PROMOTING ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING AMONG LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY LEARNERS THROUGH MOVIES

ROZMEL ABDUL LATIFF*, NOR HASNI MOKHTAR, RAJA HANANI RAJA MUSHAHAR & MICHI FARIDA ABDUL HALIM

ABSTRACT

English language learning in a non-native environment is always a challenge. This is especially so among limited English proficiency (LEP) learners. Despite having eleven years of instructions in English in primary and secondary school, there are still quite a number of LEP learners entering the university. This may be attributed to lack of exposure to the language, as classroom instruction alone is not sufficient for mastery of a second language. Although English is widely spoken in Malaysia, this does not apply to all communities, especially in rural areas. In such circumstances, watching movies in the target language can provide the necessary exposure, the ample amount of listening and reading in the target language, which provides the comprehensible input essential for language acquisition. Movies also come with closed captions, which not only help the learner recognize the words but also enable them to look up the words in a dictionary. An action research was conducted to investigate the effectiveness of using movies in a Foundation English course. This paper details the implementation of movie viewing in the course and presents the usability and appropriateness of using English movies in the acquisition of English language skills and creating cultural awareness among LEP learners. Finally, this paper highlights the learners' responses regarding their experience in watching the movies. These responses provide invaluable insights into the impetus for future use of movies in the ESL classroom.

Keywords: Comprehensible input; Cultural awareness; Limited english proficiency (LEP) learners; Language skills; Movies.

INTRODUCTION

Limited English proficiency (LEP) learners possess the aptitude and competency to attain the same standards as other students. World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA 2014) stressed that for these learners to master the English language, educators need to plan and design a suitable curriculum. Also, it is important for educators to create a learning environment that promotes the same to these limited English learners. It is imperative that curriculum design, instructions and the strategies used match the level and the learning strategies of the learners (Kunasaraphan 2015).

Research in the US and Canada have shown that in teaching English to LEP learners, oral proficiency takes 3 to 5 years to develop, and academic English proficiency can take 4 to 7 years. Analysis also revealed that offering bilingual education widens academic performance gap between LEP learners and native English speakers and it may not be possible to offer adequate language instruction to limited English proficient learners within the time allotted during the normal school day (Hakuta, Butler & Witt 2000). This is happening in a native speaking environment. It is definitely worse in non-native speaking environment like Malaysia

where English is generally used and taught as a second language and mostly in English language classrooms only.

It is a big task for the instructors to get learners interested in the language and motivated to work on improving their proficiency. Instructors need a 'vision of learners as capable individuals for whom limited English proficiency does not signify deficiency and for whom limited academic skills do not represent an incurable situation (Walqui 1999, cited in Menken & Antunez 2001)

Whatley (2012) suggested using visual aids such as motion pictures or video clips to greatly enhance the teaching of ESL (English as a Second Language). The combination of both images and sounds significantly aids in the achievement of the pedagogical goals of reading, writing, listening and speaking in English. This creative and innovative approach is deemed appropriate and timely as the use of movies in the ESL classroom is becoming an accepted practice to bridge between the classroom and the outside world. Movies serve as an extension of the classroom, where students can put into practice what they have learnt and are taught how to make use of their surroundings as a source of comprehensible input. Through movie viewing, students will be able to scaffold the foundations of English grammar, develop their fluency in the English language and create cultural awareness. Furthermore, movies, which exude the attributes as being visual, realia and authentic, can have great value as an integral part of English lessons.

The LEP learners undertaking a foundation English course in a local Institute of Higher Education were observed having difficulties not only in the retention of language items previously encountered but also in the acquisition of new ones. They have problems in speaking and writing and mastering the grammar items of the English language. This may be attributed to lack of exposure to the language, as classroom instruction alone is not sufficient for mastery of a second language. Although English is widely spoken in Malaysia, this does not apply to all communities, especially in rural areas. To overcome these obstacles, English language instructors are posed with the challenge of providing these learners with opportunities to learn and use English in a more relaxed and less intimidating atmosphere. A variety of teaching strategies were proposed and tried to ensure that all learners have an equal opportunity for learning despite learner differences such as learning styles and strategies. In other words, language instructors have to build a bridge between the classroom and the outside world, to sustain, reinforce and nurture the process of learning and acquiring language skills within and outside the classroom.

The bridge identified to make this connection is movies, which were incorporated into the foundation English course. Watching movies in the target language should provide the necessary exposure, the ample amount of listening and reading in the target language, which in turn will provide the comprehensible input essential for language acquisition for the LEP learners.

It is therefore the focus of this study, which are to investigate the effectiveness of using movies among the LEP learners and to identify which language skills are more challenging to acquire through watching movies in ESL classroom among this group of learners.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In contextualizing language use and language development, movies can be an effective medium as they provide linguistic and cultural diversity. Not only do movies afford enjoyment to the learners and instructors, but they also stimulate the development of academic skills. Watching movies give more sensory experience than reading, as they provide colour, movement and sound accompanying the verbal communication (Mirvan 2013). This visual context helps

learners understand better, making the movies an invaluable language teaching material (Yilmas 2020). Furthermore, using movies as authentic materials and media for teaching language can reinforce the direct relationship between the language classroom and the outside world (Brinton 1991). Authentic materials, as defined by Nunan (1999), is spoken or written language data that has been produced during genuine communication and not specifically written for purposes of language teaching. Thus, learners can watch and listen how the target language is used by its users in an authentic manner through the movies.

A study conducted by Aliyev & Albay (2016) reported that when language learners watch movies, this will make them notice and aware how the language is being used in different context and language community. In addition, when they watch movies, the learners are not only exposed to how the native speakers use idiomatic expressions, but they also encounter with first-hand experience listening to colloquial expressions and learning the culture of the language spoken (Stempleski 1992; Ishihara & Chi 2004; Kabooha 2016).

According to Flowerdew & Miller (2005), listening for general pleasure or interest, usually to longer stretches of discourse, will promote listening fluency. As movies attract students' interest to a level that they carefully listen to everything, it improves the listening skills of the learners (Murshidi 2020). However, if captioned movies are used, they combine visual, auditory, and lexical meanings. Captions are textual versions of the spoken words such as dialogue, monologue, narration as well as other unspoken information on the screen. This will provide the learners with a basis for producing and practising language (Wang & Shen, 2007). Danan (1995) cited in Wang & Shen (2007) claimed that closed captioned videos enhance vocabulary learning.

Curtis (2003) says that films or movies can be used with language learners at any level and even in the shortest of language lessons. A thoughtfully selected movie can inspire and motivate even the LEP learners. Yow (2014) who conducted a study incorporating movie clips into lectures discovers that selected video clips taken from popular movies help students to learn course material and generate their positive attitudes toward the subject matter taught. Shen (2005) also says that if learners are well guided in their movie viewing assignments, they will be more motivated to learn and more actively engaged in their learning process.

Being in this era of Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), we rely greatly upon technology. The technology, together with internet and media make movies readily available and simple to use. The accessibility to online movies provides greater opportunities for meaningful and authentic language use. It also opens to range of opportunities and resources available to support out-of-class learning (Richards 2015). With this sheer volume of digital media available via the internet, movies can become a much richer experience because the more English a learner listens to, the more the individual words will become discreet sounds and meanings and eventually native levels of comprehension are within reach.

By capitalizing on the advancement of technology, we can help the learners, especially the LEP learners, to learn English faster and more efficiently through watching movies than through reading books.

METHODOLOGY

This section discusses the nature of the course identified for this study, the subjects involved, the rationale of implementing movie viewing in the Foundation English course, the implementation and procedure of movie viewing employed in the study, the approach, and the instruments used in collecting and analysing the data.

The Course

The Foundation English course offered at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia is the first of the three English courses designed and made compulsory for students of the lowest proficiencies at UKM, as gauged by their MUET (Malaysian University English Test) scores, i.e., the Band 1 and Band 2 students (with Band 6 being the highest). It aims to build students' confidence and enhance their language proficiency. This course adopts an integrated skills-based approach comprising face-to-face learning in class and self-directed learning outside of class.

Subjects

Thirty-six students participated in this case study. Twenty-eight were of MUET Band 2, while eight were of MUET Band 1. Their ages ranged from 19 to 25, with 21 being the majority (15 students). The 36 participants were all in one randomly selected class in that semester. Thirty-four were first-year students while two were final-year students. The subjects of this study were not true beginners, as in fact they had taken English as a compulsory subject throughout their 11 years of Primary and Secondary education. However, their English proficiency levels remained low, likely due to their minimal exposure to the language outside of the English classroom.

The Rationales of Implementing Movie Viewing in The Foundation English Course

The rationales for implementing movie viewing in this course are:
1.   to increase students' fluency by exposing them to the speaking rate of English in the real world.
2.   to enable students to learn and remember new words and practice their pronunciation.
3.   to expose students to correct sentence structures.

To achieve the aforesaid learning outcomes, movies were utilized as they are authentic textual materials produced by and for native speakers of the target language. Applying movie videos as teaching tools can provide students with rich-content contexts in authentic language. It is hoped that in such a learning environment, students can be motivated to improve their language proficiency.

The Implementation and The Procedure of Movie Viewing

Watching English movies is one of the evaluation components of this course, where the students are required to watch a total of 10 or more movies at the rate of one per week. The students were informed of and encouraged to use the closed-caption feature (popularly referred to as 'English subtitle') available in the movie DVDs, which would greatly help them recognize the spoken words besides learning the spelling of those words.

For each of the 10 movies viewed, the students were required to fill out a one-page form. They were required to list all the main characters, write a short summary of the plot, list some new words they learned from the movie (number not specified), and rate the story on a scale of one to 10 in terms of how interesting they found it, its difficulty level and how much they felt they understood the story. The total of 10 filled-out forms were to be submitted for marks amounting to 10 percent of the course grade. This task is guided using the form and clearly achievable by the LEP learners.

The first four of these 10 movies were provided for them. Entitled *The Iron Giant*, *The Never-Ending Sto*ry, *Little Women* and *My Fair Lady*, these were screened on campus during

class hours, with the closed-captioned feature. The intention of this compulsory, supervised viewing was to give them an appreciation of and liking for movies in the English language, as previously they had generally shunned English movies (and other English media) due to their low proficiency in the language.

The other six movies were not specified or supervised but left to each student's own devices – they could either watch from among the numerous movie DVDs available in the campus library, or they could buy (and share) their own movie DVDs and watch them on their notebook computers (which all the university students own). Watching movies on their own provided a different set of advantages. In addition to choosing movies more suited to their individual tastes and preferences, they were also free to choose their own timing, to rewind and repeat whichever segments as necessary, and even to pause and look up the dictionary whenever they please, this being made possible with the use of closed captions. Furthermore, if they found the speech was too fast, they could also play the movies at a reduced speed suitable to them, since the available media player software allows the playing of movies at variable speeds of up to two times slower.

Data Collection

This case study employed a quantitative approach and was conducted on a group of 36 students taking the Foundation English course session at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. At the end of a 14-week semester, having watched at least 10 English movies, the 36 students participating in this study were administered questionnaire consisting of seven sections:

A. General, B. Listening, C. Speaking, D. Reading, E. Writing, F. Grammar and G. Culture. Each section had several statements regarding the respondent's abilities in the respective language skill areas (general, listening, speaking, etc) after watching the 10 movies. In section A and the second half of section G, the responses available were Yes and No, whereas in the rest of the questionnaire, a 1-to-5-point *Likert Scale* was employed, with 1 for Strongly Disagree and 5 for Strongly Agree.

Analysis of Data

Findings from the questionnaire were analysed using SPSS version 18. Students' responses were analysed using descriptive statistics in the form of frequency and percentage. The results were analysed and discussed quantitatively and descriptively.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section discusses the results of the study by examining the learners' questionnaire responses (N=36) while the discussion will highlight the most significant findings, especially in Section A on General information on movie viewing, Sections B-F on language skills and Section G on cultural awareness.

Movie Viewing in General

Generally, 97.2% of respondents enjoyed watching the movies as well as acquired new vocabulary from them. A total of 88.9% of them noticed cultural aspects in the movies. As for empathizing effect, 94.4% of respondents claimed they were able to feel the emotions experienced by the characters. It may be summed up here that watching movies would be an effective means of language acquisition for a large majority of the respondents.

The Effects of Watching Movies on Language Acquisition

Listening Skills

In response to whether watching movies could familiarize them with different speaking rates, the findings show that only 55.6% were able to do so. The rest were either not able to do so (2.8% of respondents) or were not sure (41.7% of respondents). This means that only a little more than half of them were able to follow the English speech in the movies, even though it is most likely at a faster rate than they are normally used to. The remaining (slightly less than half of them) had difficulties following the speech.

As to whether they could relate the new information to what they already knew, the majority of the respondents, that is 80.6%, claimed that they could. This indicates that watching the movies can enhance their understanding of the story when supported by previous reading of related information. When students read, they could only visualize whatever they comprehended from their reading, but watching the movies confirms or even corrects their initial thoughts and improves their understanding.
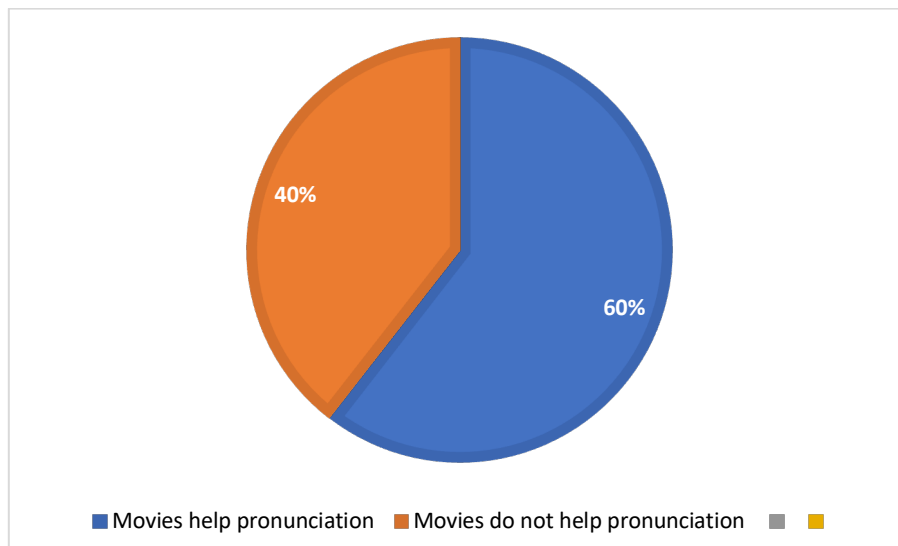

Figure 1. Listening Skills.

For listening skills, as shown in Figure 1, 60.0% of the respondents stated they were able to hear the correct pronunciation while watching the movies. This indicates that the respondents were able to learn and improve their pronunciation through movies. On the other hand, 40.0% of the respondents found the movies do not really help with pronunciation. This could probably be due to the fast-speaking rate that would prevent learners from catching what was said. In response to whether they could listen to differences in intonation to convey different meanings, 72.2% stated that they could. This shows that watching movies can help respondents comprehend situations better with the assistance of the audio and visual aspects.

For 83.3% of the respondents, they claimed they were able to recognize the words being spoken while 80.5% stated they were able to identify the correct pronunciation and intonation. Watching the words in action, 83.4% of the respondents noticed the lack of formality in the spoken English in contrast to written texts.

As to whether they could hear differences in intonation to convey different meanings, 72.2% answered in the affirmative. This is indicative that watching movies can help learners understand situations better with the assistance of the audio and visual aspects. They were able

to listen to the speech while watching the facial expressions and body language of the parties concerned, and thus understand the differences in intonation as they watched them in use.

The audio and visual aspects are also probably the contributory factors to the respondents' ability to listen to differences in stress to convey different meanings, as 63.9% of respondents indicated that they were able to do so. Finally, 58.3% of respondents claimed they could detect new vocabulary when watching movies. A study conducted by Nath et al. (2017). on employing movies as a learning tool also report similar findings. Students were instructed to watch movies as outside classroom activity and setting. The participated students claimed that by watching movies they acquire new vocabulary and knowledge on how to pronounce the words in the target language accurately. This could be due to respondents' desire to understand what they watch. Hence, with movies they are more likely to ponder over unfamiliar words whereas with reading they may simply move ahead, relying instead on a more general interpretation of the text, which may turn out to be wrong.

Speaking Skills

No.	Items	Percentage
1	Watching movies can improve my pronunciation	83.3
2	Watching movies can improve my intonation	83.4
3	I can understand variety in intonation creates differences in meaning	80.5
4	I can understand variety in stress creates differences in meaning	69.4
5	I can develop awareness in differences in slang use through watching movies.	77.8

Table 1. Speaking Skills.

From Table 1, most of the respondents, 83.3%, felt they could improve their pronunciation by watching movies. They were able to identify the words being spoken and hear the correct pronunciation. Therefore, they are able to adopt the correct pronunciation in their daily usage based on how the words were pronounced in the movies.

Watching movies also helped the respondents improve their intonation: 83.4% claimed they were able to do so. This could be from watching the words in action, with the appropriate facial expression and body language, which may help them in remembering the intonation. Respondents also indicated they were able to understand how the variation in intonation created differences in meaning, with 80.5% who responded affirmatively to this. Watching a movie and listening to words with the appropriate intonation in action helps the learners to grasp the differences in meaning. When queried whether they could understand how variation in stress created differences in meaning, 69.4% stated they could. A possible explanation is that when watching a movie, they are able to relate to the situations being depicted and are therefore able to detect the stress and understand their use in the various situations. Hence, the students feel more confident to speak in the English language when they are able to use the appropriate intonation and stress in their daily interactions.

From the findings also, 77.8% of the respondents claimed they could develop an awareness of differences in use of slang. This could be due to their awareness of the setting of the movies assisting them to notice the differences in slang. In addition, they too indicated they developed an awareness of the differences in accent. This indicates that movies are also effective in introducing or familiarizing respondents with differences in accents.
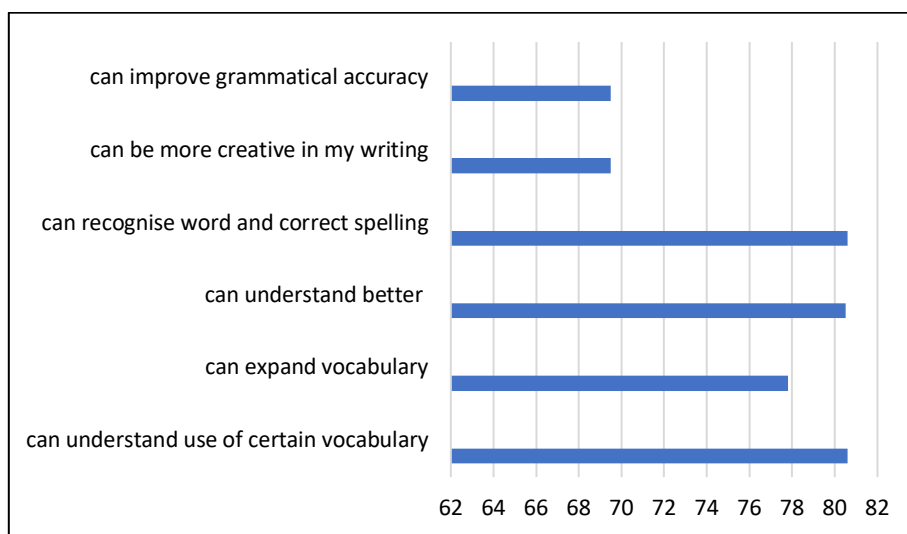
Reading Skills

Figure 2. Reading Skills.

As for the acquisition of reading skills, Figure 2 shows 80.6% of the respondents understood the use of certain vocabulary better when they watched it in use, while 77.8% of the respondents stated they could expand their vocabulary. 80.5% of the respondents were able to understand the movies better through reading the English close captions on screen. Study by Roya, Akbar, and Shahla (2015) also indicated that closed-captioned videos can enhance vocabulary learning among language learners. Reading the closed captions of the movies assisted 80.6% of the respondents in recognizing the words and the correct spelling of words when they write. Most of the respondents, 69.5%, asserted that they were inspired to write creatively as the movies helped trigger new ideas. Finally, 69.5% of the respondents also claimed that they could improve their grammatical accuracy after watching the English movies, as the movies not only aided the respondents to identify the correct grammatical elements but also use them successfully in their own writing.

Majority of the respondents, that is 80.6%, responded affirmatively as to whether they could relate information to what they already know. This indicates that watching the movies could actually enhance their understanding of the story based on previous reading that they had done. When students read, they can only visualize what they comprehend from their reading but watching the movies confirms or corrects their initial interpretation and improves their understanding.

Grammar

Respondents also indicated they could improve their grammatical accuracy, with 69.5% claiming so. Movement of time is clearly seen in movies, therefore observing the use of grammar in speech can develop an increase in the learners' accuracy. This accuracy is further enhanced when it is observed repeatedly by various senses simultaneously.

The Effects of Watching Movies on Creating Cultural Awareness

No.	When I watch movies,	Percentage
1	I can learn about the culture of a community/society	86.1
2	I can detect differences in way of life in the other culture	88.9
3	I can identify elements of behaviours/mannerisms	97.2
4	I can distinguish the ways of life shown.	94.4

Table 2. Cultural Awareness.

The findings shown in Table 2 depicts 86.1% of the respondents agreed that they could learn about the culture of a community or society through the movies watched. This indicates that watching the English movies exposes the respondents to cultures that they are not familiar with or not exposed to. In addition, 88.9% of the respondents were able to detect differences in way of life in the other culture and could recognize the historical elements being depicted in the movies. Surprisingly, 97.2% of the respondents were able to identify elements of behaviours and mannerisms in the English movies watched. This indicates that the respondents were aware of and able to recognize behaviours and mannerisms portrayed in the native speaker's culture. Finally, 94.4% of that the respondents could distinguish the ways of life shown in the movies.

Language Skills That Remain Challenging for Learners to Acquire Through Watching Movies

Overall, the learners experienced some language enhancement by viewing the ten movies, whether supervised by their language instructors or viewed independently outside of the class hours. However, they still faced some difficulties in acquiring certain language skills. Among these are: firstly, listening to native speakers, which includes familiarizing themselves with different speaking rates; listening to correct pronunciation; listening to differences in stress to convey different meaning and identifying different accents; secondly, understanding mannerisms described in reading material; followed by using grammar correctly in writing; and finally, detecting words and phrases representative of that culture.

Pedagogical Insights for Future Use of Movies in The Esl Classroom

This section provides guidelines for language practitioners to consider when planning to incorporate movie viewing in their ESL lessons.

Student's Motivation

Language practitioners should foster and develop motivation by providing clear goals and achievable tasks using movies which might otherwise be beyond the linguistic capacity of the learners. It is the teacher's task to harness this enthusiasm in a way that will develop a positive effect on language learning (Li, 2009). To further motivate and sustain the learners' interest in watching movies, it is imperative that language practitioners select movies that fascinate and heighten learners' curiosity. Learners may find that movies that are not interesting, or perceived as having values that are against theirs, are hard to follow and this may affect their view and understanding of the movie. Movies that have elements that are hard to comprehend would make learners totally misinterpret the movies. Even in the use of unfamiliar expressions may lead to wrong interpretations of the movie's plot.

Subtitles Or Closed-Captions

The question of whether to use subtitles or closed captions may arise when screening a movie. Some academics believe that captions or subtitles in the ESL student's original language are better than showing a motion picture without captions (King, 2002). In terms of listening and the overall ESL comprehension, captioned movies are more effective for the following reasons:

1.   Students are more motivated to learn the English dialogue.
2.   The gap between reading and listening skills is bridged.
3.   Students can follow a plot more easily.
4.   Pronunciation of words is learned.
5.   Word recognition is enhanced and idioms become better understood.
6.   Reading and processing skills are improved. (King, 2002)

Exploitation of Movies

Movies can be used for various situations in any ESL course. For example, in an English for Law class, legal movies can be shown to provide insight into a legal environment and legal language where a similar environment can later be recreated as a class activity. Movies can also be used as samples of workplace situations. Alternatively, movies can also be used in any English class to initiate a class discussion on issues concerned. A lecture on such issues may not be easily recalled but parts of a movie are easily remembered which can also be used as points or examples. In addition, having their idols who they adore starring in the movies is a definite way to make the learners glued to their seats and putting extra effort in understanding and following the content, thus ensuring some language learning.

Students' Knowledge of Written Text

Sherman (2003) reminded language educators that the aim of showing scenes from the movies is to recap the story and broaden the students' knowledge of the written text. As an enhancement and enrichment to English literature, the film adaptation can be quite useful, especially if students are having difficulties and are resorting to translators to help them comprehend and appreciate the story better. Hence, it is paramount to have the students read as much of the book as possible and then have them view selected scenes from the movies.

Accessibility And Practicality of Movies

Movies are readily available and cost effective as some movies which are available online could be viewed for free. Today, with the advent of technology, English language movies are available on almost any topic and for all types of learners in all the domains of instruction – cognitive, affective, psychomotor, and interpersonal. Furthermore, it is easy to control and can be played at various speeds to suit their needs.

CONCLUSION

From the study conducted, it is observed that the learners involved often displayed a great amount of interest when watching English language movies. Movie viewing is well accepted by learners as it is an enjoyable, engaging and a meaningful way to learn a language. Language learning is done indirectly in a relaxed and non-threatening manner. This is especially

important to LEP learners. Movies have been found to also facilitate learners' acquisition of language skills, particularly listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. In addition, learners can understand how grammar is being used in both written and spoken texts. Learners have indicated improvements in widening their vocabulary, detecting various intonations, and identifying stress, slang and accents in speech. Apart from these, the LEP learners of the foundation English course were able to develop cultural awareness. They could recognize the historical elements, behaviours and mannerisms being portrayed in the native speaker's culture and distinguish the way of life portrayed in the movies. These positive outcomes show that using movies in language learning is effective even though there are challenges to acquire some language skills as discussed earlier. The benefits gained by incorporating movies in the teaching and learning of English language imply that language practitioners could foster and develop motivation by providing clear goals and achievable tasks using movies which might otherwise be beyond the linguistics capacity of the learners. Movies have vast potential within the ESL environment, but they must always be accompanied with suitable activities to ensure language enhancement and enrichment. It is the learners' engagement and varied levels that must be heeded because it will determine the success of a lesson. The key to the effective use of movies in the EFL classroom lies in the creative presentation of movies and in the construction of challenging yet achievable learning tasks that are enjoyed by ESL learners. The opportunity to explore further in using movies in promoting English language learning should not be missed as movies are readily available and cost effective, where some are available online and can be viewed for free. It is recommended that future research on the use of movies in language learning need to compare the outcomes of employing short sequence movies versus whole movies.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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ROZMEL ABDUL LATIFF*
Pusat Pengajian Citra Universiti
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia
43600 UKM Bangi, Selangor, MALAYSIA

NOR HASNI MOKHTAR,
Pusat Pengajian Citra Universiti
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia
43600 UKM Bangi, Selangor, MALAYSIA

RAJA HANANI RAJA MUSHAHAR,
Pusat Pengajian Citra Universiti
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia
43600 UKM Bangi, Selangor, MALAYSIA

MICHI FARIDA ABDUL HALIM
Pusat Pengajian Citra Universiti
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia
43600 UKM Bangi, Selangor, MALAYSIA

*Corresponding Author: rozmel@ukm.edu.my