

Bridging the Gap between Theory and Practice: The Use of Films in Language Learning

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Abstract: Films can be used as a pedagogic means to improve language learning, based on the premise that, they provide real-life language input. In addition, films have the potential to provide language learners audio and visual stimuli; therefore they are essential tools in the development of foreign language proficiency. The present study aims at exploring the effectiveness of films as authentic materials on language learning. The questionnaire that was conducted on 80 undergraduate students in this study yielded that films can foster language learning.

Keywords: Films, Listening, Communication, Language Learning, Language Proficiency

1. Introduction

Films are essential materials for language learners as the language used in them comprise everyday language. Conversations in films occur in real life contexts, therefore learners explore how language is used by its native speakers. One of the major benefits of films is their contribution to the development of spoken language comprehension. Understanding the authentic language, which is used in films, supports enhancement of listening comprehension. Listening is useful in language learning for its high potential to provide comprehensible input for learners. A further benefit of films is their role in recalling of L2 vocabulary; moreover, learners gain knowledge about stress, accent and intonation. In terms of developing critical thinking, making learning more enjoyable, effective, and efficient for writing classes, movies play important role, as well. Also pronunciation can be fostered with watching films. This study intends to examine the role of watching films in language learning; in particular the study investigates whether the use of films in language learning motivates learners to develop their language proficiency.

2. Literature Review

Martinez (2002) argues that films have high level language proficiency and the vocabulary introduced in films is irrelevant to needs of learners. Similarly Widdowson (1996) highlights the difficulty of the vocabulary in films and concludes that learners can be demotivated. However, learners' ability of interpretation is enhanced through constant exposure to language input (Bacon & Finneman, 1994).

The use of films in the EFL classroom provides a great number of advantages. Many researchers (Cross, 2011; Stempelski, 2000; Mekheimer, 2011) investigated the role of films in language teaching and majority of them agree on their benefits in language learning environment. Films are essential materials in a language lesson that "provide more pedagogical options and are a rich resource of intrinsically motivating materials for learners" (King, 2002, p.1). Khan (2015) considers that it makes perfect sense

when movies are integrated into language classrooms since films are an inclusive piece of students' lives today, so they are motivating and render the language learning enjoyable.

Films are valuable sources of authentic language. Authentic materials are produced in real communication rather than for the purpose of language teaching (Nunan, 1999). As authentic materials include the characteristics of language used by the native speakers (Taylor, 1994), they have significant impact on the language improvement. Integration of these materials into language teaching is pedagogically useful because learners are exposed to the target language (Gilmore, 2007). Language learners practice how to utilize the language in real world settings. Melvin and Stout (1987) advocate the use of films in language learning because learners stand a better chance of practicing the language. Films are interesting and motivating therefore language learners effectively absorb the language input provided by them.

Moreover, Li (2013) states that movies not only provide for learners linguistic information but also enable them to understand the social environment where the language is spoken. Films are useful tools to be aware of dialectal differences of a language (Martinez, 2002) and they are associated with the study of culture (Melvin & Stout, 1987). Berk (2009) argues that "when you watch a movie or TV program, superficial and even deep feelings and emotions are elicited, such as excitement, anger, laughter, relaxation, love, whimsy, or even boredom" (p 2). These aspects of films encourage language learners to acquire vocabulary to express their emotions and feelings. Furthermore, Ismaili (2013) comes to a conclusion that in addition to learners own understanding about concepts or stories, movies provide a spectacular chance for them to obtain background understanding, as opposed to reading passages. Likewise, Schander et al. (2013) maintains that in terms of colloquial English, films become a valuable source as "they present real life contexts, an opportunity to be exposed to different voices, degrees of formality, reduced speeches, stress, accents, and dialects".

Research Questions

This study has tried to investigate the following questions:

- 1) Does the use of films motivate learners for language improvement?
- 2) Are films valuable resources to develop language proficiency?

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Design of the Study

This study investigated the contributions of films to language improvement. This study uses descriptive research method which describes a situation analyzing the collected data without searching for cause and effect. Participants answered the questions in the questionnaire and their responses were analyzed and described.

3.2 Participants

The sample defines this case study is eighty (40 male, 40 female) undergraduate students at a university in which all classes are taught in English language. The questionnaires were distributed randomly; therefore, the participants are from different departments.

3.3 Data Collection

In this research a five point Likert scale was used ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The participants were delivered the questionnaires in their classes by the researcher. The gathered data was analyzed by the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

Table 1: Attitudes of students towards the use of films for language improvement

Variables	Frequency	Mean	Standard Deviation
1. The use of films enhances listening comprehension		4.462	.6740
Strongly Disagree (1)	0		
Disagree	0		
Neutral	8		
Agree	27		
Strongly Agree (5)	45		
2. The use of films fosters pronunciation		4.475	.5948
Strongly Disagree (1)	0		
Disagree	0		
Neutral	4		
Agree	34		
Strongly Agree (5)	42		
3. The use of films develops knowledge of stress accent and intonation		4.138	.6702
Strongly Disagree (1)	0		
Disagree	0		
Neutral	13		
Agree	43		
Strongly Agree (5)	24		
4. The use of films improves spoken language comprehension		4.367	.5888
Strongly Disagree (1)	0		
Disagree	0		
Neutral	4		
Agree	39		
Strongly Agree (5)	37		

5. Films increase lexical knowledge		4.575	.5687
Strongly Disagree (1)	0		
Disagree	0		
Neutral	3		
Agree	28		
Strongly Agree (5)	49		
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6. Films help with communication		4.475	.6157
Strongly Disagree (1)	0		
Disagree	0		
Neutral	5		
Agree	32		
Strongly Agree (5)	43		
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7. The use of films motivate learners for language improvement		4.475	.6556
Strongly Disagree (1)	0		
Disagree	0		
Neutral	7		
Agree	28		
Strongly Agree (5)	45		
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8. Films are valuable materials for overall language proficiency		4.550	.5932
Strongly Disagree (1)	0		
Disagree	0		
Neutral	4		
Agree	28		
Strongly Agree (5)	48		

Table (1) demonstrates the attitudes of learners towards the use of films in language learning. It is noteworthy that, majority of the participants are of the opinion that films are useful and motivating tools that can be utilized in language learning. The questionnaire yielded that participants believe in the potential of films in terms of their role in pronunciation, stress, intonation, lexical knowledge, listening comprehension, and language overall language proficiency development.

Table 2: Multiple Regression: Attitudes towards the use of films in language learning

Dependent Variable: Films are valuable materials for overall language proficiency

Variable	Coefficient (SE)	Standardized Beta	P-Value
Q1	.077	.009	.018*
Q2	.100	.317	.005*

Q3	.083	.029	.155
Q4	.099	.032	.045*
Q5	.086	.310	.001*
Q6	.185	.006	.033*
Q7	.091	.427	.000*

$R^2 = .820$

*Significant at $p < .05$

Table (2) measures the proportion of the variation in the dependent variable (films are valuable materials for overall language proficiency) that was explained by variations in the independent variables. The "R-Square" tells us that 82 % of the variation was explained. The beta coefficient tells us how strongly the independent variable associated with the dependent variables. It should be noticed that six of the significance levels are $< .05$, so they are all significant.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The use of films in language learning helps learners to notice that language can be used in different contexts. Learners become aware of how language is used by its native speakers in a particular language community. The naturalistic environment in films helps students acquire the language at ease. Films appeal to people's emotions thus learning process becomes more entertaining and easier. Through films learners are exposed to examples of real language considered as a valuable source of input. The input hypothesis, developed by Krashen (1985), argues that language is acquired by receiving comprehensible input; films in this respect are necessary tools in language learning since they provide language learners meaningful comprehensible input. The focus in language learning is in the process of communicating for that reason presenting learners variety of opportunities increase the communication efficiency of learners. Learners focus on meaning while watching hence films activate their capacity for acquiring language. Conversational interactions in natural settings develop oral skills and learners use this information in their own speaking performance. Films are criticized for not teaching the Standard English such as vocabulary and grammar usage, however the role of films in the development of lexical knowledge and grammatical structure cannot be underestimated. By extension, these are the aspects learners need to take into account when writing.

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