
USING FILMS TO TEACH LISTENING COMPREHENSION

Eka Rizki Amalia, Nurulazizah Ria Kusriani, Pungky Ramadhani

Institut Pesantren K.H. Abdul Chalim Mojokerto, Indonesia

(ekarizkiamalia2104@gmail.com)

Received: 14th June 2019; Revised: 27th November 2019; Accepted: 28th December 2019

ABSTRACT

Using films for classroom activities is often doubted as an appropriate and meaningful way to teach listening comprehension. Since the film is authentic material and far from pedagogical instruction, its use has rarely been paid attention to. This paper aims to prove that using film can be an alternative and effective way to teach listening comprehension. The problems which are commonly faced by the students in film viewing for listening activities and the proposed techniques along with film viewing activities are discussed further in this paper. The result of the discussion shows that using film to teach listening comprehension is motivating, enhancing and appealing for the students.

Key Words: films; listening comprehension; listening activities

ABSTRAK

Menggunakan film untuk kegiatan di kelas sering diragukan sebagai cara yang berarti dan sesuai untuk mengajarkan listening comprehension. Karena film adalah materi otentik dan dianggap jauh dari konten pedagogik, penggunaan film jarang sekali diberi perhatian. Artikel ini bertujuan untuk membuktikan bahwa menggunakan film untuk kegiatan pembelajaran dapat menjadi salah satu alternatif dan cara yang efektif untuk mengajarkan listening comprehension. Artikel ini membahas masalah-masalah yang umum dihadapi oleh siswa dalam kegiatan pemutaran film, teknik-teknik untuk memutar film, dan kegiatan-kegiatan dalam pemutaran film untuk kegiatan listening di kelas. Hasil pembahasan menunjukkan bahwa menggunakan film untuk mengajarkan listening comprehension sangat memotivasi, menggugah dan menarik bagi siswa.

Kata Kunci : film; pemahaman mendengarkan; kegiatan mendengarkan

How to Cite: Amalia, E.R., Kusriani, N. R., Ramadhani, P.(2019). Using Films to Teach Listening Comprehension . IJEE (Indonesian Journal of English Education), 6(2), 119-132. doi:10.15408/ijee.v6i2.14531

INTRODUCTION

Teaching English by using films has gained attention in the EFL classroom, including in Indonesia. Some lecturers and teachers choose to use films to introduce the class with the lesson that tends to illustrate real-life content. The use of films in the class is still related to curricular demand. While at the same time the material is delivered sufficiently, the attracting and engaging audiovisual aids of the film motivate and enhance the learners' willingness to study. When the learners are motivated to study, then the goal of teaching will be easily reached as the learners will encourage themselves to be actively involved in the learning process.

There are many reasons behind the use of films in the teaching and learning activity. One of them is that the rich content of films introduces the learners to be exposed to a real-life situation and sometimes to the world of imagination. These audiovisual media lead the learners to use and optimize their sight and hearing to grasp the information delivered by the films. These two senses, sight and hearing, enable the learners to absorb the input more optimally. Another reason for using films to teach English is that films offer opportunities for developing fluency. Since the English films present the

English language spoken by a native speaker of English, the learners as the audiences will notice and unconsciously learn how to speak and use the English language appropriately.

The main purpose of using films in the classroom is generally because the lecturers or the teachers want to introduce and accustom their students to listen to English. This is the primary idea of teaching listening. While listening is not merely hearing but comprehending the spoken passage, the students are demanded to have listening comprehension skills for the listening activity. When the students can comprehend the spoken passage from the film, they will be able to catch the idea and the message implied and explicated from the films played. That is the goal of teaching listening comprehension. Thus, the lecturers and the teachers should teach their students to master listening comprehension skills.

Despite its strengths, the use of films in the class activity has raised controversy among classroom teachers who have mandated curriculum to follow and the limited time allocated. This is because some teachers still perceive films as a medium of entertainment and not for the pedagogical setting. This opinion is not completely unacceptable since films are

authentic materials and are not made for learning. Films are naturally made for entertainment and pleasure purposes. When the films are utilized for the learning activity, they are mostly given outside the classroom setting as an assignment or project. Then the question is, if the teachers want to use films to teach listening comprehension skill, then how should the teaching and learning activities be conducted and what level of students is the most appropriate to teach by using films.

This paper describes the use of films to teach listening comprehension in the classroom. This paper aims to prove that film is an appropriate medium to teach listening comprehension skills for certain levels. This paper covers the following discussion: an overview of films as authentic material, techniques of using film in the classroom, criteria of selecting the film, using film in teaching listening comprehension, and classroom activities for film viewing.

FILM AS AUTHENTIC MATERIAL

Film as an authentic material often raises controversy to be used in classroom activities as it is considered to have many weaknesses and difficulties for both teachers and students. As authentic materials, films are not produced for pedagogical

purposes. Therefore, the content of the film may not be familiar enough for the students. Mishan (2004, p.216) in Ruusunen (2011) points out that film viewing can be rather challenging sometimes. It can cause boredom and passiveness for the students. To make the class enjoyable, relaxed, and watching the films as learning as well as entertaining experience, the teachers should plan activities and tasks. It can be done by introducing the topic and related vocabulary to the students initially. By knowing the topic and the vocabulary beforehand, students will be encouraged to follow the film viewing as they have already known, at least, some words that the characters in the films utter. This can make the students be more focused on the film and engaged in the learning activity.

Related to film as authentic material, Gebhard (1996, p.89-109) points out some disadvantages of using authentic material. The first is that it is often difficult to access authentic material. However, today we can easily access and get authentic material like the film either by buying or downloading it from the internet. The second is that sometimes it is difficult to make authentic material comprehensible to the students. Different cultural backgrounds and language barriers are mostly found. This can be overcome by explaining the

cultural content and introducing some vocabulary and expressions to the students initially. The third is that some students may not accept and consider authentic material as a valuable learning source but take it simply as a kind of entertainment in between their boring class hours. The teacher can overcome this by stating the objectives of the film playing before it is played. The students must understand first that they have some activities or assignments to be completed while or after watching the film. By doing so, the students will concentrate and focus more not only on watching the film by purpose but also enjoying it.

Wilson (2011) mentions some obstacles in playing a film in the classroom. Frequently, the language level of the film is too high for the students. As we know that all characters in English films speak real English as their daily language because they are native speakers of English. Overlaps and interruptions between speakers are easily found. There are also incomplete sentences with false starts and hesitation, background noise and voices, loosely packed information, and so forth. All those are found in the film. Another obstacle is, for the teacher, to design activity which correlates to the curricular content and the students' need and interest for film viewing sometimes takes time. There

are not many teachers who have sufficient time to do that. Thus, teaching English by using film can be challenging for some teachers.

Even though there are some negative aspects or disadvantages of using film in classroom activities, there are also some reasons and advantages of why using film in the EFL classroom is appropriate. Some of them are increasing motivation, developing intercultural communication (King, 2002), and preparing the learner for global citizenship (Starkey, 2007). The use of film is also one of the key channels via in which learners can be exposed to what occurs in the real world (Hayati and Mohmedi, 2011). Since the film can portray the real-life situation, students will indirectly experience what the characters in the film are experiencing. Furthermore, films are a visual medium and a good starting point for learners to explore and experience another culture (Pegrum, 2008). Here is the role of the teacher to open students' minds and give an understanding of which culture is appropriate and which are not for their age, cultural background, and society. The teacher should filter the content which is not suitable for the students so that they will only obtain a meaningful and valuable message from the film rather than negative content.

Not all students have access to watch certain movies. The movie played by the teacher may be the first movie they watch. Therefore, the teacher has to make sure that the students get a wonderful experience from watching the film. As they are motivated while and after the film viewing, as King (2002) mentions, it is possible that the motivation to learn a language could be enhanced through the incorporation of films into the language classroom. This is good for the students as they are motivated to learn English through fun activities.

There are some reasons why using movies in EFL teaching is considered a useful method and has several advantages compared to the more traditional teaching styles. The first is that films can be considered as authentic material and they provide the learners with genuine input (Mishan (2004, p. 216) cited in Ruusunen (2011)). The genuine input helps the students to understand that there is a connection between traditional classroom teaching and the real-world and that the foreign language, the English language, is used by the characters not only in the films but also in their daily lives. Further, Krashen (1985) in Ruusunen (2011) points out, a natural input helps the learners to acquire language without necessarily even noticing that they are listening or reading a foreign language.

When the students are watching the films, they are unconsciously acquiring the language spoken by the characters in the film and this activity is done without any conscious attempts of doing listening strategy. The students do not even notice or realize that they comprehend the spoken passage delivered by the characters in the film. This is the benefit of watching a film. In conventional listening activities, the students often feel under pressure when they are asked to listen to the spoken passage. They tend to catch every single word and sentence of the spoken passage. This is not a good strategy as when they miss one or more sentences, they will become stressed and feels like they fail to follow the listening activity. Comprehension is the most important thing and this can be acquired by the students unconsciously by watching a film.

The second benefit of using film is that it has been studied that films enhance English language skill development since they bring variety, reality, authenticity, and flexibility into the EFL classroom and before anything, diversify the curriculum (Stoller (1988, p.1) cited in Ruusunen (2011)). The problem here is that in Indonesia, where the whole content of the curriculum is from the government and every school and teachers should follow and apply it, it is sometimes difficult to

create and implement our lesson plan. Teachers are demanded to fulfill the curricular goals which some of them are overloaded. Too many materials should be delivered and not much time to complete all. Consequently, some teachers are in a rush to finish delivering the materials based on the standard and basic competence and some students may have not mastered all the materials yet. The solution to this problem is that the teacher does not necessarily teach all materials stated in the standard and basic competence of the syllabus. It is commonly known that the only purpose of teaching junior and senior high students in Indonesia is to bring them to succeed in the national exam. Teachers may focus only on indicators of graduate competency standards or known as SKL (*Standard Kompetensi Lulusan*). Since the teachers cannot diversify the curriculum by themselves, they should modify and make variety and alternative of it, and film viewing is one of some alternatives.

The third benefit of using film in the classroom is that films can motivate the students to study English and the visual of the film may also help the weaker students to understand since it offers another channel of understanding in addition to just listening to the language (Champoux (1999) and Stoller (1988) cited in

Ruusunen (2011)). Unlike cassette and other audio aids, the film offers more entertaining content as it is rich in visual effects. The motion pictures of the film provide students another media to acquire and understand the spoken passage. When doing the listening activity by audio aids, the students sometimes get difficulty in catching the message delivered because they only use one sense, i.e. hearing. When watching a film, they optimize their sight and hearing to process to understand the message and the content of the film. This is also a fun activity as they will also enjoy the audio and visual effects of the film.

TECHNIQUES FOR USING FILM IN THE CLASSROOM

Using film in the classroom cannot be implemented without an appropriate approach or strategy. We cannot simply play the film fully and ask the students to watch it. There are some strategies of film viewing so that the goal of using film can be optimally reached. King (2002) proposes some approach of film viewing as follow;

1. Short sequence approach: a) equential approach; teaching scene-by-scene or one segment at a time; b) A single-scene approach; utilizing one scene or segment from the entire film; c) A

selective approach; featuring only a few scenes from different parts of the film; d) A whole film approach; showing the film entirely in a single viewing.

When selecting certain approaches, teachers must consider the teaching objectives and target groups. Teachers must consider and plan what is the goal to be achieved whilst and after film viewing and its appropriateness to the students' level. For example, the two-hour film has a problem in its length and overloaded content for less advanced learners, therefore the teachers should not play the film one at a time. For mature and advanced learners, films should be chosen simply not only for entertainment value.

2. Whole film approach: A whole film approach is an approach where the film is played entirely and studied as a whole. This usually takes one or two hours of film viewing. Shea (1995) in King (2002) argues that playing a film in its entirety is a theoretically and empirically sound way of teaching English. He further says, "If I cut up the movie in five-minute segments, focusing on the linguistic structure and the form

of the language, the students might never have recognized the emotional force and narrative dynamic of the video (film) as a story about important things in the human experience, aesthetic and ethical things like dreams, imagination, and commitment; things that drive language and ultimately stimulate students to learn it in the first place".

In line with this, King (2002) says that showing complete film enhances student motivation to such an extent that students are visibly impressed with how much English they can figure out. While watching the film, they can enjoy the visual motion pictures telling the story which they can understand. After the whole film is played, their confidence soars when they realize that understanding a movie is not as difficult as they had imagined before.

So far, EFL learners have limited listening input to learn the current usage of English. As EFL learners do not listen to English directly as much as ESL learners, they are lack of exposure to the real English usage by the native speakers. This limits their acquisition of

the English language. The whole film approach with abundant exposure to authentic listening not only facilitates learners' listening strategy training but also achieves awareness of pragmatics as an essential component of communicative competence (King, 2002).

CRITERIA FOR SELECTING THE FILM

When we want to use film as teaching aids, we cannot choose any film we like. As teachers, we have to follow the accepted standards of choosing a film, i.e. choosing the right film for a particular level of students. Arcario (1992) in King (2002) suggests that comprehensibility is a major criterion in selecting video language-learning purposes. Some of the requirements in choosing an appropriate film are to choose scenes that balance in dialog with good visual support, appropriate speech delivery, clear picture and sound, and standard accent (King, 2002). Sometimes the storyline is interesting and attractive to the students, but the enunciation, the speed, and accent make the story difficult to understand as the students are foreign language learners. As stated by Dove (1998) in King (2002), if the teachers use the wrong film, it will

result in students' frustration, confusion and may lead to their depression and they will feel sure that they will never understand the "real" English. Viewing film can easily lead to students' frustration when they give up on trying considering film as stimulating aids for learning English.

Another consideration in choosing a film is the content and the comfort level of students. Some films may contain explicit sex, violence, and excessive profanity. This kind of film should be ruled out. Unfortunately, we cannot always find a film which is completely appropriate for the students. Some films may still contain minor scenes of sex, violence, and profanity. Thus the teachers should delete those scenes by cutting or fast-forwarding the film whenever it may be considered offensive.

Another thing which should be taken into consideration is that the students' motivation and interest are important things to be concerned about. Entertaining films are sometimes enjoyable and close to popular culture which now the students are very engaged in. Films which full of dramatic tension and good acting will surely catch the students' attention but then it will make the students forget about the language and will focus more on the plot. Another factor is that

recently released films are much more appealing to students than classic ones. Moreover, if the films succeed in box offices, then they will be more interesting and attracting the students. For college students, films which contain romances, romantic comedies, and less violent action will relatively simple plots and subplots are also good choices (King, 2002).

The last but not the least consideration in choosing a film is that films should be appropriate and suitable for age and culture for both genders. Since gender is a sensitive issue, we may not raise any sensitive things that may lead to misunderstanding. It is rarely found a film with sensitive talk about genders indeed. However, we must become a good filter and selective to choose the appropriate films for our students.

The length of viewing the film in the whole-film approach is quite different from another approach. For advanced and more proficient students, it is better to show a two-hour film in two class periods (King, 2002). It serves the students as good intensive listening training. When the students are attracted and deeply engaged by the story, they will appreciate the continuity of the story as their teacher will give in the next meeting. For low-level students, it is better not to apply the

whole film approach but short sequence one. Teachers can choose the most suitable strategy which will lead to the student's understanding of the film.

USING FILM IN TEACHING LISTENING COMPREHENSION

Brown (2006) states that listening comprehension is not merely an act of hearing but deals with an interactive process. It is an active process in which individuals concentrate on selected aspects of aural input, form the meaning of passages, and associate what they hear with existing knowledge (Gilakjani and Ahmadi, 2011). The mastery of listening comprehension skills is a must for learners as they are demanded to understand and comprehend what the speakers are saying and not to exclude the language acquisition. Listening comprehension skill is believed to help the students acquire the language they are learning and then associate it with other skill i.e. speaking. When the learners can comprehend the input they get, they will have a further understanding of what they are learning and thus will make it easier for them to master other skills.

Underwood (1989) in Gilakjani and Ahmadi (2011) mentions seven causes of obstacles to efficient listening comprehension; 1) listeners cannot

control the speed of delivery, 2) listeners cannot always have words repeated, 3) listeners have a limited vocabulary, 4) listeners may fail to recognize the signals which indicate that the speaker is moving from one point to another, giving an example, or repeating a point, 5) listeners might have lack of contextual knowledge, 6) it can be difficult for listeners to concentrate in a foreign language, and 7) students may have established certain learning habits such as a wish to understand every word. Such obstacles need a strategy to solve as Vandergrift (1999) in Gilakjani and Ahmadi (2011) states that strategy development is important for listening training because strategies are conscious means by which learners can guide and evaluate their comprehension and responses.

Some strategies in teaching listening comprehension are proposed by many experts. Two of them are top-down and bottom-up strategies. Some experts who suggest the use of bottom-up and top-down processing strategies in listening are Nunan (2002, p.239), Brown (2000, p.260), Vandergrift and Goh (2009, p.399), and Wilson (2008, p.15). The bottom-up model emphasizes the decoding of the smallest units – phonemes and syllables – to lead towards meaning, while the top-down model emphasizes the use of background knowledge to predict

content (J. J. Wilson, 2008, p.15). In the past time, only the bottom-up model was used to be applied. However, these days, it is generally that both models are necessary. In developing materials and lessons, it is important to teach not only bottom-up processing skills, such as using the information we get about sounds and word meanings but also to help our students use what they already know to understand what they hear (top-down model).

Besides teaching the students listening comprehension strategies, teachers are also demanded to conduct activities which will support the students' listening comprehension skill. The activities must be constructed in good sequence and each activity must be meaningful which consists of pre-, while- and post-listening activities.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Wilson (2011) and Gilakjani and Ahmadi (2011) suggest three listening activities; pre-, while, and post-listening activity. While for using film in classroom activities, Stoller (1988) cited in Ruusunen (2011) proposes pre-viewing, viewing and post-viewing activities. These steps are to ensure that the students stay focused and motivated throughout the lesson, and the goals of the lesson are clear for them. The nature and length of the

activities depend on the film selected, the needs of the students, their age and proficiency level and instructional objectives.

Stoller (1988) cited in Ruusunen (2011) emphasizes that pre-viewing activities prepare students for actual viewing. Before playing the film, the teachers should prepare the students with activities that will make it easier for them to help the film viewing activity. Some examples of this activity are student polls, interviews, problem-solving, discussion of the title of the film, introducing the topic and theme of the film, brainstorming activities, information gap exercises, dictionary or vocabulary exercise, and so forth. The teacher may also ask students to predict the storyline or what the characters are going to speak, based on their knowledge and information that they have already got. Further, pre-viewing activities can have two primary goals: (a) to help to activate students' prior knowledge, building up their expectations for the coming storyline; and (b) to provide the necessary context for the specific film viewing task. Pre-viewing can make it easier for the weaker students to benefit from the film and its many beneficial aspects.

The second activity is viewing activities. Students as listeners, as well as audiences who participate actively in

the viewing and listening experience, are more likely to construct clear and accurate meaning as they interpret the speaker's verbal message and nonverbal cues (Gilakjani and Ahmadi, 2011). As Stoller (1988) cited in Ruusunen (2011) points out, viewing activities during the film facilitate viewing of the film. The activities help students to deal with specific issues and focus on characters or storylines and also at junctures in the film. Some examples in viewing activities are directed listening, information gathering, film interruptions, and second screening. For example, a film interruption helps the teacher to control whether students have understood what happens in the film. Thus, these viewing activities are a simple way to keep the students focus on viewing despite the length of the film.

The last is post-viewing activities. Stoller (1988) in Ruusunen (2011) highlights the importance of post-viewing activities. They are meant to stimulate both written and oral use of the target language and information from the film. Post-viewing activities should extract the main ideas and issues of the film since the small details of the film have been missed. Post-viewing activities are also essential to understand the main points of the film. Post-viewing activities can be conducted, for instance by film

summaries, discussions, comparisons, speed writing, using notes for writing practice, role plays or debates. For listening comprehension skills, post-viewing activities are important because they extend students' listening skills. After-viewing activities are most effective when done immediately after the film viewing. Well-planned after-viewing activities offer students opportunities to connect what they have watched to their ideas and experiences, and encourage interpretive and critical listening and reflective thinking. Furthermore, post-viewing activities provide opportunities for teachers to assess and check students' comprehension and clarify their understanding. Different comprehension questions can be assigned for students to discuss after film viewing. In the end, in the discussion session, students can utter their interpretation as well as their opinion about the film.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Along with the awareness of the importance of master listening comprehension skills for students, teachers are demanded to teach listening comprehension skills. Not many teachers find it easy to conduct listening class which is fun, motivating, enhancing and appealing for the students. As listening skill is mostly

considered as a difficult skill and it is indeed not easy, teachers must find alternative aids and media to teach listening comprehension skill. Many printed textbook material is supposed to be considered as listening material. However, most of the materials do not fulfill the students' need for mastering listening comprehension skills as they are not the 'real' spoken English because the material is pedagogically constructed for learning. On the opposite side of pedagogical material, there are also authentic materials that closely reflect the 'real' spoken English.

One example of authentic material that is close to the real world of English is film. A film with its rich audio and visual content attracts its audiences and guide them to be involved in the storyline they are watching. But there is a problem, that the authenticity of the film is one of some reasons why it is considered too difficult for the students to comprehend the spoken passage. While listening is not merely hearing but there is the purpose behind that activity, the listeners, especially EFL learners, are demanded to get full listening comprehension. When the film is used as the media to teach listening comprehension, then there are some requirements of how shall the films be played.

Top-down and bottom-up processing strategy make the listening comprehension activity more meaningful and straight to reach the objectives of the listening activity, that is, comprehends the spoken passage. Whereas, to obtain the objectives of listening comprehension, there must be a well-planned and well-organized activity to conduct. Pre-, while-, and post-viewing activities will benefit both teachers and students to follow viewing activities. One important thing is, listening and watching film provides an opportunity for students to hear the accurate pronunciation of words and sentences as they are spoken by the native English speakers.

Some teachers may get difficulties to fully leave traditional textbook where there are already exercises and texts available. Some teachers may also get difficulties to combine authentic materials with the textbook. However, using films as authentic materials has many advantages and it can bring variety and flexibility to the classroom. It can motivate both students and the teacher and make learning English as a foreign language more enjoyable and fun.

Looking at the advantages of using film to teach listening comprehension, further research related to the use of film in classroom activities is necessary.

While there are already some proofs of the effectiveness of using film to teach advanced and proficient learners, viewing the film for low-level learners is still in debates. It will be challenging for the further researcher to investigate the use of film to teach low-level students and it will be more challenging for teachers to combine film with the learning material which can fulfill the curricular demands which of course, by considering the students' need as well.

REFERENCES

- Brown, H. Douglas. 2000. *Teaching by Principles: An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy*. London: Longman.
- Brown, Steven. 2006. *Teaching Listening*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gebhard. 1996. *Teaching English as a Foreign or Second Language: A Teacher Self-development and Methodology guide*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Gilakjani, Abbas Pourhossein, and Ahmadi, Mohammad Reza. 2011. A Study of Factors Affecting EFL Learners' English Listening Comprehension and the Strategies for Improvement. *Language Teaching and Research* Vol. 2 No. 5, 977-988.
- Hayati, A, and Mohmedi, F. 2011. The Effect of Films with and without Subtitles on Listening Comprehension of EFL Learners. *British Journal of Education Technology* Vol. 42 No. 1, 181-192.
- King, Jane. 2002. Using DVD Feature Films in the EFL Classroom. *Computer Assisted Language Learning* Vol. 15 No. 5, 509-523.

- Nunan, David. 2002. Listening in Language Learning. In J. C. Richards & W. A. Renandya (Eds.), *Methodology in Language Teaching: An Anthology of Current Practice*.
- Pegrum, M. 2008. Film, Culture, and Identity: Critical Intercultural Literacies for the Language Classroom. *Language Intercultural Communication* Vol. 8 No. 2, 136-154.
- Ruusunen, Virve. (2011). *Using Movies in EFL Teaching: the point of view of teachers*. The University of Jyväskylä.
- Starkey, H. 2007. Language Education, Identities and Citizenship: Developing Cosmopolitan Perspectives. *Language Intercultural Communication* Vol. 7 No. 1, 56-71.
- Vandergrift, Larry, and Goh, Christine. 2009. Teaching and Testing Listening Comprehension. In M. H. Long & C. J. Doughty (Eds.), *The Handbook of Language Teaching*. Massachusetts: Wiley Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- Wilson, J.J. 2008. *How to Teach Listening*. Essex: Pearson Longman.
- Wilson, JJ. 2011. *How to Teach Listening*. Essex: Pearson Longman.