

The use of the media in the teaching of English-related studies in the university of Annaba

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Abstract

Educational media have in recent years been the subject of voluminous research. This paper, which limits itself to the use of the electronic media in education, explores the usefulness of television-related devices to the teaching of English to Algerian learners at the undergraduate level. It lays out the findings of the author's experiment using the video-cassette recorder and video material as teaching aids, to improve the "output" of both instructor and recipient.

Introduction:

As the Second World War drew to an end, the world embarked upon an epoch of unprecedented interest in schooling. Indeed, schooling came henceforth to be seen as the "key that unlocks the door to modernization" (1). The new socio-economic and political reality, which stemmed from that multi-faceted revolution, served as a breeding ground for new ideas in different areas of the educational sector. Teaching methods were to be constantly modified and new concepts, such as audio-visual demonstration in the classroom, were to be introduced into education. Special attention was to be given to the electronic media which emerged not only as vital means of communication but also as practical vehicles for efficient learning.

The media are today omnipresent in all the aspects of daily life. The word "media" is commonly defined as "...any form or device or equipment which is normally used to transmit information between persons". Newspapers, books, projectors, radio, television and the video-cassette recorder are, therefore, all media.

This paper is limited only to the study of the electronic media, notably the television-related devices, as teaching aids. Television is now, in Amove's words, "utilized to extend or transform comprehensive education systems" (2).

It has also been branded as the "most miraculous" of all modern arts that have revolutionized human civilization, for it is always capable of providing more people with more knowledge.

Educational media began to take real shape in the 1950's when new teaching devices were being integrated into schooling. A wide range of audio-visual aids, such as record players, maps and charts, soon became part and parcel of classroom teaching in different parts of the world. More advanced devices, such as television sets, overhead projectors, video-cassette recorders and computers, entered schools only during the past three decades or so. Educational radio broadcasting gradually improved its systems of transmission and later educational television transmissions were to enter the schooling arena in force.

Three major reasons lay behind the large-scale use of the media in education over the last few decades. First, the post-World War II period witnessed a rather unprecedented demographic explosion that, together with the introduction

of compulsory education in most countries, led to a substantial increase in the number of people wishing to attend school. Second, the sphere of knowledge, which was increasingly widening, fostered the need for not only more knowledge but also for better knowledge. Third, the technological revolution, that profoundly altered the shape of the human way of life, provided the educational sector with some ever-improving inventions. These included electronic media devices which came to be emphatically recommended by planners and educationalists to meet the new huge schooling requirements in terms of both quantity and quality. The newly introduced electronic aids were to be regarded as a "life buoy" in academia.

The media gradually became intimately linked to any effort aimed at uplifting the standard of teaching. Educational media devices helped improve the quality of instruction in classrooms, especially those which suffered from poorly trained instructors. They offered possibilities to retrain poorly qualified teachers through intensive instruction. They provided young people, who could not benefit from regular schooling, with the chance of an education. And they helped enrich poorly prepared curricula, especially those related to verbally oriented subjects such as foreign languages (3).

After this brief account of the evolution of the role of the media in education, this study now looks into the merits and demerits of educational electronic media. This is with special reference to the reality of the Algerian university as reflected in the findings of a case study about the teaching of both English Oral skills and American Studies in the University of Annaba.

(II)

Algerian universities have now reached a point of dire need for not only a higher level of English teaching but also for better trained teachers. The influx of students seeking to learn the language is growing at a phenomenal pace. The sphere of what must be learned within the overall language course has also been widened to an unprecedented level. And what must be learned is becoming more and more complex as new elements, which the recipient should understand, keep unfolding. This inevitably widens the spectrum of skills that must be mastered by the student of English.

Over the last four years, and in the absence of a satellite dish in the Institute of Foreign Languages and also in the absence of documentary video material, the author has been using a modest personal collection of video-taped movies to enrich the syllabi of the Third and Fourth years of undergraduate English training. The student's response to this experiment has been quite spectacular. All students, including those who are usually shy or lazy, have shown interest and have actively taken part in the debate. The questionnaire results have revealed that the overwhelming majority of students see sound picture as a much needed break from the orthodox or conventional way of teaching. This is especially true of the Third-Year students who complain of a loaded curriculum, that comprises subjects of different contents but all conveyed in the same way: the teacher does all the talking and the students do all the listening. The experiment has also revealed that most students prefer humorous dialogue, especially that which is skillfully performed as in "All the President's Men" and "Escape to Victory".

The efficiency of the role, which the media can play in the teaching of English-related subjects, depends on the nature of the course, on the quality of the course, on the quality of the material and also on the proficiency of both student and teacher. The use of the video material can compensate a good deal for the shortage of literature in the University library. The video-taped material, which is distinguished by its advantage of playback, often adds experiences that transcend the sphere of the classroom and, therefore, helps widen the scope of the student's knowledge. This is true of "All the President's Men" which has given the Third-Year students a detailed account of the Watergate scandal as an illustration of abuse of power that usually happens when balance of power is tilted towards one branch of government at the expense of the other two; it has also vividly shown the American political system in operation.

One other advantage of the video-cassette recorder in teaching is that it enables the teacher to save a good deal of his precious time, by providing a general overview about a given topic whilst he can focus in class on some specific elements of that topic. "Escape to Victory", for example, gives students a general idea about the different accents there are in the English-speaking world in not more than 115 minutes, while the teacher can concentrate his effort in class on one particular accent and can also devote more individual attention to his students. The teacher can also use the video-taped material to integrate different subjects in one session as in the case of "All the President's Men" which links two seemingly unrelated subjects that are Oral Skills, especially the study of the American accent, to the American political system.

The experiment with the Third and Fourth-Year students has also revealed that video-taped material, if adequately chosen, can provide learners with not only a much needed information to substantiate their training, but also with a highly significant entertainment value. As Katz argues, entertainment is vital to learning in general even in purely conventional schooling (4).

(III)

The video-cassette recorder is growing increasingly important in teaching in general and in the teaching of foreign languages in particular. The fact that the video-taped material combines picture with sound renders it extremely significant as a mean of methodical instruction in various

fields. The learner ought to be exposed to the views and revelations of outstanding thinkers and cultural figures who can, thanks to this electronic medium, be watched in different parts of the world without having to pay visits to individual universities. Visits of this kind are usually either excessively costly and time-consuming, or virtually impossible when the speaker is already deceased. Students in different countries can, through video-cassette recorder, receive the same message in sound and picture (5).

Any process of learning must primarily aim at stimulating the learner, at directing his own activity and at fostering his inner potential of creativity. The audio-visual media seem most suited for motivating the student, as they represent the ideal vehicles for visual demonstrations and for exposing, both in sound and in picture, significant objects and happenings such as in the field of history. The documentary film "La Légende du Siècle", which vividly tells the story of the world in the twentieth century in about sixty minutes, is an illustrative case in point. Such media can also, as Hill and Koenig argue, bring to the student some much needed experimental skills that the conventional teacher cannot provide in his classroom (6). This is especially true of technical subjects like acoustics and phonetics. By attracting the learner's attention and stimulating his drive for greater knowledge, in addition to providing information and entertainment, the audio-visual material can, in the words of Wilbur Schramm, "contribute interest and incentive rather than boredom" (7).

Electronic audio-visual aids seem well suited to give a qualitative boost to the Algerian universities which are lagging far behind their counterparts not only in the developed world but also in many countries of the so-called Third World. Video-taped material can help Algerian instructors in different fields both update and substantiate information they acquire from second- or third-hand sources which represents almost their only medium of knowledge. Algerian teachers, who are currently deprived of attending academic conferences worldwide due to the financial restraints inflicted upon their institutes, can find in such material a way to keep abreast of the times. This, therefore, makes it paramount on the part of educational authorities in this country to at least try to provide video-taped accounts of such conferences which will certainly help give the Algerian teacher a breathing space after this long period of merciless seclusion.

Video-taped material seems particularly appropriate to enable the Departments of English-related studies to unify their curricula and to purvey to all students identical messages in both sound and picture. It can also help make up for the shortcomings of poorly trained teachers, impose a nationally designed syllabus that should be followed by all institutions, and even determine the pace which ought to be respected by all the teachers of the subject. Algerian universities have always suffered from the acute problem of the shortage of adequately trained teachers. The video-cassette recorder represents a tool whereby the best teachers in the land can be shared by all students regardless of the university they attend.

(IV)

The author's investigation into the use of the video-cassette recorder in the teaching of both English Oral Skills and American Civilization has also revealed some limitations in the use of electronic media in education generally. Any teacher wishing to be successful in using the video-material in his classroom must pick and choose the ap-

appropriate material that is relevant to both the nature of the learners and to the course taught. What is on display is often Western-produced and is usually irrelevant to the Algerian cultural reality and should therefore be adequately modified before being transmitted to Algerian learners. But, to render the material culturally relevant usually requires tremendous efforts and a lot of the teacher's precious time.

Educational video material cannot be effective if the classroom is too large, as students cannot see clearly. To tackle this problem with the Third-Year students, the author divided the class into several small groups. This, however, proved time-consuming for the teacher who could have used his time for some other purposes than repeating the same material several times.

In addition to the lack of an adequate physical infrastructure in the Department of English-related studies at the University of Annaba, software material is virtually non-existent. And in absence of a proper training of teachers to use such method in the most efficient manner, at least guides to use educational electronic media should be provided. This is simply because such media require from the teacher some special skills which differ from those expected from him in the conventional classroom.

Using electronic devices in education must be both regulated and rationalized so as to stimulate the curiosity and enthusiasm of students so that they become what Arnove has called "active, inquiring, and challenging citizens" (8). Yet, too much reliance on this method can be detrimental to the student's behaviour; the teacher should therefore be trained to be able to contain the student's over-enthusiasm and prevent it from becoming a problem of discipline. In this, the teacher should be firm and, at the same time, friendly with the learners. This very method of teaching can in some other instances, however, foment students' passivity and sustain the old schooling habits of "one-way communicator" and "authoritative teachers as role models" (10).

Conclusion

Despite their undoubted usefulness in the educational sector in general in the teaching of English Oral Skills and American Studies in particular, the electronic media cannot

substitute for the human relationship that exists between instructor and learner. This human touch cannot in any way be threatened by what Roderick MacLean called the "sheer mechanic of electronic media" (11). The teacher should indeed be in complete control of his classroom and should be left totally free to use the media material in the way he wants depending on the nature of the course and on the needs of his students. The teacher should not feel that the privacy of his class is invaded and should be given free hand in handling the video material by being able, for instance, to stop and start the tape whenever deemed necessary for both explanation and analysis (12). It is also rightly argued that the visual media serve more the training of the teacher than that of the student (13).

The electronic media devices, such as the video-cassette, can serve only as teaching aids that the teacher uses in the classroom freely for denotation and magnification. Such devices can relieve the teacher from his marginal responsibilities and can supplement his work in the classroom. But, they cannot in any way substitute for the teacher who is, after all, responsible for their effective use in education: he answers questions, animates discussions and analyzes the content.

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La réforme du code de commerce par le décret législatif 93.08 (du 25/04/1995)

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Résumé

Le passage à l'économie de marché impose la mise en place d'une plate-forme institutionnelle d'essence libérale. C'est dans ce sens qu'est intervenue la réforme du code de commerce à travers l'intégration de nouvelles sociétés commerciales et de nouvelles techniques de crédit.

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