

AN INTEGRATED SKILLS APPROACH USING FEATURE MOVIES IN EFL AT TERTIARY LEVEL

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents the results of a case study based on an integrated skills approach using feature movies (DVDs) in EFL syllabi at the tertiary level. 100 students took part in the study and the data was collected through a three - section survey questionnaire: demographic items, 18 likert scale questions and an open-ended question. The data and results of the survey revealed that the integration of feature movies in the syllabus helped students in several ways: (1) improve language competence by watching, listening and speaking, (2) understand authentic language and culture, (3) increase fluency and integrated writing skill, (4) practice English for various functions and purposes, (5) learn vocabulary and authentic expressions, (6) distinguish between artificial and natural use of language, and (7) use the language in social exchanges and different interactional settings. Finally, as for the pedagogical implications and drawbacks in the integration process of feature movies, some relevant suggestions and recommendations are given.

INTRODUCTION

Feature movies (FMs) are a much more dynamic medium than a textbook or an audio recording in the EFL context. Movies are such valuable and rich resources for teaching because they present colloquial English in real life contexts rather than artificial situations; an opportunity of being exposed to different native speaker voices, slang, reduced speech, stress, accents, and dialects (King, 2002). Although some teachers may view movies as a medium of entertainment, which seems to have no place in the pedagogical setting, many teachers may assign a film presentation project for their intermediate English students in which films are viewed holistically and critically (Casanave and Freedman, 1995). However, teachers may decide which functions of the FMs they will introduce in the EFL curriculum, and to what extent they have to exploit integrated skills in pursuing EFL learning.

The review of literature on the use of FMs in ELT reveals that varieties of English, slices of culture and historical change can be demonstrated. Furthermore, using audio-visual elements aids learning and movies are great fun to watch (Lynch, 2008). King (ibid) suggested that “it is a refreshing learning experience for students who need to take a break from rote learning of endless English vocabulary and drill practices, and replace it with something realistic, a dimension that is missing in textbook-oriented teaching.”

Listening is the predominant skill among other integrated skills in presenting FMs in EFL classes whether the movies chosen are presented with subtitles or not. Hence movies can provide an opportunity for extensive listening, “listening for general pleasure or interest, usually to longer stretches of discourse” (Flowerdew & Miller, 2005: 19). However, to make the practice of listening tasks more useful, the movies may be presented without subtitles depending on the learners’ language proficiency level.

If chosen with appropriate length and interesting topics, FMs, which are purposeful and tailored to students’ learning needs and proficiency level (King, ibid), can provide enjoyable language learning opportunities for EFL students in a non-native teaching environment. Some researchers (Qiang et al, 2007) argue that FMs make the learner's articulatory organs work even when the learner is merely watching the movies silently. This is evidenced by their silent (covert) imitation of the speakers’ pronunciation and utterances without making a sound. Unless a before watching discussion activity is designed, learners’ silent imitation may not help them improve their speech. In fact, movies provide exposure to real language uttered in authentic settings and the culture in which the foreign language is spoken (Telatnik and Kruse, 1982; Stempleski, 1992). In addition, they assist the learners’ comprehension by enabling them to listen to exchanges and see such visual supports as facial expressions and gestures simultaneously (Allan, 1985; Sheerin, 1982), which may boost their insights into the topic of the conversations.

As Kusumarasyati (2006) claimed “the sheer development of multimedia for pedagogical purposes has encouraged more and more educators to make use of them in their language classrooms. Among many different

types of media, movie videos remain one of the popular teaching tools due to several reasons.” Based on this idea, the present paper attempts to explore some learning activities designed to improve EFL learners’ active listening skill as well as other integrated skills. It also aims at promoting better understanding of cultural diversities through FMs as a teaching tool. It is claimed that the language spoken in the movies, but also presented in the appropriate cultural context (Chapple and Curtis, 2000; Herron et al, 2002) can be an invaluable means of enhancing more appropriate use of language and preventing cross-cultural understanding.

METHOD

The present study is aimed at learners’ reflections on integrating FMs with the syllabus as part of multimedia studies in EFL classes of intermediate and pre-intermediate learners in the English Preparatory Program (EPP) at the tertiary level with regard to some specific issues. A total of 100 students taking EFL courses at the EPP participated in this study. 14 of them were at intermediate level of English and the rest were at pre-intermediate level. The students are trained in EFL to complete their education in various English-medium four-year departments or two-year programs.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study covered the following questions which guided the research process in regard to exploitation of using FMs in a non-native EFL context as well as the pedagogical and linguistic implications.

1. To what extent do the students think integrating FMs into the EFL courses aided them in exploiting various language competencies, TL skills, critical thinking, cultural awareness, appreciation of filming arts, authentic use of language and language differences between a non-native environment and in the TL settings?
2. Do the students find FMs helpful in the English prep courses they took?
3. In what ways do the students consider integration of the FMs with a large amount of linguistic and lexical data into the syllabus helpful to gain competence in the TL?
4. In terms of developing fluency, practicing structure and writing as an integrated task do the students think the FMs are worth consolidating different teaching tasks to attain TL skills?
5. What was the most advantageous/disadvantageous part of FMs?
6. What was the most irrelevant aspect of using FMs in EFL courses?
7. How would the students think FMs help them improve their translation skill?
8. What do the students think about integrating FMs into the syllabus in aiding peer interaction?
9. What were the students’ suggestions for using FMs more effectively in practicing authentic language?

INSTRUMENT

In this study a three-section questionnaire was used to collect data. The first section included demographic items such as age, level group, gender and department to be referred to as some items in the main section of the questionnaire need a point of correlation. The second section consisted of 18 items, in which respondents were requested to choose a number from 1 to 5 using the criteria, based on a five-point Likert-type scale (Vagias, 2006) (strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree). The items were, more likely, based on research for the implementation of an integrated skills approach rather than a discrete skills approach. The last part of the survey included a comment section (optional) aiming to search for the students’ opinion about implementing the FMs in EFL courses in the EPP.

PROCEDURE

The implementation of FMs into the syllabus was threefold with a preliminary part and also involved some subheadings:

Plot, summary and characters in the movie

- Before-Watching Activities (BWA)
 - Discussion
 - Picture-telling activity
- While-Watching Activities (WWA)
 - Who said this? Guessing quotations
 - Self-directed comprehension tasks (finding missing information and sentence completion)
- After Watching Activities (AWA)
 - Teacher-directed comprehension tasks
 - Movie-related writing tasks

Plot, summary and characters: Before watching the whole movie, a brief plot summary and the main characters in the cast with their role names in the movie were given to make the students familiar with its theme, and to have an overall picture of it.

Before-Watching Activities: This segment is an initial step followed prior to watching the whole movie. The students engaged in some previewing activities, including various discussion questions related to the topic/events presented in the movie.

While-Watching Activities: Immediately after the BWA stage the students were engaged in the core activity. In contrast with short sequence viewing, the whole movie approach was adopted. The students watched the movie in two class sessions in a multimedia class equipped with cable channels with English medium broadcast, a DVD player, a computer and a data projector with loud speakers. This segment of the study contained two types of “*Who do you think these quotations belong to?*” questions: one was with the names of the characters students could choose from, and the other was without the names.

After Watching Activities: AWA covered comprehension, open-ended, completion as well as multiple choice questions as a consolidation of tasks done in previous sections. In this part students were asked to answer general comprehension questions focusing on the details in the movie.

DATA ANALYSIS

The data was sorted and the variables were summarized into qualitative data which made them easy to analyze. The collected data was written into excel sheets prior to being subjected to statistical analysis. The data from the first (demographic section) and the last (comment section) parts received through the questionnaire based on the general framework established, and the teachers’ noticing the students’ reactions to using the FMs, were subjected to content analysis which is a useful model to explain the basic process of qualitative data analysis. The model, interlinked and cyclical, consists of three parts: Noticing, Collecting, and Thinking about things. The second section of the questionnaire consisting of students’ responses to 18 items was entered into SPSS 11 (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) for computation of descriptive statistics. Before its entry into the statistical package, the data was coded as “strongly agree” 1, “agree” 2, “neutral” 3, “disagree” 4 and “strongly disagree” 5. After the data collection, means, frequencies and percentages were calculated for each item in this section. The data written into charts produced by the SPSS program are given in the results section below.

RESULTS

The results are presented within the framework established by the consolidation of survey research questions. First, findings from the second section of the questionnaire are presented, and then based on the question “*What do you think about using feature movies in the preparatory program ELT class?*” students’ responses in the comment section will be discussed. Unfortunately not all the students submitted their comments. This study sets out to answer the following research question:

How and to what extent did the students think watching FMs (captioned/non-captioned) in English Preparatory classes as part of the CALL syllabus helped them improve their various competencies, critical thinking, cultural awareness, receptive/performative and translation skills, authenticity of language in the movies, use of TL in various contexts, fluency, grammar and structure?

In Table 1, the descriptive statistics display means, frequencies and percentages with regard to how and to what extent students agreed or disagreed that watching FMs increased their EFL skills, cultural awareness, and improved linguistic competencies. All in all, the survey results shed light upon asserting student’s beliefs as to whether watching feature movies (captioned/non-captioned) increased their linguistic awareness and helped them improve various language competencies and integrated skills.

Table 1: Survey about using feature movies in EFL teaching

Watching feature movies in English Prep Courses helped me improve my:	Mean	SA		A		N		D		SD	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1. Understanding of the authentic language used in the movie.	2,1	17	17	63	63	11	11	7	7	2	2
2. Critical thinking about the Target Language (TL) culture.	2,4	16	16	40	40	33	33	11	11	-	-
3. Knowledge of how the authentic language is used in various contexts and settings.	2,5	7	7	47	47	37	37	8	8	1	1
4. Performative skill (speaking).	2,4	18	18	46	46	20	20	12	12	4	4
5. Receptive skill (listening).	2,2	23	23	49	49	14	14	11	11	3	3

6. Translation skill from TL into mother tongue while watching non-captioned movies.	2,6	10	10	35	35	41	41	13	13	1	1
7. Fluency.	2,5	13	13	43	43	23	23	20	20	1	1
8. Grammar and structure.	3,0	7	7	29	29	24	24	35	35	5	5
9. Writing as an integrated skill presented as a final task after watching the movie.	3,2	4	4	30	30	23	23	29	29	14	14
10. Knowledge of how TL is used for different functions and purposes within a context.	2,5	8	8	48	48	27	27	16	16	1	1
11. Vocabulary and authentic expressions.	2,2	23	23	50	50	15	15	5	5	7	7
12. Understanding and appreciation of life in the TL country	2,3	22	22	42	42	21	21	13	13	2	2
13. Understanding and appreciation of the filming arts.	2,9	11	11	31	31	29	29	18	18	11	11
14. Understanding of the difference between the artificial use of TL in a non-native environment (classroom) and natural use in a native environment.	2,1	32	32	35	35	28	28	4	4	1	1
15. Interaction with peers in the English Language Teaching class	3,1	9	9	28	28	27	27	21	21	15	15
16. Understanding that such movies are very beneficial in acquiring the authentic aspect of the TL.	2,4	16	16	46	46	20	20	15	15	3	3
17. Understanding of how well the varieties of the English language can be demonstrated in the movies.	2,4	11	11	51	51	28	28	6	6	4	4
18. Language skills with the fun and joy I experienced while watching the feature movies.	2,4	29	29	34	34	18	18	9	9	10	10

Key: SA: strongly agree; A: agree; N: neutral; D: disagree; SD: strongly disagree.

The results as displayed in Table 1 are based on the students' answers. 86 students at B level (pre-intermediate) watched the FMs entitled *You've Got Mail* (1998), 119 minutes long, and *My Best Friend's Wedding* (1997); 105 minutes long, and 14 students at the C level (intermediate) viewed the FMs entitled *Message in a Bottle* (1999), 131 minutes long and *Tin Cup* (1996), 135 minutes long. The students did all the *before*, *while* and *after watching activities* respectively. The movies were chosen randomly and the activities were all identical in each feature movie. As for the statistical distribution of the answers shown in Table 1 above, a majority of students "strongly agreed" or "agreed" that watching FMs helped them improve:

- critical thinking about the TL culture
- understanding authentic language in various contexts
- performative and receptive skills (speaking, listening)
- fluency
- writing as an integrated skill
- use of TL for different functions and purposes
- vocabulary and authentic expressions
- appreciation of life in the TL country and the filming arts
- the difference between the artificial use of TL in a non-native environment
- interaction with peers in ELT class
- the benefits of movies in acquiring the authentic aspect of the TL
- the varieties of English demonstrated in the movies
- language skills with fun and joy.

Nevertheless, it seems some students did not believe or were "neutral" that watching FMs was helpful as a teaching tool in improving their:

- translation skill from TL into mother tongue
- grammar and structure.

Although some students (35 per cent) agreed that FMs were useful to improve their *translation skill from TL into mother tongue*, almost half of them (41 per cent) were "neutral". It is assumed that the reason why the students remained neutral about the translation as part of WWA is that, as the teachers observed, there was no time at all to allocate for the students to translate what they hear or see if the movies were shown with captions.

In the detailed analysis of some items (3, 9, 13 and 15) in the questionnaire, regarding whether watching FMs helped them improve their *knowledge of how the authentic language is used in various contexts and settings* (item # 3) 37 per cent claimed to be "neutral" contrary to 47 per cent "agreed". The result shows that almost one

third of the respondents had no idea of the effect of authentic use of language in learning EFL. This emphasizes that the authentic aspect of a foreign language should be embedded into the syllabus to actualize the authenticity more in the ELT context. Almost 29 per cent of the respondents “disagree” that *writing as an integrated skill* (item # 9) was helpful in improving their English. This acknowledges that writing in the process of watching FMs was considered as a final assignment in consolidation of language study skills. So the integration of the writing skill into the syllabus should be reconsidered in regard to a more sustainable, suitable and enjoyable learning/teaching component. Responses to item # 13, *understanding and appreciation of filming arts* and item # 15, *interaction with peers in the ELT class* were quite satisfactory. However, 29 per cent of the respondents were “neutral” to *filming arts* and they seemed to have no idea of the artful effect of watching FMs in an EFL context. How this might be improved seems quite intriguing for implementing such an aspect for the sake of ELT. Item # 15, also creates contradiction to popular opinion in the questionnaire, 27 per cent of the respondents were “neutral” to the idea of *interaction with peer in ELT class*, whereas 28 per cent of the students’ response was “agree”. Their response to this item may reveal such a fact that, in feature movie watching, teachers should allocate time for peer interaction to increase their self-esteem and fluency.

DISCUSSION OF THE STUDENTS’ RESPONSES TO THE OPEN-ENDED QUESTION

The students’ responses will be discussed in this part of the study as an important aid to this research. Their views, comments and opinions of how to implement the FMs into the appropriate segment of the syllabus are of primary importance to create a better opportunity for them in terms of the visual aspects of language teaching. Students’ views and comments on the question: “*What do you think about viewing feature movies in ELT in the English Preparatory Program?*” were given randomly but they were consolidated and evaluated as *problems and advantages* of using FMs from their perspectives. A total of 27 students (6 females, 21 males) expressed their feelings, reactions, favorable/unfavorable comments, as well as their critiques. The comments consolidated are twofold and illustrated in figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Students’ Comments on Using FMs in ELT

Problems	Advantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the selection of movies; • boring, old and all about romance; • not about real life stories; • movies relevant to students’ common interests; • movies with subtitles. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • good and useful for ELT class, fluency, accent, use of English and intonation; • helpful to learn English better; • entertaining and educational; • improves speaking and listening skills; • appropriately chosen movies are better and useful; • helps improve everyday authentic conversations.

DISCUSSION OF PROBLEMS

The movie selection criteria seems to be the most complicated and time-consuming step. As King (2002) claims “the merits of uninterrupted film viewing are numerous as long as teachers follow accepted standards of choosing films: choosing the right film for a particular level of students.” All the movies chosen were pre-viewed for not only appropriateness to the syllabus but also for preparing *before, while and after watching activities*. So in the movie selection process, the following points were taken into account:

- clear and easily understandable language used in the movies
- appropriateness to the level of students
- violence, sex and profanity
- cross-cultural aspects
- paralinguistic aspects (accent, slang, intonation, pronunciation etc.)
- number of short and longer dialogs
- the amount of conversations rather than visual scenes
- appropriate for both sexes
- not contrary to or offending the host culture
- suitability to EFL context and teachable aspects
- thought-provoking content
- plots interesting to all age groups and not peculiar to a biased/certain context
- appealing topic but not about politics, religion or special field-related
- comprehensible and usable for language learning purposes.

The students also commented that the movies should be shown with subtitles. To a certain extent, few parts of the movies were shown with subtitles; but some teachers reported that the subtitles distracted students’ attention, and proved unhelpful during WWA due to insufficient time and synchronizing the tasks with the scenes watched,

particularly with “*Who do you think these quotations belong to?*” Supporting our argument, King (2002) emphasized that in captioned FMs students focus is on reading captions not listening to dialogs and the activity becomes reading skills development rather than listening comprehension training. Massi and Blázquez (2008) have suggested some perspectives in choosing appropriate or suitable audiovisual texts such as the learners’ linguistic level of proficiency, age, needs and interests, their learning strategies and cognitive styles.

DISCUSSION OF ADVANTAGES

Despite a few objections, most students were in favor of using FMs. However, if there is use of FMs without preparation of tasks and activities, the outcome expected from the learners will not be satisfactory in an ELT non-native context. Students’ appreciation of FMs with the tasks and activities seem to be more contributive to their learning of contextualized vocabulary, authentic use of language and various contexts and paralinguistic skills they may improve in an artificial environment.

The students claimed FMs are good references for cross-cultural understanding and authentic, educational, entertaining, accessible aid to learning and practicing English through visual elements and dialogs in various contexts. Even though most students were rule-oriented in learning EFL, from their explicit comments, we can infer that they did not have any ambiguities and frustrations about their expectations from FM activities. As for the role of FMs in listening comprehension, King (ibid) claims that “exposing learners to authentic materials, however, is a necessary stage in the learning process to help them master listening strategies.”

PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS AND DRAWBACKS

The pedagogical aim of this study is to help learners increase their intrinsic and extrinsic motivation to practice English in various contexts. FMs and specific activities may provide more pedagogical options, and are a rich resource of intrinsically motivating materials for learners (King ibid). The students’ responses to the open-ended question, their perspectives about the movie choice are various. FMs should be easy to understand, and the comprehensibility of the dialogues and the language used should not contain heavy accent. Arcario (1992) suggests that comprehensibility is a major criterion in selecting a video for language-learning purposes. The drawbacks about using FMs in EFL classes can randomly be listed as follows:

1. Students do not learn language skills if the films are shown without any activities
2. Careful selection and adoption of activities and tasks, the syllabus should be designed within the linguistic output expected
3. Captioned and non-captioned aspects of movie viewing should be determined
4. Careful integration with the core syllabus should be done
5. Enabling students to learn cultural issues, linguistic and lexical elements and providing various language practice materials will make films more advantageous
6. Non-captioned movies may hinder the learning opportunities of movies
7. Captioned movies may cause students’ distraction and become a ‘screen reading’ activity
8. Offending scenes and non-standard articulation of language may decrease students’ motivation and enthusiasm
9. Teachers’ unnecessary interruptions may distract students’ attention and the audio-visual interactive session may become a classical in-class teaching.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this fast growing and rapidly changing digital world, FMs have become an effective language teaching tool to develop the EFL learners’ receptive and performative skills. It also enhances possibilities of exposure to audiovisual discourse and stimulates the learners’ imagination, cross-cultural understanding and critical thinking respectively. The authentic language input for improving the EFL skills, presented through FMs that arouse the learners’ potential and motivation can engage them in a variety of communicative activities related to aural perception in the TL. The study focused on the development of students’ paralinguistic skills and absorbing the living, authentic language. Therefore, all the activities and the tasks were based on the whole-movie watching session and the analysis of linguistic items was considered in regard to the integrated skills approach. When new media and relative components are incorporated into lessons, the learners may develop FLL skills and will also become autonomous learners and increase their critical thinking skills as well.

The significance of teaching language through FMs is multifold: Firstly, cultural aspects are well expressed and all perfectly shown and manifested in the English movies. Secondly, the learners can avoid the boredom of language instruction for a certain time. Thirdly, the teachers will be able to utilize the multimedia tools as FMs to make the language lessons more informative, imaginative, motivational and entertaining. For the implementation of a feature movie-based syllabus into the curriculum five things seem to be important in terms of EFL objectives:

1. Careful selection of FMs with clear topic and language is the first condition for using movies to Teach English as a Foreign Language (TEFL);
2. A tailor-made, objective-oriented activity and integrated task worksheets to be exploited for BWA, WWA and AWA during the feature movie teaching sessions;
3. To induce/ elicit timely and optimal output from the learners in the teaching sessions, several self-directed activities, tasks and integrated skills activities are most significant to create a learnable, visual environment for communicative competence;
4. Teacher's explicitly set roles are not limited to showing the movies and implementing the activities in the lesson but they are to be more determining about the objectives to make the most of learning opportunities of FMs in TEFL;
5. Learners' enthusiasm and motivation about learning English becomes more evident when they are provided with well-designed activities and tasks on FMs; besides, the use of FMs may be more stimulating, enjoyable, involving even the low motivated learners from this highly digitalized e-generation.

The research suggested that the movies and accompanying activities/tasks provided not only a fertile source of language input and cross-cultural understanding but aspects of non-verbal communication and paralinguistic skills as well. However, we found several important points such as the teachers' attitude towards feature movie viewing; learners' perception of movies to develop their EFL skills in a non-native setting, and finally the time allocation for viewing, activities and integrated tasks to be implemented. Teachers have an indisputable role in implementing the FMs and for making the movie-based multimedia lesson a rewarding EFL learning experience. The careful implementation of set goals and objectives lies with the teachers as well. Learners' consideration of FMs holds a very important place, because the objectives and integrated activities/tasks should be clearly defined prior to teaching. Besides, the purpose is not to view the movies as passive listeners but it requires the learners' actual participation. The last point is the time limitation and how much time should be allocated for the use of an integrated approach to this visual aid to FLL and whether or not it gets sufficient attention of the learners and help them attain the EFL skills.

Finally, syllabus objectives, set goals, linguistic contribution to EFL learners' output, content of the movies, selection criteria, paralinguistic features received from the movie sessions, students' attainment goals, learner strategies, authentic language and the reflections of certain experiences previously gained are a few of the most important components to improvise this study. The research confirmed that FMs with appropriately designed activities and tasks were not only a valuable resource for the EFL classroom, but they enhanced students' self-motivation, and provided an enjoyable, educational experience for students and teachers alike.

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