which is conducted by Koolstra & Beentjes (1999) also indicates that young children can acquire elements of a second language through watching subtitled television programs, which belongs to multimedia category. The results of another study conducted by Jones & Plass (2002) show that the students listened to the aural passage, they acquired more vocabulary when they had both pictorial and written annotations available than when they had only written annotations or only pictorial annotations available. When students are able to have a clear image of new words, they are learning new words. Once they achieve this step, it is possible that they are able to strongly connect the forms and meanings of new vocabulary. Thus, according to Hu and Deng (2007), vocabulary acquisition under multi-media environment can improve the vocabulary teaching efficiency and extend students' vocabulary, and it is also of great help in improving students' English level as a whole, for the teaching-software usually carries the voices of native-speakers with rich context, this helps the learners foster a nice linguistic intuition. However, results from research conducted by Kim, Kim D and Whang (2013) indicates that presenting the information in "visual text and added spoken text" or "reduced visual text and added spoken text" significantly decreased learners' ability to learn and retain English vocabulary. Besides, there is a little distinction in the recognition of English vocabulary between the presentation modes of "visual text" and the "visual text and added graphics" (Kim et al., 2013). In other words, acceptance for several types of multimedia affects students' vocabulary acquisition. Thus, teachers, as the guide of class, should select a certain type that is the most suited for students. It is highly recommended that when chose multimedia in class, the design principles should be qualified according to the content of learning, student characteristics, and the conditions which performance is measured (Fletcher & Tobias, 2005).

It cannot be denied that vocabulary is closely related to reading. Multimedia provides reading process visual annotations and glosses which enables learners to memorize unfamiliar words in reading text for a long-term period. According to Marzban (2011), there are mainly four types of glosses: text gloss which offers a textual definition or meaning of the unknown word; picture gloss usually involves in a static or stable picture to describe or display the meaning of the unknown word; audio gloss often uses the voice of a native speaker to read the word, or to read a sample sentence containing the target word, or to read the meaning of the target word; and video gloss which refers to a short video to explain the meaning of the target word. Traditional English reading class in China often requires students to read materials on the paper, when students cannot understand the unknown words, teachers translate the meaning of these words to Chinese directly. After that, teachers require students to memorize those unknown words after class. Unlike traditional method, multimedia provides visual annotations tend to deepen students' memory of new vocabulary. Audio and video gloss engages both the visual working memory and auditory working

memory, while text gloss involves only the visual working memory, remembering the unknown words by multimedia-based gloss facilitates the reading comprehension ability (Marzban, 2011).

Thirdly, different listening tasks that improve students' listening skill are created by different patterns of multimedia. In English learning process, except for vocabulary, listening can be regarded as another necessary part of English learning. Communication is based on understanding of others' talk. From my personal experience, if I cannot understand what others talk about, I cannot insert their conversation. On the other hand, listening is also one of areas that need to be evaluated in the test. Brett (1997) points out that listening is one of the crucial skills in second language learning, it plays a significant role in the language acquisition process, and its development is the prime concern to language teachers. It is a process that includes receiving, attending to and assigning meaning to aural stimuli (Jones & Plass, 2002). Listening is a language skill that is highly related to context. Conversations happens in different scene. Although scenes are designed in English textbooks, but it is not real and hard for students experiencing personally. However, multimedia is able to expose students to a foreign language context and environment, which is beneficial to listening. Also, students in Chinese primary, secondary as well as high schools seldom have opportunity to contact with a foreign language environment. However, the use of multimedia is just right for this situation. First, the traditional multimedia based listening teaching approach for English teachers is to play audio tapes, which creates an environment in conversation based on textbooks. It enables students to focus on listening practice. According to Brett (1997), materials like audio cassettes or video cassettes are designed for improving listening skills by providing authentic listening or viewing texts that are connected with motivating, focusing, and achievable tasks, the tasks serve to direct listeners to relevant aspects of meaning in the texts. This method is commonly used by most of English teachers in China now in classroom. However, audio cassettes or video cassettes designed based on textbooks sometimes are out of style. Not like those cassettes or tapes, update videos may provide more veritable context than tapes and cassettes. Thus, videos, as another multimedia-based teaching method, is worthful to be applied in teaching students' listening comprehension. Meskill (1996) confirms that video can be regarded as a significantly plentiful source of context for language procedure and programs which include full motion video seems to motivate students and engages them in paying attention to aural input. Based on certain context, students could easily build up a whole vision of a certain conversation. Learners are able to have experience and easily draw connections between utterances and how they function within a visually described background through studying target language communication in a multimedia format (Meskill, 1996). In addition, for both tapes and videos, teachers could control the speech speed of characters flexibly. In other words, it is available that teachers could manipulate what they want to students listen again or what they want slow down speed for students better understanding during class. Meskill (1996) points out that the special characteristic of multimedia is well suited to assist learners in their understanding of reduced forms of target language speech. In general, listening patterns are different when in formal occasion and informal occasion. According to Meskill (1996), "having the written version of fast, naturally-paced aural text on the computer screen allows the learner access to both the written and spoken forms simultaneously". However, an English class is limited, it usually lasts for 45 minutes in China, which means that English teachers may not achieve teaching goals if too much multimedia- based method is used during the class. On the other hand, listening skill is an ability that need to be practiced continuously, which means students have to practice by themselves after school. It is possible that teachers could arrange some listening homework for students after class. Mayor (2009) confirms that the actual time-on-task devoted to developing L2 listening comprehension skill in class is obviously not enough, so they suggest that a substantial part of a listening course should consist of self- learning. For example, teachers can set up several tasks that require students look for key words or key clues in a video or audio. Students may watch the specific video or listen to the audio repeatedly in order to search the key words and clues. Through this process, their listening skills are improved.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper analyzes the concept of applying multimedia in primary English language teaching in China. The reasons of coming up with this concept is based on the special English curriculum which requires students deal with test first. Due to this reason, multimedia as a teaching method is proved that could maintain students' interests in learning English. In addition, researches conducted by several investigators in my essay also support that the use of multimedia in English teaching develops students' English proficiency, namely, vocabulary, reading as well as listening. It is an era when technology education

is becoming increasingly crucial. English teachers in China need to follow this trend, adjust the teaching method to fit with technology. Although multimedia might be a new method for English teachers in primary education and due to the limited class time, teachers may concern that using multimedia interrupts test-centered teaching. It is suggested that schools or institutions could provide teachers opportunities training professionally in other countries, which are well applied multimedia in class. Teachers could also draw lessons from another teachers' experience. Therefore, it is highly recommended teachers to use multimedia in English class.

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