



# Teaching English as a Second Language: Exploiting English Films as Pedagogical Tool

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## ABSTRACT

Considering the globalization of language and its transition, English has been playing an important role. The non-native speakers of English language are now a days required to master the skill of communicating in English. Since ESL students have inadequate exposure to the native speakers and the natural ambiance for learning English as the secondary language, it gets difficult for them to acquire the skills. For the, one of the suitable ways of learning the language is English movies as they provide real time experience of leaning English. English movies are vibrant and can help its learners improve their verbal abilities of listening and speaking; it can also strengthen language sensitivity, advance the literary accomplishment; further, it can also enhance and cultivate learning interests. Therefore, in most of the ESL classrooms, the trainers have been using English films in order to provide more exposure of English to the learners. English movies are more or less authentic material of teaching the paralinguistic skills in English: the accent, pitch, pronunciation, intonation etc. The film watching is an activity where the ambiance is created and the learner enters the environment of native speakers of English language. Watching English movies is a prevalent and authoritative tool for the learners to learn English as a second or foreign language. An English teacher can always provide a comprehensive attention of students using the films. The main task that teacher has to do is choosing the correct movie suitable for the topics and classroom teaching-learning. This paper mainly focuses on the influence of English films on learning English in ESL classrooms using audio-visual aids. The paper further focuses on common problems for English teaching as well as the difficulties needing consideration in making full use of functions of English films in English study.

*Key words: Activities, English films and English language learning, authentic films, English films as pedagogical tools*

## OVERVIEW AND RATIONALE

After various experimenting various teaching practices, a series of informal interaction conducted with my students of English classroom (Teaching English as second language - TESL), it revealed that out of all the authentic materials used for teaching aural comprehension i.e. listening with understanding, the use of English films has been the most effective. While working and experimenting for more than three years with commercial films have advanced my

English teaching classes and has demonstrated the worthiness of such films beyond aural comprehension. With the introduction of a well-thought-out structure of auxiliary guides and workbooks, a series of thoughtfully selected films can serve as the core for a total skill-building curriculum of advanced listening, speaking, writing, and reading. Movies, a prominent medium of communication in twentieth century has hardly been touched by TESL as a content tool. They can be an almost inexhaustible source of material for in-class English language practice. With watchful selection and purposeful planning, films can be used to their full potential and become a valuable teaching tool in the field of TESL. watchful selection and purposeful planning are key factors in the development of a formal film program for skill-building. However, philosophical and theoretical direction is a third factor which must underlie both of the above factors.

## **I. THE ROLE OF ENGLISH FILMS IN ENGLISH LEARNING**

Films are reproduction of life: they enrich our cultural and social values. At the same time, it can vividly provide people with auditory and visual enjoyment. In order to gain students' attention, movie teaching makes full use of rich content and various genres of the films to arouse enthusiasm and excitement of the students. Besides, the movies can also transform simple words into intuitive language. In brief, film teaching can create an ambience to learn the second language, in which English learning becomes a kind of natural communicated bustle. Students get consciously involved in language learning activity due to films as films raise interest in learning and practical ability to use English. Foremost benefits of using films in English language teaching as second language are as follow:

**(a) Improves Listening Comprehension and Spoken English:** Talking about the improvement of spoken skills, one of the incidents of my English Language class should be mentioned. While students were invited for JAM (Just a Minute) activity, one of the girls astonished everyone with her spoken skills. When she was asked about her learning pattern, the girl replied: "I like watching English movies. They make me happy and also improve my listening and speaking abilities." As film words are more vividly, learners can effortlessly remember how to use them and reproduce the dialogues; try to taste the pronunciation and intonation in the actual context of words. However, the pronunciation and intonation are lubricant for speaking English confidently. Students will never feel the resilient jolt which intonation rhythm showed the huge function in the film while reciting the words or listening the text of English book.

### **(b) To Accrue Vocabularies and Idioms**

In films, the vivid plots and actual context can help spectators remember numerous words and sentences. Learners remember not only its meaning but also the corresponding use method. Besides, such retention is clear and hard to forget. Words and phrases in life appear in the film, including a lot of slang and colloquial. Only in the real context can we realize the fitting meaning. Here are few examples of English idioms from classic movies or films:

**1. face the music:**

There are two kinds of people in this world... those who stand up and face the music, and those who run for cover. Cover is better. – from *Scent of a Woman* (1992)

**Idiom Meaning:** deal with the consequences

**2. rise and shine:**

Rise and shine, Adam. You're probably wondering where you are. I'll tell you where you might be. You might be in the room that you die in. – from *Saw* (2004)

**Idiom Meaning:** wake up

Watching a film can not only accumulate words of life but also can help English learners remember some uncommon, complicated vocabulary as well as some idioms. English learners can choose the type of movie according to their own requirements.

**(c) Apprehend the British and American Culture:**

Equated with other teaching aids, film has unique advantage in introducing British and American culture. Through the scene, learners can visually see the foreign geographical conditions, social customs - traditions, and foreign characters etc. Intentionally or not, English national values, beliefs, feelings of the world are conveyed by the film. For example, (i) the film *The Social Network*, is the sort-of-true story of how a student changed the face of the internet from his dorm room. The story behind Facebook isn't short on drama either; it included betraying a friend and being sued for intellectual property theft. Though the real-life people portrayed dispute parts of the film, David Fincher's film showcases the solid work ethos of one of the wealthiest men in the world. (ii) Movie, *The Pursuit of Happyness* is a real-life story of Christopher Gardner, a man who invests heavily in an exclusive medical device that doesn't offer a great benefit over its cheaper competitors. As a result, he finds it hard to sell them and his life hits a downward spiral. His family is collapsed and he is forced to live on the street with his son. Then he gets a job as a stockbroker, but before he can receive any money, he has to spend six months of training and sell the medical devices. This movie shows that even when it seems like you're living the American Dream, it can all fall away due to a twist of fate and the deck can become stacked against you. Still, Gardner succeeds against the odds. (iii) another example is the film, *Gone with the Wind* which introduces the American Civil War; also expresses emotional confusion of American people; (iv) the film *Forest Gump* is a chronicle of the United States: Almost all the historical happenings are shown in the film, such as: "the Ku Klux Klan", "Vietnam war", "sexual revolution", "American Civil War", "black movement", "Watergate scandal", etc. In addition, different living conditions and social phenomenon are also referred in the film, such as "school bus", "single-parenting", "football - soccer", "American education - kindergarten, primary school and university", and so on. Therefore, by watching English movies, students can better understand the foreign culture and avoid communication barriers, to a certain extent.

### **(d) To Develop Interest in English**

Films are engaging and the learners are always keen on watching movies; the movies provide the sense of vision and enjoyment. Audience can not only hear the sound of the characters, observe their actions but also can enjoy the beautiful cinematography and music in a film. These elements activate the enthusiasm of the students; make them involved in the environment and, imperceptible access to rich knowledge, and gradually appreciate English. Sometimes a teacher babbled a lesson would not leave a deep impression to the students. However, students can taste a good movie for a long time, or even for their whole life.

## **II. COMMON PROBLEMS BY USING ENGLISH MOVIE IN COLLEGE TEACHING**

Every coin has two facets. There are a lot of advantages of teaching using films, while at the same time appear some problems. Watching a movie during the class will become a form without any help of teaching if teachers misused the movie in class. It means that the effect of watching a movie was less than expected. What might be the roots of the problems? First, it's very hard for a teacher to arrange a proper time to enjoy a whole movie. It takes almost two or three hours for a wonderful film. Student with good English proficiency may take audio-visual speaking lessons every week. But the novice ones who only use class time is obviously not enough. They have to take time out of regular class. It's very difficult to make a unified arrangement for the teacher. Furthermore, appreciating and discussing the film asked more available time to use. Second, how to choose a proper movie for all the students is a question. The different level of the students, the preference of the appreciation types and the existing resources determined the type of movie to choose. Nevertheless, students even in the same class have different level and preference; besides, the existing resources are limited. Moreover, it is also difficult to ensure that the vast number of students can benefit from it. This requires teachers to have higher professionalism to organize and plan carefully. A teacher needs to provide constant guidance for learner to cultivate good study habits. Only in this way teacher can achieve her/his ends. To cut it short, such and many other aspects should be paid attention to during film teaching for a teacher.

## **III. THE POINTS TO BE TAKEN CARE OF DURING THE TEACHING BY FILM**

### **(a) Material selections**

Teachers should carefully choose simple plot and standard pronunciation films which can meet the students' requirements. Of course, the film content should be healthy and positive. According to survey, most students like watching life comedy genre in which can receive spiritual enlightenment. Teacher must avoid violence and pornographic films which may have a bad effect on students. Considering the source of the film is necessary. To avoid arcane pronunciation films

although they are English movies. The pronunciation in European productions and the films of United States is standard. It can be used as study material. Actors, such as Mag Rain, Julia Roberts, Tom Hanks, their pronunciations are much articulated and authentic. So, their movies can be recommended to imitate to study.

### **(b) Reasonable arrangement of time**

The non-native learners only spare time in learning English during classroom hours. At the same time, class time is so limited that it is quiet impossible for an ESL teacher is impossible to use the whole day time to appreciate the film. Therefore, teachers should manage self-study time and extracurricular time to finish the film. The last but not the least, students can timely review film content and deepen the impression by dormitory chatting when they finish the film and go back to their dorms. Besides the proper time, reasonable frequency of the movie should also be paid attention to. How often is the most reasonable? The answer may be once a month. Of course, the students also can choose other ways to see the film according to their circumstance.

### **(c) Design Good Movie Teaching Steps**

It is not only the teacher who is responsible for teaching learning using Film, it also involves students to choose a movie to see. If in that way, students will only consider the movie as a general entertainment, film teaching will not work. Therefore, the teacher should be a good guide while watching a movie, not only arrange good movie teaching, but also strengthen students' appreciation. Teaching through films can be divided into three parts: The first, teachers should choose the movies for teaching as well as the time and place to watching according to the actual circumstance of students. The second part deals with process of the movie: the teachers should give the students some information prompt mainly in the field of play before, such as set the keywords, introduce the plot, or give some questions etc. This part is very important for understanding the film. During the film, teacher should better require students to take notes, write down the film of the words, idioms, slang, good expressions, information, and motivate learners to read and imitate the classic sentences or standard pronunciation. The third part is mainly for feedback, and learning effect. Teachers can use the ways such as Fill Blanks and Answer the Questions, Discuss, Report, and Act Out to test students' understanding of the film. Teachers should attach great importance to the role of the feedback.

## **IV. CONCLUSION**

To put it in a nutshell, the use of films in English teaching is an effective teaching method. It can not only arouse the keenness of students in learning English, improve the level of listening, speaking, but also lead a way to know foreign cultures. At the same time, students attain artistic enlightenment. However, film teaching problems may take place during the teaching. Therefore, teachers should give full play to the role of the lead, scientifically design the teaching ideas, and help students form good learning habits. And this is the way, ESL students can the advantages of English movies; they can obtain the comprehensive language skills and communication skills.

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