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English through Mass Media

A design project submitted in  
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree  
Master of Arts in Teaching English as a Foreign Language

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### Abstract

The 'English through Mass Media' course is intended for adult EFL learners with intermediate level of proficiency. It is aimed at developing reading, listening, speaking, writing and presentation skills. Considering the results of students' needs analysis there is more emphasis on speaking and listening in comparison to other skills. The course comprises ten two hour lesson plans. Each lesson plan comprises a topic related to mass media. The topics are as follows: media, propaganda, blogging, making effective presentations, Internet, social media, news, movies, television, music and songs. Students' language development is assessed through blogging, micro blogging presentation and speaking checklists. Listening and reading comprehension is measured based on a number of reading and listening activities. This course has been piloted at a language school in Armenia for a total of 16 hours. As a result of piloting experience this project comes with teacher's reflections and recommendations.

*Key words:* Mass Media, content-based instruction, CBI, English, adults

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The current design project is aimed at teaching English through mass media. This course is designed based on a content based instruction approach, since all of the English language lessons included in it are related to mass media. Mass media are the channels of communication that transmit information so as it achieves broad audience (Livesey, 2011). This content has been chosen for the course, since it embraces a wide variety of language forms thus making it possible for teachers to expose students to different forms of English.

The following course was conducted in a language school in Yerevan. The school is one of the most successful language centers in Armenia and it employs innovative EFL teaching methods. It suggests a wide variety of courses including General English classes that concentrate on the four skills: reading, listening speaking and writing.

Although General English classes are held in a communicative method and are supposed to develop all the skills, the needs analysis for the course shows that there is considerably greater demand for speaking, listening and presentation skills in comparison with others. Therefore, the ‘English through Mass Media’ course incorporates all the skills mentioned above having more emphasis on listening, speaking as well as presentation skills.

The purpose of the project is to create an innovative and effective English language course with ten complete lesson plans with a focus on media literacy. The course also aims to show the possibility of integrating mass media in language teaching.

Furthermore, this course is a contribution to target language school’s overall curriculum and is one more attempt to develop EFL teaching and learning in Armenia.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Brinton et al. (2003) define content-based instruction (CBI) as teaching second language and an academic subject at the same time. In particular, it develops students' language and academic knowledge through authentic and meaningful contexts. In this respect, Grabe and Stoller (1997) mention that Krashen's theory (1983) related to comprehensible input supports the idea of CBI. For,  $i+1$  theory of acquiring the language becomes possible through giving meaningful context (Krashen & Terrell, 1983). As a result, language learning through context enables students to deal with academic tasks and therefore raises their proficiency beyond language level (Met, 1991).

In addition, Stryker and Leaver (2007) suggest that content based instruction provides students with an opportunity to become autonomous learners. Its philosophy assumes encouraging students to keep on language learning not only inside but also outside the classroom. On the other hand, Troncale (2002) argues that CBI itself does not lead to learner autonomy. Instead, CBI enables instructors to integrate learner autonomy developing approaches in their courses.

According to Stryker and Leaver (2007) there are wide variety of models of CBI such as sheltered content courses, discipline based instruction, adjunct courses, foreign language across the curriculum (FLAC) and theme based instruction.

Sheltered courses are usually designed for K-12 second language learners and may involve specifically designed history, science, social studies and English courses. Teacher's task in sheltered courses is to employ special techniques and methods in order to make the content more simple and comprehensible for the language learners (Stryker and Leaver 2007).

Adjunct courses serve as a means of connecting English as a second language (ESL) classes to the ones in a regular academic program (Brinton et al.,2003).

FLAC programs include the usage of a foreign language as a means of conducting research in certain courses throughout the whole university curriculum. Due to this approach students can read primary sources for their articles in their foreign language. In this way this program helps students to make use of the foreign language in a meaningful way thus enriching students' cross cultural knowledge (Stryker and Leaver, 2007).

As far as theme-based instruction is concerned, Brinton et al (2003) describe it as a part of CBI in which one crucial theme or topic drives the whole curriculum (Styker and Leaver, 2007). Moreover, Brinton (2001) in her article concerning her theme-based literature course points out that theme-based approach concentrates on a broad topic that corresponds to students' interests and is intended for developing multiple skills. Although this model of CBI is commonly used with younger learners it can be practiced with learners of all ages and be developed around any kind of topic (Peregoy & Boyle, 2008). Hence, in his study of theme based English language instruction conducted on science students Arslan (2010) found out that theme-based teaching makes it possible for learners to develop academic language skills. What is more, thematic patterns contributed to the increment of learners' motivation.

Cameron (2001) highlights that the topic functions as a thread to connect the lessons throughout the course. Furthermore, the main principle for the thematic curriculum design is to keep away from unconnected activities and fragmentation in exercises (Berry & Mindes, 1993).

Cameron (2001) also believes that theme-based instruction integrates all the components in the curriculum together instead of having them separated into different topics. Thus, thematic curriculum has shifted from general education into English as a foreign language teaching, since it provides meaningful as well as motivating uses of the target language

(Cameron, 2001). In the long run, the primary purpose of theme-based instruction is to focus on language development instead of content mastery (Brinton et al., 2003).

Another significant benefit of theme-based instruction advanced by Cameron (2001) is that it enables students to learn target vocabulary quite easily due to the theme that provides meaningful context to understand and use the new words in a natural way both in oral and in written forms. Therefore, Brown (2001) holds the idea that theme based teaching is very practical approach and is quite effective in terms of language learning. Brown (2001) distinguishes four essential principles for second language learning which are well supported by theme-based teaching. The four principles are as follows: meaningful learning, communicative competence, intrinsic motivation and automaticity.

In other words, theme-based instruction to makes the integration of four skills possible, for it is the topic that controls over the sequencing and the selection of language items. This phenomenon is similar to real life situation, in case of which successful communication requires various language skills in the same period (Nunan, 2003).

The 'English through Mass Media' course belongs to theme-based instruction approach. The course goes consistent with Cameron's (2001) definition of course design in which the theme of the course serves as a thread between the lessons and keeps them connected. This course also focuses on the language rather than on content learning thereby corresponding to Brinton, Snow and Weshe's (2003) definition of theme-based instruction.

### **Mass Media in Language Teaching**

Oroujlou (2012) states that with the help of media study it is possible to find out useful information about the culture, beliefs and lifestyle of a country. And as media contain authentic information they can serve as effective sources for language learning. Also, media



incorporates various dialects and discourse styles that may arouse interests among language learners and may familiarize them with diverse language forms.

The usage and the efficiency of mass media in EFL classroom has been touched upon by many researchers (Bahrani 2011, Brinton & Gaskill 1978, Grubba 1999, Steplenski and Arcario 1992, Tafani 2009, Willie 1979).

### **Videos in Teaching English**

Steplenski and Arcario (1992) concentrated on the usage of videos in theme-based teaching. Consequently, they identify several benefits of applying videos in theme-based curriculum: one of them being the possibility of introducing a new unit related to the theme, new features of the previously discussed theme and development of thematic units through a new medium. Lonergan (1983) emphasizes some other advantages of video application in EFL classroom that is videos provide students with authentic speech and bring 'an air of reality into classroom' through exposing learners to diverse sociocultural issues, speakers and various uses of language.

However, Steplenski and Arcario (1992) believe that videos should not stand alone in a language classroom. Instead, teachers should incorporate previewing, viewing and post viewing tasks in the lessons based on students' needs, proficiency level as well teaching objectives.

Steplenski and Tomalin (1990) discuss the advantages of video learning in contrast to television. So, television allows for one time viewing that may be supported by an activity book. However, video can be watched multiple times thus enabling students to get acquainted with speaker's body language in a detailed manner. Steplenski and Tomalin (1990) also place an emphasis on the motivating component of the video apart from its pedagogical value, since video does not work effectively if it is not engaging enough.

Staplensky and Arcario (1992) reflect on the criteria for choosing video materials taking into consideration degree of visual support, speech delivery, difficulty level of the language as well as students access to related materials.

On the other hand Çakir (2006) touches upon some possible disadvantages of video integration into the lesson. The main disadvantages appear to be quality of videos and the risk that teacher might not be well trained in terms of video technology use thus making the video integration less effective.

### **News in Teaching English**

Brinton and Gaskill's research (1978) refers to the effect of the usage of another form of media-news. It shows that the usage of BBC broadcast in an EFL classroom motivates students to learn the target language not only in the classroom but also outside of it.

Poon (1992) states that using local news which is related to current issues, develops students' listening skills to the same extent as common listening materials do. However, according to Brinton & Gaskill (1978) TV and radio news broadcasts enable teachers to incorporate real information in the lessons and make it possible for students to concentrate on substantial issues in contrast to other activities. In this sense the inductors take quite a significant role in terms learning since they have to provide students with background information for the news thus raising students' awareness of their new environment. Also, the usage of TV newscasts (BBC) in the classroom increases students' motivation in terms of developing their listening proficiency not only inside but also outside the classroom.

Television and radio newscasts as a means of developing listening comprehension have been also investigated by many other scholars. Among them Bahrani (1992) mentions that extensive exposure to mass media news develops not only listening but speaking skills as

well. It is explained by the recycling of vocabulary and the fluency of speech provided in TV news.

In addition, the research conducted on developing speaking fluency through newspapers by Akdemir et al. (2012) shows that newspaper articles are one of the most effective materials to use in an EFL classroom to teach functional language, cultural patterns as well as idioms. Based on the research it is suggested that newspaper articles can be subject for various debates among students as a result of which students develop their oral skills.

### **Blogging in Teaching English**

In spite of the fact that weblogs were not initially intended for language learning they have huge potential to be used for that purpose as well (Arani 2005). Hence, weblogs enable learners to practice writing skills in different ways such as summarizing, paraphrasing and reflecting (Brooks et al., 2004) Furthermore, blogs make it possible for students to recycle the language they have learned during the class (Pinkman, 2005) and reflect on their learning. In this sense Lee and Sabatino (1998) state that reflecting on what is learned helps students get better understanding of the concepts that have been presented during the class. Lew and Schmidt (2011) mentions that a very effective way of encouraging reflective learning is to get learners express their ideas on what they are learning during the time they are learning it. According to Muncy (2014) blogging may serve as an effective tool for reflective learning, since learners are usually assigned to reflect their thoughts in a written form.

Blackstone et al (2007) consider blogs as interactive platforms that make writing instruction more effective, since they help students to learn both inside and outside the classroom. According to Pinkman (2005) through blogging learners get engaged in more creative and engaging writing tasks that lead to language development. Moreover, writing in blogs boosts teacher-student as well as student- student interaction throughout learning as it

enables them to share feedback on blogging platforms (Hyland and Hyland 2005). According to Stainley (2005) it develops the idea of community among learners and stimulates participation both from shy and dominant students.

In spite of the positive aspects of blogging mentioned by different scholars ( Blackstone et. al, Muncy 2014, Pinkman 2005, Stainley 2005) weblog writing has some drawbacks as well (Campbell, 2004, Hall, 2005 Wu, 2005).

Wu's (2005) research indicates that students may also have poor participation in blogging. The results of the research show with 35% of participants publishing less than three blog posts out of seven assigned ones.

In addition, Hall (2005) mentions in his research that students wrote blog entries with little sense of community. They simply published their writings for the sake of doing the task. Most of the blog owners ended up with little comments or interaction on their pages.

Another disadvantage related to blogging is that its availability to everybody is likely not to be accepted positively by the students. They may feel embarrassed by the idea that others can see their mistakes in writing (Blackstone et al., 2007).

### **Micro Blogging in Language Education**

According to Hsu et al. (2011) micro blogging enables students to learn collaboratively and makes it possible for them to become producers rather than passive consumers. Micro blogging may also foster exchanges among students as well as students and the teacher through giving feedback, sharing some information (Ebner & Maurer, 2008). Furthermore, micro blogging may help students develop reading and writing fluency (Ritchie, 2009).

Taking into consideration the existing evidence (Arani 2005, Brinton and Gaskill Steplenski and Arcario 1992 , Poon, 1992) on the effective usage of mass media in language teaching the 'English through Mass Media' course entails all the forms such as videos, news, blogging as well as micro blogging. The following mass media models serve as means of

developing reading listening speaking, writing and reflective learning skills throughout the whole course.

### CHAPTER THREE: PROPOSED PLAN AND DELIVERABLES

This section introduces the implementation, instruments and results of environment as well as needs analysis. The first part of this section entails description of environment analysis. Correspondingly, the second part touches upon all the aspects of needs analysis.

#### **Environment Analysis**

Environment analysis aims to find out to what extent language school setting meets the requirements of the course and whether there are available sources necessary for the course. Environment analysis was based on interviews (see appendix A for environment analysis questions) with

- Director of the school
- Director of studies

#### **Results of Environment Analysis**

Environment analysis shows the following results:

- A group may include not more than 10 students
- Duration of lessons depends on the number of students. If there are more than 3 students then the class may take 2 hours. Otherwise, 1.5 hour is provided for one lesson
- Students' level of language proficiency is determined based on an already established placement test
- Depending on the number of the lessons in the course the frequency of the classes may vary
- The school provides all the necessary technologies such as projectors, speakers, Internet access as well as a computer lab
- The school also provides all classroom materials such as copies, markers and white boards

### Needs Analysis

The purpose of needs analysis is to find out students' needs in terms of mass media for language learning purposes and therefore to design the course goals, objectives, and materials that will be geared to the target needs. The participants are 28 students from the hosting language center with an intermediate level of proficiency in English.

### Needs Analysis Instruments

Needs analysis instruments were interviews (see Appendix B for needs analysis interview questions) with teachers who had previously piloted EFL extracurricular courses at ICLT and a questionnaire (see Appendix C for needs analysis questionnaire) incorporating questions related to learners' preferences of mass media forms for language learning purposes.

### Questionnaire Results

Questionnaire results are presented in the tables below.

Table 1

*The Forms of Mass Media That are Used to Get News*

Forms of mass media	Number of answers chosen
Internet	28
Television	20
Radio	3
Newspaper	2

Table 2

*The Forms of Mass Media Used for Language Learning Purposes*

Forms of mass media	Number of answers chosen
Songs	27
Movies	25
Short videos	25
Science programs	23
Documentary programs	12
Advertisements	8
Podcasts	7

Table 3

*Willingness to Learn English through Social Media*

Answers	Number of answers chosen
Yes	27
No	25



Table 4

*The Skills that Students Would Like to Develop through Mass Media*

Answers	Number of answers chosen
Listening	14
Speaking	14
Presentations	12
Writing	10
All the given skills	10
Reading	8

Taking into consideration the results of the questionnaire the course includes most of the required forms of mass media to meet students' interests and language learning goals.

Since there is a considerable demand for listening and speaking skills, the course has a greater focus on these areas. Also, considering the fact that about 45% of the participants prefer all the skills the course targets those skills as well.

### **Interview Results**

According to interview results students' requirements are related mostly to speaking skills. Although the general English course provided at the school targets all the language skills, students tend to develop this skill to a higher level in order to be able to communicate easily without any language difficulties.

The main challenges of extracurricular courses are related to homework assignments. Since, these kinds of courses usually take place once a week it is difficult to motivate learners to do homework.

Hence, interview results proved the necessity of highlighting speaking skills throughout this course. Moreover, the amount of homework assignments reaches the minimum level because the course takes one class per week.

## **Goals and Objectives**

The course goals and objectives have been established based on the students' needs analysis. Hence, they aim to develop speaking, listening, reading and presentation skills through media.

As a result, by the end of the course students will be able to debate and discuss diverse topics related to mass media. They will watch and listen to different authentic media programs and identify main ideas and details from listening materials. They will also develop their skimming and scanning skills through reading media related texts.

Furthermore, they will be able to make their own presentations using different programs and present them effectively in front of the audience.

In addition, students will develop media literacy skills. The latter is aimed at targeting writing and reflective learning skills. Moreover, it enables students to revise the target vocabulary by making short written posts on a micro blogging platform (Twitter).

## Assessment Plan

The assessment options for the course are speaking skills, listening comprehension, blogging, micro blogging, reading comprehension and presentations (see assessment plan grid in the course book on page 4).

Throughout the course students are going to reflect on the topics of lessons in their blogs. One of the aims of blog posts is to develop students' writing skills. So, this option serves for assessing students writing skills development throughout the course as well as their ability to reflect on their own learning.

Micro blogging which assumes making written posts on Twitter is intended to measure students' ability of using the new vocabulary in a written form in various contexts. As far as speaking skills are concerned they are going to be assessed through debates and discussions and role play activities. They are assessed based on content and language feedback. Content feedback is related to the development of ideas as well as their spontaneity. On the other hand, language feedback is related to all language mistakes students make during their speech (grammar, pronunciation, word choice).

Presentations are assessed by students (peer-assessment) as well as by the teacher. Peer assessment is included in presentations to enable to students make judgments on the effectiveness of the presentations.

Since there is no grading system in the hosting language school, the assessment is implemented based on checklists designed for the course. Students are provided with checklists for all options of assessment. The checklists present all the central areas on which the feedback will be given (see the checklists in the course book on pages 6, 7).

Based on the evidence collected through the checklists and the results of listening and reading activities there is significant improvement in speaking and listening skills and presentation skills. As far as writing is concerned there is no significant development in this

area in terms of grammar and vocabulary use. However, there is considerable improvement in reflective way of writing. Also, there is some improvement in reading in terms of skimming and scanning skills.

## **Learning Plan**

The learning plan includes 10 successive two hour lessons plans all of them related to mass media. The learning plan has designed so as each lesson refers to one specific topic in mass media (see the learning plan in the course book on page 5).

As there is an emphasis on speaking skills in the course all the lessons in the learning plan involve speaking activities. As for listening activities there is only one lesson that does not explicitly focus on those (Movies). However, there are a number of speaking discussion activities in this lesson that require listening as well.

Another goal mentioned in the course is to develop presentation skills. Hence, the learning plan involves 4 presentation tasks for students. The first presentation is designed and given in groups during the lesson. As for the other 3 presentations students design them at home and present them in the class individually. Students have an opportunity to choose the topic of their presentations, since the focus of this task is on the way they present rather than on what they present.

To achieve media literacy development 4 blog reflections and 4 micro blogging tasks have been included in the learning plan. The first reflection is written in frames of the 'Blogging' lesson, since during this lesson students learn how to create blogs and publish their writings there. In addition, 3 blog reflection tasks are related to students learning on a daily basis, whereas the last one is related to their learning throughout the whole course.

Also, there are 5 media oriented reading texts involved in the learning plan that are intended to develop students reading skills.

The first lesson is introduction to mass media and it aims to familiarize students with general impact of mass media on the society. The rest of the lesson plans have an emphasis on one form of mass media enabling students to get detailed insights about each of them.

## CHAPTER FOUR: REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

English through media course was piloted at ICLT language school in a classroom consisting of six students. So, piloting gave room to several reflections and recommendations which are presented below.

First and foremost, the course was initially developed for students with intermediate level of English. However, the participants of the course appeared to have different levels ranging from intermediate to upper intermediate levels. As a result most of the materials in the lesson plans were submitted to adaptations and some changes. It can be deduced from the outcomes of the course that lesson plans can be adapted for some sublevels of intermediate level. In addition, adapted lesson plans can be used for homogeneous as well as multilevel classes unless the diversity between levels ranges from B2 to B1.

Second, due to the piloting the content of the lesson plans was a bit changed to meet the needs of students in that particular group. For instance blogging was not supposed to be a separate lesson plan in the course but rather one part of a lesson. Since, students had very vague idea of blogging it was added into the course as a topic of a lesson plan to provide detailed information on that form of media and scaffolding for their further writings in the blogs. As a result lesson plan on blogging replaced the one related to documentary films.

As far as blogging is concerned it is worth mentioning that it was a challenging task for the teacher to get students to do blogging assignment as homework. Since, the course assumes one lesson per week students were not keen on doing homework in a written form. Besides, blogging assignment target reflective learning. So, in case students do it a week after the lesson it is likely that they forget some important details from the previous lesson. As a matter of fact, reflective learning task may not be fully achieved. Hence, to solve this problem all the blogging activities were carried out in the computer lab during the class

hours. It took students 15-20 minutes to finish the task. This means that it is not only possible but also more effective to do blogging assignments during the lessons.

In the same way micro-blogging assignments were not actively completed if assigned as homework. So, it is worth considering some class hours for micro-blogging tasks. Nonetheless, it is important to take into account students' preferences concerning the platforms for micro-blogging. Prior to piloting the course twitter was intended to be the target for micro-blogging. However, most of the students in the group were not familiar with and enthusiastic about this social network. On the other hand there was significant interest related to Facebook which as a result replaced Twitter. Therefore, based on the context and students, either of the platforms can be used.

Although the focus of using micro blogging was on appropriate usage of vocabulary in different contexts it did not give fruitful results. It goes without saying that students' writing included the target vocabulary. However, most of the time students did not use the words appropriately. In spite of the fact that all vocabulary related the mistakes were corrected in the comments section there was little development in this area as they made similar mistakes when using other words in different short stories. So, the recommendation is that micro blogging can be used more effectively for other purposes. For instance, students or teacher can upload short videos or audios related to the topic of the lesson. When they watch or listen to shared materials they comments on those thus being involved in the learning process outside the classroom.

Moreover, language games are recommended to be added in the course. As each lesson in the course takes two hours without breaks it would be better to use at least one or two games in the lesson. Especially the games that pre-suppose movement from the students may work effectively in the course as they not only stimulate learning but prevent students from getting



bored or tired during the lessons (see the games in the course book in lessons *Music and Songs, Propaganda, Blogging, Making Effective Presentations*).

Last but not least, course effectiveness has been evaluated based on assessment as well as students' final reflections (see the final reflection questions in the course book on page 45). In this sense the course has been very effective in terms of developing students' speaking and listening skills which is proved by the evidence collected through assessment checklists as well as students' reflections. Out of 5 students 4 mentioned in their reflections that the course helped them develop speaking and listening skills. One of them mentioned that speaking was improved to a considerable extent, whereas there was a little development in listening.

The evidence based on presentation checklist indicates that there is significant development throughout the course among all students in terms of giving presentations. In addition, students claim in their reflections that they have never made presentations before and the course helped them to develop this skill.

Furthermore, the assessment of weblog writing shows little growth in grammar and vocabulary, however there is noticeable development in reflective writing which goes consistent with students' reflections. According to students' reflections blogging helped them analyze what they learned during the lessons.

Taking into consideration all the mentioned points above, this course succeeded in achieving most of the intended goals and objectives.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A

#### **Environment Analysis Interview Questions**

- How many students can be involved in a group?
- How many hours does one class take?
- How is the level of students determined?
- How many lessons are given per week?
- What technology sources are available in the school?
- Does the school provide materials (markers, copies) necessary for the course?
- Which language skills are the most demanded in the market?

## Appendix B

**Needs analysis questionnaire**

**1. Please circle the forms of mass media you use to get acquainted with news.**

**You can choose more than one option**

1. TV 2. Internet 3. Radio 4. Newspapers

**2. Which forms of media do you use for English learning purposes? You can choose more than one option**

1. Movies/ films
2. Songs
3. Science programs
4. Documentary programs (animal world. Etc)
5. Short videos
6. Podcasts/audio
7. Advertisements

**3. Would you like to develop your English skills through social media?(**

**YouTube, Face book, Twitter, blogs etc)**

1. Yes 2. No

**4. If you had a chance to learn English through mass media which skills would you like to develop**

1. Listening
2. Speaking
3. Reading
4. Writing
5. Presentation
6. All the above given skills

## Appendix C

### **Needs Analysis Interview Questions**

1. What are the required skills by the students?
2. What skills would you suggest to develop in terms of the course?
3. Which are the main challenges of extra-curricular course?