



Using Documentary Films in Oral Interpretation Class

What is the Appropriate Length?

Dr. Darcy Soong
Applied English Department
Jin Wen University of Science & Technology
#99, An-Zhong Rd. Xin-Dien District, New Taipei City, Taiwan
E-mail: darcy@just.edu.tw

Received: 09-07- 2012

Accepted: 09-08- 2012

Published: 01-11- 2012

doi:10.7575/ijalel.v.1n.6p.131

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.7575/ijalel.v.1n.6p.131>

Abstract

Documentary films may not be as well-organized as traditional textbooks used in classroom, but their potential as teaching materials is enormous and remains largely unexplored. In an oral interpretation class, normally the aim of using documentary films as teaching materials is to teach language; therefore, the presence of relevant functions and structures of the language should be the prime consideration. While using a documentary film in classroom, many teachers might be confronted with the question: "How long a film and how much its content should be?" Unlike a documentary film used to stimulate discussion or other skills for English native-speaker students, the documentary film for the oral interpretation class should be carefully selected and even tailor-made so as not to discourage students. The study is, therefore, carried out with an aim to investigate what length of documentary materials is acceptable to EFL students (especially low and pre-intermediate level students) of oral interpretation to deal with in a two hour class. Through data gathered from students of three classes I taught last semester, and in-depth interviews with five colleagues who also use video materials in class, this study identifies the length of video material a crucial factor on which depends the success of video-based oral interpretation class.

Keywords: Documentary Film, Length, Oral Interpretation Class

1. Introduction

Thanks to globalization which has increased the chance of mutual communication between different peoples in the world. Oral interpretation has become more and more important and colleges are teaching students the skills to meet the growing demand of the business world. When asked to teach the subject, the first question most teachers might have to face is "how to find good interesting teaching materials being used in classroom?" Unlike other subjects, oral interpretation requires lots of practice in class to train students to be a good interpreter; the teaching materials therefore, must be authentic and communicative to reflect the real situation.

Based upon that, a growing number of teachers start to get rid of the traditional hard-copy books and turn to use videos in class so that students are able to see how the language is used the real life. Documentary films may lack the glamour and excitement of popular movies, but it is carefully scripted and delivered in Standard English, therefore, they are often adopted as teaching materials by school teachers. With its visual and audio effect, a video film is more attractive to the learner. For EFL students who don't have easy access to English speaking environment, documentary films also provide them a chance to learn how English language is being used in a real situation.

However, for EFL students, especially basic and pre-intermediate students, it is not easy for them to fully comprehend the script of a documentary film. The selection of appropriate documentary films is therefore important if a teacher decides to use them as teaching materials in oral interpretation class. Normally, a video can train students listening (soundtrack) and reading abilities (scripts) and is seen as a good solution for the correction of EFL students' pronunciation and accent.

For English native speakers, "the eye is more powerful than the ear, and will dominate. If viewers are offered both reading and listening, they will read in preference to listening." (Sherman,2003,p.16), and it is even so for EFL students. If EFL students are denied the access to the subtitles and scripts in a documentary film, are they



fully aware the content of the film? If not, documentary films can't be justified as good teaching materials.

Given the fact that most documentary films are designed for educational not entertaining purpose, students are expected to learn something in watching the videos. When they are used as language teaching materials, teachers are obligated to make students know exactly what is happening in the film. After all, the main purpose of watching the film is to learn language not to be entertained. If a film is too long and too difficult for EFL students, they won't show any interest in it, and it is no point to use a film to teach. This paper aims to discuss how long a documentary film is suitable in an EFL oral interpretation class so that students can derive the maximum benefit from the experience of watching documentary films.

Soon followed the Introduction, a literature review on using documentary films as teaching materials and its advantages will be covered in Section Two. My personal experience in using documentary films in the oral interpretation class will be discussed in Section Three. Methods used in this study will be explained in Section Four. Section Five will be data collection and analysis, and results will be further elaborated in Section Six. Finally, the conclusion comes in Section Seven. Due to the constraints of time and budget, this study is not able to take a comprehensive sampling from students of other colleges/universities around the country in questionnaires, and it might be one of the limitations of this study, and the author sincerely hope that a large-scale investigation can be launched in the future to know more about the effectiveness of using documentary films in oral interpretation class.

2. Literature Review

For long, teachers are used to using textbooks in classroom. However, more and more teachers today begin to question the rationale of using textbooks in their teaching. Reasons cited include: (a) the content may not be relevant to the teaching or not in the right level. (b) the textbook may not include everything a teacher wants to include and (c) there may not be the right mix of activities (Graves,2000,p.174). A great number of teachers now turn to video and audio materials—a daring breakthrough from the past and their goal is to catch students' eyes and make them more willing to learn in class.

2.1 *A Revolution of Teaching Materials—from Textbooks to Video Films*

With modern technology, teaching materials nowadays are much more colorful and interesting than before, and it is especially so in language teaching materials. Most textbooks today combine language samples, explanations, and activities into a single volume and they are often accompanied by both sound recordings and visual aids when intended to promote skills in oral as well as written language (Savignon,1997,pp.132-3). Most EFL students do not use English in their daily life given the fact that they don't live in English-speaking environment. However, English video films help substitute for the experience as they bring the real English world to the learner.

Learning is a complex process and visual teaching materials are a great help in stimulating the learning of a foreign language. Good visual materials will help boost student's enthusiasm and motivation to learn. They not only assist students in acquiring language skills indirectly by acting as a major motivator and stimulus for language development, but also provide students with incentives to communicate orally as they work collaboratively on tasks and communicative projects.

Today, traditional textbooks might not be the only teaching materials for students; on the contrary, with the widespread Information and Communication Technology (ICT), textbooks are not seen as the only source of knowledge. "For some teachers and some learners, the shift from a course book to learning resources has already taken place"(McGrath,2002, p.137).

"As we learn most through visual stimulus, the more interesting and varied these stimuli are, the quicker and more effective our learning will be" (Bowen,1990,p.1). Doubtlessly, with their compelling power, video materials provide viewers much more visual stimulus than books, and a growing number of teachers are using them as teaching materials in classroom. Unlike their predecessors before, modern teachers have quick and easy access to English-language television and feature films with English subtitles, which can soon be converted into teaching materials.

As a matter of fact, there is a wide variety of types of video recording, like drama video, TV news, discussions, interviews, TV commercials and documentaries. The audio-visual input of video materials is really a resource that we can't ignore; however, we still need to know that not every one of them is suitable to be used in an EFL classroom.



2.2 Why Documentary Films Meet the Requirements of EFL Class?

Documentary films may lack the glamour and excitement of popular movies, but they can serve as a rich language resource, providing students with opportunities to engage in a broad range of topics to express their views by drawing on and applying the language, knowledge and skills they have developed. Unlike movies and TV commercials, which use a great number of slangs or even abusive languages in the dialogues, the language of documentaries is carefully scripted and delivered in Standard English, which makes them more suitable as teaching materials for EFL students. Even though the definition of Standard English varies, “English used in the news media and in literature is seen to meet the criterion” (McKay, 2002, p. 51). Comparing to other video resources, documentary films are generally more serious; and they usually have a sober style with standard phraseology and a Standard English accent. Moreover, documentary films normally deal with specific topics and teach useful knowledge to audience that make them more suitable than movies and TV commercials being used as teaching materials.

Citing the reason why documentary films are good for teaching materials, Sherman claims they are “highly-planned programs which present facts and opinions about single subjects”, and the “high focus” of documentaries make them “the TV version of a newspaper or magazine article.” “For language teaching, they are not very difficult to understand.....Most upper-intermediate students can cope with most documentaries, and at intermediate level they can manage edited version” (2003, pp. 62-3).

For EFL students, apart from being able to read the written language in English scripts, they can also learn how to pronounce those words correctly while watching a documentary film, and the key vocabulary items tend to recur throughout the soundtrack, providing EFL students with valuable repeated encounters with the lexical content, and that is impossible to be done in reading a textbook. A film also helps improve EFL students’ listening comprehension. The most important of all is that, a documentary film provides EFL students access to samples of language that reflect real-life language-- the language being used in daily life instead of book English, which is not practically used. Furthermore, the video images appeared in a film catch students’ eyes and intrigue their interest in learning the language.

The last but not the least, lessons with video could be more enjoyable to EFL students because of visual stimuli which impel them to learn English language while watching the film, and EFL students will have a sense of achievement if they are able to successfully “decode” an English film and learn English from it.

2.3 What Is Crucial in Selecting a Documentary Film for EFL Class?

“For a teacher designing a course, materials development means creating, choosing or adapting and organizing materials and activities so that students can achieve the objectives that will help them reach the goals of the course” (Graves, 2000, p. 150). Therefore, selection of instructional materials should always come into a teacher’s mind before he starts teaching. However, a teacher must understand that he is unable to target everything; and he needs to make choices based on the goals and objectives of his syllabus.

Basically, different materials must be taken to meet the different requirements of different students. For selecting teaching materials, Richards and Rodgers provide a guideline, in which they believe that materials designed for a taught course must be different from those designed for student self-instruction. They claim that teaching materials in a taught course need to focus on the communicative abilities, interesting exchange of information, and should involve different kinds of texts and media (1986, pp. 25-6). Hall even suggests criteria by which teaching materials should be evaluated: the need to communicate, the need for long-term goals; the need for authenticity; and the need for student-centeredness (2003, pp. 229-32).

Those four factors are certainly essential for teachers in selecting documentary films being used in an EFL class. However, there are still some factors that teachers need to pay attention to in choosing videos as teaching materials. Of the six factors cited by Stempleski & Tomalin, the following three-- interest, length, language level, seem to be the most important as the two scholars elaborated much on them. In the area of interest, they argued that a film should first need to attract students’ interest as students normally think of it a TV program, and they don’t want to watch it if they consider a sequence is dull. As for the length, they asserted that no more than five minutes in length for a single one hour class to allow time for other classroom activities. While talking about the question of language level, they made it clear that it is not a “crucial criterion” as even low level students can struggle to grasp the meaning from the clues provided by a language teaching video (1990, pp. 9-10).

3. Use of Documentary Films in Class

There is no doubt today that English has gained the strongest and most widespread position as a language of



wider communication (Olshtain,1989,pp.45-6). At the same time, it is the most widely used language in today's world. According to Crystal, of 12,500 international organizations listed in the 1995-1996 Union of International Associations' Yearbook, approximately 85% use English as their official language, and about 80% of the world's electronically stored information is in English. He also estimated that 1.5 billion (or one in four) of the world population use English as a first, second or foreign language (1997,pp.61-2). Consequently, most audio films are dubbed and subtitled in English, and they provide teachers excellent teaching materials in class.

3.1 Oral Interpretation—A Course Gaining Momentum

The phenomenon of globalization has made international communication more intense and more important in the global village. Consequently, oral interpretation also gains momentum in this interdependent world. More and more English departments in Taiwan's college and universities now include oral interpretation in their course planning in the hope that students are able to do oral interpretation at workplace after they leave school. In order to get a closer look of the popularity of the course being included in English departments of colleges/universities in Taiwan, this author takes colleges/universities joining Center for Teaching & Learning Excellence in Northern Region set by the Ministry of Education as an example.

At present, there are 39 polytechnic colleges and universities joining the center and 23 of them are located in the Greater Taipei area. 14 of the 23 polytechnic colleges and universities have the Applied English department. After surfing the websites of the 14 English departments, this author finds that 11 of the 14 English departments offer oral interpretation in their teaching programs. 6 of the 11 have 4 credit hours, and the other 5 have only 2 credit hours. (For details, see Table One).

Table 1. English Departments of Polytechnic Colleges/Universities in Greater Taipei that Offer Oral Interpretation Course

Colleges/Universities	Oral Interpretation Course Offered		Credit Hours
	Yes	No	
National Taiwan University of Science & Technology	√		4
National Taipei University of Science & Technology	√		4
National Taipei College of Business	√		4
Jin Wen University of Science & Technology	√		4
Takming University of Science & Technology	√		4
Tungnan University	√		4
St. John's University	√		2
China University of Technology	√		2
Chilee Institute of Technology	√		2
Hsin Wu Institute of Technology	√		2
Mackay Medical Nursing & management college	√		2
Taipei Chengshih University of Science and Technology Technology		√	0
De Lin Institute of Technology		√	0
Kang Ning Junior College of Medical Care & Management		√	0



3.2 Application of Documentary Films in the Teaching of Oral Interpretation

Teachers using documentary films in class need to be reminded that students' levels of documentary tolerance need to be taken into first consideration in choosing the appropriate films. In the oral interpretation class, while students watch a film, they are expected to acquire basic information from it, paying the way for doing oral translation practice later on. In order to make students thoroughly understand what is going on, teachers are suggested to do preliminary vocabulary work before they start playing the film. By this way, students will quickly get the full picture if names of people, places, organization, acronyms and their pronunciation are reviewed well before they watch the film.

On the other hand, they are encouraged to disrupt the viewing and explain to students about vocabulary, grammar and even background information that he thinks students might fail to understand. Unlike native-speaker students, most EFL students' English proficiency is not good enough to support them to view the entire documentary film. Moreover, focusing on the aspects of language in watching a documentary film, teachers need to make sure that students understand every part before he continues his teaching. After all, the purpose of using a film in class is to teach students English, not to entertain them.

Finally, in order to understand students' comprehension of the content, a short quiz is necessary soon after the viewing of the film, and this is especially so in the teaching of oral interpretation which requires repeated practice. Of course, test questions must be related to the content of the film to further impress students about the key words and grammar rules they have learned in watching the film. Normally, in my class, I will give ten short questions (five Chinese to English, and five English to Chinese) and ask students to practice oral interpretation by using what they have learned after watching the documentary film.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design

This study employs both qualitative and quantitative research. Major methods used include interviews and questionnaires. Data were collected from teachers and students of the Applied English Department of a Polytechnic University located in the suburbs of Taipei, Taiwan. Data from students mainly came from questionnaires conducted in three oral interpretation classes in academic year 2011 (from August 1, 2010 to July 31, 2011) Students from the three classes had been taught oral interpretation for half a year by using video materials well before they were surveyed in the questionnaire. Data from teachers, on the other hand, came from interview with teachers who also used documentary films in their teaching for at least a year.

4.2 Research Time

This study was conducted from Feb. 21 to Apr. 22, 2011. The design of the questionnaire questions and interview guideline took a month to complete. The survey was conducted from Apr.5 to Apr. 15, 2011 and was done in three different classes taught by the author. Interviews with 5 teachers started from the middle of Mar. to the middle of April 2011.

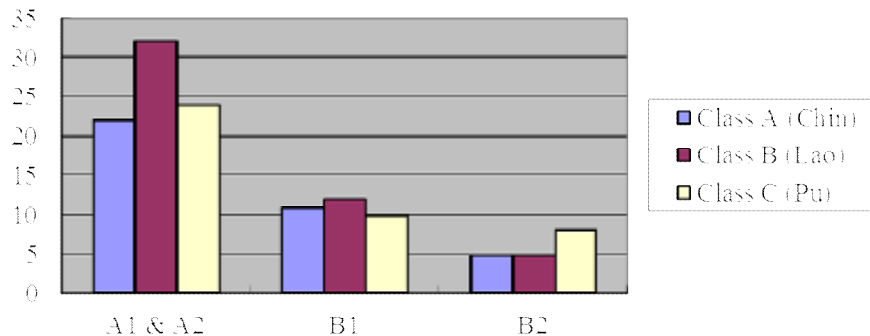
4.3 Participants

4.3.1 Students

129 senior students in three different classes were included in the questionnaire survey. (38 in Class Chin, 49 in Class Lao, and 42 in Class Pu) In terms of their education and age, they were quite a homogeneous group. All of those students took oral interpretation class, in which documentary films were used as teaching materials in the first semester of the academic year 2011.

According to the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference) classification (See Appendix A), 78 of the 129 students holds a A1 or A2 certificate (Elementary Level) of various English proficiency tests, like General English Proficiency Test (GEPT), TOEIC, or IELTS, 33 hold a B1 (Pre-intermediate Level) certificate and 18 hold a B2 (Intermediate Level) certificate. Based on students' English level, they were assigned to three different groups. Students in Group A were those holding a A1 or A2 certificate. Students in Group B held a B1 certificate, and students in Group C held a B2 certificate.

Table 2. English Proficiency Level of the Three Classes



4.3.2 Faculty Members

Apart from students, five teachers (including two English native-speaker teachers and three Chinese teachers) using videos in their teaching were interviewed to get their viewpoint on the effectiveness of the audio/video teaching materials in class. As for educational background, four of the five teachers hold doctoral degree. (two from local universities and the other two from foreign universities) Four of the five teachers had teaching experience for more than five years and the other one over ten years. Various kinds of films were used by the five teachers in class, including TV news broadcasts, TV commercials, movies, and documentary films.

4.4 Instruments

The instruments used in this study included a questionnaire, in which students were first asked to provide their background information, and then they were asked four questions related to their viewpoints upon the application of documentary films as teaching materials. The questionnaire was given to students and they were given 20 minutes to complete the survey in class. Of the 135 questionnaires sent out, 129 valid ones were taken back. 6 students were either absent or refused to answer for various reasons. The other instrument used was interviews with five teachers who also used videos in class as teaching materials.

4.4.1 Questionnaires

The design of the questionnaire aimed to know questions as follows. (A) What is the students' English level? Students were asked to categorize themselves according to the Common European Framework (CEF) criteria. (B) Whether students take a positive attitude on documentary films as teaching materials? Are those films more helpful than traditional textbooks to help them to learn English? (C) How long a documentary film can students (especially low and low-intermediate level students) deal with in a two hour class? (D) What are the reasons that EFL students find it difficult to get the full picture of a documentary film? (Detailed questionnaire, see Appendix B).

4.4.2 Interviews

On the other hand, in conducting an interview to teachers, an interview question outline (See Appendix C) was formulated beforehand, in which each interviewee spent 30-40 minutes with the interviewer to answer the following questions. (A) What level of students is the teacher teaching? (B) How long a film is appropriate for EFL students to watch in a two hour class? (C) What is the teacher's major concern in the selection of a film being used in class?

5. Data Collection and Analysis

As mentioned above, this research adopted both quantitative and qualitative methods; consequently, data collected will also be analyzed accordingly. In quantitative research, data collected from a questionnaire was used to analyze students' view on documentary films as teaching materials. In qualitative research; on the other hand, teachers' view on those programs was taken through interviews.

5.1 Quantitative Analysis

Of the valid 129 questionnaires taken back, only 12 of the 129 students (0.09%) thought that textbooks are better than documentary films being used as teaching materials. Even though students were not asked to give reasons for their preference of documentary films, one student wrote in the questionnaire: "I definitely support



documentary films being used as teaching materials because it is extremely boring using a textbook in the oral interpretation class. Moreover, an authentic film provides real scenes where English is used in the real life and students will be further impressed.”

As for tolerance of a documentary film in a two hour class, 16 students (12.5%) indicated that they are able to cope with a film for more than 20 minutes. 16 students (12.5%) preferred to have a film between 15-20 minutes. Another 24 (18.7%) students wished the length of a film between 5-10 minutes. The other 73 students (56.5%) explicitly supported a film in 10-15 minutes. Therefore, it is easily seen that an ideal documentary film being played in a two hour class ought to be between 10-20 minutes and this is corresponding to Stempleski & Tomalin argument (a five minute film for an hour). As the normal speed of speech is between 90-120 words, the content of the film is ideally between 1200-2000 words, depending on the level of English language used, and teachers are encouraged to interrupt the viewing or even to playback, leaving ample time to explain and help students understand the content.

When asked about the major handicaps in understanding a documentary film, students' response varied. Three choices were included in the questionnaire: poor word power, poor listening and lack of background information, and students were asked to identify their major handicap in understanding a documentary film in class. After further analyzing the data, poor listening stands out as the biggest obstacle while poor word power trailing behind, then followed by lack of background information for EFL students in watching an English film. 68 of the 129 students (52.5%) polled admitted that their listening comprehension needs to be further improved in order to catch up the meaning of an English film in class, and 49 (38.2%) attributed their failure to poor word power. Only 8 students (6.2%) cited shortage of background information as the major obstacle; on the other hand, 4 students specified other reasons, like cultural difference and unfamiliarity with the subject of the film.

5.2 Qualitative Analysis

Of the five teachers interviewed, two English native-speaker teachers replied that normally they used a documentary film for 15 to 20 minutes in a two hour class. Two Chinese teachers used a film for 10-15 minutes and one teacher used a film for less than 5 minutes. It is interesting to find that native English-speaker teachers preferred longer films than non-native-speaker teachers as the former ones used films for 15-20 minutes. In contrast, non-native-speaker teachers tended to use shorter films. For this phenomenon, a Chinese teacher explained that partly because Chinese teachers knew the problems EFL students might encounter in the process of learning English as they had the same experience in learning the language. And they tended to spend more time in explaining to students about vocabulary and grammar rules in the subtitles, leaving them no choice but to cut the length of the film.

As for the question, what is their major concern in choosing films for teaching materials, three identified authenticity, and two cited the need for communication. Even though opponents argue that “using authentic material is inappropriate in an EFL class because “it is not constructed to contain only the aspects of language the learner has encountered or learned up” (Graves,2000, p.156), three teachers explicitly expressed in the interview the use of authentic materials, especially documentary films helps to motivate students' learning in class, for they are able to learn the real-life English, and watching a film is definitely more interesting than reading a textbook.

Most of all, they saw authenticity an important factor in the selection of teaching materials because it gives learners a taste of the real world, and it also gives students an opportunity to practice the language they have learned. Teachers also pointed out that the less authentic the materials used in the classroom, the less well prepared students will be for that real world, and students will find it easier to use English in life or at workplace if they are exposed to authentic materials in class.

6. Results and Discussion

Until the prevalence of the Information and Computer Technology in the 1980s, documentary films were seldom used as teaching materials in class. However, the situation changes dramatically as more and more teachers adopt them in class today, and from data collected and analyzed above, some findings can be drawn below.

6.1 A Film is More Interesting than a Textbook

In the questionnaire, over 99% students polled favored the use of documentary films as teaching materials in oral interpretation class, and it shows that a film with its extraordinary visual and aural effect successfully catches students' eyes, and makes language learning more interesting. Since the 1970s, the communicative, authentic task has evolved as a vital element in second language curriculum planning” (Butler-Pascoe &



Wiburg,2003,p.44), consequently, the focus of language teaching has shifted from linguistic competence to communicative competence today, and students are expected to “use” the language, not just to “study” it.

Traditionally, EFL teachers use a textbook in teaching and most activities in class are about reading, hence students don't have a chance to practice listening, which indirectly lead to EFL students' listening worse than their reading comprehension, and the reading-centered teaching has been criticized as some argue “language instruction should focus on the learner's listening comprehension in the early stage of acquisition, while delaying oral production until the student was more familiar with the new language” (ibid.,p.82). The use of video films has reversed the trend as EFL students are able to listen and read the subtitles while watching a film.

The integration of language skills in a documentary film is also laudable, and the use of videos exemplifies the excellent fit between technology use and strategies for communicative language teaching. Expanded and massive supply of documentary films on various topics also enables teachers more choice of the films being used in class, depending on students' English proficiency and interests. Moreover, the authentic content of a documentary film makes it ideally suited to support a communicative language teaching approach.

6.2 A Long Film Will Frustrate EFL Students in Class

Normally, a documentary film is more educational than entertaining. Too much content definitely will frustrate EFL students, and teachers will also find themselves struggling to teach the entire lesson in class time. And this fact has reflected in the questionnaire as 78.8% students indicated that they think a film between 10-20 minutes is more appropriate in a two hour class. In my investigation, some students also wished that the teacher can break the film to several parts, and each just lasts for 5-6 minutes in an hour, and they believed this might help them understand the content of the film more easily.

To native speakers, it won't bother them too much to watch a 20 minute film in a two hour class, and they may like to devote more of the class time to subsequent discussion. However, to EFL students, especially to low and low intermediate students, they will suffer in watching a documentary film which lasts for more than 20 minutes as there are too many new vocabulary items for them to cope with and on the other hand, their listening and reading may not support them to catch up with the speed of the dialogue. Without the help of the teacher, most of them can't thoroughly understand the content.

Teachers need to be reminded that the use of a documentary film in an EFL class aims to teach students language skills; therefore, just like in using a textbook, teachers should not hesitate to interrupt the viewing once they find that students fail to understand because of vocabulary or grammar problems. In a textbook, the reading in each unit normally contains 500-600 words, likewise, each documentary film used as a teaching material is ideally limited to the same words in length to enable ESL students ample time to learn the language in the subtitles.

When viewing in our own language, we tend to go for the general idea; in other words, we try to get the “message.” However, when EFL students are watching an English film, they are not just trying to view a film. They are actually focusing on the language, and that is why it is unwise for teachers to give them a heavy workload by extending the length for more than 20 minutes. If they ever do so, they run a risk of frustrating students in class.

6.3 Documentary Films Meet the Demand of Authenticity and Communication

The school of Communicative Language Teaching calls for teaching of real-life English to students, and a growing number of teachers are following the trend, partly because of globalization which requires even closer communication between different peoples of the world. Under this situation, the use of authentic teaching materials in class becomes more important. “When we come to look at the details of foreign language planning, one consideration becomes paramount—the communication needs of learners”(Johnson,2001,p.204). Authentic materials are generally seen “real-life” materials; therefore, more and more, they draw the attention of EFL teachers today.

Three of the five teachers interviewed clearly expressed that authenticity tops the concern in their selection of teaching materials. They believed that authentic materials help students learn what is practical to deal with the English requirement of their daily life and workplace. The other two teachers chose the need to communicate, asserting that the purpose of learning a foreign language is to communicate with other people in the language.

The use of documentary films in class can easily meet the need of authenticity and communication, for almost all documentary films are authentic materials and they provides EFL students interactive language—the language of daily conversational exchange. It is also much easier for students to understand a film than a book because the



language is interpreted in full visual context. Besides, almost all documentary films present facts and opinions about single subjects, and they are generally dubbed and subtitled in Standard English. All these make documentary films more suitable than other fiction or non-fiction films as teaching materials in class.

7. Conclusion

The study doesn't aim to overthrow the use of textbook in English teaching; rather, it offers modern teachers another choice of teaching materials in class, especially the teaching of oral interpretation, for which teachers are unable to find good quality hard copy books as teaching materials in class. Furthermore, modern teachers need to have new thinking in teaching the e-generation students who are getting used to visual and aural effects of electronic products. In teaching oral interpretation to low and intermediate level students, documentary films are good teaching materials in many ways.

First, they are easy to understand. The Standard English accent and carefully scripted language make them more ideal than other video films being used as teaching materials in class. EFL students can learn both reading and listening while watching the film in subtitles—far more interesting than reading the boring textbook in class as in the traditional way

Second, they are shorter than feature films, and the pace is slower. The content, style and purpose of documentaries vary enormously. Some are about famous people, and some are about history, travel and other cultures. Teachers enjoy much freedom in choosing different documentaries based on students' interests and level of English proficiency.

Even though, documentaries are generally shorter than feature films, teachers still need to be reminded that the use of longer films will frustrate ESL students. In my investigation, I have found that students favored the length of a film between 10-20 minutes in a two hour class. If a film is longer than 20 minutes, it is advised that teachers break it up and play the film in several times, each time less than 20 minutes. Students' levels of documentary tolerance and understanding should be taken into the first consideration in the selection of suitable films as teaching materials. After all, we are using documentaries to teach English, and students need to be taught each word in the film.

References

- Bowen, B. M. (1990) *Look Here! Visual Aids in Language Teaching*. London: MacMillian Publishers Ltd.
- Butler-Pascoe M. & K. Wiburg (2003) *Technology and Teaching English Language Learners*. New York: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Crystal, D. (1997) *English as a Global Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Graves, K. (2000) *Designing Language Courses*. Boston: Heinle & Heinle Publishers.
- Hall, D. (2003) "Materials Production: Theory and Practice" In D. Hall and A. Hewings (Eds.) *Innovation in English Language Teaching*. New York: Routledge.
- Johnson, K. (2004) *An Introduction to Foreign Language Learning and Teaching*. Essex: Pearson Education Limited.
- McGrath, I. (2002) *Materials Evaluation and Design for Language Teaching*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Mckay, S. L. (2002) *Teaching English as an International Language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Olshain E. (1989) "The Fact-finding Phase in the Policy-making Process: The Case of a Language of Wider Communication" In C. Kennedy (Ed.) *Language Planning and English Language Teaching*. New York: Prentice Hall International Ltd.
- Richards, J. C. & Rodgers, T. S. (1999) *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Savignon, S. J. (1997) *Communicative Competence—Theory and Classroom Practice*. New York: The McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc.
- Sherman, J. (2003) *Using Authentic Video in the Language Classroom*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Stempleski, S. & Tomalin, B. (1990) *Video in Action—Recipes for Using Video in Language Teaching*. New York: Prentice Hall.



Appendix A: CEF Criteria for Language Ability

The Common European Framework divides learners into three broad divisions which can be divided into six levels:

A Basic Speaker

A1 Breakthrough or beginner

A2 Waystage or elementary

B Independent Speaker

B1 Threshold or pre-intermediate

B2 Vantage or intermediate

C Proficient Speaker

C1 Effective Operational Proficiency or upper intermediate

C2 Mastery or advanced

The CEFR describes what a learner is supposed to be able to do in reading, listening, speaking and writing at each level.

level	description
A1	Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. Can introduce him/herself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and things he/she has. Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.
A2	Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need.
B1	Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes & ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.
B2	Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialization. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.
C1	Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognize implicit meaning. Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organizational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.
C2	Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. Can summarize information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. Can express him/herself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in the most complex situations.

(Sources: Wikipedia

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Common_European_Framework_of_Reference_for_Languages)

Appendix B: Student Questionnaire Questions

Class: _____ No: _____ Name: _____



(1) Do you hold a language proficiency certificate?

- No
- A 1 or A2 (TOEIC 350+, GEPT Elementary)
- B1 (TOEIC 500+, GEPT Intermediate)
- B2 (TOEIC 575+, GEPT High Intermediate)
- C1 (TOEIC 880+ GEPT Advanced)
- C2 (TOEIC 950+ GEPT Superior)

(2) Do you think that a documentary film is better than a text book as a teaching material in class?

- Yes
- No

(3) What is your major handicap in understanding an English documentary film?

- Insufficient word power
- Poor listening comprehension
- Lack of background information
- Others (please specify) _____

(4) In your opinion, what is the appropriate length of a film being used as a teaching material in a two hour class?

- More than 20 minutes
- 15-20 minutes
- 10-15 minutes
- 5-10 minutes
- Less than 5 minutes

Appendix C: Teacher Interview Questions

(1) What grade(s) are you currently teaching?

- Year 1 Class
- Year 2 Class
- Year 3 Class
- Year 4 Class
- Various Classes

(2) What is the length of documentary films as your teaching or supplementary materials in a two hour class?

- More than 20 minutes
- 15-20 minutes
- 10-15 minutes
- 5-10 minutes
- Less than 5 minutes

(3) In your opinion, what is the most difficult part in choosing a documentary film as a teaching material?

- The need to communicate
- The need for long-term goals
- The need for authenticity
- The need for student-centeredness
- Others (Please specify)