

How EFL Teachers Can Use TV News to Boost Listening Comprehension and Speaking Proficiency in Their Classes?

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Abstract: One of the main challenges regarding language teaching and learning is how to improve listening comprehension and speaking proficiency. Accordingly, the present paper aims at helping EFL/ESL teachers as well as learners to know more about the pedagogical values of TV news in order to incorporate TV news stories in an intermediate or advanced level conversation courses. Moreover, the role of the instructor is also explored and teaching suggestions are offered. Finally, an extensive checklist of listening comprehension and speaking proficiency core activities and a demonstration on incorporating them into a lesson plan is also integrated into these materials.

Key words: TV News; Boost; Listening Comprehension; Speaking Proficiency

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INTRODUCTION

Most part of my teaching experience was spent on conversational English classes to beginner, intermediate, and advanced level students at university as well as some language centers. This teaching context was the ideal place to experiment new materials to see which one can best boost listening comprehension and speaking proficiency. I began each term with new students and endless possibilities. I saw each class as an opportunity to explore, review, question and reflect upon my teaching methods. I adapted old materials, introduced new interactive activities and tried to give students more opportunities to use the target language.

TV NEWS AND LANGUAGE LEARNING

Exposure to mass media news, for example, TV and radio news, the pedagogical value of such materials, and the possibility of using TV and radio news at all levels of EFL/ESL settings in order to enhance different language skills have been the focus of so many studies.

In a research conducted by Brinton and Gaskill (1978) and Cauldwell (1996), the effect of listening to TV and radio news on improving EFL students' listening comprehension was studied. Brinton and Gaskill (1978) argued that using TV and radio news utterances as teaching material has proved effective

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on improving listening comprehension of EFL learners having difficulty in dealing with comprehending news utterances. A similar study which focused on using TV news to improve listening proficiency was also conducted by Poon (1992). In addition to the above mentioned studies, Baker (1996) also focused on the pedagogical value of TV news in EFL classes and listening comprehension. According to Baker (1996), TV and radio news can help EFL students improve their listening comprehension.

The use of fast speech such as those of TV and radio news in EFL/ESL classrooms has also been studied by some other scholars. In this regard, Cauldwell (1996) conducted a study aiming at discovering the relationship between direct encounters with fast speech such as TV and radio news and teaching listening to EFL students. Accordingly, students may have some problems coping with fast speech at first. However, EFL students can diminish these problems and improve their listening through great amount of exposure to fast speech. Another short study conducted by Mackenzie (1997) also highlighted the possibility of using TV and radio news reports at all levels of EFL learning. The study rejected the assumption that because the reporters speak too fast, the content is too complex, and the vocabulary is too difficult, TV and radio news cannot be used at lowest levels of EFL situations.

Regarding proficiency and comprehension of television and radio news in a foreign language, a research by Berber (1997) highlighted the point that through enough exposure to these materials, students can easily cope with the comprehension of such materials. Cabaj and Nicolic (2000) also noted that a great amount of exposure to TV and radio news could help students to cope with TV and radio news broadcasts easier. Moreover, through exposure to TV news and radio programs students acquire the knowledge, structures, strategies, and vocabularies they can use in everyday situations.

In the same line, a study was conducted by Bell (2003) focusing on the pedagogical value and informative aspects of TV and radio news broadcasts in EFL settings. He considered background knowledge or content schemata, formal schemata, and linguistic difficulty as three broad categories for selecting any kinds of TV and radio news stories for the EFL classrooms. However, Wetzel et al. (1994), in their study, found that TV news is not always helpful in comprehension.

One more descriptive study on the use of TV news stories to integrate the four skills was not many years ago by Christina (2006) and Joiner (1990). However, the work only focuses on describing some point regarding personal experience of using TV news stories to integrate the four skills in her classes. As the matter of fact the work is not based on any theoretical frame work!

In short, the majority of the aforementioned descriptive and experimental works have been conducted on the pedagogical value and the effect of exposure to TV and radio news genre on promoting different language skills especially listening comprehension but none of them has specifically focused on how EFL teachers can use this source of material in their classes.

THE DESIGN

I decided to use TV news into my classes to spice things up. I soon realized the countless benefits of using this material. I have now been using TV news for the last 4 years and although I cannot declare myself an expert, I believe I have learned how to effectively incorporate it into English as a Foreign Language (EFL) class in Iran. I have researched and gathered information regarding the use of video in the classroom, inquired about their use among colleagues and professors and also went straight to the source to ask the students themselves what they enjoyed and what worked best for them. From what I learned from these sources and my own experiences, I have gathered a guide that describes best my purpose and motivation for using TV news, offers helpful strategies, and presents several types of core activities EFL teachers can use in conjunction with any TV news story.

Some of the reasons an EFL teacher may use TV news in their classroom can be:

1. TV News episodes are **short**; usually lasting 2-3 minutes each. Anything longer than 10 minutes is often difficult for language learners to process and retain.
2. TV News episodes introduce students to material that uses authentic language. This allows the students to have an opportunity for rich and varied exposure to English. Using news allows the

teacher to bring the voices of other English speakers into the classroom. This helps students **build confidence through the practice of listening to native speakers.**

3. TV News episodes are an excellent example of language in context and become a model for student production.
4. TV News episodes introduce the students to **new vocabulary and expressions** set in a natural context.
5. TV News episodes can be used to **generate ideas or topics to discuss in class.**
6. TV News episodes **extend the classroom and provide a window into the target culture.** Because language and culture are interconnected, understanding the social context of language is extremely important. This can be used as a vehicle for teaching students how to communicate more effectively.
7. TV News episodes give **visual support** for students (facial expressions, gestures, and context) that help learners interpret the language being heard.
8. TV News episodes provide a natural **integration of listening comprehension with speaking proficiency.**

After using and experimenting with TV news in the classroom, the results clearly show the numerous benefits they hold. In addition to assisting teachers as they introduce new language, TV news stories engage the students and support their language learning process.

TV NEWS RESOURCES

The easiest TV news broadcasts to access are Press TV and IRINN in Iran. Once you have established which TV news broadcast you have access to, directly record the program onto a video cassette tape. Each week watch the selection of news stories, choose which one you feel is appropriate for your students, and then develop activities to coincide with the broadcast.

TV NEWS SELECTION CRITERIA AND VIEWING REMINDERS

1. Choose stories that are relevant to students' lives.
2. Use various broadcasts that provide exposure to various accents and cultures.
3. Choose stories that are proficiency-level appropriate; political and science related stories are often too difficult for many students to understand.
4. Use stories that lend themselves to many learning activities and the integration of the four skills.
5. Cue the video ahead of time.
6. Copy the news story 3-5 times, if possible, so there is no need to rewind.

HELPFUL TEACHING TIPS

The following are several teaching tips that will help make teaching TV news stories easier and more enjoyable for both the teacher and the students.

1. Offer students a choice in the news content you show in class. Take an inventory of their interests and then bring in news stories that reflect those interests.

2. Let students initiate in private-practice before asking them to respond to your questions regarding the news story.
3. Prepare extension activities to fill the space between the first and last students' finishing an activity. Such activities allow the teacher options without punishing students for finishing assignments or group activities early. Some examples could include a crossword puzzle, a game, or role play that recycles the same language the students have previously studied. It is important for teachers to get feedback from students regarding their comfort level on the various four skills assignments, processes, and procedures used in conjunction with the news stories.
4. Ask your students regularly about their feelings about activities in class. You could give them a formal feedback form to fill out or ask them informally to give you a thumbs up or a thumbs down.
5. All four skills activities should include opportunities for students to play an active role in their own learning. When preparing for a task, help students become aware of any relevant strategy, from their own language, that might help them to perform the task successfully. For example, you may want to ask the students to think about positive interpersonal skills in their culture before they interact with or participate in small groups when talking about the news story.
6. Recycle, recycle, recycle! Students need to see and use the language numerous times before it is acquired. Thus, it is essential that teachers reuse and include language taught in previous lessons in their current lesson. Thematic units are a useful method of recycling language in any lesson. If you are teaching a news.

CONCLUSION

I hope that sharing my experience with using TV news in the classroom has given you the support you will need to implement it into your EFL curriculum. Of course the activities and suggestions laid out here have a lot of room for improvement (as a teacher the need for growth always exists), but I hope this "guide" is a useful tool for any EFL teacher who wishes to bring in another perspective and possibly more depth into his/her classroom. Using TV news in the classroom allows teachers to open the classroom door and invite the world in, thus, benefiting the students on many levels.

I also hope that the contents of these chapters help you look at teaching EFL in a whole new light. Try the ideas and suggestions included here, but keep on the path where I left off. Continue to explore better methods of teaching TV news stories and more fruitful ways to serve your students. I, of course, will do the same.

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