Using Instructional Technology Tools to Teach Informational Texts in Thailand

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the teaching of English as a Second Language (ESL) to medical personnel (nurses and doctors) in a hospital in Northern Thailand. The study shows that using technological devices like listening and comprehension CDs, tape recorders and the Internet to teach informational texts can help ESL learners overcome some of their learning difficulties. Evidence from the study suggests that such a pedagogical approach not only improves the comprehension of informational texts but also students' mastery levels of spoken and written English. The findings also reveal that such a pedagogical approach exposes students to the various nuances and differences associated with Global English awareness and understanding.

Keywords: Informational Texts, Internet, Pedagogy, Student Learning, Technology Integration, Technology Tools

INTRODUCTION

Some researchers point out the importance of informational texts in the reading class. Informational texts, for instance, help students to acquire new knowledge that influences their opinion about themselves and the world (Mooney, 2003). Information texts are also effective literacy tools because they make the learner realize that all uses of written language occur in specific places and times that are part of the learners' broader societal practices (Alvermann, 2001). Informational texts are important in English as a second Language (ESL) classroom in the sense that they help students create meaning out of their reading by relating the materials under study to other information they had previously acquired (Gabriel & Gabriel, 2010). Integrating informational texts into language and literacy instruction expands students' content knowledge within their areas of study and also encourages the use of sophisticated language (Pentimonti et al., 2010). Therefore, the teaching of informational texts should be at the core of the ESL comprehension curriculum.

Informational texts related to the learner's community and experience have the advantage of helping students generate and decode

words and phrases that are often used in texts unfamiliar to the students (Gabriel & Gabriel, 2010). In addition, informational texts related to the learner's experience and interest build the self-efficiency and engagement for reading and writing which in themselves are central to theories of motivation (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). Informational texts have also unique benefits such as acquiring inferential language and vocabulary, and content area learning (Stone & Twardosz, 2001). Teaching informational texts supports inquiry-based science curricular that simultaneously teach literacy and language skills (Conezio & French, 2002). Motivation is a key factor in the ESL classroom and informational texts have a motivating impact on students and as a result, learners begin to engage in certain reading and vocabulary exercises by themselves. Students who initially show little enthusiasm for texts assigned by their instructors genuinely enjoy informational texts that evolve around the students' favorite topics (Duke, 2004). The importance of informational texts is so vital that instructors are encouraged to create opportunities for students to use informational texts (Duke, 40).

Technology and Informational Texts

Technology in general has enumerable advantages and benefits for the language instructor in the sense that technology is not just an aid for language learning but also an important medium of literacy in its own rights (Shetzer & Warschauer, 2000). The rapid development of new technologies leads to a metamorphosis of the nature of literacy itself; in addition to reading and writing, the current definition of literacy also includes the ability to learn, comprehend and interact with technology in a meaningful way (Coiro, 2003). Every learning context in this era is a multicultural environment and in order to teach to the standards and enhance literacy, technology has to be integrated into the classroom (Lam, 2010). Technology is also a valuable tool in the ESL classroom because

technology makes it easy to accommodate diverse cultures (Lam, 2010). Technological tools such as computer-mediated communication, audio and video streaming help ESL students (Sleeter & Tettegah, 2002).

The Internet is also useful in the ESL classroom because it enables ESL students to communicate and interact directly with native speakers of English (Wood, 2002). The Internet provides learners with the accurate pronunciation, new vocabulary and exposure to Global English or "World English." The use of digital photos from the Internet also serves as a memory link to students' experiences as well as tangible prompts for descriptive language and tools for organizing a sequence of events from an informational text (Labbo, Eakle, & Montero, 2002).

Retelling stories or re-narrating stories based on informational texts is the most effective way to find out if the learners have understood the narrative or material they have read or been exposed to (Brown & Cambourne, 1987; Gambrel, Pfeifer, & Wilson, 1985; Morrow, 1985; Morrow, Gambrel, Kapinus, Koskinen, Marshal & Mitchell, 1986). Retelling of stories and recording them helps students sharpen their listening, speaking and comprehension skills (Rutzel & Cooter, 2007). Furthermore, evidence from research indicates that reading informational texts aloud as well as recording has a positive impact on students' literacy and language development (Mol, Bus, & de Jong, 2009).

The co-existence of informational texts and technology is blatant in this era (Gambrell, 2005). Further, strategies that promote the integration of educational technology into the teaching of informational texts to ESL students should be encouraged. However, research is still at its infancy especially one that focused on the connection between technology and the use of informational texts in the teaching of ESL. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine the teaching of ESL to medical personnel (nurses and doctors) in a hospital in Northern Thailand.

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