

Using Mobile Phone Technology in EFL Classes

Teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL) who want to develop successful lessons face numerous challenges, including large class sizes and inadequate instructional materials and technological support. Another problem is unmotivated students who refuse to participate in class activities. According to Harmer (2007), uncooperative and unmotivated students are a serious problem and can easily disrupt the instructional process.

Often, routine activities structured around whole class lectures and drills can contribute to the lack of motivation, especially when the students are children or adolescents. As many teachers know, project-based tasks alleviate this problem by allowing students to use their imagination and creativity and actively express themselves in a variety of interesting and enjoyable tasks. A project-based task focused on students' interests also helps transfer the limited facilities of the classroom setting to the real world, where students are freer to use individual learning styles and make personal choices.

This article discusses how teachers can have their students use mobile phone technology—which is not typically considered an educational tool—to produce video projects and thus boost their communicative use of English.

The importance of communicative competence

An analysis of English language teaching (ELT) methodology reveals that achieving *communicative competence* in a second language involves not only knowing the grammatical rules of a language but also knowing when, where, and with whom to use the language in a contextually appropriate way (Ellis 1994; Hymes 1971; Richards 1985). This requires more than mere knowledge of English grammar and vocabulary; it requires skill in how to use English in communicative situations. For example, a person with communicative competence will know how to do things in English—such as making a purchase, asking for directions, persuading someone, and expressing personal feelings—and will also know how

to manage formal (speaking to an elder) and informal (speaking to a peer) language styles. According to Brown (1994), communicative language teaching (CLT) allows learners to practice English as it is actually used in a speech community and equips them with the language skills they will need when they leave the classroom for the real world.

As teachers search for solutions to large class sizes and unmotivated students, they should consider projects that match the principles of CLT. In contrast to teaching a structural syllabus with a preponderance of grammar and vocabulary drills, project work lets students collaborate on tasks that demand authentic, relevant, and real-life communicative interactions. In turn, this type of authentic communication helps students to acquire communicative competence in a second language, much as a person learns his or her first language (Richards and Rodgers 2001).

Barriers to communicative tasks

The principles of CLT are not always easy to put into practice. For instance, large class sizes tend to favor receptive activities involving reading and listening because they are less demanding and time-consuming for the teacher than productive activities involving speaking and writing in pairs or groups. The result is teacher-centered instruction that does not provide students with critical unrehearsed language practice and individual attention. The combination of grammar-based instruction, limited oral interaction of students in class, and inadequate opportunities to speak English outside of class with foreigners or to travel abroad does not support the development of communicative competence.

Another barrier to CLT is the fact that students may feel too shy or embarrassed to speak in class or perform in front of an audience, especially in English. This type of performance anxiety, and other feelings students have in the language learning process, have long been an important consideration in ELT (Dörnyei 2005; Harmer 2007; Krashen 1982).

To make matters worse, students' reluctance to engage in communicative activities may be exacerbated by cultural differences. Since the communicative approach

is of Western origin, it is best suited for the interactive classrooms of Western cultures, where communicative activities are more common (Harmer 2001). In cultures where the teacher-centered classroom is still the norm, learners may not respond willingly to communicative activities (Richards 1985). Teachers will surely be disappointed if they expect CLT to be easy in a country like Turkey, where it is a virtue for students to listen to older people and not to speak before asked as a sign of respect.

Producing drama activities with mobile phones

To overcome barriers, teachers must be creative in seeking methods to make their classrooms more communicative. One method I use is to take advantage of students' interest in the latest mobile phone technology by designing a project-based video task. This task, which combines drama, technology, and CLT, motivates students because they enjoy recording with their mobile phones, and when they do so in a group they receive approval, cooperation, and support from their peers, which is an important factor in their adolescent psychology (Harmer 2001; Senemoğlu 2005). There is agreement in ELT literature about the motivating effect of dramatization (Arditto 2006; Gill 1996; Hyacinth 1990; Miccoli 2003). It breaks the monotony of traditional class teaching and is enjoyable and stimulating.

A drama project is an excellent way to get students to use different communicative functions in English, including description, narration, identification, debate, and decision-making (Millrood 2001). Drama also integrates the four language skills, as students must write English scripts, engage in peer correction, and design and produce the video in English.

In addition to fulfilling the objectives of CLT, developing and recording a dramatic performance with a mobile phone can also address problems such as large class sizes, bad behavior, and performance anxiety.

Large class sizes

To be sure, drama activities require optimum space, time, and materials that are difficult to provide in large classes with limited lesson time (Royka 2002). However, not all

the activities have to take place in the classroom, and students can conduct a large part of the filming outside of the classroom.

Problem behavior

A specific benefit of utilizing mobile phones for a video project is its effect on student behavior. In Turkey, at least, finding an educational use for mobile phones negates problem behavior from undisciplined students who abuse the video recording capability of their phones. Video recordings taken at school appear on websites enthusiastically making fun of students and teachers. In more disturbing cases, students use their mobile phones to infringe on others' privacy and even to harass them. Whether a behavior problem is malign or benign depends on how it is handled by the school system, curriculum, and teachers. For example, the Turkish Ministry of Education (2007) took the reasonable step of regulating students so they use the technology for positive social and educational benefits.

Performance anxiety

As noted above, anxiety interferes with second language acquisition (Krashen 1982). Project-based learning overcomes students' anxiety about class participation because it deals with interesting, real-world topics. Nevertheless, drama and role play may still cause embarrassment, and not every learner finds it easy to perform in front of an audience, especially in a second language. One way to gradually make shy students more assertive and participatory is to not require them to stand up and act in front of the whole class. With a mobile phone project, hesitant and uncommunicative students have the option of creating their film in a non-threatening home or neighborhood environment where they feel comfortable. With this experience and the help of rehearsals, students can get accustomed to speaking or acting in front of an audience. Those students who are still embarrassed to be in front of the camera can take more responsibility for writing the scripts and dialogues and gradually take on minor roles until they feel more comfortable.

Another way a mobile phone drama project reduces anxiety is by offering numerous choices for students with different interests and abilities. Several research studies examine

the interaction between language learning and individual differences (Armstrong 2000; Dörnyei 2005; Ellis 1994; Harmer 2007; Robinson 2002). Instructors must create suitable settings and appropriate methods and materials to fit the different cognitive or affective needs of students, and this is a strong rationale for considering individual differences in aptitude, attitude, motivation, and learning styles. For example, while an extroverted student might participate enthusiastically in group work and play the leading role in a film, an introverted student might perform best by working independently at home using toys or puppets for the roles, rather than appearing personally in the film.

Ideas for mobile phone video projects

Students can consider a wide range of topics to produce a drama project with their mobile phones. To begin, they can get ideas from many popular programs on television, including talk shows, game shows, news specials, and parodies. Following are four ideas for projects that can be expanded or reduced to adapt to the requirements of semester length, class size, language level, and age group.

Project 1: A short film

To make a short film, students will have to decide whether to base it on fact or fiction. After composing a script for the different scenes, assigning roles, and rehearsing their parts, they record the performance. Since this category offers students a large spectrum of genre options, such as drama, action, horror, and comedy, it is highly likely that they will find something of interest.

Project 2: A documentary

A documentary offers numerous topic choices suitable to different age groups. Students can plan out how they are going to narrate and record details about something of real-life interest, such as their family life, their neighborhood, their pet, their school, or their friends.

Project 3: An instructional video

An instructional video is a challenge, as it requires providing a clear description of how to accomplish a task, such as cooking something from a recipe, building a dog kennel,

or making a kite. For example, students can develop a four-act video to: (1) introduce a game, (2) describe the roles of players on the different teams, (3) explain the rules of the game, and (4) show the game actually being played.

Project 4: A commercial

Students can make a commercial by adapting an idea from an existing commercial or by making up one of their own. In the commercial they persuade the audience to buy something—such as a new beverage they have invented—by talking about the selling points and advantages of the drink. They write the text in English, rehearse it, and then act out the commercial while filming the production with a mobile phone.

Assessment of video projects

In addition to providing meaningful and real-world language experience, Skehan (1998) lists two other important elements of project-based tasks: (1) students work towards a goal, and (2) the activity is evaluated by its outcome. A mobile phone project consists of several stages done both in and outside of class. All of these stages can be graded independently, including the drafting of scripts, peer review and revision, and rehearsals of the film. To give feedback and evaluation of the final outcome, teachers and students can use a

video assessment instrument like the rubric in Table 1, which lists six criteria and allows for a maximum score of 24 points.

A mobile phone drama project can also be assessed through the Internet by uploading the videos to a website, preferably an official site under Ministry of Education, and having students, teachers, parents, and academicians evaluate and rank them. Then, at the end of the school year, the best works for each drama category can be selected and given awards by the Ministry of Education. Some of the drama productions may also compete in national or international competitions.

With a video project, students produce something tangible that they can keep in their portfolios or personal albums to show their parents, friends, or perhaps their grandchildren. Moreover, students will see themselves actually speaking English. All of these factors will come together to give them a sense of accomplishment.

Additional activities for mobile phone features

The previous projects require a mobile phone with a video recording function, but teachers can also create activities for mobile phones that do not have video capabilities. Three examples of such activities are described on the next page.

Table 1: Assessing a Video Project

CRITERIA	Excellent (4)	Very Good (3)	Good (2)	Needs Improvement (1)
Quality of video script				
Acting				
Video content				
Video organization				
Video pacing				
Overall effectiveness				

Activity 1: Phone auction

In this activity, a student presents the features of a mobile phone to the class in an effort to convince other students, who are possible customers, to make competitive bids. It is important for the teacher to model the activity with an inexpensive mobile phone so as to not hurt the feelings of students who also have inexpensive phones. In addition to practicing English constructions necessary to make monetary bids, the exercise helps students learn the English equivalents of a mobile phone's technical features.

Activity 2: Text messaging

An activity to teach patterns of paragraph organization is the *chain reaction*, which can be done with the text messaging function of a mobile phone. The teacher starts the session by texting the first part of an "if clause" sentence (for example, "If I am late for class...") on his or her phone and sending it to one of the students. That student has to complete the sentence (for example, "If I am late for class, my teacher gets angry with me") and forward it to another student who uses the second clause to continue the chain reaction ("If my teacher gets angry with me..."). Usually the activity finishes with a funny statement such as "If I get home late, Bill Gates visits me."

This technique can also be used to compose a *chain story*, where each student adds a new segment of a story to the one he or she receives by text message. Another idea is a simple vocabulary task, where students create a new word that begins with the last letter of a word they receive as a text message.

Activity 3: Reminder function

An out-of-class activity that will help students learn new vocabulary utilizes the *reminder function* of their mobile phones. Students place short, meaningful sentences that contain new vocabulary into the reminder function of their phones, which will prompt them from time to time during the week to practice the word in context.

Conclusion

Project-based tasks are an effective way to create a rich environment for language learning. As students work through the different stages of a project, they must negotiate and use all their language skills to reach the end goal.

There are many projects to select from, and a drama activity is one of the best. Introducing drama projects into the classroom is highly recommended because they are inherently interesting and motivating, and they offer great potential for student interaction and practice with authentic communicative language functions. Like any speaking or acting project, drama activities face challenges, including performance anxiety and classes that are too large. These problems can be lessened when teachers allow students to do video-based mobile phone projects, working independently outside of class, where time is more flexible and students are free from the anxiety of speaking or acting in front of an audience.

References

- Arditto, N. 2006. Educational conference: Using drama in the EFL classroom. London: British Council. www.britishcouncil.org/elt-conference-06-paper-using_drama-nelsonarditto.doc.
- Armstrong T. 2000. *Multiple intelligences in the classroom*. 2nd ed. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Brown, H. D. 1994. *Principles of language learning and teaching*. 3rd ed. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Dörnyei, Z. 2005. *The psychology of the language learner: Individual differences in second language acquisition*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Ellis, R. 1994. *The study of second language acquisition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gill, C. S. 1996. Using drama techniques to encourage oral interaction. *The English Teacher* 25 (October): 72–86. www.melta.org.my/ET/1996/main6.html.
- Harmer, J. 2001. *The practice of English language teaching*. 3rd ed. Harlow, England: Longman.
- . 2007. *The practice of English language teaching*. 4th ed. Harlow, England: Longman.
- Hyacinth, G. 1990. Using drama techniques in language teaching. Washington, DC: Education Resources Information Center. ERIC Database ED366197.
- Hymes, D. H. 1971. *On communicative competence*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Krashen, S. D. 1982. *Principles and practice in second language acquisition*. Oxford: Pergamon.
- Miccoli, L. 2003. English through drama for oral skills development. *ELT Journal* 57 (2): 122–29.
- Millrood, R. 2001. *Modular course in ELT methodology*. Moscow: Drofa.
- Richards, J. 1985. Conversational competence through role play activities. *RELC Journal* 16 (1): 82–100.

Richards, J. C., and T. S. Rodgers. 2001. *Approaches and methods in language teaching*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Robinson, P. 2002, ed. *Individual differences and instructed language learning*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Royka, J. G. 2002. Overcoming the fear of using drama in English language teaching. *Internet TESL Journal* 8 (6). <http://iteslj.org/Articles/Royka-Drama.html>.

Senemoğlu, N. 2005. *Development and learning*. Ankara, Turkey: Gazi Kitabevi.

Skehan. 1998. Task-based instruction. *Annual review of applied linguistics* 18: 268–86.

Turkish Ministry of Education. 2007. Reward and discipline in high schools: Regulation 26408. Ankara, Turkey: Turkish Ministry of Education.

SÜLEYMAN NİHAT ŞAD is an English instructor in the ELT department and a PhD student in Instruction and Curriculum at İnönü University in Malatya, Turkey. He has been teaching English to different age groups in various institutions for about eight years.

ANSWERS TO *THE LIGHTER SIDE* CHICAGO WORD TRAIN

1. fountain, 2. newspaper, 3. rail, 4. lake, 5. eat, 6. tower, 7. river, 8. road, 9. damp, 10. pizza, 11. aquarium, 12. museum, 13. music, 14. clip, 15. pier, 16. roof, 17. food, 18. dance, 19. east, 20. trail, 21. loop, 22. power, 23. row, 24. windy

VoIM-Mediated Cooperative Tasks for...

(continued from page 33)

Appendix Website Resources for VoIM-Mediated Cooperative Tasks

VoIM-Mediated Cooperative Tasks for English Language Learners • George M. Chinnery

VoIM Clients	
Google Talk	www.google.com/talk
Skype	http://skype.com
Yahoo Messenger	http://messenger.yahoo.com
Windows Live Messenger	http://messenger.live.com
Alternative Chat Clients	
Gizmo	http://gizmoproject.com
Pidgin	www.pidgin.im
Vyew	http://vyew.com
Online Video Clips	
Movies.com	http://movies.go.com
YouTube	www.youtube.com
Movie / TV Scripts	
Drew's Script-O-Rama	www.script-o-rama.com
SimplyScripts	www.simplyscripts.com
Text-to-Speech Programs	
AT&T Labs	www.research.att.com/~ttsweb/tts/demo.php
IBM Research	www.research.ibm.com/tts/coredemo.shtml
Audiovisual Media Search Engines	
EveryZing	www.everyzing.com
Pluggd	www.pluggd.com
Podscope	www.podscope.com