

Chalk and Talk or Overhead Projector? Coping up with Learners' Preferences

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Abstract

With large number classes, writing a text for analysis or exercises for discussion on the black or white board while explaining at the same time may be very exhausting for the teacher and time consuming as well, especially when teaching a whole section of more than a hundred students in the amphitheater. In this study, and for needs analysis purposes, the students were asked to fill in a questionnaire to allow for deeper understanding of their attitudes towards the English course and the way it was presented during the first semester as well as their potential intricacies within this important subject matter. A sample of 29 students contributed in this study. Based on the analysis of the students' responses, we found that the use of the OHP promotes interaction and communication in the educational settings and saves time especially when balanced with traditional use of the chalkboard to meet the needs of different types of learners.

Keywords: Overhead Projector (OHP), Needs Analysis, Learners' types, Learners' Preferences.

1. INTRODUCTION:

With the 21st century's inventions and developments in the teaching tools, the "chalk and talk" method is considered now an outdated one because there are so many other teaching aides; use of overhead projector and PowerPoint presentations on top of them. In a university setting where students are expected to be the center of the learning process and the teacher is only a guide and facilitator of that process, it is often a challenging step to decide upon which method and instruments to use. In our immediate level, the very first session was an icebreaker with the students of second year computer engineering, where they were asked to introduce themselves and give an estimation of their level in English, besides their expectations of the course content. Most students expressed their weaknesses in vocabulary and grammar were hindering them from developing their language proficiency and hoped the present course would cover these two important spheres. Indeed, we opted for a week-by-week lectures on grammar points and text analysis where

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vocabulary and comprehension questions are the focal points.

However, with large texts and long grammar exercises in addition to the big size of the amphitheater, we had to reconsider the situation and tools. The chalk and blackboard are now very exhausting for the teacher, besides students cannot see the handwriting from the back. We have then thought of using the overhead projector to display the lesson on and explain every now and then on the blackboard.

2. ‘Chalk and Talk’ or Multimedia?

The use of well-planned and informative power point slides is always helpful and strengthens students’ learning. Needless to say, the effective use of clipart, images and pictures as illustrations to the lesson will certainly enhance learning. Nonetheless, we should never forget that when we think of a teacher, we imagine him/her standing in front of a board with a chalk in hand. With the board and chalk, our elementary teachers went step by step and clarified every single difficulty on the board and could get our full attention while writing. Some pictures of the neat and well-presented explanations are even still engraved in our minds, although in most schools now the chalk is replaced with a marker and the green or black board is now a white.

It has recently been reported that much of China’s success came from their teaching methods which the UK and other educationally developed countries have been moving away from since a couple of decades. The Chinese “chalk and talk” approach is the most direct form of teaching that has been proved efficient and fruitful by the results of Chinese students in international tests. This leads us to think that we have been misguided by the tremendous flow of technology into EFL classrooms (Donnelly, 2014).

The old method ‘chalk and talk’ depends basically on these two teaching instruments, i.e., the teacher writes and explains at the same time. It has been judged insufficient and lacking innovation especially with the continuous inventions of the 21st century which can be used effectively in classrooms to enhance the learning process. For example, when teaching new vocabulary items, we often try to refer to the objects with their shapes, usages, etc., whereas a fast and a more effective way is to show the picture on a screen. Of course, our teachers used to draw or bring pictures or even the concrete objects to the class but the learning situations change and their requirements as well.

There are many teachers who still opt for the ‘chalk and talk’ method, some even focus more on the talk than the chalk in order to get the most of the students’ attention and avoid their laziness when only

copying what is written on the board. On the other hand, the use of slides has also been criticized in that it permits for both students and teachers' laziness as the students do not take notes when the lecture is given to them in a clear format. Even the teacher who feels prepared as he gets his slides ready may only read what is written on them. This situation, then, might destruct the learning process and this teaching instrument will serve the opposite of what it was intended for.

Another deficiency noted when using the PowerPoint presentations is the decrease in the amount of teacher- student interaction which may make the lecture a monologue. However, when teachers use boards and simultaneously discuss, explain, and question, this will make the classroom more interactive. Shind and Patil (2015: 143) argued that "The high speed of presentation may reduce participation of students; but when boards are used students are likely to participate more. Too strict order of slides may limit the extemporaneous performance of instructor which will not happen during teaching with boards". Hence, it is true that students' roam about during the course while the teacher moves through his slides ceaselessly.

Therefore, we are not in the position of underestimating the use of either technology or the old method in teaching. Yet, we should agree that the over emphasis of multimedia may lead to undesired outcomes.

3. Observation of the students' reactions and immediate treatments

At the very beginning of the course, every teacher is expected to have a roadmap for the best progressing of his lectures. In the scientific branches, learners are mainly interested about developing their English skills with relation to their field of studies. Hence, we collected a series of lessons based on scientific texts related to the field of computer engineering. However, there must be a reliable method to present these texts for analysis. Using the board to write a whole text of 300 to 500 words is not an easy task besides the time it consumes while the teacher is in front of the board and the learners are focusing on something else. This situation obliged us to change the method and depend on the chalk only for explanation or emphasis. We have first opted for the use of handouts which later on proved useless since most students used to come to class without them, they appeared not interested in making copies although given the options of taking pictures and sharing them on their official Facebook group. Finally, we thought it was better to display the lesson on the overhead projector and provide the students with the lectures on PDF files with the exercises unsolved to guarantee their participation in the class. Meanwhile, the new vocabulary and

solutions of the exercises are to be written on the blackboard. Moreover, the large size of the amphitheater makes it difficult to communicate with the students. They may have forced themselves to stay focused on the lesson, take notes, engage in the writing activities, but when they were asked to participate and speak up, they often abstained because of the problem of sound transmission; they had to raise their voices but most of the times they were not heard appropriately. Henceforth, they hated being asked to repeat their responses or even questions. This situation increased their negative attitudes about feeling shy to volunteer which created a kind of embarrassment amongst them.

According to Susikaran and Phil (2013: 3): “The reason why a good teacher teaches well is that he can inspire the students’ strong study desire and arouse their study interest”. To do so, there are a number of ways a teacher can follow such as bringing multimedia to the classroom which has been the subject of several research papers claiming the utility of introducing technology in the EFL classroom. In our immediate level, we opted for the overhead projector as a means to help the teacher and learners as well since teaching the language necessitates more written input especially for reading and grammar.

At first, they were all happy for the new method because it saved them energy while the lesson was given to them in a PDF file. Yet, we have noticed some laziness and tedium while the lecture was presented; few pens were in hands and exercises were not copied only answered visually. They were depending on the files they got at the beginning.

As for the reading comprehension section, of the course, sometimes, the size of the screen does not allow for long texts to be displayed as one segment; we had to divide them on two parts and wait until all the students finish the silent reading of the first part to move to the second before reading the whole text out loud and engage in the discussion. Further, we noticed that some students were very eager to engage into the reading or discussion, but because of the big size of the amphitheater which hampers sound transmission, they often abstained or felt shy of raising their hands to participate.

One other important issue that university teachers encounter with their students is their carelessness about attending the course. So many absences were recorded regarding the total number of students expected in the amphitheater; the total is 400 students clustered over 4 sections, each section contains a hundred students. However, during the whole semester, we have never recorded this total; in only one best case we had about 85 students, yet most of them have stayed for about 10 minutes, signed their names, and then have left the amphitheater as soon as the

teacher has turned to the blackboard. This situation explains that what is really important for these students is to sign their names only for administrative reasons. We have immediately thought of a quick solution for the situation; students who stay till the end are asked, every now and then, to write a small paragraph on the same topic of the lesson which will be graded and added to their final mark. We were not expecting to see the result of this treatment on the spot because some students do not believe until they see concrete actions and they will see them after the exams, so the result may occur in the second semester.

4. Method

The descriptive method has been chosen to conduct this study. At the end of the first semester, the students have been asked to fill in a questionnaire for evaluating the course. They have been through both Grammar and Texts Analysis courses. Grammar lessons were precisely about the present simple and continuous, the past simple and present perfect, the use of since, for, already, just, and yet. Texts analysis has dealt with specialized reading materials such as: Networking Today, Network Communication, Data Communications Equipment. The grammar lessons were displayed on the overhead projector with their activities and examples, further explanations were written on the blackboard. On the other hand, little usage of the blackboard was in the reading sessions except for some synonyms or acronyms which needed clarifications.

At the end of the first semester of the academic year 2017-2018 and with second year Computer Engineering students this study has been conducted to understand about their preferences concerning the method and material used in the English course as a kind of evaluation of the teaching and learning process in order to plan for the second semester.

It is worth noting here that at the very beginning of the course, students were asked to identify their weaknesses and introduce themselves in a form of a paragraph so that the teacher could have an idea about their level and their difficulties. Through that first contact with the students, the teacher and the students have agreed upon more reinforcement on grammar and vocabulary since they were indicated as major problematic areas in learning English.

The questionnaire was distributed in the last session before the winter holidays. It was the last week and most students were absent. Hence, this study included only 29 students out of 100.

5. Questionnaire Results Analysis

Q1: How would you rank your level of interest in the English course?

Very interested ☐ **Interested** ☐ **Indifferent** ☐ **Not interested** ☐

Table 1. Students' level of interest in the English course

Interest in the English course.	Very interested	Interested	Indifferent	Total
Number and rate of responses	13 (44.82%)	15 (51.72%)	1 (3.44%)	29 (100%)

The results of this question show that quasi totality of the present students during that session were interested in the course. This can be related to their wiliness to attend the last session in contrast to their peers who left mainly due to the lack of interest in the course.

Q2: What pushes you to come to the English course?

Lectures' content ☐ **Administrative reasons** ☐ **For developing one's level** ☐ **Others.....**

Table 2. Students' Motives to attend the course

Motives to attend the course	Lectures' content	Administrative reasons	Developing one's level	Others	Total
Number and rate of responses	11(28.95%)	16 (42.10)	8 (21.05%)	3 (7.90%)	38 (100%)

In the LMD system, students are allowed a limited number of absences and this creates a kind of pressure on them to attend the courses in order not to lose the right to take the exam and pass to the next level. This can be seen in the results of this question where 42.10% declare that they come to the English class for administrative reasons. However, 28.95% of the respondents seem to be interested in the course content and 21.05% want to develop their level in English. Three students representing 7.90% of the sample ticked the last option but did not provide other motives.

Q3: What do you think about the method used in the English course (text analysis and grammar sessions)?

Interesting ☐ **Not interesting** ☐ **Indifferent** ☐

Table 3. Students' Perception of the English course

Perception of the English course	Interesting	Not interesting	Indifferent	Total
Number and rate of responses	19 (65.52%)	5 (17.24%)	5 (17.24%)	29 (100%)

This question aims at investigating the degree of interest in the course method as feedback for the teacher to help design the second semester's course. The results revealed that 65.52% of the respondents find it interesting and 17.24% describe it as not interesting, while 17.24% are indifferent about it.

Q4: Do you prefer that the teacher writes the whole lesson on the blackboard?

Yes ☐ No ☐ Indifferent ☐

Table 4. Students' Perception of using the blackboard only

Prefer Blackboard	Yes	No	Indifferent	Total
Number and rate of responses	16 (55.17%)	11 (37.93%)	2 (2.9%)	27 (93.1%)

The table above indicates that 55.17% of the respondents prefer to follow the teacher's writing on the blackboard while 37.93% declared the opposite. This means that an important portion of the sample is not ready for the use of the overhead projector or they may have been witnessing some difficulties of concentration when the teacher reduces her presence in front of the blackboard. This has been made clear through their answers to the next related question. It is worth mentioning here that two students (2.9%) said that it does not matter to use either method.

Q5: If yes, please say why?

Their answers to this question ranged between the following:

- I can follow well and understand better with the traditional methods.
- It's easier to see on the blackboard.
- I prefer the teacher writes and explains on the blackboard because that makes me concentrate more and this method helps me to write some notes on my copybook.

Q6: do you prefer when the teacher explains the lesson displayed on

the overhead projector and uses the blackboard for clarification?

Yes ☐ **no** ☐ **Indifferent** ☐

Table 5. Students' Perception of using the overhead projector with the blackboard

Prefer OHP + Black Board	Yes	No	Indifferent	Total
Number and rate of responses	16 (55.17%)	11 (37.93%)	2 (2.9%)	27 (93.1%)

The number of answers to this question is the same as the previous one, yet, not the same students provided the same answers. Again, the same previous two students said that it does not matter to use either method. This Indicates that the students' problem is not with the use of the overhead projector as a means in itself, but with the overuse and the neglect of the teacher's role as a facilitator of the lecture, as well as the students' tendency to learn in the traditional method which they have been following for several years (tradition keepers).

Q7: If yes, please say why?

Answers to this question were more related to the motivational aspect of the use of overhead projectors in the classroom. The students reenforced their perspective by focusing on the aspect of time saving when using both methods simultaneously to answer to both types of learners and avoid boredom. The reasons provided by the respondents are listed below:

- It saves time; we cover more material, and it clarifies key points.
- It is clear to read and more understandable.
- I prefer to write directly from the overhead projector.
- We do not get bored.
- I like it because it solved my "getting sleepy" issues.
- It is better in the reading sessions only and not the grammar session.
- It makes learning faster, easier, and interesting.

Q8: do you have any further comments concerning the course and method?

This question revealed many suggestions from the part of the students as it was anonymous, so they felt at ease to express themselves and clarify their needs and expectations from the course. Some of the answers were serious, others were funny, and some others revealed their

utmost objective of attending the course; getting excellent marks. Below are their respective answers:

- We need more activity and energy during the session.
- Personally, I don't think it's that interesting because I have already studied these lessons in high school and I was hoping for oral sessions where we choose a topic and talk about it openly with no restrictions like doing some kind of debates, but since the majority of students do not attend, I guess it would be useless.
- Blackboard or overhead projector, it doesn't matter for me what the teacher uses.
- All that matters is that we're studying English.
- Grammar sessions are more interesting.
- Text analysis is very interesting.
- Very interesting for me, I have attended 99% of the courses and I've never regretted coming over.
- I understand in both methods.
- I like English but I think it's a waste of time because we have other priorities.
- We should spend more time in learning tenses.
- My level of interest in English is so high like it's the first thing I'm trying to learn and the reason is that English will help me learn everything else I want since the best documentation in the internet are in English.
- Help us in using English in our life.
- I suggest changing the content of texts, grammar is more important; we should study it a lot to develop our level.
- Using only the overhead projector makes us feel bored so I would like to combine between using it and writing some stuff on the blackboard.
- Help us in the exam.
- Give me 20 in the examination.
- You're a good teacher, mais pourquoi marquer les présences ?
- I've attended almost all English courses, please give me 20.
- You're just doing well in teaching us. Thank you.

6. Discussion

The main findings of this study reveal that in large classes where discussion and students' interactions are limited, learners tend to prefer the traditional 'chalk and talk' method to the electronic presentation of the course. An eclectic method of both approaches is though called upon to help learners with different learning styles to stay on the track and keep their interest in the course. Several studies investigated learners'

preferences and found more support to the 'chalk and talk' method claiming that the electronic presentations create some problems like covering too much material, not providing hard copies of the notes, and quicker presentations of the lectures (Shallcross & Harrison, 2007; Vamshi et al., 2010; Laronde & MacLeod, 2012).

This study shed light on the preferred methods of teaching English to Computer engineering students to whom English is a subordinate subject matter. Other studies can opt for enlarging the sample to other branches or specifying it to English learners for more insights and comparison between the fields.

7. Conclusion

Multimedia teaching method belongs to CAI (Computer-Aided Instruction). Obviously, it has some inconveniency, yet we should make best use of its advantages and bypass its disadvantages. The world is moving on to new technologies and the classroom environment is witnessing several changes that requires us to cope up with and dive in the action research outcomes.

Of course, one tech-tool cannot replace all teaching methods and we can apply several methods and tools together in one class for the betterment of the teaching/learning environment. We can use advanced educational theory to fulfill the target of college English teaching by utilizing modern educational technology reasonably.

In a nutshell, we should not be impercipient to multimedia teaching methods and neglect our students' tastes, preferences and learning styles.

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