*Journal of Education and Social Development*, 2018, 2–2
December, 2018, pages 10-14
doi: 10.5281/zenodo.1403941
http://www.ibii-us.org/Journals/JESD/
ISBN 2572-9829 (Online), 2572-9810 (Print)

# Interactivity: Engaging Video Activities in Online Courses

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**Abstract**

Student enrollment in online courses in U.S. institutions of higher education has continued its upward trend in this century (Seaman et al, 2018) and the outlook is for even greater learner participation in virtual courses in the years ahead (Stansbury, 2017). Preparing for this upsurge in online education, universities have set aside resources to develop and upgrade online instruction although issues related to the quality of course offerings have received far less attention (Yu & Hu, 2016). Embedding multimedia into online course content can enrich the learning experience and student motivation can be increased in courses that use digital learning tools in addition to plain text. Best online instructional practices include assignments that are student centered, collaborative, reflective, and interactive (Kassop, 2003; Thalheimer, 2008). This paper examines video-related activities in the authors' online courses that involve little student interactivity, on the one hand, to those that promote critical thinking, collaboration (Palloff & Pratt, 2013), active learning (Woo et al, 2007), reflection, and engagement, on the other. The activities involve instructor- as well as student-created video assignments and submissions. Formative and summative student feedback indicate that meaningful student engagement increases with greater video interactivity.

*Keywords* interactivity, video, online instruction

## 1 Introduction

Student enrollment data collected by the Babson Survey Research Group in 2016 indicate that the number of students in higher education in the United States dropped during the previous four years. Conversely, the popularity of online courses in higher education continued to grow. In fact, academic year 2016 witnessed the fourteenth consecutive year of growth in distance education and one-third of all higher education students were enrolled in at least one online course (Seaman et al, 2018). With annual online enrollment growth rates now exceeding student population growth in higher education, "online learning within institutions of higher education deserves immediate attention from university planners, faculty members, and students" (Croxton, 2014). This trend is continuing with public institutions across the nation home to more than two-thirds of all distance learners most of whom are undergraduates (Seaman et al, 2018).

The trend is likewise continuing in Florida. The *SUS 2016 Annual Report for Online Education* notes that Florida led the nation in offering distance education courses in higher education in 2015 and ranked second behind Texas in students enrolled in them (State University System of Florida, 2016). In 2013, Florida Gulf Coast University, the home institution of the authors, offered 600 course sections accounting for 15% of student enrollment (Florida Gulf Coast University, 2013). By mid-2015, 26% of faculty and adjuncts were teaching at least one online course (Florida Gulf Coast University, 2015).

Student enrollment in online courses in higher education will continue to grow as institutions strategically position distance education in organizational planning. Interactivity in online courses is an important factor in student satisfaction and persistence. The kinds of interactivity that interest students vary as learning styles differ (Croxton, 2014).

This paper examines multimodal activities in the authors' online courses that address video interactivity. The video activities involved instructor- as well as student-created videos.

## 2 Literature Review

Activities that online students might meaningfully engage in require learners to interact critically with course materials (Pappas, 2015). These can be both instructor- and/or student-created activities. Draus et al (2014) found that student satisfaction, engagement, and performance increased with the inclusion of instructor-generated videos in online courses. Videos were used in different parts of their courses, notably, in lectures, announcements, and discussions, and satisfactorily addressed concerns that were often raised when comparisons between face-to-face and online courses were made, namely, that student engagement was missing and instructors were not present or engaged (Korkut et al, 2015). And, after examining almost seven million video watching sessions involving approximately 128,000 students, Guo et al's (2014) most significant recommendation is that videos shorter than six minutes are more student-engaging than longer ones.

Vural (2013) investigated videos with embedded questions and found that these types of activities can promote student learning as well as enhance the amount of interaction. They can encourage and motivate learners to pay attention to the video and interact with it by answering questions as they play the video. Cummings et al (2016) investigated specifically in-video quizzes in the context of a programming course. They recommend the use of embedded questions in video lectures as a strategy

to improve the level of engagement. Bravo et al (2011) conclude that interactive video use has a positive effect on students' perception and increases their motivation.

In addition to the motivation and engagement component of interactive videos, there is individual control over the content. They may lead to better learning outcomes and higher learner satisfaction (Zhang et al, 2006). Adiy's research (2016) concludes that learners can benefit from more control over the video with embedded questions and follow up feedback on responses.

# 3 Instructor-Created Videos

## 3.1 Course Introduction & Orientation to Learning Management System

One type of instructor-created video that is used in the authors' online courses, particularly for first-year students who may be new to online learning or unfamiliar with Canvas, the university's course learning management system (LMS), appears on the Home page during the first week of a course. The purpose of this short video is to help students navigate Canvas and use its features. Students learn how to submit assignments, use the communication tool, post to discussion forums, access the gradebook function, and adjust course settings to fit their needs. The authors use Kaltura, Canvas' online video platform, to develop these short explanatory videos. An added advantage for the students is that they see and hear their virtual professor welcoming them to the course. From the beginning of the course, students know that there is a "real" person on the other end of their digital connection. A student at the end of the semester made this comment:

> *The professor explained how Canvas worked through a screenshot video. I think that this should be required for all online courses.*

## 3.2 Module Instructions & Overviews

Another kind of instructor-created video used in the authors' online courses is an introduction to and overview of assignments due during a weekly module. These are short three-to-five-minute videos that review the objectives of the module, the course materials to access and read, the videos to view and/or interact with and the assignments to be submitted. In response to a question at the end of the semester on how the instructor presented and explained information, one student wrote:

> *For an online course, the material given was presented well. The professor went out of her way to upload a video almost every week with the specifics of the assignments.*

## 3.3 Interactive Video Quizzes

By far, the most engaging component of the authors' online courses have been the use of graded interactive video quizzes using the Kaltura tool in Canvas. These interactive video quizzes are three to eight minutes long and include embedded multiple-choice or true-false questions. Using YouTube videos, the authors easily add questions through the user-friendly Kaltura interface. As the students watch a video, questions appear that they are required to answer. Flexible settings allow instructors to choose whether viewers can repeat sections, skip questions, revise answers, get hints, and have access to correct answers. The interface has an analytics feature, which indicates who completes each quiz, which questions are answered correctly, and how much time is spent on the quiz. As soon as students submit their quizzes, they see their scores that are directly recorded in the students' Gradebook in Canvas. In the end of year university-wide Student Perception of Instruction (SpoI) survey, students respond to the question: What has the instructor done to help you learn the course content effectively?

> *The most effective thing was the interactive videos. This is because it was teaching us how to write things effectively, as well as making us actually pay attention to the entire video because there is a quiz throughout it. I really enjoyed these videos. I like the interactive video assignments because I got to listen and watch and then get quizzed to make sure I understood what I was just taught.*

> *I liked the interactive videos in this course. I appreciate anything visual so it was a nice way for me to retain the information by watching short clips and answering questions throughout.*

> *The interactive video assignments in this class were extremely effective, there was a new face showing and explaining information almost every week. We were able to re-watch the videos and go over the questions as many times as we wanted. The length of the videos was probably the best part, because they were so short it did not scare me away from wanting to check my work and watch the video twice.*

### 3.3.1 Module Content

The majority of interactive video quizzes in the authors' online courses focus on course-related concepts. For example, in the first-year composition course, there are videos on summarizing versus synthesizing, revising versus editing, and formatting the first page of a paper in MLA style. In a Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) methods course, videos deal with lesson preparation, language proficiency assessment tools, and the special needs of English language learners. The Kaltura interface facilitates the production of in-house or use of YouTube videos. These embedded videos may be accompanied by text introductions that provide students with brief overviews of the content or they may include sets of questions that students respond to in accompanying discussion forum assignments.

### 3.3.2 Course Syllabus

In addition to using interactive quizzes on module content, the authors have found that an effective strategy to motivate online students to view and read the course syllabus is to create a graded interactive video quiz on the various components of the document.

## 3.4 Web Conferencing – Synchronous and Archived

In order to increase both instructor presence in an online class and student-teacher interaction, the authors have once again experimented with the Canvas web conference tool, Big Blue Button. This function permits both instructors and students to share files and screens while seeing and speaking with each other. The conferences can be recorded, and the sessions can be made available to students who could not attend. During a recent semester, students in three online classes were polled to determine the best day and time to hold short whole-class and individual conferences. Based on feedback, sessions were scheduled on three separate occasions in each class. No students attended the whole-class sessions; one student in each of two classes joined the individual conference meetings. Since these online conferences were optional assignments, participation was low. Registration for the authors' future online courses now clearly notes that there are required synchronous web conferences (that will be recorded and made available for absent students.)

## 3.5 Student Feedback

Toward the conclusion of the fall, 2017 semester, students provided summative feedback on each of their courses. The survey, titled the Student Perception of Learning (SPoI), is completed by students who choose to participate. The authors added customized questions at the end of the survey, two of which follow.

**Q1: There are short videos created by your instructor that introduce the content covered in some of the modules in the course. These videos motivated me to learn the content in the modules (115 responses).**

| Response Option | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Strongly agree | 61 | 53.04 |
| Agree | 30 | 26.07 |
| Undecided | 12 | 10.43 |
| Disagree | 10 | 8.69 |
| Strongly disagree | 2 | 1.07 |

Respondents either strongly agreed or agreed (80%) indicating that the instructor-produced videos motivated most students to learn module content.

The following are comments from students on the instructor-produced videos in the course.

> *She uses visuals via videos and photos as part of her teaching technique that helped tremendously.*

> *The videos and examples she would use would always help me out on our assignments when I was confused.*

**Q2: There are graded interactive video quizzes on various subjects in each module of the course. The graded interactive quizzes assisted me in learning the course material (115 responses).**

| Response Option | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Strongly agree | 62 | 53.92 |
| Agree | 29 | 27.22 |
| Undecided | 7 | 6.08 |
| Disagree | 14 | 12.17 |
| Strongly disagree | 3 | 2.61 |

Similarly, approximately 80% of the respondents felt that the interactive quizzes assisted them in learning the course material. Below are more comments by students.

> *I enjoyed how our professor presented the information. I particularly enjoyed the online interactive assignments. I have never done them prior to this class and I truly enjoyed them as the term progressed.*

> *I enjoy the interactive videos and feel that they keep me focused on the videos, which are very informative.*

> *I liked the interactive videos in this course. I appreciate anything visual so it was a nice way for me to retain the information by watching short clips and answering questions throughout.*

## 4 Student-Created Videos

Student-created videos can result in more authentic learning experiences adding, according to Talbert (2015), "a large dose of humanity to the learning experience" and contribute to the development of a learning community in a course. They can involve learners in developing and demonstrating higher-order learning skills in which they must first understand, then create, analyze and evaluate course materials.

### 4.1 Reflection

Reflection can be an effective learning strategy (Dewey, 1960). It is especially helpful as an aid in the professional preparation of preservice teachers (Schon, 1987). Video technologies have been used in the preparation of preservice teachers for analysis and reflection on communication competence (Bower, Cavanagh, Moloney & Dao, 2011) and case studies (Cannings & Talley, 2002).

Online discussions of video case studies have also been used in the professional preparation of teachers (Koc, Peker & Osmanoglu, 2009). Baecher and Kung (2014) have used video tutorials on how and what to observe and analyze in teaching scenarios prior to observation and analysis by preservice teachers. Santagata, Zannoni & Stigler (2007) point out that preservice teachers require a framework to assist them in their analyses of video classroom observations and that students commented in their reflections that they valued their video-based observations more than their field-based ones. Similarly, Cannings and Talley (2002) note that use of video case studies "enable preservice teachers to reflect on classroom practice that they might otherwise not experience" (p. 367).

Students in one of the authors' Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) methods courses are assigned to produce two videos of their instruction: a five-minute video clip of an ESOL (English to Speakers of Other Languages) teaching strategy followed a few weeks later by a six-minute video consisting of a one-minute reflection followed by a five-minute video of the same teaching strategy addressing different course content. These preservice teachers concurrently intern in local K-12 schools two days a week during a semester. During the early weeks of the semester, they are introduced to the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol Method (SIOP) (Echevarria, Vogt & Short, 2012), its various components and descriptors of each, and prepare lesson plans using a template that includes the eight components of the SIOP and at least one ESOL teaching strategy (Vogt & Echevarria, 2008; Vogt et al, 2014), for example, Canned Questions. In their classrooms, they teach these lessons which are videotaped and then edit the raw footage into short clips demonstrating each SIOP component and the ESOL teaching strategy. Afterwards, they reflect on their lessons in the lesson plan itself. A sample reflection in one student's lesson plan follows:

> *This was the first time I have ever used this type of strategy to assess the students and I actually found it very worthwhile. I have decided to keep it in my lesson plan for this topic going forward as well as incorporating it into some others. I found that the strategy really pushed the students to have some deep discussions about what they had seen as well as make connections. The only thing I really wasn't prepared for was how long it takes to incorporate this strategy. I had originally envisioned it being like showdown and the groups would be able to construct their answer within a minute or two. I found the students to really engage with each other, but the result was that it took several minutes for them to formulate their answers and because of the depth that some groups had, the discussions took longer than expected. This was definitely a worthwhile addition, but I need to remember to plan the time for the higher-level thinking and discussions it has the potential to create.*

They then upload these short five-minute clips to their accounts in YouTube and embed the URLs into a course discussion forum accompanied by their completed lesson plans. Students comment on their peers' video lessons focusing on descriptive versus technical aspects of the lessons (Hatton & Smith, 1995) while using a sandwich critique format (Leibold & Schwarz, 2015): one statement about a strength in the lesson

and reason; one that needs strengthening, the reason and a suggestion for improvement; and, a final statement focusing on another strength in the lesson and the reason. One student example critique is the following:

> *I really enjoyed watching you teach this lesson! A huge strength that I saw right as your lesson started was how well you reviewed the previously learned vocabulary words. This was a great way to "build background". You also seemed very confident in teaching your lesson, which reflected back on how well the students did in responding to the questions you asked in this section as well. In the "strategies" section I did notice something that could be improved. I think it would help your students more if you gave them more time to discuss with their table the answer they came up with. It is important to think-pair-share so students are able to explain to their peers how they came up with the answer, this can lead to more mastery of the topic. You did extremely well in the "interaction" portion of your lesson. The hands-on modeling techniques you used with your students really showed how well they mastered the lesson, I will definitely use this in a future class of mine! Good job.*

The course instructor adds to the discourse with detailed comments which are technical, descriptive and promote dialog (Hatton & Smith, 1995; Hardman, 2016).

### 4.2 Video Reflections

Students then read their peers' and instructor's comments, coordinate their next assigned video lesson with their cooperating teacher, incorporate suggested changes, and go through a videotaping/editing/embedding/commenting process similar to the first. In producing the second video assignments, students include a one-minute video selfie at the beginning of the video clip in which they reflect on the teaching experiences, lessons learned, and the impact of their lessons on their learners.

Overwhelmingly, the most successful and meaningful activities in this course are these video assignments, particularly the second one. One student summed up her experience.

> *The assignment that supported my learning the most was the SIOP video lessons. These assignments required me to write a SIOP lesson plan, teach the lessons, review the video of my teaching, and reflect and improve upon them. The video aspect of the lessons really allowed me to view myself teaching and see things that I would not have noticed if I had not recorded them, and be able to improve.*

A preservice teacher started her video reflection.

> *So here we are at the end of the Level 1 internship. My ESOL teaching strategy was Bingo. Some changes that I made to my second SIOP lesson that were not in my first were I had students work more with their partners. Once they were done finding the word on their board, they helped their partners at the table. After each student got Bingo - I made sure that they all got Bingo - they would read me each of their five words in the row. The next thing I decided to do was walk around more while they worked at their tables. This was really helpful for the English language learners because I was able to see where they were and if they were following along and I could provide scaffolding support if it was needed. I think my second videotaped lesson went much better than my first. I felt more prepared and more confident with what I was doing since I was able to view and reflect on my first video and I got all the feedback from my peers and professor. I feel that I am now very comfortable with the strategy and will definitely use it in future classes. I really enjoyed teaching this lesson and I hope you enjoy watching it. Please give me any suggestions that you may have for improving the strategy or my teaching. Thanks.*

Another student reflected in an online discussion forum that

*I believe the video clips were one of the most valuable assignments we completed in this course. Knowing that it was going to be recorded placed a higher level of emphasis on getting it right and being tasked to incorporate an ESOL strategy forced me to read through the strategies and learn about different ways to approach students. To this end, I was more engaged as a learner receiving feedback and as an evaluator providing feedback and placed a great deal of effort in planning my lesson and making sure that the feedback I provided my peers was research-based and valid. The biggest difficulty I had in this assignment was actually learning how to use the movie editing software on my computer, but I was also interested in learning to use the SIOP model because it was new to me. In learning to use this new lesson planning tool, I found I was able to deconstruct my lesson into the critical aspects identified by Levine and McCloskey (2013) for language acquisition. This helped me understand how I could adapt my lesson to make sure I was meeting the needs of my English language learners and native speaking students. As I noted in my video reflection, by understanding the strategies of teaching English language learners, I felt better able to provide constructive criticism to my peers. The end result of this project was that I gained confidence and skill in being able to critically reflect on my own teaching, learn from the comments of others, and evaluate other lessons.*

### 4.3 Visual Argument

Another student-produced video assignment in one of the authors' courses is a low-stakes pre-writing assignment for a major visual argument video presentation that represents 20% of the course grade. Visual arguments use images to engage viewers and persuade them to accept a particular idea or point of view. This assignment is an "I Love Florida" video the purpose of which is to persuade a certain target audience. The students use an online app called Animoto (www.animoto.com) and combine text, music, video, and images to produce a short video. The directions to the assignment require students to create a 30-second advertisement targeting a specific audience based on the first letter of the students' last name. Examples of the breakdown of the various audiences are as follows:

- Last names beginning with A-D: retirees.
- Last names beginning with E-H: young professionals between the ages of 25-35.

This assignment successfully engages students by requiring them to convey the power of visuals in making an argument.

## 5 Conclusion

As noted earlier, overall student enrollment in higher education in the U.S. continues to decline yet student participation in online learning has been increasing (Allen & Seaman, 2017). Educational institutions are challenged now more than ever before to implement changes on campus that will attract and retain all students including the growing number of virtual learners. Efforts are being made to inform instruction so that online courses become attractive options for students (Stanford, 2016; Morgan, 2016).

One tool for motivating learners that the authors have been exploring is the use of interactive videos. The formative and summative feedback from in-house surveys, some ofwhich is provided above, indicate that both instructor- and student-created video activities lead to positive online learning experiences. These experiences appear to motivate most students to engage and interact with the material, especially the teacher-created videos with embedded questions and the student-created ones. Additionally, the reflection videos produced by pre-service teachers in the ESOL methods classes demonstrate that meaningful learning can occur when students reflect and act on what they have learned.

The task of interfacing meaningfully with online learners to meet learner needs is ever demanding of academic institutions and virtual instructors. Regarding the use of video technologies, providing online learners with more meaningful opportunities to interact with online course instructors, with one another, and with content is a never-ending quest. These multimodal ways of connecting all stakeholders should result in more satisfied students who have positive, engaging and interactive learning experiences in online courses.

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