Using English–language movies to develop speaking and listening skills of ESL learners

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Abstract

Many English as a second language (ESL) teachers who are non-native speakers of English have to overcome numerous obstacles to improving their students' language abilities, especially when developing speaking and listening skills. More and more innovative approaches are essential for them to address these problems. This research is aimed at investigating the use of English language movies in developing oral and listening skills of student teachers of English. Approximately 600 English-language films are released all over the world in each year, and teachers can utilize them as authentic materials for ESL learners who may find audio and printed materials less motivating. By using student teachers as the participants, the researcher explores how language fluency, pronunciations, vocabulary and knowledge of colloquial expressions can be enhanced by watching English movies on regular basis. The study also examines whether the use of English movies for ESL learning can create more opportunities to learn language usage in real life while creating an autonomous learning environment. Furthermore, it explores the possibility of learning words and phrases in informal situations which are not taught in ESL classrooms. Living in an English-speaking country is considered the easiest way to learn English language. Watching movies on a regular basis may provide the same experience for ESL learners to develop the speaking and listening skills of English language.

Key Words - non- native teachers, speaking, listening, English Movies.

Developing Speaking And Listening Skills Using English Language Movies

Speaking and listening are crucial skills necessary for effective communication in any language throughout the world. English language is widely used for communication and the competence in English is considered as an added potential. The ability to speak in English fluently internationalizes the outlook of the people in comparison to the other languages used for communication. English is the language of the international business, technology, science and travel and the ability to speak in English is kind of a linguistic power according to the linguist Kachru. In the Sri Lankan context of teaching English language, the majority of the teachers are non-native. Most of the non-native teachers may see themselves as inadequate models for developing speaking. The main purpose of this research is to use English language movies as authentic materials to enhance the speaking and listening skills of 30 prospective teachers of Pasdunrata National College of Education. Developments in technology have made English Language films more accessible and that motivated to conduct this research and to write this paper. Using English language movies to develop the speaking and listening skills is the main goal of the research as English language movies possess the benefits like authentic input. Motivating students and more opportunities for enhancing speaking and listening are another two aspects persuaded me to start this type of project. English language movies as authentic materials are possible to use to boost the confidence of the students to enhance the communicative skills .ESL language teachers have been using English films for decades due to number of reasons as an excellent teaching learning tool .According to the English language lectures of my institute watching English language movies help the students learn English phrases can be used in real life situations, improve

vocabulary, catch authentic language, learn sentence patterns and become familiar with the different accents of native speakers, opportunities to listen to correct pronunciation and intonation patterns .Other than these benefits some websites mention that the visuals are more effective to the learners to listen to the language expressions and facial expressions and gestures helping the learners to focus on the verbal messages. Further subtitles of the movies are useful in developing listening skills. Use of English language movies in ESL classrooms is a refreshing learning experience for students when compared with the techniques like rote learning of English vocabulary and drill practices as the films are valuable resources with colloquial English in real life context and teachers can be used movies to develop the speaking and listening skills of learners making them more autonomous learners. Many of may raise the question of why films should be used and how they could be used to improve speaking and listening skills. This action research is conducting to identify the effective ways of using English language movies to improve specially speaking and listening skills of teacher trainees and the outcomes of the research can be shared with the non –native English teachers in the country to use English language movies as authentic materials as well as materials which can be found easily.

METHOD

Participants.

30 prospective teachers of Pasdunrata National College of Education were the participants of this action research to investigate the use of English language films as an effective tool to develop speaking and listening skills. The participants are trained to be English as a second language teachers to work in government schools after three years. The participants follow a residential

course and they are in the college hostels during the first and the second year and in the third year they attach to a government schools to continue the internship period. The 30 participants are first year students and they leave the college to start the internship period in 2018.

Assessment and Measurement.

According to O Mally and Picrce (1996) assessment of oral language must focus on a student's ability to interpret a conveying meaning for authentic purpose in interactive context. Giving students a mark for speaking is challenging job. Evaluating speaking is difficult as there are many things to pay attention at the same time. One possible solution for this is to pay attention on one or two aspects at a time. For an example a particular speaking activity or task the teacher can focus on marking the content and the word stress. For next, the teacher can pay attention on intonation and linking sounds. The speaking skills are evaluated by recording all the speeches, role plays, discussions considering the following factors. Listening to the recorded speeches carefully several times and to see whether any improvements considering the following factors compared to their level at the beginning and whether the participants are able to minimize errors, use new words and phrases that they learnt when they speak, speak confidently, speak clearly, organization of ideas.

Talking about results is not possible as the study has not completed yet. I had informal discussions with all the participants and some of the lecturers work with me at Pasdunarata National College of Education to teach English as a second language. All the participants agreed that the use of English language movies as authentic material is an interesting approach compared with the printed materials used more often in ESL class room. They believe that this will be a good experience for them as well as a good opportunity for improving their listening

and speaking skills while watching a film. So far students watched 5 films and did some of the

activities planned to

do but it is not possible talk about the results. Time is vital to make this project a success as

students face problems regarding a time to watch movies.

Procedure.

This study is an action research investigation to develop speaking and listening skills of

prospective teachers. The aim is to use 20 English language movies to achieve the main goals of

the research during three months of time .Initially the idea ,the possibility of using English

language movies to develop speaking and listening skills came to my mind because of my own

kids as they usually watch English movies and use some of the words that they learnt by

watching English Language movies without any guidance and I experienced that films can be

used effectively with my students those who have problems regarding speaking fluently in

English.   I wanted use a different method where students build up their confidence, improve

vocabulary and enhance speaking and listening in an enjoyable way .The informal discussion

with the teacher trainees encouraged me as most of them responded very positively and

expressed their willingness to participate in my project. As the purpose of my study is to identify

how and to what extent watching English language movies increase the confidence to speak

fluently in English and identifying the influence of English movies on enhancing listening skills

of the participants, I decided to design activities considering three areas. Firstly, to demonstrate

the importance of speaking and listening skills and the use of English movies as easy accessible

martials. Secondly, I planned to investigate the effectiveness of English language movies as

authentic materials in developing both speaking and listening skills by creating opportunities to

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watch 20 movies and creating more chances to speak in English using various types of interesting activities in

Thirdly, I wanted to identify the most effective activities can be done by using English language movies to develop speaking and listening skills.

Why an action research is the most appropriate methodology for this study?

According to Stringer (2005) an action research is a common sense approach to personal and professional development that enables practitioners everywhere to investigate and evaluate their work, and to create their own way of practice. Mc Nill (2003) said the teacher can develop professional competence as well as improve students' learning through action researches. Furthermore Kemiss and Mc Taggert (1988) mentioned that the fundamental components of an action research include developing a plan for improvement, implement the plan, observing and documentary the effect of the plan for further planning. An Action research is particularly appropriate framework for search into language teaching (Wallace, 2000).I thought action research is the most appropriate research design as mentioned by Stringer (1996) since an action research project seeks to create knowledge, propose and implement change and improve and practice and performance. I came to a conclusion to conduct an action research using English films as often action researches are conducted by the teacher researchers to gather information about the ways how they teach in their schools, and how will their students learn. The information is collected often with the intention of gaining insight ,developing reflective practice ,aiming positive changes in the school environment and specially on educational practices ,and improving students outcomes(Mills,2003:4) I felt I too can change my way of

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teaching as well as at the end the student teachers as participants will gain something to enhance their speaking and listening skills and further more they will be able to develop English language skills stress freely .

Model of Action research.

I decided to use a simple action research model similar to the one introduced by MacIsaac in 1995 with three cycles. Seven steps are planned to implement the within the three cycles.

Step One: Problem Identification.

Initially, a problem is identified that most of the prospective teachers have, who are following the English course to be an English teacher to work in a government school. I have been working in this college for 8 years and during that period I identified that most of them do not receive sufficient exposure at their homes .They receive less opportunities to develop their speaking and listening skills as most of the text book activities are aimed developing reading and writing and grammar .According to the government gazette the students who followed the English course are from rural areas ,and the majority of the student teachers do not receive sufficient exposure to acquire English language even though they have got credit passes and distinction passes for English language in the General Certificate Ordinary Level Examination and in the General Certificate of Advanced Level Examinations. My experience with the teacher trainees helped me to identify the problem especially when I work with them during the block teaching sessions and during their internship in the third year of their course .The informal discussions had with them proved that almost all of them are not happy about their level of speaking in English. Following are the main causes mentioned by the participants and the ELT lectures regarding why students are unable to speak fluently in English even though students learn English as a second

language snice they were in the kindergartens. According to the participants they cannot speak in fluently as words are not coming to the mind, lack of knowledge on sentence patterns, lack of grammar knowledge and applying the grammar rules when speaking ,poor vocabulary, fear and lack of confidence, less opportunities to improve speaking and listening. English is taught as a second language /foreign language in our country from grade 3 to Advanced Level classes in schools but most students have many problems regarding speaking in English. Students have problems regarding speaking in English as they use English only more frequently inside the class room and less frequently outside the classroom, the environment outside the classroom does not support and give enough encouragement to the students to speak in English, students prefer to speak in their mother tongue as it is comfortable for them, most students have problem related grammar and they are confused and do not know how to apply the knowledge of grammar rules when speaking, fear and lack of confidence, problems related formulating sentences fast, students treat English as a second language or as a foreign language rather as a life skill, most of the students do not make a personal effort to go beyond the classroom, do not bother to use modern technology, films YouTube to their language learning, These are some of the answers given by ELT lecturers in the questionnaire to the questions "Why students cannot speak fluently in English? ".Other six stages of the study are (2) Preliminary Investigation (3) Hypothesis (4) Intervention (5) Evaluation (6) Dissimilation.

Data collection.

Data collection was done through the questionnaires to investigate the attitudes of the students and ELT lectures towards watching and using English language in ESL classrooms movies to develop speaking and listening skills. 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 30 student teachers and 10 ELT lecturers. The first questionnaires were given at the beginning of first the intervention. The latter is aimed to give at the end to investigate to identify the effectiveness of English language movies in improving both speaking and listening skills.

Research Questions.

The study is aimed to answer the research questions like (a) What are the attitudes of the ELT lectures towards watching English language movies as a tool to develop speaking and listening skills? (b) What are the attitudes of student teachers towards using English language movies to develop their speaking and listening skills? (c) Can English language movies be used as an effective tool to develop the speaking and listening skills?

Procedure

In this study to investigate whether films English language films can be used to develop both speaking and listening skills, English language films are provide to the participants to watch on Sundays .All of them use their own laptops to watch the movies. English language movies are given by the researcher by using pen drives on each Friday of each week and the necessary instructions are given verbally or using the mobile apps like Viber, WhatsApp or Share it. The participants are instructed to watch the movies on Sundays any time convenient for them. After watching the Film the participants' text me expressing their views on the film. The participants speak about the film and record it using their mobile phone or any device can be used to record. They are informed to send the recorded speech before Friday. In that speech they can talk about what they think about that film, Is it a good or bad film? , characters, story in brief, genre of the film, who directed it?

Activities.

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The main purpose of watching English movies on their own but not in a class room is to provide more exposure as the participants can watch the same movie again and again. If lack of time is a limitation to achieve the purposes the participants are encouraged to watch the films parts by parts. The participants are informed to watch the movies at least 10 minutes every day in order to encourage them to use the English language movies as a tool to improve their speaking and listening skills and to acquire the new terms, sentence patterns and especially colloquial terms used in day today situations. To send the recorded speech the participants are using the mobile apps they use .They are provided a note book to write the new words and phrases they catch .Apart that they can mention the time that they watch the film. If the film is a good one most of the participants text me saying that the selection of the film is good and they like the film very much and further saying that they have enjoyed a lot watching the movie .This was I experienced as the researcher when I provided the film "The Freedom Writers" as the first film to watch in my study. The language was little bit difficult according to them but it was a good experience for them as the film is about a novice teacher and her attempt to take her students to the correct path. Since it was a true story, the film impressed them passivity to be a good teacher in the future. The participants mentioned that they leant number of new words including the word "holocaust". Different types of activities are design to do with the students during a three month of period other than watching movies. The activities are designed paying attention to the films selected to use in this study. The following techniques are used when using English language movies as authentic materials to improve speaking and listening skills. In this research, the films are given to watch on Sundays as mentioned previously .The main purpose of using this method is to provide the participants with opportunities to give more exposure to communicate

effectively they as future teachers. The activities are designed starting with simple activities and moving towards advanced activities. The actives are aimed at developing fluency of the participant as well as to develop the critical thinking skills through debating, analyzing, and discussions. Selecting the English language movies according to the purpose of the study, especially the English films which can be used to motivate the participants to watch more and more films with the intention of acquiring the target language. Designing activities can be done after watching the English movies to motivate the participants to engage in speaking activities and listening activities. Selecting the English language movies which are suitable to the level and interest of the students. The success of the study depends on the selection of the English language movies as the material .For the films selection process, McGrath's (2013) criteria for choosing authentic text is a useful guide. Relevance, Interest of the topic, cultural appropriateness, linguistic demands, length, exportability are the factors mention him. More specifically, Nunan (1999) defined authentic materials as spoken or written language data produced in the course of genuine communication, and not specifically written for the purpose of language teaching. They are "samples" that reflect a naturalness of form and an appropriateness of cultural and situational context that would be found in the language as used by native speakers (Rogers &Medy).The effectiveness the study to use English language movies to enhance the speaking and listening skills, if the English language movies are selected giving attention to the relevance of those movies to the level of the students and according to the age, and interest. The more opportunities they may receive to enjoy while doing activities which are chosen by the researcher the more they gain. The use of mobile phones, popular mobile apps like Viber, WhatsApp and Share it will motivate the students participate actively as the youths now do not know to live without technology.

The selection of the films to the study should be done carefully paying attention to the cultural appropriateness as some English language movies might be inappropriate to use in the classrooms as well as in the Asian context. If the movies

and activities are considered as inappropriate by the participants, the more possibility to demotivate them has to be taken into the consideration. The language used in the movies should not be more complex to the level of the students. By participating this kind of study the students will be able to understand how they should use English language movies with their students not only for developing speaking and listening to tech grammar, vocabulary, reading and writing. When selecting English language movies the attention must be paid to select which are suitable for the all types of students and to all the age groups in order to cultivate English thinking among the students.

Ways of using English language movies in the study.

Whole –film approach.

In this approach films are presented to the participants to watch on Sundays in the hostels or at homes. The main purpose of watching the whole film is to provide an exposure to the complete communicative process of the movie. According to King (2002) the ability to comprehend the full movie will motivate and make the participants more confident. One of the demerits of this approach is time. Finding time to watch a full length movies is a huge challenge for the participants as they have assignments to complete, extra-curricular programs to attend, and going home and meeting parents on Sundays. The participants will be more passive during the time that they are watching the movie. The participants can watch as a group and they can takes few minutes of break by pausing the film and have a discussion to reduce the monotony. But Hammar, (2001) mentioned that

the stopping or resuming of the film might distract the participants' attention. After watching the full movie the participants are expected to speak two to three minutes and record and send the

researcher using any mobile app that they are using. They are instructed to send the speech clip before 11pm every Sunday. The students can speak about the Story line, characters, music, how the films end, favorite character, scene etc. While watching the movie they write the new words, phrase, quotes they think beautiful and worth to note down which are in the movie write in the note book supplied by the researcher.

Short –Sequence approach.

Out of 20 full length movies intend to watch, the short –sequence approach will be used with 5 films .Most researchers agree that most effective way of using English language movies as short sequence approach instead of overloading students with the whole film. In this approach the researcher selects one scene or many scenes from a full length film to show to the participants. This methods saves time compared with watching the whole film. But short sequence approach also can be a rich source of different activities .Short scenes of films are used to activities like discussions, listening practice .Instead of using selected scenes of a film ,short films also possible to use .The use of short films or scenes of films will help to retain the attention of the participants.

Pre-viewing.

Pre-viewing activities are planned to before watching the movie. Pre-viewing activities include pre-teaching of key vocabulary, predicting the story, guessing the plot of the film using the title of the film, brainstorming words related to the themes of the movies .Pre-viewing activities can be done both with whole film approach as well as with the short –

sequence approach. Integrating with reading skills (read the summary of the film) hope to

guide give more language exposure to enhance the describing abilities of the students in order to build up the confidence to communicate effectively.

While –viewing.

The activities are aimed to do while watching movies with the intention of helping students to maintain the attention. Students are provided the material to do comprehension questions to be answered. This will help the participants of the research to focus on the film but not to listen and write at the same time.

Post viewing

Varity of activities have been planned to implement after watching the movies. These activities are designed with the aim of improving speaking skills using more interactive activities. Followings are the activities hope to after watching movies with the students .Some of the activities are selecting a scene, character, that they like very much and describe, the participants act out a scene that they like very much as a group activity using the same dialogues, role play, two participants conduct a role play to express their opinions about a film they like very much, talks about the favorite character, act it out.(Group of students act out a scene of a film which is 10 to 20 minutes long and students act out the incidents with their friends)

Results

Talking about results is not possible as the study has not completed yet. I had informal discussions with all the participants and some of the lecturers work with me at Pasdunarata National College of Education to teach English as a second language. All of them greed that the

use of English language movies as authentic material is an interesting approach compared with the printed materials used more often in ESL class room. They believe that this will be a good experience for them as well as a good opportunity for improving their listening and speaking skills while watching a film. So far students watched 5 films and did some of the activities planned to do but it is not possible talk about the results. Time is vital to make this project a success as students face problems regarding a time to watch movies.

Discussions.

With regard to the suitable English language movies use to improve speaking and listening skills, the researcher asks five questions: (a) Does the given material make comfortable doing oral and listening activities? (b) Does the given movies make you feel free to improve your English? (c) Does the given material make you speak actively? (d) Do the films that you watch make you interested in doing listening and speaking activities? (e) Do the films make you motivated to practice your English speaking?

Conclusions.

All the conclusions are drawn at the end of the research by analyzing the gathered data through questionnaires, informal and formal discussions with the participants and the English language lecturers work with the researcher, interviews, interpreting the comments given by the participants, speeches, work sheets, observations. Discussing of the conclusions is not possible as the research has not yet completed.

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