

Using TED Talks as Authentic Videos to Enhance Students' Listening Comprehension and Motivation

Sandy El Haj Hassan
Lebanese Air Force School

Zeinab Haj Hassan
Lebanese University, English Language Department

Abstract

This action research paper explores using authentic video material in our EFL classrooms and the advantages of using video materials in our teaching. Nowadays videos are considered an important educational tool for the classroom. The rationale for this action research is to examine the benefits of using authentic audio-visual material in teaching and learning the English language. Literature suggests that teachers can expand students' interests in the activities, and consequently their motivation, through the use of appropriate video materials. This action research paper was started due to a problem we were facing while teaching military personnel at the Air Force School in Lebanon. We decided to solve this problem through using TED Talks, and we gathered data through classroom observations, analysis of student work, surveys, and interviews. The results showed that our students felt they became better in retaining information and were able to focus more on the task given since the videos were appropriate for their age. It was also revealed that their English listening comprehension skills increased after learning with authentic videos and that they had a positive attitude toward using such videos.

Introduction

Teaching listening comprehension to EFL learners can be a daunting task for the instructor as well as the learner. One of the main problems that affects listening comprehension is the selection of listening materials. Likewise, this is the kind of problem we are facing with our cadet students at the Air Force School. These students had learned English listening comprehension through the use of inauthentic audio-visual material. Therefore, the reason for the study was established based on the participants' need to be motivated and to enhance their listening comprehension. Choosing appropriate listening materials is a crucial component in this action research. More specifically, we focus on selecting authentic, natural, and diverse materials (formal, non-formal, real life language). This paper examines how choosing authentic videos in teaching listening comprehension can improve listening in English.

Technology in our time is playing a significant role in developing listening skills. One technological tool is using videos to improve students' listening comprehension. More importantly, using authentic videos can have a better motivating outcome for the learners. Video materials, if used properly, are successful tools in teaching English as a foreign language. Technology allows teachers to incorporate online videos into their traditional classes, and thus let the teaching-learning process become meaningful and interesting. A fundamental reason for incorporating authentic video materials into classroom settings is that they offer original and authentic sources of real native language use such as TV shows, movies, short videos of people talking, and songs. Authentic video materials such as these can be used by the teacher in a variety of approaches.

Action Research Questions

The following two questions were developed to guide the action research process in this study:

- 1. What will be the impact on student motivation of showing short video clips of authentic materials?*
- 2. How will this motivation impact note-taking, comprehension, and participation in class?*

Literature Review

The importance of listening comprehension is accentuated in Krashen's (1989) Input Hypothesis. Listening comprehension is crucial for language learning for it provides the right conditions for language acquisition and development of the other language skills. Additionally, motivation is considered one of the factors that affects the acquisition of a target language (Gilakjani, 2011). Accordingly, for effective use of audio-visual aids and resources, it is important to be aware of students' views and approaches toward such teaching tools. Such understanding of students' views can lead to necessary modifications of audio-visual materials. Besides using authentic video materials to motivate learners, these video aids have the advantage of helping learners gain knowledge of the cultural backgrounds and emotional standpoints from the learning materials. In this way the learners can become more autonomous and allow themselves to understand the language used in the videos. This approach in teaching listening puts into practice student-centered teaching in comparison to traditional teaching of listening comprehension. Paulsen (2001) cites two reasons for learners' positive performance when learning through online materials, which are authenticity and motivation.

Authenticity and the Role of Authentic Materials

According to Nunan (1997), authentic materials are those materials not intended for teaching; they can be oral or written and made for native speakers of the language, and they are used to communicate between native speakers for a definite purpose (Alimemaj, 2010).

Woottipong (2014) explains that video presentation will be intrinsically interesting to language learners since they will want to watch even if comprehension is limited. The author also notes that the use of authentic videos enhances students' motivation and gives them an understanding of real life situations.

The Benefits of Using Authentic Video Materials in English Teaching

Authentic material can be a "rich and exciting source of videos in EFL classes" (Stempleski, 1987, pp.12-14). These authentic videos can be used in English listening instruction. English teachers must take care to use effective and appropriate video materials for the sake of helping learners get oriented in language use as well as cultural interactions of the native speakers in the videos. According to Stempleski (1987), the materials are effective when they are related to situations students might face in real life. So, authentic video materials have the effect of creating a language environment that is close to reality, and hence stimulates learners' interest in learning English and improves their comprehension. Rivers (1981) mentioned also that language learning can be improved via efficient utilization of videos. When teachers choose effective video materials, the materials can be interesting and enjoyable for the learners, and consequently promote comprehension. It's easier for the meaning to be clear using a video.

Using video materials has various advantages. One of the benefits of using these materials is that it stimulates students' autonomy (Christopher and Ho, 1996). They could put

themselves in the atmosphere created by the video materials and try to recognize the cultural concepts as well as the pragmatics of the language used.

Videos may also be more motivating than other kinds of authentic materials. Christopher and Ho (1996) note that the music and setting can make videos more entertaining and enjoyable for the learners. In addition to that, short video movies or clips offer topics and concepts for learners to focus on and discuss.

One major advantage of using videos is that they can offer samples of real-life situations. Lonergan (1984, cited in Lustigová, 2013) highlighted that since videos present a stimulating environment for the students, they will engage in the watching process even with limited language capability. In a study by Canning-Wilson (2000), the researcher examined students' attitudes toward the use of videos in the classroom. The results showed that students prefer learning language through videos. Thanajaro's (2000) study on the use of authentic materials to improve listening comprehension in ESL classrooms showed that the use of authentic materials had a positive effect on students' motivation to learn and acquire the language. Maneekul (2002) conducted a research study on employing authentic materials to develop listening skills for undergraduate students majoring in English. It was revealed that after students watched an authentic video program, their listening skill increased to a higher level. Mathew and Aldimat (2013) concluded that the use of audio-visual materials is inspirational and motivational for the students.

There is some evidence that authentic videos increase oral comprehension, stimulate student interaction and communication with each other, encourage cross cultural awareness, and are adjustable for use with learners at any English language proficiency level.

The present study examines the use of videos as complementary material in an EFL setting. It is hypothesized that authentic video material can be employed to enhance students' motivation. Learners consider the use of video materials in class to be interesting, significant, useful, and somewhat motivating. In order to enhance learning outcomes, teachers can integrate authentic video materials in a variety of activities and tasks.

Methodology

The following description of the methodology of this study has been organized into four sections: research context and description of participants, intervention procedure, data collection procedure and data analysis procedure. The study was carried out over a period of four weeks with four sessions for each group. The methodology of this study is quantitative and qualitative since the data is explained in numerical results and the application of semi-structured interviews; these interviews were also analyzed using qualitative procedures. The study is action research with a mixed-methods design. The research makes use of both experimental and control groups. Two classes of the same level were selected; the control group using the inauthentic videos, and the experimental group using authentic videos (TED Talks).

Research Context and Description of Participants

The action research took place at the Air Force School, Rayak, Lebanon. The students are cadets and their native language is Arabic.

Participant students.

The participants consist of all male students who finished high school and are cadet students at the Air Force School in the Lebanese Army. Their age range is between 19 and 24. Each class was composed of 15 students, totaling 30 participants. Their level was upper-

intermediate based on a placement test. Students were randomly assigned into two sections. One section was assigned as the control group (Group A) and the second one as the experimental group (Group B).

Participant researchers.

In this action research, there were two teachers participating in the study. Sandy El Haj Hassan has been teaching at the Air Force School for more than seven years. The second researcher is Zeinab Haj Hassan, who has been teaching at the Air Force School for two years now. Furthermore, she is an instructor at the Lebanese University-English Department. For this action research, Sandy taught the experimental group, and Zeinab taught the control group.

Intervention Procedure

After identifying the problem, the following procedure was used during the research process:

1. We obtained permission from the Air Force School to carry out the action research.
2. The English proficiency levels of the students were evaluated using a placement test.
3. The students were randomly divided into two 15-student groups.
4. Four inauthentic videos and four TED Talks videos were chosen having the same theme.
5. For each of the sessions, the students were given two worksheets; one for note-taking and another for comprehension questions.
6. After each session, we filled out a checklist for each student.
7. In the last session, the students were asked to complete a questionnaire.
8. We interviewed two randomly selected students from each group, following up on the questionnaire.
9. The results from the questionnaire and the checklist were analyzed using a software program.

Data Collection Procedure

To measure the effectiveness of this experiment, the researchers used the following instruments:

Teacher's checklist.

The teacher's checklist aims to measure the students' comprehension of the videos. While viewing the inauthentic videos and Ted Talks, the students took key notes from the video based on predetermined worksheets that divided the videos into different parts. The students also answered comprehension questions based on their understanding of the videos. This checklist (see Appendix A) was designed by the researchers and it was applied to both the experimental and control groups to evaluate the effectiveness of using authentic videos. It consists of three main questions that were measured on a scale of zero to three (zero for having no participation and answering and three for maximum participation). The checklist was filled out by correcting the students' worksheets (note-taking and comprehension worksheets) as well as evaluating the students' participation in classroom discussions. Two instructors filled out the checklists to ensure validity.

Survey questionnaire.

After students watched the videos, a questionnaire was given to both groups (see Appendix B). This survey aims to measure the students' motivation and the videos' usefulness in increasing listening comprehension and participation.

The interview.

After conducting the surveys, two students from each group were chosen randomly for a semi-structured interview. The follow-up questions are from the questionnaire where the students are asked to elaborate more on the open-ended questions (see Appendix B and C).

Videos.

There are two kinds of videos used in this study. The first one used with the control group will be called inauthentic videos. These videos contain formal, inauthentic language which is not related to real life. Moreover, the videos date back to the 1990s and are very monotonous which makes the students unenthusiastic. For the experimental group, the researchers in this study used authentic videos from TED Talks, which are known for their authenticity and inspirational aspects. The researchers looked for similar themes for both kinds of videos in order to make the study more reliable.

Instrument validity.

The teacher's checklist and survey questionnaire were designed by the researchers and validated by colleagues who are also instructors at the same center at the Air Force School in Lebanon. Further, to guarantee the data collection tools' validity, a pilot test was done on each item and the comments of the colleagues and their recommendations were taken into account. For instance, originally, the checklist had four questions and it was reduced to three questions. All items in the instruments were agreed upon as valid.

Data Analysis Procedure

Since the study compares two groups, an independent t-test was conducted. Using SPSS, the researchers compared the mean scores of the two groups in order to see if there was any statistical significant difference among them. Quantitative calculations used in the current study were means, standard deviation, and the independent t-test.

For the teacher's checklist (see Appendix A), we entered the data in an Excel worksheet and combined the number of students who took notes, answered questions, and participated in

the classroom discussion on a scale from zero to three. Then the data for each group was used to do a t-test in order to see if there was a significant difference between the two groups.

Concerning the questionnaires (see Appendix B), the data was also numerical since it was done on a Likert scale. So, for each group a bar graph was made to represent the score for each statement and then a t-test to compare between the control and experimental group. Finally, the interviews were analyzed qualitatively by coding the answers to see if students had similar answers.

Results

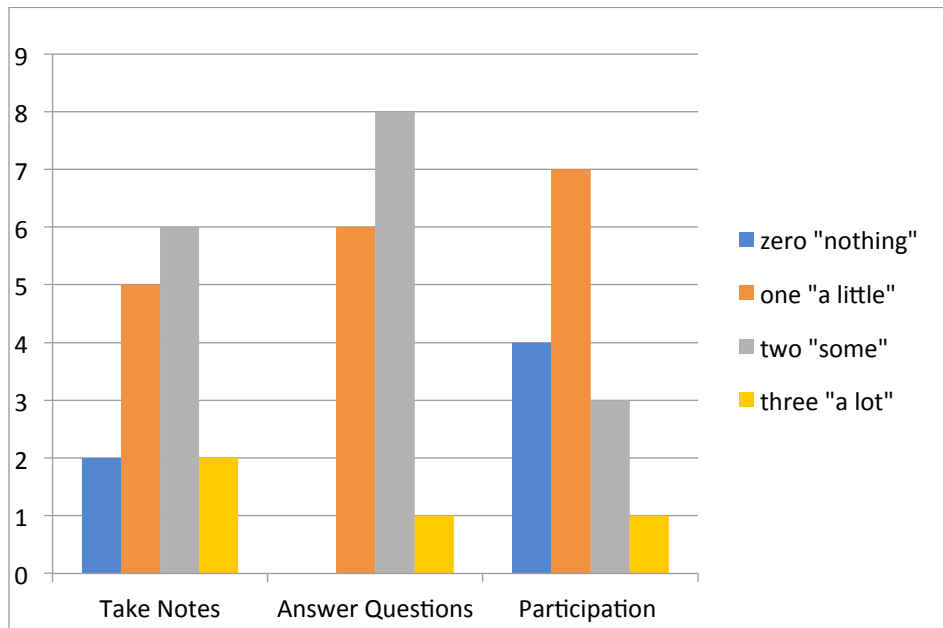
Findings

This section presents the results of this action research in greater detail, and the next section integrates and discusses the findings and connects findings from this research to the original research questions.

Analysis of the teacher checklist.

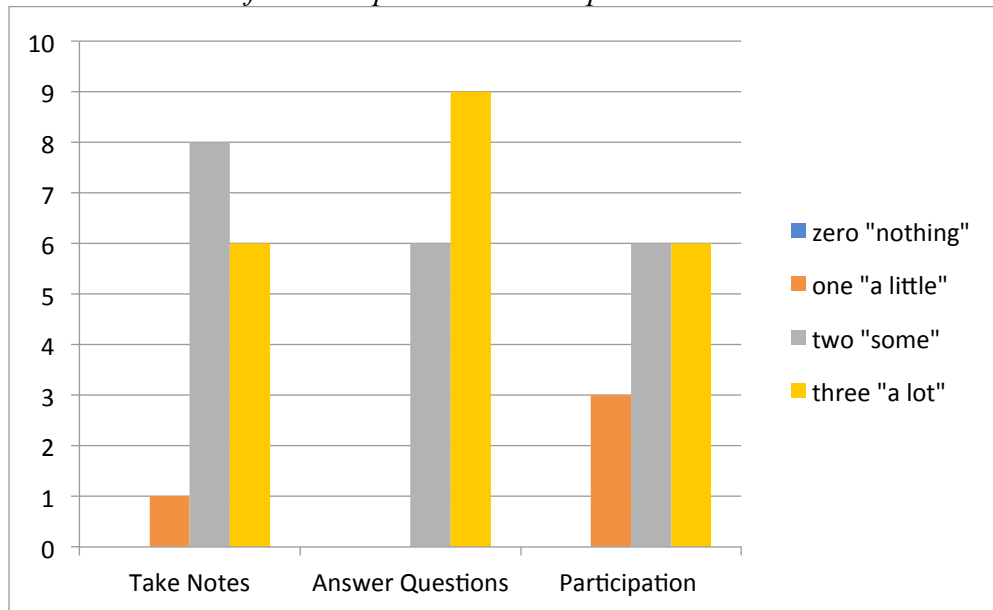
The following bar graphs show the teachers' checklists for the control group and experimental group.

*Figure 1:
Teacher Checklist for the Control Group*



In the control group, the majority of the students took only some notes. Additionally, the majority of the students answered some of the questions. Also, only a small number of students participated in discussion after the video.

Figure 2:
Teacher Checklist for the Experimental Group



The teacher's checklist for the experimental group shows that most of the students took some notes and very few took no notes. Moreover, many answered the comprehension questions. On the other hand, six students participated "some" in classroom discussion as well another 6 students who participated "a lot."

The following table shows statistical analysis of the two groups using the teacher checklist:

*Table 1:
Teacher Checklist statistics*

Group	Number	Mean	Variance	t.value	p.value	df
Experimental group	15	2.37	0.649	1.66	*0.05	84
Control group	15	1.37	0.422			

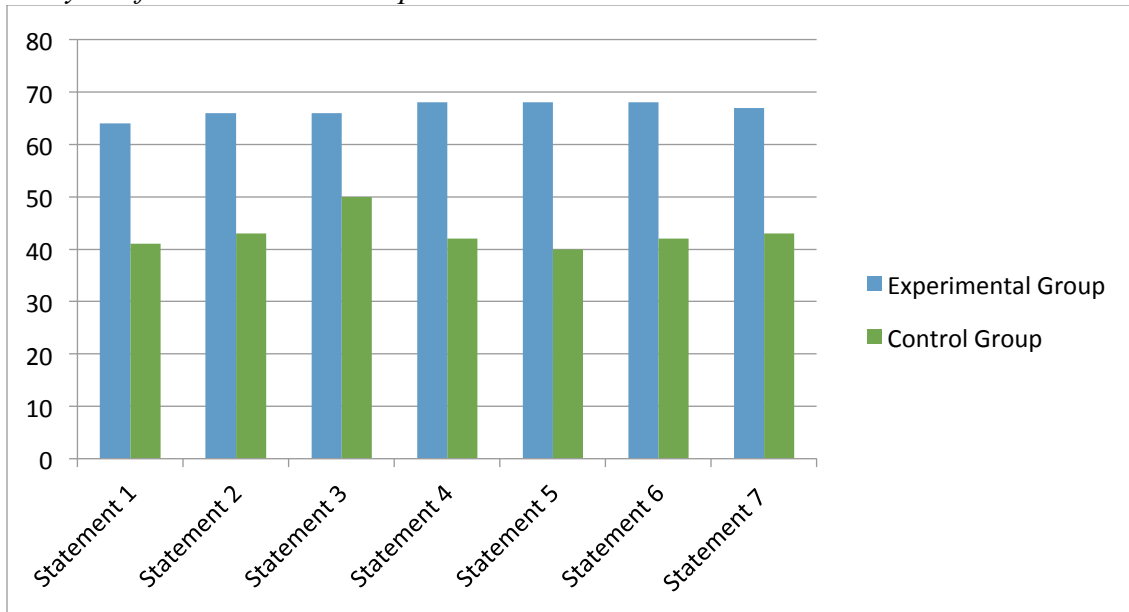
*significant $\alpha \leq (0.01/0.05)$

Table 1 shows that there is a significant difference between the experimental group and the control group, as the value of p is (0.05). The average mean of the students in the teacher checklist in the experimental group is 2.37 and 1.37 for the control group students (where 3 is the highest score possible). The mean scores between the two groups were statistically significant ($t=1.66 > p=.007$).

Analysis of the student questionnaire.

Figure 3 shows the score of each of the statements for both groups. For each group, 15 students answered Likert scale questions with a scale of 1-5. For each question, the sum of the 15 responses is presented, with a minimum possible score of 15 and a maximum possible score of 75.

Figure 3:
Analysis of the Likert scale responses



The experimental group had higher scores in each of the statements than the control group. For Example, statement 4, “I found the videos useful,” had a score of 68 with the experimental group, whereas, the control group had a score of 42.

Table 2 shows the statistical analysis for the Likert scale for the two groups. The average mean of the experimental group is 66.7, whereas for the control group is 43. Using a T-test 2 sample of unequal variances shows there is a significant difference between the two groups.

Table 2:
Likert Scale statistics

Group	Number	Mean	Variance	t.value	p.value	df
Experimental group	15	66.7	2.23	1.85	*0.05	8
Control group	15	43	10.3			

*significant $\alpha \leq (0.01/0.05)$

Interviews with students.

After completing the videos for both classrooms, we interviewed two students from each group. While interviewing the students who watched the inauthentic videos, we asked if they found the videos to be interesting and how; so, one student said that “the videos pictures are as old as our parents.” Another one said, “They aren’t difficult to understand.” Both students agreed that they were boring and old and didn’t motivate them to listen or participate. On the other hand, the students who watched TED Talks thought that they were very provoking and interesting. When one was asked if using these videos motivated him to study English and how, he answered, “Yes, very much. When I go home on the weekend, I open the TED app and watch videos because they are good.”

Discussion

Research question 1 asked, “What impact will showing short video clips of authentic material have on our students’ motivation to learn?” The bar graph in Figure 3 shows the scores of each statement on the survey questionnaire, and we notice that statements 1, 5 and 7 which concern students’ motivation (see Appendix B) have higher scores for group B than group A. This shows that more than 70 percent of the students agreed that TED Talks were very useful and helped them engage in the classroom more often. The results from the questionnaires confirmed that students enjoyed these videos and they stimulated them to get involved in classroom discussions, just as Mathew and Aldimat (2013) concluded that audio-visuals are inspirational and motivational. Furthermore, the teacher’s checklist for the students’ participation had six students who participated “some” and six who participated “a lot” compared to group A (control group) who had 7 students who participated “a little” (see figure 1 and 2). Thanajaro (2000) stated that authentic listening materials have a great impact on the students’ motivation as

well as their language learning acquisition. Therefore, the use of authentic audio-visual materials has greatly improved our students' motivation to learn.

The secondary research question asked, "How will this motivation lead to better note-taking, comprehension and participation in class?" The teacher checklist results showed how effectively the students participated in the classroom. By looking at Figures 2 and 3, we notice that note-taking for the control group had two students who took "a lot" of notes, six took "some" notes, and seven took "a little to nothing," whereas the experimental group had six students who took "a lot" of notes, eight took "some" notes, and one took a little. Similar results were also observed in answering comprehension questions where nine students answered "a lot" for the experimental group compared with eight who answered "some" for the control group. As a result, the students who viewed authentic videos were showing more communication in the classroom even if they had limited language capability. This is exactly what Lonergan (1984, cited in Lustigová, 2013) mentioned about the effectiveness of using videos in classrooms. While conducting this action research, we saw how the use of these videos has greatly improved the students' learning and communication skills and the data above shows that participation, note-taking, and answering comprehension questions, developed better than the control group with inauthentic videos. Thus, our students' motivation led to better participation and performance in the class, suggesting that the use of authentic videos was much more helpful than the inauthentic videos. Furthermore, the students who took part in the interviews confirmed that TED Talks were extremely beneficial since they felt more engaged and eager to participate and learn.

As for us, the teachers, we have seen a change in the students' behaviour and autonomy as well as students' participation and dependence on themselves. We also noticed that the environment of the class was very motivating.

Conclusion

This action research examined the effect of authentic videos (TED Talks) on the improvement of the listening comprehension and motivation of cadet EFL students. The findings of the paper show that there were statistically significant differences between the experimental group and the control group on listening comprehension tasks following the use of TED Talk videos in the experimental group. Additionally, after interviewing several students from both groups, the experimental group students considered the authentic videos to be more motivating and inspirational to them. They answered the questions more easily and participated in the discussions. Therefore, their listening comprehension improved better than the control group. However, in the long run, the students have to increase their placement level score in order to qualify for further courses. We don't know if these authentic TED Talks have a positive effect on their scores. Moreover, we need further study on the effects of authentic videos on the language acquisition of the students.

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Appendix A

Teacher’s checklist for students’ note taking and Comprehension skills worksheet

Student’s name: _____

Key for showing student’s progress for the worksheets of the video

3= a lot

2= some

1= a little

0= nothing

Attributes	Sessions			
	While using old videos			
Takes important key notes while watching the video				
Answers comprehension questions				
Participates in classroom discussion for the comprehension questions actively				

Appendix B:

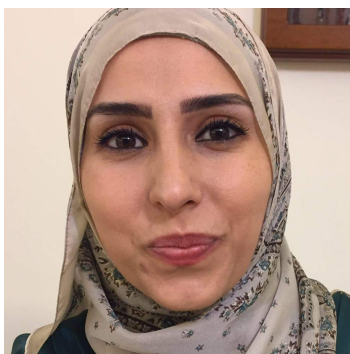
Survey Questionnaire				
Instructions: Answer statements as they relate to you. For most answers, check the box most applicable to you or fill in the blanks.				
Statement 1: The videos were interesting				
5 Strongly Agree	4 Agree	3 Neither Or N/A	2 Disagree	1 Strongly Disagree
Statement 2: The videos helped me understand the topic				
5 Strongly Agree	4 Agree	3 Neither Or N/A	2 Disagree	1 Strongly Disagree
Statement 3: The videos were easy to understand				
5 Strongly Agree	4 Agree	3 Neither Or N/A	2 Disagree	1 Strongly Disagree
Statement 4: I found the videos useful				
5 Strongly Agree	4 Agree	3 Neither Or N/A	2 Disagree	1 Strongly Disagree
Statement 5: I would like to see more of these videos				
5 Strongly Agree	4 Agree	3 Neither Or N/A	2 Disagree	1 Strongly Disagree
Statement 6: Watching videos have had a beneficial effect on my experience of learning English.				
5 Strongly Agree	4 Agree	3 Neither Or N/A	2 Disagree	1 Strongly Disagree
Statement 7: Using videos in class motivated me to study English.				
5 Strongly Agree	4 Agree	3 Neither Or N/A	2 Disagree	1 Strongly Disagree

Appendix C

1. Did you find the videos you watched in class interesting? Why or why not?
2. Were the videos difficult to understand? Please explain
3. Were the videos useful? Why or why not?
4. Do you think using videos in class motivated you to study English? How?



Sandy El Haj Hassan is an English Instructor at Air Force School in the Lebanese Armed Forces. Ms. El Haj Hassan has a master's degree in Agriculture Engineering and Food Technology from the Lebanese University – Faculty of Agriculture and Veterinary Sciences. El Haj Hassan has diploma in teaching English as a second language from the Defense Language Institute in Lackland Air Force Base. She has also attended several course overseas for teaching English. El Haj Hassan has been teaching since 2010 and has participated in several online courses. At present, she is teaching several courses for military personnel at Air Force School – English Language Department.



Zeinab Haj Hassan is an English Instructor at the Lebanese University. She is currently a Ph.D candidate at the Ecole Doctoral “Lebanese University”. She has a master's degree in English Literature from the Lebanese University. Ms. Haj Hassan has attended several online courses and participated in webinars and workshops. She has a certificate in PCELT. She has been an EFL teacher since 2008. She currently teaches at the Lebanese University, ACCESS program and Air Force School.