

Investigating the Effectiveness of YouTube as a Learning Tool among EFL Students at Baghdad University

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Abstract

YouTube is not just a platform that individuals share, upload, comment on videos; teachers and educators can utilize it to the best maximum so that students can have benefits. This study aims at investigating how active and influential YouTube can be in the educational process and how it is beneficial for language teachers to enhance the skills of students. The study demonstrates different theoretical frameworks that tackle the employment of technology to enhance the learning/teaching process. It relies on the strategies of Berk (2009) for using multimedia media, video clips in particular to develop the abilities of teachers for using technology in classrooms. To achieve the objective of the study, the researchers develop a questionnaire and apply it to fourth-year college students, University of Baghdad, to give evidence and to prove the effectiveness of technology in the academic field. The paper examines classes where computers can be employed, and also shows the challenges that face teachers and educators concerning this application. The researchers conclude that YouTube is an essential tool in classrooms as it attracts the attention of students and develops their mentality and creativity. It also helps cover the materials comprehensively, especially language. YouTube brings the fun element into classes, which thereby meet the interests of students. Such findings have a significant impact on the learning process as the students will find the educational environment more encouraging and exciting. Besides, they find the material presented worth studying, and this way, they would appreciate the efforts exerted in explaining the information. The research intends to be of value to teachers for the use of technology and for students to have a better comprehension of the materials presented.

Keywords: E-learning, social media, YouTube, questionnaire, flipped classroom, EFL college students.

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Introduction

Burgess and Green (2009, p.1) state that “YouTube is a video repository, founded in February 2005 by three former employees of the eCommerce Business PayPal, in which users could upload, publish, and watch videos by streaming.” (Portugal, Arruda & Meneghello, 2018). Users can download, view, and share video clips on a wide variety of content. Such contents include film clips, television shows, music and instructional videos, blogs or video blogs, as well as amateur videos. YouTube has turned as social media when the videos are shared and when comments and other forms of interaction occur on the site (De Witt et al., 2013).

YouTube generates knowledge, mainly; it offers multimedia forms of education. Lindstorm (1994) finds out that the abilities of learners to recall and comprehend improve better when they have a full experience, that is, when they see, hear, and do. The comprehension level of a subject is higher than 75% when they see, hear, and produce materials during instruction, whereas it is 20% for learners who only understand during preparation, and 40% only is among those who see and hear. So, learning through using videos has been demonstrated to be influential in teaching activities by different scholars. Besides, Bunus (2010) and Greenhow and Robelia (2009) have manifested that social media is valid for the learning process. Higher levels of reasoning skills like decision making and problem-solving, and capabilities of communication and collaboration through social media have developed in learners (DeWitt et al., 2013). Such expertise connects to what they are learning in their classrooms. Therefore, it is possible to use social media in instruction. Focusing on the effect of YouTube videos and devise strategies improves knowledge by integrating them to improve the teaching-learning process (Gbolahan, 2017).

The present study investigates how active and influential YouTube can be in the educational process and how it is beneficial to language teachers to enhance skills of students in learning the English language. The research tries to answer the following questions: What is the effect of YouTube videos on students in classrooms? What are the strategies for utilizing YouTube in the educational environment? And what are the challenges of using technology in the developing countries, Iraq in particular? This paper focuses on instructional YouTube videos, not any other application. It reveals the obstacles to its employment in Iraq. The study sample constitutes 100 fourth-grade college students from the department of English, College of Education/Ibn Rushd, University of Baghdad.

Theoretical framework

Rice, Cullen, and Davis (2011) state that employing the Internet has a high impact on the educational process, especially when handling classes. Raja and Nagasubramani (2018) tackle the positive and negative implications of using modern technology in education. They state that positive side of technology is that it offers enhanced Teaching and learning through the use of computers, digital cameras, PowerPoint presentations, etc, which are now important sources that teachers use to assist their learners in understanding lessons quickly. Also, the visual explanation gives students an enjoyable, exciting, and interactive learning setting, so they participate more in the class activities. Globalization is another positive side of technology in that students can meet through videos their counterparts while sitting on their chairs. A website like www.gloviso.com aids students to learn foreign languages online by joining groups of students and their teachers who are from other countries.

For the negative impact of technology, they point out that technology results in declining the skills of writing because of too much usage of chatting and shortcuts available online. Recently, children increasingly depend on digital communication to the extent that they entirely ignore improving their writing skills. The results include the misspelling of different words, misuse of grammar rules, and lack of cursive writing. Another drawback of technology is the growing incidents of cheating by the use of equipments such as graphical calculators, high tech watches, mini cameras. Technology contributes to the lack of focus as students spend their time texting and playing with their cell phones during lectures.

Wu, Hou, Zhu, Zhang, and Peha (2002) investigate the effective use of videos, and offer recommendations, directions, and approaches to achieve the best benefit in education. Bonk (2009) points out that YouTube is an attractive social medium that adds to school in general. Duffy (2008) points out that there is an increasing interest by educators on YouTube for the teaching of foreign languages like English. YouTube offers fun, and it is fast. It is easy to access videos about different cultures in different styles worldwide (Almurashi, 2016).

Berk (2009) concentrates on the role that YouTube clips play in teaching a language in college classrooms. He comes up with 15 strategies for using videos in learning environments. Seilstad (2012) examines using YouTube videos as an innovative method for English language teaching in Morocco. He states that YouTube clips are just a simple way to make the teaching material related and specified. The results display the efficiency of using YouTube videos on achievement of students and personal reflection on their learning progress (Almurashi, 2016).

YouTube has a high potential for improving the learning skills of students. Fathallah (2007) claims that educational videos are educational situations recorded on the world wide web. Such videos involve real elements, and they teach specific goals. Videos on YouTube offer several services like uploading, downloading, watching, and sharing among individuals. Clips on YouTube are available anytime and anywhere, they have a high quality of showing contents, and they offer the potential of repeating, stopping, or completing at any other time. YouTube videos provide multimedia content as they engage visual and verbal material in them thus, they develop many educational skills. YouTube videos encourage group work activities through sharing the videos which add fun and meaning to the learning environment. Thus, YouTube helps to keep the material in the long-term memory (Ebied, Kahouf & Rahman, 2016). Farlinger and Owens (2009) states that technology and the Internet contribute considerably in the social and educational lives of students.

Portugal, Arruda, and Meneghello (2018) state that the central point of teaching and learning on YouTube is 'interest,' but it is different from other planned educational contexts in that both the learner and the 'informal teacher' display their free-choice to enter to the learning situation. Also, the voice-tone and expressions of the 'informal teacher' on the video are like what they teach; otherwise they do not need to do this. Thus, what makes YouTube different from school is that the latter gives choice for neither the teacher nor the learner about the curriculum to be taught or learned. Therefore, YouTube puts all the options concerning what to teach, what to learn,

when, where, how, etc.. The link is that school knowledge is determined previously, i.e., prior; whereas experience from YouTube is free and relies on the what the learner wishes to grasp.

Zahn, Krauskopf, Hesse, and Friedrich (2012) recommend the necessity of developing teacher skills in using technology through a mental frame of mind maps; this way, they can construct educational practices through YouTube. It appears that the employment of YouTube for educational purposes has turned as a priority in the learning process. Lastly, Procopio (2011) concludes that making students familiar with the use of YouTube as a learning tool shows high enthusiasm and interaction (Ebied et al., 2016). The present research attempts to bridge the gap concerning the lack of studies on how to better use technology in classrooms, especially in a country like Iraq, where the use of computers and the Internet is somehow not that easy.

Challenges for YouTube Videos as Educational Innovations

Educational contexts can employ YouTube in teaching; Nevertheless, some authors have concerns about the security and validity of online videos. Kay (2012) maintains that videos involve positive attitudes, management of the learning process, enhancement of reading and study behavior, and the performance of students. Nevertheless, he outlines the disadvantages of using videos in learning. These are less class participation, referring to orthodox teaching, and technical problems. Recommendations made that future studies focus on providing empirical evidence on the influence of online video and new media in the learning process (Gbolahan, 2017).

Bonk (2008) reveals a few pitfalls regarding the technical side of showing a YouTube video. Sometimes, the videos on YouTube takedown without prior notice and restrictions on playing a video in a specific location. Thus, teachers should download these videos for offline playing. Besides, educators should know the policies of using YouTube like copyright and online content protocols because these are complicated, confusing, and hard to understand as they differ from one school board to another (Wilson, 2015).

Some authors find video sharing sites necessary, and YouTube clips are significant for practical, medical and clinical science, education, and research. They point out that videos on YouTube motivate student's participation and compensate for their lack of interest in traditional classrooms. Despite the overt enthusiasm of employing technology for educational purposes, they warn against the potential that social media harms the student's performance. Guo, Kim, and Rubin (2014) provide evidence that is empirical for the students attach to video materials as an addition to the pre-recorded classroom lectures. They examined the time that students spend in watching these videos to the assessment of the production. They recommend a guideline for the suitability of online videos for the producers and the teachers (Gbolahan, 2017).

Several academic institutions use YouTube to upload and share the course material on the Internet. Jafar (2012) mentions that 98% of students use YouTube as a resource of information, and 86% of them confirm that it helps their learning. Thus, the videos were a worthy instructional means. Concurrently, the number of users of innovative media has increased all over the world. The use of this innovation still restrict educational members, whether students or teachers. For instance, in the developing countries, there are challenges for the utility of technology in education. Kremer, Brannen, and Glennerster (2013) mention some of these problems, like diffusion of

technology, supplies of computers, and efficient use of ICT, requiring the availability of equipment and tools, pedagogy issues, accountability, access, and quality. Others state further issues like software licenses, training, maintenance issues, hardware and software costs, and learning material development. Liyanagunawardena, Williams, and Adams (2013) report challenge like low download speeds of Internet connections, language, and computer literacy. Some of the essential issues of educational technology include:

- A lack of understanding of user experiences.
- The problems of limited empirical evidence of the effect of new tools on student performance.
- An absence of the strategies and approaches that best fit using media in the learning process (Gbolahan, 2017).

Ebied et al. (2016) recommend that teachers should train to manage YouTube videos to make the learning process more productive. Also, universities need to activate web sites and share videos on YouTube as a teaching goal. The relationship between teachers and students should establish through an educational channel for the topic and content videos.

Flipped Classroom

It is an innovative way to join technology in classroom learning. Tucker (2012) highlights that a flipped classroom is where the instructional approach replaces the teacher generating videos and lessons where interaction takes place. Now, students follow the instructions at home, and receive them before the time of the class. Thus, the classroom is for working out the problems, and for proposing concepts. It is where interaction takes place collaboratively. Honeycutt and Garret (2014) describe a flipped classroom as an environment for learning in which the activities that conventionally completed as homework, now accomplished in classes during the lesson. This process refers to students watching a video of lectures recorded previous to classroom time. Another definition by Bishop and Verleger (2013) points out that the flipped classroom engages group learning activities in school with immediate computer-based individual instruction outside school (Wilson, 2015).

Flipped classrooms are of different types; some flip an entire class in all activities and lessons, and some flip a partial class with precise subjects and experiences. The applicability of such kinds depends on the preferences of the teacher and the students, and the technological resources available. Herreid and Schiller (2013) argue that flipped classrooms have become more appealing to classroom teachers because of the availability of Internet resources, videos in particular. The researchers concluded that teachers create an introductory video one night before the class and upload it on YouTube for students to watch. The teacher provides students with a set of questions to answer before the quality, and then the teacher uploads another video with more information in the course. It is not necessary that the teacher generates the videos him/herself or shares the content of someone else. Students prefer watching a video to reading the printed material when the teacher demands them to prepare homework. The researchers conclude that flipped classrooms provide a new model of teaching as it contains active instruction. Such classes take students at its center and its content directed to fix real-world problems (Wilson, 2015).

Johnson (2013), in his study, states some of the merits of flipped classrooms using videos for teaching. These include pace in the first place, and students can pause, rewind, or speed up the video as they wish. Flexibility is the second feature in that students can watch the learning videos wherever and whenever they like because these videos are available on the Internet. Lastly, communication is an aspect of attention in that it is videos, not any other Internet sources that allow teachers and students to engage interactively in discussions and activities. The results of that study show 84% of students find flipped classrooms more interactive than a traditional learning environment. It reports that 84% of students watch the assigned videos, and 57% like to view the videos, and 29% are neutral. Such findings indicate that students like to watch videos for educational purposes. Although 70% of students prefer traditional classrooms, there are positive attitudes for this method of teaching (Wilson, 2015).

Johnson (2013) also reveals some drawbacks of flipped classrooms. Some students have difficulty manage pace if they fell behind and keep self-mutilation to the task. There are several distractions for the students in using the Internet and YouTube. Some students find it challenging to initiate questions during the lesson, and others see the videos annoying. The findings of the study unfold that students do less homework in flipped classrooms and that students enjoy and benefit from the videos shared on YouTube. Using YouTube in flipped classrooms has excellent outcomes on the traditional learning process and can be influential and alternative to the current environment of teaching (Wilson, 2015).

Strategies for Using YouTube Videos in Classrooms

Berk (2009) offers twelve generic techniques for using video clips in teaching. First, video clips should provide content and data that is different from the information appropriate for the context. Second, they illustrate different concepts or principles like family relationships, anger management, etc. Third, YouTube videos present alternative viewpoints to develop the ability to reach decisions and convey compelling arguments. Fourth, they apply content to real-world applications for important matters like child abuse, rape, etc.. Fifth, videos serve as a stimulus for learning activities. Playing the video, the teacher can ask students for their reaction in an open discussion, direct them to answer specific questions collaboratively, or ask specific questions about the content presented. Sixth, video clips provide a good or bad application to critique, like inaccurate interpretations offered by the media on different topics. Seventh, the videos can exaggerate a particular point on various issues like personality disorders, diplomacy, and political decision making, etc. Eighth, YouTube clips snap student's attention through inserting sound clips of comedy or inspiring and motivating videos to the class while covering any particular topic. Ninth, videos should be entered into collaborative learning exercises. The teacher can assign examples of practical applications, the students critique the performance and concept, and the video is the motive for the discussion. The students engage in an unforgettable learning experience, and of course, this has various characteristics and several benefits for the educational process. Tenth, YouTube videos should motivate and inspire students through viewing uplifting message videos. A short video clip may make a gigantic difference in their moods, motivation, and attitude, and it takes the pressures they experience away. Eleventh, the teacher can use videos as commercial breaks when students are restless for whatever reason. These breaks charge student's energy and grab their attention back to the presentation of the material. Twelfth, the teacher can also employ videos to signal a return from a class break.

Berk (2009) also provides eight steps for using a video clip in teaching. These are the following:

1. The teacher picks a particular clip to provide the content or illustrate a concept or principle.
2. The teacher prepares specific guidelines for students or discussion questions, so as to have directions on what to see, hear, and search. What is the point of the clip? The teacher makes it clear to the students;
3. The teacher introduces the video briefly to reinforce a purpose;
4. The teacher plays the clip;
5. The teacher stops the clip at any scene to highlight a point or replay clip for a specific in-class exercise;
6. The teacher sets a time for reflection on what was the view;
7. The teacher assigns an active learning activity to interact on specific questions, issues, or concepts in the clip; and
8. The teacher structures a discussion around those questions in a small and large group formats.

Methodology

The researchers of the present study have developed a ten-item questionnaire applied to the fourth-year college students in the department of English, College of Education, Ibn Rushd in the University of Baghdad. Participants respond to each item as 'agree,' 'disagree,' or 'neutral.' The sample is limited to the students of the fourth stage because they have four years of study experience in the college. Also, they have a great time trying to get more understanding of the material presented to them through using the Internet, YouTube in particular. That is to say; they are more aware of the benefits of the technology they gain throughout their years of study. Besides, the researchers expect them to share their experience on how YouTube can affect their future career as teachers. The researchers conducted and applied the questionnaire electronically using the Telegram application. A vote was structured and distributed over a group of such students. This group includes 48 members, but only 26 students responded to the questionnaire. Thus, the study sample considered the 26 male and female students who answered the survey to evaluate the effective use of YouTube in their academic study. The researchers constructed the items of the poll based on the fact that YouTube can be influential for the educational environment and language learning. That is, such things are the most significant ones for the researchers to ask. Besides, they are supported and highlighted by others. The following points show the details and percentages of the questionnaire :

- 1) Learning through YouTube videos is interesting.
- 2) I understand what is presented on YouTube properly.
- 3) The use of YouTube represents a shift from a traditional to a flipped classroom.
- 4) Teachers must use YouTube in the classroom as a learning tool.
- 5) The perfect length of a video should not be more than 15-20 minutes.
- 6) It is preferable to take notes while watching a YouTube video.
- 7) YouTube can take the role of the teacher.
- 8) YouTube videos enhance language skills, especially speaking and listening.
- 9) YouTube videos presented by native speakers are better than those created by teachers.
- 10) YouTube videos are vital in developing grammatical patterns and building vocabulary.

Table 1. *Percentage of the responses to the questionnaire*

No.	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Q1	41%	38%	21%
Q2	43%	36%	21%
Q3	50%	25%	25%
Q4	82%	11%	7%
Q5	50%	25%	25%
Q6	81%	11%	8%
Q7	62%	23%	15%
Q8	88%	8%	4%
Q9	61%	22%	15%
Q10	75%	14%	11%

The researchers have not used a follow-up activity due to a lack of communication with the sample members and the difficulties expected to have students talk about their learning experience during COVID-19 global pandemic.

Discussion

The responses of students to item number one, “Learning through YouTube videos is interesting,” show that 41% of them agree that they enjoy learning through YouTube. It is quite interesting as they have fun experiencing it. About 38% of the participants give a neutral response to the use of videos as being impressive for classes, and 21% do not agree to this. Such difference in percentages indicates that it is still unusual for students to have their academic education done on YouTube. Such findings conform to that of Frdlinger and Owens (2009) in their study, which found that 93% of students feel the YouTube process is fascinating. Also, Almurashi (2016) supports this view through his interviews with language students. He concluded that the majority of his sample members feel happy and satisfied while watching YouTube videos. They like YouTube since it has audio and visual effects.

Concerning item number two, “I understand what is presented on YouTube properly,” the result showed that 43% of students agree that the materials are explained on video adequately, and the students fully comprehend them. Only 36% are neutral to this, and 21% disagree on the probability of gaining a complete understanding of the materials. Again, this conforms to the conclusions of Frdlinger and Owens (2009) that 95% of students report that they understood the content learned from the tutorials uploaded to YouTube.

For item number three, “The use of YouTube represents a shift from a traditional to a flipped classroom,” students' responses show that 50% agree to the change and 25% equally disagree and neutral. The point here is that students are hesitant about whether or not the video should carry the whole task of presenting materials with no instructions from the teacher. Wilson

(2015), in her findings, states that the individuals in her sample confirmed the change that some teachers seem passive in the whole process of teaching while in traditional, their explanation usually accompanies the videos. Both have an impact on students in one way or another.

For item number four, “teachers should use YouTube in the classroom as a learning tool,” 82% of the participants find it a must to employ YouTube videos as a tool for learning. Participants who disagree constitute only 7%, while those who have a neutral reaction are only 11%. The findings of the present study show a considerable interest in using YouTube in the classroom, unlike the results of Frdinger and Owens (2009) that display only 73% of their participants are less interested. In this regard, most the respondents feel they would use the YouTube project in their classroom, while the other respondents state they would not use this methodology. Almurashi (2016) assures that technology can play a crucial role in improving the understanding of students. His results show that learners are eager to have technology like YouTube in the classroom to be more comfortable.

Responses to item number five, “The perfect length of a video should not be more than 15-20 minutes,” show that students agree the appropriate length of the video should be on a scale between 15-20 minutes; they constitute a percentage of 50%. The rest of students divide between 25% are neutral, and 25% do not agree to this time allocation. Relying on the questionnaire, it is not clear whether students have other suggestions to share, yet clearly, this does not work best for them. Such findings conform to the instructions of Berk guideline that the video should be appropriate in length so that students will not get bored.

Item number six, “It is preferable to take notes while watching a YouTube video,” displays that students confirm taking notes while a video is playing. It is that 81% of them do take notes by either pausing or rewinding the video for minutes. Only 8% of them do not take notes, and 11% are being neutral; they sometimes do take notes other times they do not. One more time, this conforms to Berk guideline that students should write down their observations.

Regarding item number seven, “YouTube can take the role of the teacher,” 62% of students agree to the possibility of using videos instead of the teacher in classes. Others at the rate of 15% disagree, and 23% are neutral. Such findings show concordance to Frdinger and Owen (2009) that the professor is a guide on the side; he/she knows the subject material and gives good feedback.

As for item number eight, “YouTube videos enhance language skills especially speaking and listening,” 88% of the students agree that watching videos on YouTube can improve their language skills, speaking and listening in particular. Only 4% of the students do not agree with this; others are neutral 8%. Almurashi (2016) comes with similar rates and some past reviews, that YouTube is a useful tool that can build the knowledge of learners and help them improve their English fluency. Also, watching YouTube videos can help learners communicate and experience events in the videos.

Item number nine, “YouTube videos presented by native speakers are better than those created by teachers,” shows that 63% of students agree that watching YouTube videos of native speakers is more beneficial. Others 15% disagree with this, and 22% are neutral. Again, Almurashi

(2016) finds similar results in that watching official videos in the classroom can make the learning process more enjoyable and meaningful. Official YouTube videos can improve the comprehension of learners and elicit information. Additionally, it allows learners to understand the lesson in an effective and lively way. Also, YouTube videos can present the experience more realistically and comprehensively than traditional teaching methods.

Item number ten, “YouTube videos are vital in developing grammatical patterns and building vocabulary,” displays that 75% of students find YouTube videos significant in improving these two aspects of language. Only 11% do not agree, and 14% are neutral to this. Almurashi (2016) again emphasizes that there is a reasonable number of students who believe that YouTube videos can simplify lessons since it has audio and digital effects and make them more realistic and understandable. In addition, the audio-visual effects featured in YouTube videos can help learners to grasp the hidden meanings of some references and idioms in the English language and sources that are available in the library.

The point of the researchers through this study is to examine how effective YouTube videos can be to the students grasping of the material. The questionnaire items address this and find out the positive feelings and experiences that students have. Thus, these findings should be taken into account when applying technology to classrooms to enhance the teaching-learning process. Stating recommendations and suggestions is of priority to this research as it is a real attempt to lessen the challenges that hinder the Iraqi educational domain. As the results display, students find learning through YouTube interesting, informative, vital in improving language skills, and more flexible in dealing.

Conclusion

Teachers cannot leave YouTube outside the educational process as it offers all the advantages of having more beneficial and exciting teaching experience. YouTube videos should be simultaneously integral and a supplementary part of the learning process. Students find the use of YouTube videos enjoyable. Such videos increase the understanding of the academic materials, and improve the performances of the students. Students take the YouTube videos seriously by students as an educational tool since they are taking notes, and have a proper time length for the videos in their minds. Students have a strong motivation for using YouTube videos in classrooms to the extent that they confirm that it is a MUST. Besides, students do believe that YouTube videos enhance their language skills and aspects, especially that they hold a preference for videos created by native speakers. YouTube videos help students to approach the culture of the language under study through the authentic material presented. Thus, YouTube videos are vital for the educational process, and further studies should focus on improving them to serve more purposes.

Recommendations:

1. The educational system in Iraq must find solutions for the shortcomings of using technology in education.
2. Teachers and educators need to improve their skills in employing technology in the learning process.
3. Teachers need to be careful about what videos they should display to students; videos must be informative, appropriate, inspiring, and exciting.

4. Using YouTube should be taken as a MUST in classrooms as it attracts the attention of the students and meets their interests.
5. Students should be encouraged to use YouTube to improve their English language.

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