

THE INTEGRATION OF TELEVISION COMMERCIALS IN HIGHER LEARNING INSTITUTION ESL CLASSROOMS

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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on a study that examines the connection between language skills development and television commercial in higher learning institution. It has been a concern on how electronic media can really provide any potential impacts on language development. As electronic media is deemed essential in students' lifestyle these days, particularly students of higher learning institution, the integration of television commercials in English as a second language (ESL) classrooms is capable in engaging students' interests towards their language learning process. Television commercial, which is a part of electronic media, provides greater opportunities for meaningful and authentic language use that are available in the classroom (Richards, 2015). In addition, television commercial also challenges students' critical thinking skills, knowledge development and cultural point of views. Hence, since television commercial combines several 'languages' in communicating with the viewers such as visual images, audio and written language (Buckingham, 2003), it is feasible to be adapted in ESL classrooms. This paper also explores language instructors' predicaments through questionnaire in implementing television commercial as an effective teaching material.

Keywords: ESL, linguistic components, electronic media

Introduction

The teaching of English as a second language can be quite a challenge to teachers especially when the students have very low proficiency level. It is also a challenge to students in finding motivation to keep on improving their language skills as some have yet to see the significance of the international language since they are not truly exposed to the real world. The Star Online journalist, Yuen (2015) reported a statement made by The Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF) executive director where he lamented the difficulties faced by employers these days in hiring fresh graduates who are well-versed in English. The same article also stated that this situation may impede Malaysia's economic development since companies have no choice but to employ foreign talents instead. Another renowned Malaysian newspaper, The News Straits Times Online, accounted the same issue where more than 400, 000 graduates were unemployed mostly because of poor command of English (Hussaini, 2016).

Universities and colleges language teachers are usually equipped with a set of designed materials or textbooks as a guide to teaching and learning process in classroom. While these materials are helpful in guiding the lesson, it is undeniable that teachers still need to prepare additional materials to suit the students' needs. Most textbooks or guidebooks are too rigid where they obstruct both teachers' and students' creativity. In this era of modern technology, textbooks alone are insufficient to create a lesson plan that develops students' language and critical thinking skills as well as a way to motivate students in using the language. Of course, there are a lot of websites that offer additional practice for students but for institutions where classrooms are without the necessities such as computer and audio speaker for every student, teachers will not be able to employ it in classrooms.

Hence, teachers will find the need to look for materials that can promote students' language and critical thinking skills which at the same time motivate students to participate in the activity as well as the materials being authentic that students are able to see it relevant to their learning needs. Gebhard (1996) mentioned in his study that there are unlimited sources for teaching materials. Nevertheless, the challenge faced by teachers is to opt for materials that can capture the interest and stimulate students' imagination so that they become more motivated to learn (Oura, 2001).

This study examines how television (TV) commercials can be a helpful and practical teaching and learning materials in ESL classrooms. Students these days are very much attached to the electronic media and TV commercial as a part of this media provides greater opportunities for students to use the language in a more meaningful way (Richards, 2015). TV commercials provide a number of benefits to teachers as. One of them is the duration of the TV commercials where it is usually between 30 to 50 seconds, which is ideal for language learners (Erkaya, 2015). This brevity makes it easier to be conducted even in a short period of lessons and teachers will be able to sustain students' attention, unlike movies or TV shows. The short length also makes it easier for teachers to select, manipulate and prepare the lesson (Tuzi et. al., 2008). Most importantly, TV commercials are catchy and designed to be entertaining, as mentioned in a study by Smith and Rawley (1997). It is crucial to be able to grasp students' interest in learning the language as it will also be a motivation for them to improve themselves and be confident to apply it outside the classroom. When TV commercials are used in lesson, language learners would gain more confidence when they deal directly with authentic materials in classroom (Taher & Tam, 2012).

Teachers may wonder how to be able keep up with the preparation of lessons that have to incorporate all main language skills and at the same time manage to capture students' interest. These days, students' attention span is getting shorter because they are attuned more to technologies than people (Goleman, 2013) and this is the real challenge for teachers. Imagine preparing a traditional lesson plan for hours not knowing students have different interests these days. It can be frustrating and physically and mentally tired. TV commercials are able to not only seize students' attention but at the same time teachers also benefit from it as there is less preparation. Classrooms that integrate TV commercials also explore critical thinking skills, knowledge development and cultural point of views. In short, TV commercials generate excitement to students when it is used as an instructional medium (Intajuck, 2004).

There are many studies on the impacts of TC commercials on students' listening and aural skills. Bieberly (2013) points out TV commercials can be used to teach syntax, phonology and morphology, as well as pronunciation, intonation and emphasis. Of course there are the usual listening exercises in the form of audio CD and books but these may be too rigid and students are not able to apply it in reality. In addition, the pace of the audio texts can be too slow that it is deemed unnatural in real spoken language. It may also be too rapid that students cannot cope with the audio texts as they also need to spot the answers needed to the questions in the books (Brinton & Gaskill, 1978). Nevertheless, since most TV commercials use native speakers, certain words may not be understood by ESL students but they can identify the main theme and the important points (Intajuck, 2004). Teachers can start a listening lesson by preparing basic questions related to the TV commercials before the students get the chance to view them. This allows students to think and guess critically of what to expect from the TV commercials. Teachers can also include necessary keywords for the students to listen to in improving their pronunciation and intonation skills. Davis (1997) and Lee (1994) as mentioned by Tuzi et. Al. (2008) in his study, have found in their studies where TV commercials help to improve students' listening skills and boost their motivation to learn. The visual clues would help them to understand the linguistic meanings in the TV commercials.

Another language skill that can be developed through TV commercials is speaking, mainly persuasive speech. Teachers can begin with a simple question asked verbally on the main theme or the intended meaning of the TV commercials. This will lead to a discussion which allows more students to take part and share their viewpoints. In addition, students can learn more on body language, proxemics, intonation and pronunciation through the visual contents provided in the TV commercials (Bieberly, 2013). In the meantime, discussion also permits critical thinking skills whereby the analysis of the TV commercials can be a form of self expression. Students can critically analyze the TV commercials as commercial makers always try to manipulate or convince the audience to purchase their products or services (Tuzi et. al., 2008). This activity can then lead to persuasive speech practice or "pitch game" where students have to persuade their classmates to "purchase" their product or services after they have viewed the TV commercials. It is an activity that students will enjoy as they have to be creative in delivering their speech by using different tones and expressive body language. In short, TV commercials expose students to true-life language so they can demonstrate it and are able to handle real-world inputs successfully (Begum, 2014) especially to prepare them for their job interviews and career opportunities.

On top of listening and speaking skills, the use of TV commercials in classrooms can offer a progress in students' reading and writing skills since it also increases the target language input (Flynn, 1998) where students can use any new terminologies found from TV commercials in their essay writing. Teachers can also ask students to explain their viewpoints in a form of a paragraph or produce a new set of dialogues or tagline based on the TV commercials that have been viewed. This, at the same time, enhances their critical thinking skills and also their creativity to create interesting dialogues or taglines. Thus, TV commercials are capable to reinforce and test students' English vocabulary and knowledge of grammar structures (Intajuck, 2002). Based on the TV commercials viewed, teachers can prepare worksheets of comprehension questions using difficult and unusual vocabulary and grammar. This will initiate students to be more inquisitive and active in language learning as well as utilizing their critical thinking skills. The next chapters will further explore language teachers' experience and perceptions on the use of TV commercials in the classrooms as well as the techniques used in liaison with language skills and TV commercials.

METHODOLOGY

In order to investigate how widely TV commercials have been used in ESL classrooms, a small scale survey was done involving ten language teachers from a public university in Melaka. All participants have at least 3 years teaching experience in tertiary level. This study will be a groundwork for a future research, hence the small number of participants. It is also to view the participants' awareness on TV commercials integration in ESL classrooms.

The survey consisted of eight statements or questions and data collection took one week.

Items	Answer Type
1. I am fully aware of what television commercial (TVC) is.	Yes No
2. Three (3) of my favourite TVCs are:	<i>Participants are required to provide the response.</i>
3. I find the above TVCs interesting or entertaining because of...	The setting of the TVC. The plot of the TVC. The brand it carries. The models in the TVC.
4. As I find it interesting, I integrate TVC in my ESL classrooms.	Yes No
5. (If 'YES' in Q4) These are the ways I integrate TVC in my ESL classrooms (<i>may tick more than 1 response</i>)	Students re-act the TVC. Students write a new set of dialogues or taglines.

	Ask students a set of questions in relation to the TVC. Hold a group discussion on the aspects of the TVC. Students have to persuade classmates to purchase the products marketed in the TVC. Students write an essay entry on the message behind the TVC.
6. (If 'NO' in Q4) I do not use utilise TVC in my classroom because... (may tick more than 1 response)	It is time consuming. Students have low proficiency level. Internet connection is unavailable in classrooms. I do not see it as an effective method in my classrooms.
7. Which language skill is affected most by TVC as a teaching and learning material?	Listening skills. Speaking skills. Writing skills. Reading skills. Grammar knowledge.
8. I personally think TVC is effective as a teaching and learning material and will apply it in my ESL classrooms.	Yes No Maybe

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The data analysis has found that all participants were aware of what TV commercial is. This was an expected result as TV commercials have become more famous these days with their creative contents. Participants were then asked to list their three favourite TV commercials and four out of nine participants included Petronas in their list. Most of the brands mentioned such as MAS, Maggi, Gardenia, Milo and Shell demonstrate family and friends relationships in their TV commercials and it was believed this type of commercials affect participants' emotions. As Smith and Rawley (1997) illustrated where commercial is designed to have an effect on viewers since the visual and musical reinforcement is usually strong and lasting. This was associated with the first item where every participant was aware of the existence of TV commercials.

In the third question, participants were asked of the criteria of the TV commercials that they found interesting and entertaining. Majority of the participants chose the plot (80%) while 20% selected the brand carried by the TV commercials. This has shown that TV commercials have the appealing factors where viewers are able to relate to the plot, similar to TV dramas and movies. TV commercials these days are getting more creative where they would highlight cultural elements and values to be adapted in ones' daily life. In fact, viewers often have the slogan or tune of the TV commercials rolling around their heads even hours after TV has been turned off (Smith & Rawley, 1997).

Next, the participants were required to respond on whether they have integrated TV commercials in their ESL classrooms since all of them agreed that TV commercials were interesting and entertaining. Even though every participant found the subject matter appealing, only 60% of the participants used TV commercials in their classrooms. These participants were then asked of the ways they integrated TV commercials in classrooms in the next question which allowed them to pick more than one choice of out six alternatives. The third and fifth options were individually picked for five times where they would ask TV commercials related questions to the students and conduct a persuasion speech session where the speaker has to persuade his or her classmates to purchase the products marketed in the TV commercials, respectively. Both of these activities do not only test students' comprehension and speaking skills but also critical thinking skills as the questions to be imposed can be literally on every aspect of the TV commercials, from the plot and brand to the background music and dialogues. The fourth option which was on holding a group discussion was chosen for four times by the participants. The first and second options which were students to re-act the scenes in TV commercials and write a new set of dialogues or taglines, respectively, had two votes each. Only one participant chose the sixth option which was to make students write an essay on the message delivered by the TV commercials.

Meanwhile, 40% of participants who opted for a 'No' for the fourth item in the survey had to select the possible reasons on not utilising TV commercials as a teaching aid in their classrooms. The fourth option had three votes which was that they did not see TV commercials as an effective teaching material while the third option was voted once, in related to the unavailability of the Internet connection in the classroom. On the other hand, the first and second options had zero votes from the participants. It is believed that through sharing session between teachers may allow them to uncover the benefits of using TV commercials in ESL classrooms.

In the seventh question, participants were asked to decide the language skills that were most affected by the use of TV commercials as a teaching and learning materials. As in the last two questions, participants were allowed to go for more than one choice. Listening skill was voted nine times while speaking and reading skills were voted six and two times, respectively. Writing skill and grammar knowledge were each voted once. As in a number of studies (Davis, 1997; Lee, 1994 as mentioned by Tuzi et al, 2008) students who are exposed to TV commercials have shown improvement on their listening skills and also their motivation to learn. Despite the diverse results, this has proven on the capabilities of TV commercial as teaching and learning material as it provides an extension of classroom activities that can be arranged.

Finally, 50% of the participants agreed that TV commercial was effective and would integrate it in their ESL classrooms while 40% decided on a maybe. Only one participant would not be employing it as a teaching and learning material. Indeed when it comes to classroom activities, there are many elements to be taken into considerations such as students' proficiency level, interest, time provided for one lesson and not forgetting teachers' workloads. Nevertheless, TV commercial has already been

used widely in language classrooms, thus, teachers may perhaps make attempts to adopt it in classrooms as an alternative to the traditional method such as the use of textbooks.

CONCLUSION

It can be observed from the findings that TV commercials do have the potential to be an excellent a teaching and learning material in ESL classrooms. The main concern, other than the availability of Internet connection, is the awareness of the capabilities that TV commercials can provide to both teachers and students. They are authentic and in this age of technology, students are more visually attracted to mass media technologies (Taher & Tam, 2012). Since TV commercials are usually current, students will be able to become accustomed to the linguistic features of the TV commercials and associate with the language in the real world.

Pedagogically, TV commercials enable teachers to incorporate all language skills in their lesson when the suitable ones are used because some commercials may only be visual, if not audiovisual. Even so, along with students' creativity and critical thinking skills, teachers can instruct them to write a dialogue, tagline or an essay in relation to the visual TV commercials which will also enhance their writing skills and grammar and vocabulary knowledge. In addition, incorporating TV commercials and persuasive speech shapes students to be more competent in real world communication. The element of persuasion found in TV commercials can be practiced in situations where they need to persuade or convince someone in their real life (Begum, 2014).

In short, TV commercials can provide numerous language learning opportunities in ESL classrooms. It is easily accessible, free and authentic materials which not only help students linguistically but also their critical thinking skills. Students of low proficiency level will also be motivated to learn and use the target language outside classrooms since they are able to relate to the TV commercials. Additionally, teachers can organize a variety of learning activities just by using one TV commercial as there are many elements to be discovered. As stated by Flores (2005), in this evolving and dynamic language world, teachers need to maintain their course work to be current and also culturally relevant, which can easily be recognized in any TV commercials.

Finally, in relation to research limitations, there should be a greater number of participants involved for future research. This is to strengthen the findings and at the same time establish the awareness on the advantages of TV commercial as a teaching and learning material in ESL classrooms.

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