Effects of Videos on Students’ Knowledge of the Target Language Culture

Aslı Akyüz
Istanbul Medeniyet University

Ayfer Tanış
Kırklareli University

Eftima Khalil
Bahçeşehir University

Özdenur Ardıç
Bahçeşehir University

Enisa Mede
Bahçeşehir University

Abstract

As language and culture are two inseparable entities, language teachers need to take the culture of the target language into consideration during their teaching practices in order to have learners who are able to speak the language well and understand the social context in which it exists. Also, as 21st century teachers, we cannot deny the efficacy of technology integrated courses to maximize learning. Grounded on this information, this research aimed to find out the effects of videos on the knowledge of the target culture of EFL students and to analyse students’ perceptions about learning culture of the target language. The participants of the study included 60 students enrolled at a public university in Turkey during 2016-2017 academic year. Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected by means of a Target Culture Knowledge Test and an attitude questionnaire followed by semi-structured interviews regarding students’ perceptions about learning the culture of the target language. The results of the study pointed out that using videos enhanced students’ knowledge about the target culture. Also, the results indicated that students had a positive attitude toward learning the target culture. The findings can contribute to curriculum developers, teachers, instructors and teacher educators.

Keywords: culture, video, English as a foreign language

Suggested Citation

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INTRODUCTION

Language and culture are deeply rooted. To express how they relate to each other, Jiang (2000) stated that “language and culture make a living organism; language is flesh, and culture is blood. Without culture, language would be dead; without language, culture would have no shape” (p. 328). Obviously, what Jiang indicated is to express how they are intricately interwoven so that it is not possible to separate these two without losing the significance of either language or culture (Brown, 1994, p.165). Therefore, grounded on their relatedness, there is no doubt that teaching or learning second language cannot only be restricted to teaching or learning language skills, but it also requires the knowledge of culture of that language as the language is the mirror of culture.

Although several studies on teaching culture have revealed that language and culture are inseparable (Brown, 2007; Kuang, 2007; Schulz, 2006; Knutson, 2006; Kramsch, 1998), culture is still often taught separately and not integrated into the EFL learning process. In that sense, there is not a successful method of teaching culture and there has been a debate about how it should be taught. As a response to these debates, Kramsch (1995) stated that future language teachers should act “not only as the impresario of a certain linguistic performance, but as the catalyst for an ever-widening critical cultural competence” (p. 90), which set the goal of language education as enhancing learners’ intercultural communicative competence. Also, to achieve this goal, as 21st century teachers, it is not possible to deny the efficacy of technology integrated courses to maximize learning. Based on these, using tools such as videos and movies is considered to increase students’ motivation toward learning the target culture and to improve learners’ intercultural communicative competence.

Grounded on these, this research aimed to propose teaching target language culture through videos as this kind of strategy could give language learners opportunities to understand both the target language and culture better and enable language teachers to create more effective instructional materials. That’s why in this research, video was selected as the main teaching aid to find out both its effects on students’ knowledge of the target language culture and their perceptions toward learning the target culture.

Review of Literature

Videos are often used to teach different aspects of language as they provide a model of authentic language use for language learners. In that sense, the effects of them on language teaching have been studied by several researchers mainly in terms of skills development such as listening comprehension (Rahmatian & Armian, 2011; Wagner, 2010; Herron et al., 2006), speaking (Stephens et al., 2012), reading (Mirvan, 2013), writing (Eken, 2003), and vocabulary growth (Webb, 2010). As for teaching culture, videos have widely been used by language teachers as they give learners a chance to deal with intercultural misunderstandings; promote the growth of empathy, show intercultural conflicts including stereotypes, enable learners to view traditions and intergenerational conflicts, and allow them treat with various patterns of behaviour (Roell, 2010). However; to our best knowledge, there are only a few studies investigating the effects of using videos on improving knowledge of target language culture:

First, videos were used in Herron and Hanley’s experimental study (1992) with the aim of comparing two methods for presenting cultural information to students and finding out whether short videos could enhance learners’ retention of cultural information. The participants in the study were 56 fifth grade English-speaking students in a French Language (FL) course in English Elementary School program. The findings of the study revealed that the experimental group outperformed the control one in terms of learners’ retention of the target culture, which supported using videos in foreign language classes as a way of teaching of target culture. Following that, Martinez-Gibson (1998) held an experimental study to evaluate FL students’ ability to understand cultural differences between the native and target culture as introduced in a Sprite commercial appeared on Spanish television in 1993. The participants of the study were undergraduate college students enrolled in a fifth semester Spanish composition class. In the study,
taking part in pre and post video viewing culture based discussions enabled students to recognize culture related issues better in a FL commercial. In parallel with the previous studies, Herron et al. (1999) conducted an empirical study to explore whether students could learn culture through a video based second language program with 38 English speaking college students enrolled in three sections of a 15-week French course. The results showed an overall growth in cultural knowledge of the target language, which proved the effectiveness of videos to improve learners’ knowledge. However, as Herron et al. (2000) pointed out that the previous research (1999) didn’t question the effectiveness of using videos to teach culture to language learners having no or virtually no prior experience in learning French, another study was conducted with 50 college students enrolled in a 15-week French course to find out whether novice learners could learn culture through culture embedded videos and also learners’ perceptions of how well they could learn about the culture of the target culture. In the study, the treatment resulted in an overall increase in novice learners’ cultural knowledge of the target language. As well as in the previous research, the results indicated that videos were effective materials to enhance knowledge of culture of the language learners. Herron and Hanley (2002) conducted another study to find out the effects of journalistic videos on fostering intermediate level language students’ cultural knowledge and obtained that students’ knowledge enhanced with the journalistic videos. As proved in the previous research, the findings indicated the effectiveness of using videos in teaching target culture.

As for EFL students’ perceptions towards learning the cultural features of the target language community in their classrooms, there have been some studies whose findings differed from one study to another. Some of these studies proved that EFL learners had positive attitudes towards learning the target culture (Albirini, 2009; Sançoban & Çalışkan, 2011; Jabeen et al., 2013; Rafieyan et al., 2013) and these studies recommended the integration of cultural elements of target language into every language classroom instruction. Contrary to those studies’ findings; some studies (Jabeen & Shah, 2011) indicated that EFL students had negative attitudes toward learning the target culture.

Grounded on these, the previous research has specifically focused on either the effectiveness of videos to teach target culture or perceptions of students toward learning target culture. However, it is significant to explore whether learning culture through videos could enhance both students’ cultural knowledge and their feelings toward the target culture or not. In that sense, this mixed method research aimed to find out not only the effects of on Turkish EFL students’ knowledge on the target language culture but also the perceptions of students about learning culture of the target language in foreign language classrooms by ensuring validity and reliability through triangulation.

The following research questions were addressed in this study:

1. To what extent will video-integrated instruction affect Turkish EFL students’ knowledge of the target language culture?
2. What are the perceptions of Turkish EFL students toward learning the target language culture?

**METHOD**

**Research Design**

The study was designed as a mixed method research in which both quantitative and qualitative research and data were mixed. In this context, two variables were involved: the dependent variables were the students’ knowledge of the target culture and their perceptions about learning the culture of the target language. The independent variable was whether the use of videos affected students’ knowledge of the target culture.

Initially, the following null and alternative hypotheses were formulated (Huck, 2011):

\[ H_0: \mu_1 = \mu_2 \]

and
H₁: μ₁ ≠ μ₂

Where μ₁ stood for the mean of students’ the pre-test scores, μ₂ stood for the mean of students’ post-test scores. The null hypothesis (H₀) stated that there was no statistically significant difference between the means of the paired tests. On the contrary, the alternative hypothesis (H₁) stated that there was a statistically significant difference between the means of the paired tests. In this research, the level of significance (α = .05) was considered to be sufficient according to the covered literature.

Setting & Participants

The participants included 60 (38 males and 22 females) A1 level engineering department students enrolled at a Turkish state university in Kırklareli during the fall semester of 2016-2017 academic years. For the selection of the participants, convenience sampling was conducted. Among the several Basic English classes, one of the classrooms was selected because of its convenient accessibility and proximity to the researchers. The participants were freshmen EFL learners and had 4 hours compulsory Basic English I lessons per week while taking their major area courses at the same time. The students, 18 years of age or older, were accepted to the university according to their scores that they had achieved on the nationwide university selection and placement test. The participants in this study started taking EFL courses in their regular university programs during 2016-2017 academic year as there weren’t any preparatory programs at the university. Besides, the students who wanted to be exempted from Basic English courses were asked to take an English proficiency test at the beginning of the academic year. However, only a limited number of students were able to pass the English proficiency exam due to the limited English proficiency. Therefore, the participants in this study included the students who had compulsory Basic English I course in the fall semester. At the very beginning of the study, the participants were informed about the research and asked to give informed consent.

Data Collection Instruments

Data for the research were gathered by means of the Target Culture Knowledge Test developed by the researchers, the Attitude Questionnaire used in Rafiyean et al.’s (2013) and interviews with the students to triangulate the results.

Target Culture Knowledge Test. The test covering several target culture related issues included 20 multiple-choice questions designed by the researchers. The total score for all 20 items was 100 points; each item was rated as 5.

The Attitude Questionnaire. The questionnaire developed by Albirini (2009) was used to examine the perceptions of participants about learning culture of the target language in foreign language classrooms. The data were collected by means of an adapted version of the questionnaire used in Rafiyean et al.’s study (2013). It consisted of 12 items which were all answered on a five-point Likert Scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree” with the given values 1 to 5. The reliability estimate was α = 0.87 for the questionnaire and it was also justified to have the content validity (Rafiyean et al., 2013).

Interviews. The interviews were semi-structured in design and audio-taped. They were conducted with six of the participants whose main score in the test changed significantly after the treatment. They were 10 minutes in length and conducted in Turkish by two of the researchers for validity and reliability of the data collection. Follow-up questions were asked to elicit further information.

Procedure

The research was carried out in a class in which one of the researchers was also the teacher of the participating group. Besides, to ensure validity and reliability of the research, another researcher was also present in the classroom during the whole treatment and data collection procedure. At the beginning of the treatment, the students were allotted 15 minutes to take the Target Culture Knowledge Test which was used as the pre-test. The total scores of the pre-test were recorded to ensure students’ current knowledge of target culture. In the sixth week, the same test was used as the post-test. The time interval between the tests was six weeks in order to minimize the effects of the pre-test on the results and conclusions of the treatment.
During the six-week treatment, the teacher was teaching the target culture by using some videos which were a part of a series called “Window on Britain” by Oxford University Press. These were the main teaching aids in the treatment to teach target language culture. In the Window on Britain series, the reports were combining factual information with some semi-dramatized scenes. Among several topics in the series, six of them were included in the treatment: An introduction to Britain, Food, Sport, Festivals, Leisure and London. In the videos, English was clear and appropriate enough for the participants’ language level. And also, there were English subtitles with the video. The researchers designed fifty-minute lessons in which videos were integrated (Appendix A). The target culture was taught through the videos at the first thirty minutes. Discussions or brainstorming activities about English culture and values were used at the beginning of each session. Following that, the students were exposed to the videos twice: first for general understanding and the second for getting more details. Right before re-watching, the whole class worked through the worksheets: first students read the questions for one section and then watched the corresponding video clip to answer those questions. After that, the whole class checked the answers together because an interactive listening comprehension activity was seen as a great way to expose students to the target culture. Finally, the researcher gave slightly more depth exploration of the target culture.

In the final week of the treatment, the students were administered the same test to see what impact the treatment had on their knowledge of the target culture. Besides, the questionnaire to explore the perceptions of participants about learning culture of the target language was given to the students. Following the questionnaire, to triangulate and validate the results, the interviews were held with 6 students (3 females and 3 males). For selection of these students, purposive sampling was used. Grounded on this, all participants were chosen according to a predetermined common criterion that was relevant to meet the research aim (Patton, 2002). The researcher selected from among the students whose main score in the test changed significantly after the treatment. At the very beginning of the interview, the participants were informed about the audio-recording and asked to give informed consent. During the interviews, they were expected to give more details about their perceptions regarding learning culture in language classrooms.

**Data Analysis**

As the study was designed as a mixed method research, the data analyses were combined with both qualitative and quantitative strategies and the data were validated by means of triangulation. Whereas the obtained data from the paired samples t-test and the attitude questionnaire were analysed by Statistical Packages for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 22.0, the interviews were analysed by means of pattern coding to reduce the “large amounts of data into a smaller number of analytic units”, as suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 69). In this context, initially the data were grouped according to the categories and then interpreted in light of the study’s overall focus on students’ perceptions toward learning the target culture. In this regard, in terms of credibility and trustworthiness of the study, the researchers were supported by quantitative and qualitative research experts in each step of the study especially for inter-rater reliability while checking the codes and analysing the results.

**FINDINGS**

**Question 1: To what extent will video-integrated instruction affect knowledge of the target language culture of Turkish state university A1 level EFL students?**

In order to find out whether the video was an effective tool in teaching the target culture or not, a paired samples t-test was conducted. The researchers aimed to report the effect by taking both statistical and practical significance of their results into account. Grounded on the results of the paired samples t-test (Table 1), the differences between pre and post-tests were statistically significant in terms of students’ target culture knowledge (α < .05; Cohen’s d = 3.5) variable. The obtained findings indicated that the researchers rejected the null hypothesis and there was a statistically significant difference between the means of the paired t-tests. As for practical significance, the obtained Cohen’s d (Cohen’s d = 3.5) showed that the video treatment had a huge effect on students’ target culture knowledge according to Cohen’s criteria.
Table 1

**Paired Samples t-Test**

| Pre-Test/Post-Test | Paired Differences Mean | Std. Deviation Mean | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) |
|--------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|---|----|----------------|
| Mean               | 13.529                  | 1.747               | -39.83 | 59 | .000          |
| Std. Error         | -43.329                 | -36.339             | -22.807 |
| 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | -43.329 | -36.339 | -22.807 |
| Lower             | Upper                   |                     |         |     |               |

**Question 2: What are the perceptions of Turkish students toward learning the target language culture?**

The results of the questionnaire revealed that the students had a positive attitude towards learning the target culture as indicated clearly in Table 2. According to the results, many of the students agreed that they enjoyed learning the target culture and regarded it as a useful learning experience. Besides, more than half of the students stated their interest in knowing some cultural facts about English language and people. Moreover, most of the students indicated that they preferred language courses including cultural elements to those focusing on language alone. In addition, most of them stated that the course had positive impact on their attitude toward English culture and agreed that knowing about the target culture helped them understand the context of the language better. Again, most of the students agreed with the idea of integrating cultural elements into every language classroom and showed willingness to take further courses that would have cultural components in their future language classes.

Table 2

**The analysis of the attitude questionnaire**

| Statements                                                                 | SD   | D     | UN      | A       | SA    |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|-------|---------|---------|-------|
| 1. I enjoyed the culture part of this course.                             | 2(3.3%) | 1(1.7%) | 10(16.7%) | 30(50.0%) | 17(28.3%) |
| 2. The culture part of this course made my life in the classroom very difficult. | 33(55.0%) | 19(31.7%) | 6(10.0%) | 0(0%) | 2(3.3%) |
| 3. It was interesting to know some cultural facts about English language and people. | 5(8.3%) | 5(8.3%) | 12(20.0%) | 27(45.0%) | 11(18.3%) |
| 4. I prefer language courses that focus on language alone to those include cultural elements. | 13(21.7%) | 15(25.0%) | 14(23.3%) | 12(20.0%) | 6(10.0%) |
| 5. The culture elements were useful learning experiences.                 | 2(3.3%) | 3(5.0%) | 9(15.0%) | 28(46.7%) | 18(30.0%) |
To triangulate the results, the researchers conducted interviews with six of the participants about their perceptions regarding learning the target culture. By supporting the results of the questionnaire, the analysis of the interviews revealed that generally Turkish students were pleased with learning the target culture. Based on the analysis of the audio-scripts of the interviews, researchers explored the five main areas: opinions about learning the target culture, choice of course content, the obtained benefit, reactions toward learning the target culture, and feelings about learning the target culture.

**Opinions about learning target culture**

The first interview question aimed to find out the students’ thoughts about learning the target culture in a foreign language class. Nearly all of the participants agreed on its importance and indicated that the target language was strongly related to its culture and the more they got knowledge about the target culture, the easier learning the target language were. One of the participants reported his ideas as shown in the following quotation:

> I think the target language is strongly related to its culture. They affect each other, so the effect is mutual. The more we understand the target culture, the better we learn the target language (Student 3, December 12, 2016).

Only one of the participants stated that he did not perceive culture as an important element of language classrooms as indicated in the following quotation:
English is a worldwide language and its culture consists of different cultures. For me, English culture should be taught according to individuals’ needs and interests (Student 4, December 12, 2016).

**Choice of course content**

The second question aimed to reveal whether learners preferred language courses that focused on language alone or those including cultural elements. Again nearly all the participants indicated their preference for courses including cultural elements. They reported that knowing about target language culture was useful as it could make their communication with a native speaker easier as in the following quotation:

> I prefer language courses that include cultural elements of target language. In my point of view, learning target language is theoretical, but knowing about its culture is practical. Language and culture are inseparable. When I want to communicate with a native speaker, it can be useful for me to know about English culture (Student 3, December 12, 2016).

Only one of the participants indicated that it was not necessary to integrate the target language culture into foreign language classrooms as follows:

> I prefer the language courses that focus on language alone. The target language culture needs to be integrated into English courses if learners specifically want to learn it (Student 5, December 12, 2016).

**Reactions towards learning target culture**

When asked whether they enjoyed learning about target language culture, all the participants revealed their positive feelings toward it. The answers of them showed that they realized the similarities and differences between Turkish and British culture after they watched the videos. One of the participants explained his ideas as follows:

> I really enjoyed it. It helped me refresh my knowledge about target language culture such as the sport called “cricket”. Also I have realized that there are some similarities and differences between my culture and the target language culture. I learned that football is a common thing in both cultures (Student 4, December 12, 2016).

The other two also indicated that they enjoyed learning the target language culture. However, they indicated their preference for watching videos about sports and festivals to the others:

> For me, the most enjoyable part about the culture is watching festivals especially Halloween and also what British people do in their free time such as walking and playing golf (Student 1, December 12, 2016).

**Obtained benefit**

The fourth question aimed to find out whether they got benefit from learning the target language culture or not. All of them agreed on its benefits such as gaining knowledge about British people, enhancing general knowledge, having better communication with native speakers and retaining the cultural knowledge better:

> I had chance to recognize British people. It also makes easier to communicate with speakers of English. I believe I won't have any adaptation problem if I go to an English speaking country one day. Moreover, it made a significant contribution to my general knowledge (Student 3, December 12, 2016).
Feelings towards target culture

The last question was about whether the course had a positive impact on their attitude toward the target culture. All of them agreed on its positive impact. One of the participants reported it as in the following quotation:

_The lesson reached its aim which was to introduce British society. It was really interesting and exciting to know about British culture. The course raised my curiosity about target language culture_ (Student 1, December 12, 2016)

In conclusion, the results of the paired samples t-test revealed that the integration of culture into the course content through videos resulted in a significant difference in students’ scores regarding their knowledge of target culture. Also, the findings of the questionnaire indicated that students had a positive attitude towards learning the culture. Besides, the results of the questionnaire and interviews complemented each other as both of them indicated the positive attitudes of the students toward the target language culture.

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

This research aimed to investigate the effects of using videos on Turkish state university A1 level EFL students’ knowledge of the target language culture and evaluate students’ perceptions toward learning the target culture in foreign language classrooms. The findings proved that using videos had great impacts on improving learners’ knowledge of the target culture, which proposed another way of enhanced instruction for second language acquisition as recommended by Martinez-Gibbon (1998) and Herron et al. (1999). In addition, the results revealed that culture integrated instruction had an overall positive impact on students’ perceptions regarding learning the target culture as reported by the other researchers (Albirini, 2009; Sançoian & Çalışkan, 2011; Jabeen et al., 2013; Rafiyan et al., 2013). Obviously, these results suggest that cultural materials should be a part of every foreign language classroom instruction. Therefore, foreign language teachers should determine key cultural items in every aspect of the language that they can teach by using culture-integrated videos. So, students can have better attitudes toward the language, people speaking that language and the social context in which it exists. In addition, as stated by Jiang (2000), every form of language has different meanings in different contexts as the form is associated with culture even if the same language forms are used (p.329). To present this diversity, teachers need to use a variety of methods, techniques and materials on their way to teach different aspects of language such as listening, speaking, writing, reading and vocabulary growth. As well as the skills, based on the findings of this research, it is obvious that students should also be exposed to the target culture by using different teaching aids such as videos in order to satisfy all the needs of learners in terms of language acquisition. During these processes, they can have a chance to develop both cultural and linguistic awareness as they can have an access to the subtleties of the culture. In that sense, the findings of the research can contribute to program developers, language teachers and teacher trainers as the findings indicate that culture and language need to be taught as integrated elements in learning and teaching process.

LIMITATIONS & SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The focus of the current research was specifically on teaching British culture. However, as English assumes the role of international language (McKay, 2000), further research can explore other ways to develop language learners’ intercultural knowledge and raise their awareness. In such studies, videos can be used as main or supplementary teaching materials. The researchers could also investigate the effects of teaching culture(s) through videos on students with different ages and different proficiency levels. Finally, further research can be conducted to investigate how different techniques are good to teach culture(s) and explore whether the integration of these other tools can be as effective as videos or not.
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**Correspondence**

Res. Asst. Asli AKYÜZ  
asli.akyuz@medeniyet.edu.tr

Instr. Ayfer TANIŞ  
ayfertanis@gmail.com

Eftima Khalil  
eftimakhail@yahoo.com

Özdenur Ardıç  
ozdenurardic@gmail.com

Asst. Prof. Dr. Enisa Mede  
enisa.mede@es.bau.edu.tr
### APPENDICES

#### Appendix A

**Lesson Plan**

| Recent topic work:          | Recent language work:                                      |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| "Window on Britain"         | **Speaking:** brainstorming, warm up questions             |
| An introduction to Britain  | **Listening:** listening and watching the video related to Britain |
|                             | **Writing:** taking notes and writing their ideas about British culture |

1. Students will be able to improve their listening skills with the integration of such other skills as speaking and writing.
2. Students will be able to talk about British culture.
3. Students will be able to answer comprehension questions about the visual text they watched.
4. Students will be able to brainstorm about Britain.
5. Students will be able to be aware of British culture and British people.
6. Students will raise their intercultural awareness by means of the video they watched about target culture.
7. Students will be able to summarize what they learnt at the end of the lesson.

| Time | Stage | Aim | Anticipated Problems and Solutions | Procedures | Interactions | Material |
|------|-------|-----|-----------------------------------|-------------|--------------|----------|
| 6min.|       | Ss will be able to predict what will come based on the clues. T aims to activate their prior knowledge and experiences. | Ss may not be interested in the topic. T can raise their attention by asking them some questions. | T comes to the class and greets Ss. T Shows the students the flag of Britain and asks them to guess the topic. | T → Ss | Flag |
|      | Pre-Watching | Ss will be able to guess what the topic is and explain their opinions. Such guessing creates curiosity and makes Ss wonder what the video is about. | T writes the questions "What is the United Kingdom? What does it stand for?" on the board and asks the students to answer them as a warm-up activity. | T writes Britain on the board and wants the students to tell as many words as they can about Britain as a brainstorming activity. T also asks questions "What do you know about Britain? Have you ever been there?" | Ss → T | Board and markers. |
| Time  | Activity                                                                 | Notes                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|-------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 6 min.| While Watching                                                             | Ss will be able to listen and watch the video about Britain. Some students may not want to give answers. T can encourage Ss to give answers. Some students may not understand the instructions. T helps them and gives extra explanations. |
| 7 min.| Post-Watching                                                             | T informs the students that they will watch the video related to Britain to fill in blanks in the hand-out the teacher delivered. Some students may get bored and tired. T gets students to involve in the classroom. |
| 10 min.|                                                                           | T expects to maximize Ss vocabulary knowledge for better comprehension of the visual text. Students might finish activity earlier than expected. T may give them another activity as the second follow-up activity. |
| 5 min.|                                                                           | T distributes the hand-outs to the ss and asks them to answer the comprehension questions related to the video they watched. (Multiple choice questions) T gives 2 minutes to Ss and asks them to write a short paragraph summarizing what they learnt at the end of the video lesson. |

Adapted from Harmer, J. (2007). How to teach English. Pearson, Essex: Longman, p.161, p.163.