

EFL STUDENTS USE OF TECHNOLOGY IN THE PRESENTATIONS

Bahire Efe Özad & Ülfet Kutoğlu

ABSTRACT

English for Mass Communication is a course offered by the Faculty of Communication and Media Studies to the students studying at the Departments of Journalism, Radio, Television and Film, and Public Relations and Advertising in their sophomore year. Students taking this course are required to make a presentation at the end of the semester. In their presentations, the students are required to use some visual aids like posters, VCD, or power point. This study explores the ideas and feelings of the students who show preference towards using technology in order to enrich their presentations.

Key Words: ESL, Project work, Affordances, Effectivity, Technology in the classroom, Communication Education, TAPE Analysis, Two-Step Reading (Denotation and Connotation)

In the late twentieth century, parallel to the rapid developments in new technologies, particularly communication technologies, some characteristics of traditional education started to change. Today, teachers, through the use of multimedia technologies that include texts, graphics, sound, pictures etc., are seeking to provide richer atmosphere for their students. In other words, technology offers teachers educational communication technologies. One of these is the video which is one of the technologies that brings material to life, enhancing students' abilities to remember and understand what they see and hear. Until recently, teachers have just used videos primarily as a visual tool to demonstrate events or concepts. Currently, computers offer more than pictures, sound and animation; they enable students to interact, get feedback synchronously, and to improve their creativity.

In addition to supporting the teacher by enriching the classroom teaching/learning situation, some products of technology, such as the internet stand as the independent education provider which promotes independent learning. As a result, in the information age, students need to learn how to operate technological products. What is more, they need to discover alternative ways of interpreting and using new technological tools.

The present paper explores the use of technology in a course where the technology is not the main emphasis of the course. Before the English for Mass Communication course, in the freshman year, the research participants took two computer courses: Computer Literacy and Computer Mediated Communications. In these two courses, they were introduced to the basic concepts and skills of computer literacy and the role of technological tools in communication.

Ryder (1996:1) based on James Gibson's *model of affordances* defines *affordance* and *effectivity* in relation to computer literacy. Ryder (1996) suggests that the term *affordance* describes a potential for action, the perceived capacity of an object to enable the assertive will of the actor. Ryder cites Gibson (1977), according to whom *affordances* are:

“The action possibilities posed by objects in the real world. There are many objects in our environment. Some we ignore, some we adapt to, and some we appropriate for our assertive will. It is the objects in this last category that fall under the definition of affordances. Certain objects afford opportunities for action. An affordance is a value-rich ecological object that is understood by direct perception. Perception informs individual affordances. Action transforms into effectiveness which extend human capabilities ... Our bodies are affordances. The eyes afford perception, the ears listening, the hands manipulation, the tongue and vocal chords afford utterances. ... Natural affordances emerge into effectiveness through the use in conscious activity. In other words, first we are aware, and then become unconscious about using something. Then, affordance becomes effectivity” (Ryder 1996:1, 2).

Technology media are affordances to the extent that they promise extended human capabilities of seeing, hearing and uttering. In other words, tools are affordances to the extent they offer extended capabilities for manipulating things in the environment.

In relation to this study, the technological literacy the students obtained from the computer courses they took in the previous year represents their affordances. The students convert affordance into effectivity when they use the technology while doing their presentations. English language the student obtained from their previous education represents another affordance. Though presentations, student's affordances are extended into effectivity.

This study sets out to explore whether the students feel confident and willing about using the technology when they are engaged in another activity. With this respect, we would like to explore the educational technology in relation to the affordances of the sophomore year students studying at the Faculty of Communication and Media Studies.

Context of the Study

After the English Preparatory School, three English courses are provided at the Faculty of Communication and Media Studies. Two of these courses are offered by the School of Foreign Languages and one of them by the Faculty of Communication and Media Studies. English for Mass Communication (COM 233) is the last course provided by the Faculty of Communication and Media Studies in order to improve students' English competence and to help them to understand their departmental courses better. English for Mass Communication is an intensive writing, reading and speaking course which aims at focusing on the specialized language of mass communication studies. Incorporating various texts and readings from the Faculty curriculum are used to familiarize the students with the language used in the field of Journalism, Public Relations and Advertising and Radio, Television and Film. Students are expected to practice English in all aspects of media: print, sound, and moving image. Step by step, each section in the course pack shows students how language, sound and images are combined to make media texts, how media texts are put together, to attract a particular audience and how they can be broken down for easy analysis.

The course material consists of two English For Specific Purposes (ESP) books. One of them is called *Mixed Media* by Barrie Day; the other one is called *Marketing* by Maggie-Jo St. John. The aim of using this material is to help students to improve their skills in media literacy over the range of related texts such as printed and moving image. The material aims to build up the vocabulary about the media texts and to study these texts by using the TAPE model and two-step reading.

The TAPE model is a basic tool for examining any media text. Students analyse the text in terms of type of text, the target audience which the text is intended, the purpose and how effective do the readers consider the text would be. Two-step reading is another tool of examining media texts in depth. Two-step reading is based on the examination of the different signs that make up the media text (denotation), and the consideration of the meanings and the effects that these signs have (connotation).

Moreover, students are expected to apply these models to their own work. They prepare projects and present them. 20% of the course assessment has been allocated to the presentation of a project prepared by the students. 15% of the presentation has been allocated to their skills in presentation and 5% to the written report. At the end of the academic semester, these presentations are presented to the class either individually or as a group work. Each group contains maximum two students and the duration is approximately 10-15 minutes for each student. The topics of these presentations are chosen from the students educational background and they are supposed to use TAPE analysis and Two-step reading. Using these models and subject related topics motivate the audience more. Hence, the audience contributes to the presentations by asking some questions related to the topic. The presenters are free to use visual aids or not in presenting their projects. It should be emphasized that the use of technology in the students' presentations was not guided by their teachers but completely on voluntary basis. Yet, it could be observed that the ones who use visual aids get more attention from the class and additionally their classmates ask more questions to them or give more feedback concerning their presentations.

Data Collection Techniques

Data have been collected through presentation reports filled in by the researchers, classroom observations and semi-structured interviews. Presentation reports were filled in by the teachers while evaluating the students' performance. Observation notes were also taken during the student presentations. Semi-structured interviews were given to the students three months after the course.

Analysis and Findings

This section covers the analysis of presentation reports, classroom observations and semi-structured interviews. In the 2002-2003 Fall semester, 60 students made presentations as a part of the assessment of COM 233 Course. Out of these 60 students, 40 (70%) were males and 20 (30%) were females. From these students, 33% used no visuals, 20% used posters, 27% used OHP and 20% used computer. From the students who did not use any visuals, 14 of them were males and 6 of them were females. 35% of the males did not use any visuals and 30% of the females do not use any visuals.

The percentage of the females who did not use any visuals was less than the percentage of the males. This suggests that when compared to males, females use more visual aids in general. The main reason for this outcome could be the fact that mostly the females are shy and they would like the visual tools to get the attention of the audience to

the tools rather than themselves. In the classroom observations, it has been observed that the males are mostly more confident in presenting a paper in front of the class.

The students who used visuals in their presentations fall into three categories: the students who used posters, those who used OHP, and the ones who used computers. 25 % of the males and 15 % of the females used posters. 20% of the males and 40% of the females used OHP. 20% of the males and 15% of the females used computer in their presentations. In other words, more male students show preference towards using the technological devices more than female students. What is more, the male students prefer to use computers which are the most advanced tool of technology and they feel more confident in using this tool. 47% of the males and 40 % of the female students used computers. From the interviews, it is concluded that the males learn to use computers at an earlier age compared to the females. This could be the reason for their confidence in using this technological tool in the classrooms. It has also been observed that male students feel more confident while using the technology.

As we mentioned above, some of the students who preferred to use technology in their presentations were given an interview. The percentage of the female participants is 40% and the percentage of the male participants is 60%. 8% of the students were 18 & 19 years old and the rest was between 20 and 24 years old. One student did not answer this question.

Out of the 15 male participants, 53% used OHP, 13% used computer, 27% used computer and OHP, 7% used computer and projector. Out of the 10 female participants 30% used computer, 30% used projector, 20% used OHP, 10% used OHP & DVD, 10% used computer and OHP. In the first question, the participants were asked whether they used technology while doing their presentations. 100% of the participants replied 'yes' for the interview. The research participants were chosen among the students who used technology in their presentations.

In the second question, the students were asked which tool of technology they used in their presentations. It seems that the majority of the presenters preferred to use OHP as a tool of technology in order to improve their presentations. Some students mentioned that they had shown preference towards using OHP because it is easy to use. 20% of the participants used computers only, 40% used merely OHP, 12% used projector only, 20% used both computers and OHP, 4% used both OHP and DVD, 4% used computers and projector.

The third question was about the age at which they started to use technology. 12% mentioned that they started to use technology in the primary school, 40% in high school, 44% at the university. 4% did not answer this question. 12 % of the participants who confirmed that they learned to use the computer in the primary school were all males.

The fourth question was related to the location where (at home, high school, private course, university or elsewhere) the students learned to use the technology they used for their presentations. 40% said that they learned to use it at the high school, 40% at the university, 12% at home, 4% in the primary school and 4% from the father. Although from the father does not indicate the place, it could be interpreted as "at home". This raises the percentage of the participants who learned to use the technology at home to 16%.

Question five asked the students whether they used this technological aid elsewhere prior to this presentation. 72% said 'yes' and 28% said 'no'. Out of the 72% who said 'yes', 40% mentioned that they used it for the presentation they made for one of the English courses (EFL 109, of EFL 110) they took prior to English for Mass Communication. 20% mentioned that they used technology in the presentations they made for the Public Relations and Advertising Department's courses; 8% mentioned that, in addition to English courses, they also used technology in Com 101 course (Introduction to Communication Studies). 4% mentioned that they used technology in Computer Mediated Communication course.

In question six, the students were asked why they chose to use this particular tool in their presentations. 64% mentioned to make the presentation topic more understandable and it was easier to express themselves, 20% said that using this tool would make the presentation more effective and convenient, 12% pointed out that it was easy to use this tool, 4% did not answer the question.

In the question seven, we asked the students what they were hoping to achieve or what sort of contributions they were expecting from this technological tool for their presentations. 52% stated that they were hoping to make eye-catching presentation, it was easier to make presentation, and it attracted the attention of the audience to the visual tool and the presenter felt more comfortable during the presentation. 12% was hoping to make more effective presentations, 8% to get a better grade, 4% to have experience with the technological tools, 4% to enrich their presentations. Unfortunately, 20% did not answer the question.

Question eight was about how they felt about their presentations; whether they felt satisfied or not. 64% felt satisfied, 28% were more than satisfied, 8% were almost satisfied about their presentations. 96% felt satisfied, 4% not satisfied. 88% mentioned that the audience was satisfied, 8% had no idea about the audience cause their peer students did not listen, 4% mentioned that the audience was not satisfied.

Question nine asked whether this technological tool made the contribution they were hoping. 84% said that using this technological tool made the contribution they were hoping. 12% did not answer. 4% said yes but complained that the internet was slow.

In question ten, we asked whether the students had preferred their COM 233 teachers guided them to use technology effectively. 64% said 'yes', 12% 'no'. 4% pointed out that it depended on the students. The student himself/herself had to decide because it was his/her own presentation. 4% of did not answer the question.

Conclusion

In today's world, technology promises dramatic changes in the way we learn and teach, what is more, the way we interact as a society. The essence of technology is considered to be *doing* rather than *knowing*. Indeed, Luehrmann (1981) states that "computer literacy is doing, not 'knowing about'". Since the essence of technology is doing rather than knowing, it is suggested that man should be addressed as *Homo faber* (the maker) rather than *homo sapiens* (Medgeway 1992:69).

In this study, we tried to explore the reasons why the students prefer to use technology in an optional situation where they were not obliged to. The results suggest that: The students who participated in the study showed preference towards using the OHP more than other technological devices. They were not taught how to use the OHP or VCD at school, yet they used them merely as a result of imitating their teachers. This is very important because it draws our attention to the fact that in the class not only what the teacher teaches but also what he/she does is learnt. Hence, it could be said that the more a teacher uses the technological tools in the class, the more his/her students will use technology in their presentations.

Almost all of the students were satisfied with their presentations. Since the majority of them used technology in the class, it could be said that using technology in the presentations make them feel confident and relaxed. The females feel more confident while using the OHP and the males while using the computers. The presenters thought that the audience also felt satisfied. This makes them positive about their presentations.

Most of the students pointed out that they had preferred their COM 233 teachers help them in their use of technology in addition to their language and presentation skills such as eye-contact, voice quality, presence, body language in their presentations.

In the present study, we investigated the students who preferred to use technology. We suggest that it would be interesting to explore why some students do not prefer to use the technology in their presentations. Is this due to practical reasons or due to inconfidence in using the technology?

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Appendix 1 Question form

Please answer all the questions.

Age:

Sex:

Student number:

This study is related to the presentation you did for your Com 233 course.

Question 1:

Did you use technology while doing your presentation?

Question 2:

Which tool of technology have you used?

Question 3:

When did you learn (at which year\ at what age) to use this technology?

Question 4:

Where (at home\ high school\ private course\ in the university in other courses) did you learn to use this technology?

Question 5:

Did you use this technological tool in another presentation prior to Com 233 course?

In which course? When?

Question 6:

Why did you choose to use this tool?

Question 7:

What were you hoping to achieve\ what sort of contribution were you expecting from this technological tool for your presentation?

Question 8:

How was your presentation?

Were you satisfied?

Were the audience satisfied?

Question 9:

Did this technological tool made the contribution you were hoping?

Question 10:

Would you have preferred that your Com 233 teacher guided you to use the technology effectively?