The Advantages of Using Films to Enhance Student's Reading Skills in the EFL Classroom

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Abstract

Having students who are exposed to different media and technology resources, from audio to printed material students lack the motivation for learning in conventional way. For this reason, teaching English, finding ways and materials to make the learning experiences for EFL students more engaging and interesting has become more challenging than ever. This is the main reason why English language teachers always keep searching for more motivating teaching sources. Although most of course books have CD's and DVD enclosed, these turn out to be less authentic and not very engaging for students. In order to bring the variety into the classroom many teachers use films in EFL teaching. Films are usually seen as a media that attracts students' attention, present language in a more natural (interactive) way that found in course-books. What is more important films offer a visual context aids which help students understand and improve their reading skills. This paper analyzes the effects of using films in the EFL classroom. It reveals it effects on developing students reading and communication skill.

Keywords: media, films, teaching English, reading skill, comprehension.

1. Introduction

Many scholars have revealed that films used in EFL classroom can become an important part of the curriculum. This is based on the fact that films provide exposures to the real language, used in authentic settings and the culture in which the foreign language is spoken. They also have found that films catch the learners' interest and it can positively affect their motivation to learn (Kusumarasdyati, 2004; Luo, 2004).

Being an English teacher at South East European University, I've had difficulties in engaging students in the reading activities. The graded readers that students use in our university are often intimidating to students. In many cases, the settings and historical context presented in graded readers are unfamiliar to the students. Therefore, they do not feel motivated and show no interest in reading. Contemporary scholars on media literacy believe that the same habits that a good reader brings to a written text are those that bring students to a visual text. According to those scholars in both cases, students predict, make connection, ask questions, and interpret. In both situations, meaning is made through the details of character, theme, plot, mood, conflict, and symbolism. Many teachers prefer to watch the movie adaptations of famous and current novels as a supplementary source to the reading. Practice has shown that, reading the entire book can be tiresome and boring while an audio visual experience can be more entertaining and engaging to students.

2. Literature Review

Although there are many studies conducted regarding using the movie in ELT classes, very few studies were done on the use of films for enhancing reading comprehension; with the exception of one study (Weyers, 1999) . On the other hand, there are numerous researches on using the videos in developing particular language skills, especially reading comprehension, (Wetzel,Radtke & Stern, 1994; Ginther, 2002; Gruba, 2006; Opat, 2008; Suvorov, 2008; Chung, 1994; Ockey, 2007). Herron and Seay (1991) had conducted the research on using video in reading comprehension. The research has provided evidence that the experimental group performed significantly better on the final tests of reading comprehension with both the video and the audio than did the control group in which no strategy training occurred. Herron, et al. (1995) has come to a conclusion that:

> *"Video is lauded for contextualizing language (i.e., linking language form to meaning) and depicting the foreign culture more effectively than other instructional materials. Videotapes permit students to hear native speakers interacting in everyday conversational situations and to practice important linguistic structures. Unlike audiocassettes, video's visual dimension is thought to reduce ambiguities present in native speaker voices and to motivate students to want to learn the foreign language (Herron, et al., 1995, p. 775)."*

Other scholars has concluded that movie fragments help enhance memory and recovery of information in reading and reading (Pezdek, Lehrer, & Simon, 1984). Using the same pattern, they may help develop writing skills (Hanley, et al., 1995). Herron and Hanley (1992) concluded that using films in EFL classroom offers background information that activates prior knowledge, which is essential in stimulating the four skills activities in the classroom.

Joseph R. Weyers (1999) carried out a research with an authentic soap opera to measure whether it can increase students reading comprehension and enhance their oral production. For his research he used the control group and the experimental group.

The experiment was conducted in two second-semester Spanish classes for 8 weeks at the University of New Mexico. All students took the pre- and post-treatment tests. Both groups followed the established curriculum for second-semester Spanish. However, the experimental group was supplemented by the experimental treatment. The study required that students in the experimental group watched two episodes of a Spanish soap opera per week. Before viewing each episode, the teacher gave the participants a short summery in English of the *telenovela*. At the end of the research, result of the experiment has suggested that *telenovelas* are a valuable source in increasing the students' reading comprehension skills. Jia-Jen Luo's study examined the influence of DVD films on students' reading comprehension. Nine films were incorporated into the class curriculum and used during the whole school year. The DVDs were the main materials of the course, supported by the additional, specially designed activities. Instructional activities included story-telling, picture description and open-ended questions for group discussion on topics retrieved from the films. The researcher incorporated caption-on and caption-off activities in order to practice student's reading skill. The final results of the statistical analyses indicated that student's reading skill "did improve" through the instruction of using DVD films in a motivating learning environment with "lower level of anxiety" after a whole school year .

3. Method

Two types of data collection were used:

1. Questionnaire for students

2. The quiz given at the end of the presented vocabulary

1. Data are collected through students' and teachers' questionnaire which investigates their attitudes towards movie-based teaching and learning. The questionnaires are designed in the form of a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree". The questionnaires were distributed to six LC English teachers and to the 60 students.

2. The quiz was given at the end of the reading section.

This study is primarily concerned in contributing to the quality of the process of teaching and learning, through the use of media, particularly using films in ELT classroom. For the purposes of this study the controlled and experimental groups were used. A class of 28 students was subject to the experiment and the remaining thirty two students served as a control group. The experimental group considered a novel-based movie in English before they had read the same novel on the graded reading Books (Oxford University Press). The control group students were given the same readers, with the same question activities but without the movie accompanying the books.

The study attempts to answer these research questions:

- What are the teachers' attitudes towards the using films on development of the students' reading skills in academic settings?
- What are students' perceptions towards using films in EFL classroom?
- Can using movies be engaging and helpful for students to develop their reading skills?

Participants

- The participants in this study were SEEU undergraduate students, between the ages of 18-25. The total sample of participants consisted of 80 students, male and female, all in a multicultural classroom setting. Their level of proficiency is intermediate. The study took place over four month's period of time.
- Six teachers who have already implemented the films in their classes were sent a questionnaire.

4. Procedures

For the purposes of this study, films "Gulliver's' travels" and "Picture of Dorian Grey" which were used as an in-class reading as well were chosen for both groups (controlled and experimental). However, classroom procedures and teaching methods were different for each group. These two films were chosen because they are required on the syllabus but also because students found these readers very difficult to analyze and understand.

The controlled group used the usual procedure and activities for the in-class reading. In both cases at the beginning, of the class, students were given a short list of vocabulary words and phrases used in the book in order to prepare them for better understanding of the story.

The controlled group reading class began with a cover picture and the book title for discussion, then getting started by activating their previous knowledge, and getting ready to read; at this stage students are given pre-reading questions and True/False questions as a brainstorming activity. At the end the students are given post-reading questions in order to check comprehension.

For the Experimental Group, the movie trailer introduced the core theme. Students were also given True/False

questions as a brainstorming activity. All through movie class, students viewed segments of ten-to-fifteen-minute video material. As the students watched the tape, the teacher stopped occasionally to check comprehension. During this time students had "while-watching" questions, which purpose was to check comprehension but also force students to better concentrate on the movie.

After watching the films, the experimental group received a questionnaire which aim was to get students' feedback regarding using the movie in the classroom and to investigate the relationship between movie-viewing and student's performance.

After watching the movie, students (of the both groups) were given quiz with vocabulary, writing and speaking activities. The vocabulary exercises consisted of comprehension questions, True /False questions. For the writing activity, students had to write a brief summary of the story. And finally, as a follow up activity, both groups' students were given an oral assignment 2-3 min for each student to describe best/worst character of the story.

Although presenting full-length films in a classroom is time consuming, after some practicing it does not necessarily become a significant obstacle. In the SEEU where I have implemented this teaching technique, one session of lesson lasts for 100 minutes. This facilitates showing one entire movie (approximately 90-115 minutes long) .On the other hand, doing the relevant exercises cannot be completed in a single session, but this can be easily overcome by splitting the activities into two sessions.

5. Interpretation of Findings / Results

The findings reviewed in this study showed significant differences between experimental and control group of students on integrated skills using video incorporated in the teaching material. We might conclude that motivational factors associated with movie-based teaching helped to increase the efficiency of the teaching and learning process.

Q1. What are the teachers' attitudes towards the using films on development of the students' language competence and performance in academic settings?

The general impression of the teachers is that films have a positive effect on students' language learning process. They believe that using films combined with the readers helped students to become active participants in the classroom activities. Teachers claim that films can enhance the communicative competence; they improve learners' interaction in class and provide students with more opportunities to use English. They also claim that they faced difficulties while selecting suitable films for different proficiency levels and that watching a movie might be very time consuming. Almost all teachers received positive feedback from students when they involved films along with the reading activities and as a result students were participating in the classroom debates and vocabulary activities as well as written assignments related to the movie review.

2. What are students' perceptions towards using films in EFL classroom?

Using films in the classroom was new and very pleasant experience for the students. They claim that they enjoyed the assigned activities in the classroom. Students were more motivated to see and hear real life situation than to follow the activities in the graded book. Their impression is that films also provide a relaxed atmosphere. Students claim that using movie is a good way to improve English vocabulary and gives them more chances to practice English. Most of students said that they have learned new words approximately 3-5 mainly because those words that have been repeated many times. According to them key word preview given at the beginning of the class facilitates learning and it helped them to understand clearly the content of the movie. From the students questionnaire we might conclude that:

- Students preferred genres are comedy and action movies and they do believe that English movies have beneficial effect on learning English.
- Students' answers show that they are interested in learning English if the teacher uses English films as teaching materials.
- They were neutral regarding the questions do they think that their movie preferences will affect their learning and do they think English captions are good in learning English. This may be very reasonable answers having in mind that they didn't have too much exposure to the movie-based teaching in order to be able to measure their achievements and be able to give more concrete answers.
- Regarding the keyword preview, which method was also applied in this study, students agree that it helped them understand the story line of a movie and that the keyword preview before movie viewing motivated them to learn English.
- Students agreed that movies are useful in learning English and that they have learned some English by watching the movie. They mostly learned words that were repeated many times.

3. Can using movies be engaging and helpful for students to develop their reading skills?

The questionnaire's results show that students can learn more effectively when their attention is focused on the task; therefore they are focused more on the language they use than on the grammatical form. The classroom atmosphere is comfortable, cooperative and there is a lot of interaction among students. As a result students

score better results at all skills. In addition, different types of tasks stimulated different patterns of interaction. As in reading, good listeners make good use of chunks to understand what they hear (Hawkins et al., 1991). From the students' responses to the questions concerning the development of reading skills in the questionnaires revealed that students gave positive responses.

Students responded positively to the movie-based instruction and indicated that the advantages of using films to teach reading increased learning interests and motivation. Students claimed that it provides the chance for learning real-life conversation .Films helped improve reading comprehension, writing and speaking ability. Students of the experimental group scored much better results from the controlled group. After watching the movie they were more motivated to read the graded book. They also were keener to participate in group discussions. They were able to discuss and analyze the characters and had a better picture of the events. While watching the movie and completing the vocabulary activities, students acquire and use new words. Learning new vocabulary helps students become more fluent because the more words they know, the easier it is to express themselves. All these processes encourage students to develop critical thinking skills. In ELT classes words and expressions are studied in isolation from a meaningful context. On the other hand by watching movies, students can access, view, and repeat texts that are richly contextualized by good features of accompanying visual and textual information. Another important benefit of films is that students are able to recognize core vocabulary and the rules and patterns of words used to communicate.

6. Advantages and disadvantages of using the films as a supplementary resource

One of the advantages of using the movie is that visual images stimulate student's perceptions directly, while written words can do this indirectly. Films are more sensory experience than reading -- besides verbal language, there is also color, movement, and sound. Movie-based experimental class was livelier and the students were more interested in following the lesson carefully, contrary to the other class were reading was presented through graded readers only. Movie-viewing experiences further created more student-teacher and student-student discussions. Films draw students' attention and captured their interest. The benefits of using the films in teaching and learning is unquestionable. Among advantages emphasized above, films enhance student's reading skills in a way that it strengths students' understanding of English context-bound expressions. It may also help learner practice pronunciation by repeating after the characters. On the other hand, by doing so, it helps students' to guess the words meanings from visual clues. It also helps develop other skills such as listening and writing skills. Along with this skills, watching films ,extends their thinking skills like comparing and contrasting, analyzing perspective, constructing support or error analysis.

Among its positive sides there are some disadvantages as well. Among the most common disadvantages cited by the participating teachers was that using films in the classroom meant lost class time and the difficulty of showing films in class periods.

As the main disadvantage in watching the movie is that a movie must generally reduce events into two hours or so while there is no time constraint on a novel. While the meaning of a novel is controlled by the writer, the meaning students get from a film is the result of a mutual effort by a large number of people. Another disadvantage is that films do not allow interacting with the plot or characters by imagining them in our minds. For some teachers, this is often the most frustrating aspect of turning a novel into a movie. Some students might resist viewing the movie without or with English subtitles. These films take more effort to follow because of the need to read the subtitles and watch the scenes.

7. Pedagogical Implications and Suggestions for Further Research

This study was an investigation on the correlation between the viewing the films and effective learning in EFL classrooms. Although the study revealed that films could facilitate the learning is not necessarily a must. It greatly depends on how pedagogically appropriate films are used and how effective it is used in teaching. Films and their special features such as subtitles were of a great help to develop an effective learning environment. Poor readers tend to have little background knowledge about the text, which causes them to have difficulty comprehending what they are reading (Anderson & Pearson, 1984). Since films supply additional background information, they can activate schema to aid reading comprehension (Mei-Ling Chen ,2012) Based on the findings of the study, three pedagogical implications were emphasized.First, teachers can employ movie-based instruction to improve students' reading and speaking skills. Second, teachers can increase students' interests and learning motivation by incorporating films in the reading activities. Last but not least, activities derived from the films, such as dictation, group discussion, and oral presentation, can also enhance students' reading and speaking skills.

8. Limitation

Time for implementation of this experiment was too short; maybe implementing this method over more periods

of time may yield different findings. The study was limited to a relatively low number of students. It should also be assess in other language levels as EAP, ESP etc.

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