The Effectiveness of Using Films in the EFL Classroom: A Case Study Conducted at an International University in Thailand

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Abstract

Films have always been seen as an entertainment and its power since birth has had strong impact on people's lives. Today, films are no longer thought of as simple entertainment media but rather educational tools as well. Globalization has contributed greatly to the availability of English-language films and that enriches the source of English learning material dramatically. This research paper explores the effect of using English films in English as foreign language (EFL) classroom. It reveals the effect on developing students' motivation, comprehension as well as communication skills. The study was carried out on a sample of two groups: an experimental group using films alongside their course book and a control group taught in a conventional way. The participants were classified as pre-intermediate level. The findings of this study have shown that those in the experimental group significantly outperformed their control group counterpart in terms of motivation and language production. Also, this study offers pedagogical implications for EFL teachers to use films in their classrooms to enhance students' listening and speaking skills which as a result improved students' learning.

Keywords: communication skills, EFL learners, films, motivation

Introduction

According to Thanasoulas (2002) the teaching methods in EFL countries still follow the traditional one which causes so much passiveness and boredom among the students. That is part of the reason why students are weak in their use of the target language in conversation especially where English is taught as a second or foreign language. Textbooks and teachers' talk are the only dominant sources of information and knowledge. This is the cause of reticence in most of the learners when they are in communication situations or in interaction with other students in lessons.

According to (Ismaili, 2013) movies are an enjoyable source of entertainment and language acquisition. As an authentically rich source, feature movies have been being mostly used for listening speaking comprehension courses. Vocabulary could also be taught and learned with the aid of sounds and images, which provides clear context for the students' understanding.

Currently, due to available facilities, time limitation, and the impact of the traditional teaching method, films are rarely exploited in classrooms. In many universities, only some individual teachers use films in their classrooms. Other than the rather fixed and strict curriculum in various universities, the students seek for more entertainment while learning in language centers, where word games and music are often employed to create an enjoyable atmosphere in class. Besides, the use of films was not official in the curriculum but rather based on individual teacher's interest (Kramsch& Sullivan,1996).

In the contexst where the researcher is teaching, Pearson Longman's "Speakout" is being used as the main textbook. The textbook contains a CD with sample conversation. There are idioms and conversation exercises in for students. However, students are quite passive and they are just practicing rote learning by memorizing the pattern of conversation from the textbook for their role-play activities. From the researcher's preliminary observation, they are not motivated to naturally involve in conversation activities as required by the course objectives. As Sherman (2003) states that authenticity brings excitement, and also films are considered as another kind of text, strengthened by its "visual dimension" (Voller & Widdows, 1993), films should be used as one of the needed materials for teaching English. Furthermore, the use of films was not implemented as a part of any courses' syllabus nor a particular lesson at the context where the researcher is teaching. Instead, textbooks with drills were popularly employed for both lessons and self-studying (Kramsch &Sullivan, 1996).

From the situation stated above, films are therefore being used to enhance students' motivation in order to improve their oral production.

Research Questions the main question should be highlighted in the abstract
1. What are students' attitudes towards using films in the conversation classroom?
2. What are teachers' attitudes towards using films in the conversation classroom?
3. Does watching films enhance students' motivation to improve oral production?

Literature Review

Learning would need motivation, especially in language teaching and learning. For decades, hundreds-or even thousands of linguists, researchers, and instructors have been

searching for the answer of how to motivate the language learners. There have been many books and articles presenting the findings of those scientists. As Wlodkowski (1978, p.12) states in his book, motivation is a process "that can arouse and instigate behavior, give direction and purpose to behavior". Dornyei (2001,   a s   citied in Thanasoulas, 2002) explains "teaching skills to motivating learners should be seen as central to teaching effectiveness".(p.116) However motivating is not an easy task for any teacher to accomplish. Teacher's books and other types of resources still cannot provide sufficient and efficient approaches to the teachers to motivate their students. Besides, Thanasoulas (2002) agree that even though there are a lot of education-oriented publications which provide taxonomies of classroom-specific motives, they do not completely offer an efficient guide to teachers or classroom researchers. He also believed that motivation is related to teacher-learner relation and group   processes. For the teacher-learner relation, individuals or institutions appeal to the commitment and interest of others when group nprocesses focuses on a group of people and group activities.

Though the teacher can inspire the learner to study and practice the target language, many researchers believe that motivation ought to come from the learners themselves. Caroll (1981, as cited i n   Madrid et al 1993) says that "language learning begins when the learner feels motivated to communicate something to someone". (p.180). Bialystok (1978, cited in Madrid et al. 1993, p.18) supports this when he said, "learner will seek language exposure only if they feel motivated". Lambert (1974, cited by Madrid et al 1993, p.18) was even more explicit when he pointed out the link among the learners" attitudes, orientation, motivation and proficiency in second language learning. With these findings and their own research, Madrid (1993, p.20) concluded that attitudes and motivation "are the most important determinant factors in the learning or acquisition of second language".

Wlodkowski(1978) also believes that motivation should be a factor the learners possess themselves as "the teachers can't directly motivate the students". He even had a stronger statement as "no one motivates anyone" because "just as we are responsible for our own feelings, we are responsible for our motivation" (p.45)

Moreover, culture has long been part of English teaching and learning. Brown (1994) describe: "A language is a part of a culture and a culture is a part of language. The two are intricately interwoven so that one cannot separate the two without losing the significance of either language or culture". (p.12) Movies, as a reflection of the Western world and developed by the westerners, contain numerous cultural features that the Asian learners should be aware of. Not only the behaviors, attitudes but also the language does show the cultural features. If the Asian learners, the Thais particularly, do not understand these differences in culture, they would find it difficult to catch the meanings in the movies they watch, or in conversations with the western foreigners in real life. Bada (2000) also adds that "the need for cultural literacy in ELT arises mainly from the fact that most language learners, not exposed to cultural elements of the society in question, seem to encounter significant hardship in communicating meaning to native speakers". (p. 12)

The awareness of culture would help the Thai students comprehend the meanings contained in the conversations in the feature films. This may result in their ability to use

the language properly when they communicate with foreigners in daily talks because now they may understand: The totality of a way of life shared by a group of people liked by common and distinctive characteristics, beliefs and circumstances as well asthe attitudes and behavior of a community of people who share inclination, interests and goals. (Tomlinson &Masuhara, 2004, p. 12)

Films have been intensively studied for decades by researchers around the globe because of their high value of context and authenticity. Sherman (2003) highlighted the importance of authenticity as authenticity itself an inducement- there is a special thrill in being able to understand and enjoy real thing. They can bring the inspiration that no other types of learning materials can to the language learners.

According to Lonergan (1984) movies in particular and film presentations "will be intrinsically interesting to language learners. The learners will want to watch, even if comprehension is limited" because the language learners seem to always have a strong desire to
watch films like "normal consumers" (Sherman, 2003). The design of movies, like literature, attracts much of the students" attention because they contain a lot of cultural values and the students can also see the behaviors in those cultural contexts (Stempleski and Tomalin, 2001). These contexts might be similar to those of the students in their daily life and that might inspire the learners to discuss more as they understand the contexts better by the aid of sounds and images and their own knowledge as well. Also, Lonergan, (1984) pointes out the appeal of films:

> The speakers in dialogues can be seen and heard; other participants in the situation can be seen. The language learner can readily see the ages of the participants; their sex; perhaps their relationships one to another; their dress, social status, and what they are doing; and perhaps their mood or feelings. Further, paralinguistic information, such as facial expressions or hand gestures, is available to accompany aural clues of intonation.
> Similarly, the setting of the communication is clear, the language leaner can see on the screen where the action is taking place. This information may help to clarify whether the situation is very formal, or perhaps informal. (p.4)

With these advantages of films, the learner will be motivated to communicate with their partners in debates, helping them to learn from each other. More importantly, they learn "non- verbal communication, the types of exclamation and filling expressions that are used, how people initiate and sustain a conversational exchange and how they negotiate meaning" (Rivers, 1994 as cited in Eken, 2003, p. 13).

The students often need textbooks when they learn language but it does not necessarily mean textbooks are their only choice. Films are also texts because they "tell stories. They have characters. They contain messages. They can be used in the classroom just like any other text, but their visual dimension makes them richer than most other text types" (Voller& Widdows 1993, p. 342). But not only do images work their magic, sounds are also

considered as the learners can listen to "all kinds of voices in all kinds of situations, with full contextual back-up". In addition, the students will have chances to access "a vast up-to-date linguistic resource accent, vocabulary, grammar and syntax, and all kinds of disclosure, which shows us language in most of its uses and context- something neither course book nor classroom can do" (Sherman 2003, p.2).

Though films have many benefits to the learners many teachers so far have still approached films as a source of teaching materials with caution. Firstly, there is a part of the learners who used to be "textbook-oriented and test-driven" and they tend to "focus on form rather than meaning and accuracy rather than communication" (King, 2002, p. 14). Secondly, it is because using films is a "new experience" to some teachers and may cause potential problems. There may be so many worries for the teachers if any technical problems suddenly arise. For example, if the buttons do not show functions or the cables are broken somewhere. "This insecurity can lead teachers to doing nothing else with the film films than switching them on, letting the class watch them, and then turning them off" (Lonergan, 1984, p.6). Lonergan also cited other researchers" warnings on professional terms such as unfocused viewing (Duncan 1987 cited in Voller & Widdows,1993, p.342), the lack of knowledge of the language and culture concerned when watching (Blakely 1984, cited in Voller a& Widdows) or too much emphasis on the verbal component (Visscher, 1990, as cited in Voller & Widdows 1993).

Feature films, with their content of stories are a kind of literature with the aid of visual dimension. Besides, feature movies "are more intrinsically motivating" as they carry "a story that wants to be told rather than a lesson that needs to be taught" (Ward & Lepeintre 1996 as cited in King 2002). Not like other types of films such as documentary, films for educational purposes and so on, feature movies embed "colloquial English in real life contexts rather than artificial situations, an opportunity of being exposed to different native speaker voices, slang, reduced speeches, stress, accents, and dialects" (King, 2002, p.19).

Films can "provide exposures to the real language uttered in authentic settings" (Stempleski 1992 cited in Kusmarasdyati, 2004). They are not designed for the purpose of second-language education and thus are authentically rich. Films then seem to be good choice of teaching material since they provide "stream of speeches, such as reduced sounds or phrases and stammering, which occur in spontaneous discourse common in everyday speech" (McCoy 2009, p.18).

Lee (1995) supported the above definition by saying "the text is usually regarded as textually authentic if it is not written for teaching purposes, but for real life communication purpose". Van Lier (1996 as cited in Pietila, 2009, p112) even related the authenticity in the classroom to the process of "self-actualization, intrinsic motivation, respect and moral integrity in interpersonal relations". Finally, Widdowson (1990 cited in Pietila, 2009) believed that language learners, if need to be able to have natural communication, should be "involved in natural communicative

language use in the classroom whereupon the classroom has to be authentic". This is also the nature and the top target of language learning (Kaikkonen, 1998 as cited in Pietila, 2009, p.23).

Authentic materials also can lead to motivation in learning among the students, one of the main factors to determine the quality of the students' learning (Whitaker 1995, p. 160). Melvin and Stout (1987, p.55) say that the lessons will hold much of the students' interest once the authentic materials are provided and the students know what they use that language for in the future.

During conversation, each speaker would have to clarify the meanings his/her co-speaker(s) want to imply. Through that process of clarification, the speaker would do his/her best to overcome the difficulties of confusion or misunderstanding and learn the target language. Each student has his/her own strategy to overcome those difficulties which Rubin (2008), defined as communication strategies. According to her research, Rubin saw that communication strategies is getting meaning across or clarifying what the speaker intended. Communication strategies are used by speakers when faced with some difficulties due to the fact that their communication ends outrun their communication means or when confronted with misunderstanding by a co-speaker.

Stern (1992 a s cited in Hismanoglu, 2000) adds to the term as he said: "Communication strategies, such as circumlocution, gesturing, paraphrase, or asking for repetition and explanation are techniques used by learners to keep a conversation going. The purpose of using these techniques is to avoid interrupting the flow of communication".

Supporting this view, Dornyei and Thurell (1994) found that the second-language learners tend to use communication strategies which included message adjustment or avoidance, paraphrasing, approximation, appeal for help, asking for repetition, asking for clarification, interpretive summary, checking, use of fillers hesitation devices" for their informal everyday conversation.

For turn signal, Duncan (1974) suggests a set of cues which includes: intonation, drawl, body motion, sociocentric sequences such as but uh, or something, you know, pitch or loudness accompanied with socio-centric sequences, and syntax. Other researchers added in more clues of turn signals such as Jefferson (in Orestrom 1983 as cited in Kato, 2000) who found that a silent pause after a grammatically complete utterance also works as a turn signal, Orestrom (1983 as cited in Kato, 2000) with the finding of a question which is generally followed by some responses and Cook (1989) when he found that eye contact also signal turn-taking.

Feature movies or films contain numerous conversations and the actors and actresses used conversation strategies to demonstrate their meaning at best. When the language students watch films, they will not only learn the language but will also watch how the language is performed in
specific contexts. It will also motivate students to achieve the course's objectives.

However, though turn-taking is one of the basic mechanisms in conversations to promote and maintain talk (Kato, 2000; Coulthard, 1985), the speakers would have turn-taking differently due to different rules in their own cultures. Like other Asian countries, the Thais are strongly aware of face-saving and take it as top priority in conversation, not conversation-saving as the Westerners do (Kato, 2000). That explains why the Asian second-language learners often fall silent when they should take turn to continue the conversation or to change the topic when it needs (Kato, 2000). Because of the particular and distinguished rules in cultures make the foreign learners, especially the Asian learners, feel hard to follow the procedures of turn-taking such as entering and leaving conversation, taking turn without being rude and changing the topic (Cook 1989).

Eryilmaz and Dam (2005) emphasize that the teachers should "raise the learner' awareness of non-verbal communication in order to improve their use of natural language, increase confidence and fluency and help to avoid intercultural misunderstanding" because "non-verbal communication is a system consisting a range of features often used together to aid expression" (p.43) Therefore, "body-language (particularly facial expressions and gestures), eye contact, proximity and posture are probably those which learners most need to be aware of in terms of conveying meaning, avoiding misunderstandings and fitting in with the target culture.

Although students spend more than a quarter of each day engaged with various forms of media, and television in particular (Rideout, Roberts & Foehr, 2005), research indicates that mere exposure is not sufficient for students to acquire significant visual or media literacy (Messaris, 2001). Rather, explicit instruction is required to equip young people with the critical discrimination skills they need. Film is a form of visual media, and its optimal use can strengthen the visual material. This includes providing visual demonstrations or evidence, dramatizing events and concepts, and appealing to the emotions. Educational video with instructional strategies and cognitive modeling traits can engage students in better comprehension (Lin, 2003).

Hassen Kabooha(2016) has conducted a study on the use of film in the EFL classroom in Saudi Arabia. EFL teachers and their students were interviewed about their perceptions on using films and how they perceived films affected the language skills. The result showed that both teachers and students were positive about using films in language classroom. Besides, students reported that their vocabulary were widened considerably due to watching films. Contrastingly, the study's findings showed that using films in classroom would not be beneficial for the students if the instructors did not give them the appropriate learning activities to go with the film (pp. 248-57).

Participants
The participants of the study were third year Thai undergraduate students, between the ages of 19 - 22. The total sample of participants consisted of 90 students. Their level of proficiency is pre-intermediate. This sample was divided into two groups: an experimental group exposed to films while the control group was taught in a conventional way. The study was carried out in the academic year 2015. Also, to get teachers' attitudes in using films in the classroom, four ELT teachers participated in this study. For the purpose of this study 45

students were in the experiment group and another 45 in the control group. Moreover, 50 ESL teachers responded to the questionnaire.

Methodology and Data Analysis

In order to answer the research questions, two types of data were collected. The first is the 21 items questionnaire data for eliciting students and teachers' attitudes on using films in the classroom and another is the conversation role play activities. Empirical evidence derived from Wilkins'(1976) research and theories proved that role-play is an effective technique to animate the teaching and learning atmosphere, arouse the interests of learners, and make the language acquisition impressive. The role-play activities were taken from the exercises provided in the textbook itself.

The teacher response questionnaire was carried out by contacting the teachers by email, which included a link to the Internet survey. The age and gender of the respondent were the two first background questions. 40 out of the total 50 respondents (96%) were female and 2 (4%) were male. 8 (16%) of the respondents were under 28 years old, 11 (22%) were aged 30-35, 18 (36%) were aged 36-40, 9 (18%) were aged 40-50 and 3 (6%) were aged 50 or older. The next background question was about the teachers' experience as English teacher. 5 (10%) of the respondents had worked as English teachers for less than a year or one year. 7 (14%) of the respondents had worked as English teachers for 1-3 years. 6 (12%) had worked as teachers for 4-9 years. 9 (18%) had worked as teachers for 10-15 years. 11 (22%) had worked as teachers for 16-25 years and 12 (24%) had worked as teachers for over 25 years. Thus, the majority of the respondents were very experienced teachers in the field of EFL and ESL.

When asked whether the teacher has used some of the following materials on his or her EFL class: a full movie or vdo, parts of a movie or vdo, vdo clips or no audiovisual material. Only 10 of the 50 teachers had showed a complete movie in their class while less than had used some scenes of a movie and only five used clips of a movie. Finally, very few of the respondents answered that they had not used any audiovisual material concerning movies. There can be several of these reasons, for instance lack of knowledge, lack of ideas or lack of time. When asked about the effect of using vdo and films in their classroom, majority of the respondent answered that it motives the students and made it easy for them to teach this is in-line with Allan (1985) and Champoux (1999) who point out, movies diversify the curriculum and bring variety and entertainment into the classroom. Using movies also motivates the students and makes it easier for the teacher to handle even abstract themes and topics.

A Likert-type scale from 1 to 5 (1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=do not know, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree) was used for responding to their attitude of using films and Vdo in their classrooms. The respondents' answers show that teachers' attitudes towards using movies in teaching oral communication are rather positive. Majority of the respondents (38%) agreed that movies are a useful way of teaching oral communication. However, a majority (40%) gladly uses movies in teaching oral skills. These claims also showed that some teachers are unsure about using movies in teaching oral communication, since the amount of "do not know" answers was rather high. Perhaps the teachers feel that if they do not have much experience about using movies in teaching oral communication, they are not sure about their opinions either.

Students' response using movies 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 situations than to follow the activities in the graded book. Their impression is that movies also provide a relaxed atmosphere for students. Students claimed 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 throughout the film.

Moreover, the post experimental questionnaires were designed using a 5-point Likert scale in order to elicit students' motivation level from two experimental groups. An evaluation using the index of item-objective congruence (Rovinelli & Hambleton, 1977) by five experts were used, where content experts rate individual items on the degree to which they do or do not measure specific objectives listed by the test developer. The result of IOC from five experts is no less than 0.8. Also, Cronbach's alpha was performed and the results of this questionnaire revealed very high reliability i.e. Cronbrach's alpha =.87.

The data obtained from the post-experimental questionnaires were analyzed using the SPSS program. The data concerning students' general background as well as their responses were calculated and presented in percentage. A five-point Likert-scale was used to measure the level of learning motivation. Such scale was used in the questionnaire to specify the level of the agreement or disagreement based on the following criteria: 3.68 – 5.00, High degree of Motivation, 2.34 – 3.67Moderate degree of Motivation, and 1.00 – 2.33 Low degree of Motivation. The students in experimental group had the high degree of motivation while those in the control group reported to be in the low degree of motivation.

Another research procedure is the use of the eight conversation quiz activities were given to both experimental and the controlled group at the end of each lesson according to the course syllabus which consisted of 16 weeks or one semester. The experimental group watched English films after reading the course book while the control group students were only using course book without any other input in a conventional way. After watching the film and classroom teaching activity, students were given quiz with vocabulary, speaking activities and role-play. Lastly, after each lesson both group had to perform a role play as required by the course.

The uses of colloquial expression while the students were performing role-plays were rated by three raters. The researcher and the two instructors examined and compared each other's coding results and discussed the agreements as well as disagreements. The colloquial expressions were recorded and quantified. The percentage of the inter-rater was 89.93% which was quite high. Three native speakers at the university were consulted when certain language points were not able to be settled.

Findings and Discussion

The discussions of this study's findings are presented according to the research questions. The findings of this study revealed that students in an experimental group were more motivated which helped to increase the efficiency of teaching and learning process.

1. What are students' attitudes towards using films in the classroom?

Students, similar to the teachers, were equally positive about the use of films in the classroom when they answered a five-point Likert scales questions. Their impression was that films provided a relaxed atmosphere and motivated them to do the activities. 79% claim that films provided them with new vocabulary in context and give them more chance to be able to use them correctly. Majority preferred drama and action genre. When asked if movies enhanced their conversation skills, 82% answered positively with only 18% claiming that they do not see any positive effect of using films.

2. What are teachers' attitudes towards using English films in classroom to enhance students' conversation skills?

Overall, 97% of teachers participated in this study have a positive attitudes towards using films in the classroom to enhance students' conversational skills according to the questionnaire data. They believed that using movies together with the course book material helped the students to actively participate more in the classroom speaking activities as compared to those in controlled group. However, around 3% found it time-consuming to let the students watch films in the class time. All teachers except one participated in this study wanted to include films as a part of syllabus designed to be used side by side with the course book. The reason one of the teachers didn't want to include films is because of time constrain. Furthermore, most teachers claim that it is quite difficult to find suitable movies for ESL students and can rather be time consuming in the selection process.

3. Does watching films enhance students' motivation to improve oral production?

From the researcher's observation, together with other experts on both groups performance on their role play activities, the film-based experimental class was livelier and students produced more authentic speech which included wider range of colloquial expression. Their vocabulary was wider as compared to the students from controlled group. Moreover, their improvement of oral production can be seen in both role-plays and vocabulary activities. When asked about the development of their oral production skills, the questionnaire data revealed that more than 80% reported that films provided higher chance for learning real-life authentic language and as a result student get opportunity to practice real-life conversation. Questionnaire data also revealed that films helped improved their listening comprehension. Moreover, 95% mentioned that native speakers in the films made them more confident in speaking English. As supported by Eken (2003), an authentic and meaningful context creates effective EFL instruction and so the film's rich context makes it a medium of enjoyment and engages students in real-life conversation pattern. Also, as compared to their controlled group counterpart, students in the experimental group used informal phrases and slang in their role play activities which mimics the real life situation. Besides, 92% of the students believed that their speaking was more spontaneous and films improved their vocabulary acquisition. This finding is in line with various scholars (Yuksel & Tanriverdi, 2009; Hsu, Hwang, Chang, & Chang, 2013) who state that incorporating films and movies in classroom can significantly enhance student's vocabulary acquisition, retention, and recognition.

Pedagogical Implication and Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, some few pedagogical implications were emphasized. First and foremost, EFL teachers can use films in their classroom to enhance students' listening and speaking comprehension. Secondly, students' motivational level can be improved by incorporating films alongside their course book materials. Last but not the least, students' vocabulary can be widened as well as they can learn to produce authentic language as used in context.

In conclusion, it is clear from the present study that using films in classroom can be one of the most powerful instructional media which help in developing students' language skills. The participants, both students and teachers, have positive attitudes in incorporating films in their classrooms to improve English skills. Moreover, it is found that students are highly motivated which result in more in-class participation and teacher-student engagement. Also, colloquial expression provided students higher opportunity to learn vocabulary in context.

Limitation

First and foremost, limitation is the time implemented for this experiment was too short. Further implementation over a longer period of time may result in a different finding. Also, this study is limited to a particular international university in a Thai context. It should also be assessing to other context and other language levels to see the result.

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