How can movies be effective in learning English idiomatic and everyday expressions?

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Abstract

This study aimed at examining the effect of movies on learning English idiomatic and everyday expressions among Iranian EFL learners. The sample population of this study was English major students of Islamic Azad University, Isfahan (Khorasgan) Branch. Their first language was Persian and their age ranged between 25 and 45. The participants were 30 male and female students who were chosen based on their scores in a placement test to ensure that they were in the same level of English language proficiency. An experimental design was used in which pre-test–post-test was utilised. After the data were analysed statistically through a paired-samples *t*-test, the results showed that movies had significant effects on learning English idiomatic and everyday expressions among Iranian EFL learners and improves their English learning. Thus, language teachers and syllabus designers can include movies as an effective and interesting tool in teaching vocabulary in general and idiomatic and everyday expressions

Keywords: English learning, everyday expressions, idiomatic expressions, movies.

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1. Introduction

Language, according to Hudson (1980), is at the centre of human life, and the ability to learn language is among the greatest mental achievements of mankind. Studies of language in television news programmes have found that speakers use one unique metaphor for every 25 words (Graesser, Mio & Millis, 1989). Linguists and educators in various language-related fields have been able to understand, to some extent, what language is and how it is learned as a second or foreign language (L2) and how it can be taught. Language is composed of many different parts each of which is important in learning. Learning and understanding idioms, metaphoric and idiomatic expressions have long played an important role in the English language. In fact, the use of idioms is so widespread that understanding these expressions is essential to successful communication, whether in listening, speaking, reading or writing.

Gibbs (1992) believed that by developing a clear understanding of figurative language, students can further comprehend texts that contain metaphorical and lexical meanings beyond the basic word level. Honeck (1997) noted that figurative language is language that means one thing literally but it is taken to mean something different and it is a special aspect of language. Gibbs (1980) held that a strong knowledge of idioms will help the students to be better speakers and negotiators. They will also be in a better position to use their knowledge in appropriate contexts. Thus, it would be true if we conclude that the frequency of idioms is an important aspect of vocabulary acquisition and language teaching (Fernando, 1996). Native speakers of a language use idioms all the time. Idiomatic usage is so common in every language, and of course in English, that it seems very difficult to speak or write without using idioms.

In Iran, most students have taken English classes for at least 6 years before they enter university. However, most of them remain insufficient in their ability to use the language. They have remarked that the dull materials used in most language classes are one of the reasons for their lack of motivation to learn. In recent years, to promote the learners' mastery of language skills, language teachers have been eager to look for a variety of quality teaching materials and aid to be used in EFL classes to ensure that the students can gain an optimum level of learning. Teaching English, nowadays, has become more challenging than ever. In order to help the learners' mastery (increase the proficiency) of language skills, language teachers have to provide quality teaching materials that will be engaging, interesting, up-to-date while simultaneously being a tool that will ensure that the students learn.

There are a number of reasons for and advantages to incorporating films into L2 learning such as increasing motivation, developing intercultural communication (King, 2002; Pegrum, 2008; Pegrum, Hartley & Wechtler, 2005) and preparing the learner for global citizenship (Starkey, 2007). Although foreign language films might inevitably bring a certain frustration to language learners who have not achieved a high proficiency level, it is nevertheless obvious that the use of film is one of the key channels via which learners can be exposed to what occurs in the real world (Hayati & Mohmedi, 2011; Pegrum et al., 2005). Apart from putting the target language in a relatively natural context, films are a visual medium and a good starting point for learners to explore and experience another culture (Pegrum, 2008). It is possible that the motivation to learn a language could be enhanced through the incorporation of films into the language classroom (King, 2002). Many studies have been conducted on teaching and learning through film in European languages such as English, French, German and Spanish (Dupuy & Krashen, 1993; Pegrum et al., 2005).

Films are motivating for EFL/ESL teaching because they embody the notion that a film with a story that wants to be told rather than a lesson that needs to be taught (Ward & Lepeintre, 1996). Films are such valuable and rich resources for teaching because they present colloquial English in real life contexts rather than artificial situation; an opportunity of being exposed to different native speaker voices, slangs, reduced speeches, stress, accents and dialects, (Stempleski, 2000).

There are numerous studies on the use of videos in developing particular language skills. Herron and Seay (1991) conducted research on using video in listening comprehension of EFL students. He used intermediate level students and divided them into two groups. The study provided evidence that the experimental group performed significantly better on the final tests of listening comprehension with both the video and the audio files than did the control group in which no strategy training occurred. Furthermore, Weyers (1999) carried out a study with an authentic soap opera to measure whether it can increase students listening comprehension and enhance their oral production. At the end of the study, the results of the experiment suggested that telenovelas are a valuable source in increasing the students' listening comprehension skills.

Ruusunen (2011) focused on studying how movies are used in five different areas of language teaching: teaching oral communication, teaching writing, teaching vocabulary, teaching grammar and teaching cultural aspects. The results of the present study indicated that almost all of the respondents were interested in movies in general and most of the teachers had also used some material concerning movies in their own teaching in all five areas of language teaching. However, some of the participants believed that using movies is time-consuming and that finding suitable movies is difficult.

Ismaili's (2013) study analysed the effects of using movies in the EFL classroom and it revealed its effects on developing students listening and communication skill. The participants in this study were pre-intermediate and intermediate level of students, aged 18–25. The results of the study have shown that significant differences between experimental and control group of students on integrated skills, using video incorporated in the teaching material. The study concluded that movies attract students' attention, present language in a more natural way than that found in course books. What is more important are movies offer a visual context aids which help students understanding and improve their learning skills.

In a study carried out by Saburi, Zohrabi and Karimi Osbouei (2015), an attempt was made to find out whether learning vocabulary improves when watching subtitled movies. In total, 24 male and 22 female upper-intermediate students taking English classes in a private language institute located in Iran participated in this study, and the quantitative analysis of watching subtitled movies for vocabulary tests was conducted. The statistical results showed that the use of movies with subtitles can improve students' engagement in learning and retrieval of new lexical items.

Goctu (2017) examined the attitudes and awareness of English foreign language (EFL) learners to the integration of English movies in their classes in terms of improving their foreign language skills. The findings of the study indicated that students have positive attitudes towards the use of movies in their classes in terms of improving their language skills. This study is remarkable for teachers who are willing to use movies in their classes as a tool to improve their learners' foreign language level.

In a study conducted by Jafarpour Boroujeni, Hashemian and Saeidfar (2013), an attempt was made to make use of a corpus-based analysis of metaphorical expressions in order to see if gender and level of English language proficiency improve the learning of these important elements of the English language. Sixty participants were classified in two groups of intermediate and advanced learners based on the results of the Oxford placement test (OPT) prior to the course. The results revealed that there was a significant difference between the males and females. Further analysis showed that females had a better performance than males in general.

Tadayyon and Ketabi (2014) investigated the attitude of the Iranian male and female EFL learners towards learning and producing idioms in particular. A random number of 40 students majoring in English Translation and Literature at Isfahan University, Iran were surveyed using an attitude questionnaire. The results indicated that Iranian EFL learners have a very high positive attitude towards both learning and producing English idioms.

Ababneh (2016) studied the attitude of Jordanian EFL students towards learning English idioms. The findings showed that the majority of the participants have positive attitudes towards learning

English idioms as they believed in their importance for achieving effective communication in English. Moreover, it was indicated that gender had not any significant effect on the attitudes of the participants towards learning English idioms.

Although, research has indicated the impact of movies on learning English, very few works examined learning of idiomatic and everyday expressions through movies among Iranian male and female EFL learners. It should also be noted that there are no studies conducted in the cultural context of Iran. Therefore, this study was an attempt to explore the effect of movies on learning idiomatic and everyday expressions among Iranian EFL learners. Indeed, the current study aimed to teach new words which were taken from the movies. Keeping all these objectives in mind, it was hoped to provide useful information regarding presenting movies in EFL classrooms to make learning more interesting, enjoyable and beneficial. Based on the problem introduced above, the following research hypotheses are formulated:

i. Movies have no significant effects on learning English idiomatic and everyday expressions among Iranian EFL learners.

2. Method

To achieve the research objectives and to address the research problem, the researcher conducted quantitative true experimental research in which random sampling and a pre-test–post-test design was used. A quantitative research generates quantifiable data. It is primarily concerned with observable and measurable phenomena involving people, events or things and establishing the strength of the relationship between variables, usually by statistical tests (Couchman & Dawson, 1995). In this study, data were collected at the Department of Foreign Languages at Islamic Azad University, Isfahan (Khorasgan) Branch in Fall Semester 2015.

2.1. Participants

The sample population for the present study was English major students of Islamic Azad University, Isfahan (Khorasgan) Branch whose first language was Persian and they were in the age range of 20 to 50. They formed a group of 30 male and female students who were chosen by a placement test to make sure that they were in the same level of English language proficiency. All the participants were at intermediate level based on their scores on the placement test. They were randomly selected from 60 students who had taken the Oxford quick placement test. According to Perry (2005), those students scoring over 80% correct might be considered to have high ability (advanced), those between 50% and 80% average ability (intermediate) and those below 50% below average (beginner). Thus, for the purpose of this study, those scoring between 50% and 80% (intermediate) were chosen.

2.2. Instruments and materials

The Oxford quick placement test (UCLES, 2001) was produced in collaboration with the University of Cambridge local examinations syndicate. It was administered to guarantee participants' homogeneity in terms of their proficiency level. It is quick, reliable and easy to administer, making it ideal for placement testing and examination screening. This placement test contains 60 multiple-choice questions and participants' responses were scored on a scale of 60 points.

The pre-test is a set of questions given to participants before the treatment begins in order to determine their knowledge level of the course content. In this study, the vocabulary pre-test consisted of 23 multiple-choice items from the everyday and idiomatic expressions selected from the movie 'The Social Network'. The post-test which was used after the treatment was the parallel form of the pre-test. It also contained twenty-three multiple-choice vocabulary items which were comparable to the pre-test in terms of difficulty.

In this study, the movie 'The Social Network' (2010) was selected as the teaching material based on the student's opinion. The Social Network is a 2010 film about the founding of Facebook, the social networking website and the resulting lawsuits. The Social Network is a 2010 American biographical drama film directed by David Fincher and written by Aaron Sorkin. Adapted from Ben Mezrich's 2009 book The Accidental Billionaires: the Founding of Facebook, A Tale of Sex, Money, Genius and Betrayal, the film portrays the founding of social networking website Facebook and the resulting lawsuits. It stars Jesse Eisenberg as founder Mark Zuckerberg along with Andrew Garfield as Eduardo Saverin, Justin Timberlake as Sean Parker and Armie Hammer as Cameron and Tyler Winklevoss. Neither Zuckerberg nor any other Facebook staff was involved in the project, although Saverin was a consultant for Mezrich's book. The film was released in the United States by Columbia Pictures on October 1, 2010.

2.3. Procedures

In the beginning, Quick OPT was administered in a group of 60 male and female English major students of Islamic Azad University, Isfahan (Khorasgan) Branch to select the participants at intermediate level. Then, 30 students from both genders were chosen based on their scores on this test, took a pre-test and participated for a two-month period in a movie class. The class was held two days a week.

At the beginning of the course, a vocabulary test (the pre-test) consisting of 23 multiple-choice items from the words and expressions selected from the movie was administered among the students to see how many of the words in the movie were known to them and if the students were homogeneous in terms of their knowledge of idiomatic and everyday expressions.

In the class, a movie is used as the teaching material. The teacher prepared a vocabulary list of every 10 minutes of the movie and presented it to the class while the students were watching the movie clip and explained the meaning after they have watched that part with their help, sometimes guessing the meaning from the context and sometimes from the text with it. The movie was selected based on the students' interest, determined by an opinion poll; the theme of the movie was about daily issues; thus, all the learned materials can be used in their everyday speeches. It focused on learning idiomatic and everyday expressions to help them deal with daily conversational situations, for instance, to have a toast, rehearsal dinner, reception party, arranged marriage etc.

The movie was examined by the researchers thoroughly and all the unknown and necessary key words and vocabulary were driven and listed before the test. The researchers watched the movie prior to the beginning of the class and prepared the vocabulary list from the movie script. During each 10-minute movie clips watching, the teacher wrote the words used in the clip on the whiteboard. After each part finished, the teacher explained meanings of the words and expressions by asking students to guess the meaning from the context and co-text.

When the teacher made sure that all words and expressions are fully understood and comprehended by the students, a discussion about what happened in the movie was done, afterwards about the scenes, plot and characters of the movie, so that the students could use the vocabulary they have just learned in a similar real life situation, during which the teacher observed, monitored and controlled the number of learned words they used in their conversations and sentences.

In each session, one or two 10-minute movie clips were shown and followed by teaching the expressions and also, 15 to 20 minutes of discussion. The movie was a full feature movie and the movie clips were 10-minute parts, while some parts could be repeated in some cases on the need or demand of the students. There were 24 movie clips that were shown in the class.

At the end of the treatment, another test (the post-test) was administered to show whether they learned the respective vocabulary and how much progress they made. Finally, the collected data were used for the data analysis and the results are shown in the next section.

3. Results

3.1. Normality of data distribution

Before checking the hypothesis, normality of data was checked. Kolmogorov–Smirnov test was run on the data and the results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Kolmogorov–Smirnov test of normality

	N	Normal parameters		Kolmogorov–Smirnov Z	P-value
		Mean	Std. deviation		
Pre-test	30	12.666	1.89	0.855	0.458
Post-test	30	15.833	2.24	0.702	0.709

As Table 1 depicted, the *p*-values for both tests were greater than 0.05; thus, the normality tests of the pre-test and the post-test was confirmed and parametric tests can be used. For checking the hypothesis, because of the normality of data, paired-samples *t*-test was used for the comparison of the pre-test and post-test results.

3.2. Addressing research hypothesis

As it was stated above, the research hypothesis was 'Movies have no significant effects on learning English idiomatic and everyday expressions among Iranian EFL learners'. To uncover the difference between the performance of the participants regarding learning English idiomatic and everyday expressions before and after the treatment, the pre-test as well as post-test scores were compared. Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics related to pre-test and the post-test.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for comparing the pre-test and the post-test

	N	Mean	Std. deviation
Pre-test	30	12.26	1.890
Post-test	30	15.83	2.001

Table 2 indicated that the mean score of the pre-test (M = 12.26) was lower than the mean score of the post-test (M = 15.83). To check the statistical (in-) significance of the difference between the mean scores of these two tests, the data were subjected to the paired-samples *t*-test. The results of the *t*-test are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Paired-samples *t*-test for comparing the pre-test and the post-test

Pre-test–Post-test	Paired differences				
	Mean	Std. deviation	T	Sig. (two-tailed)	Df
	−3.56	1.94	−10.06	0.000	29

As demonstrated in Table 3, the p value was less than the alpha level (0.000 < 0.05) and thus, the difference between the pre-test (M = 12.26, SD = 1.890) and the post-test (M = 15.83, SD = 2.001), *t* (29) = −10.06, *p* = 0.000 (two-tailed) was statistically significant. Thus, it can be claimed that the results of the two tests were drastically different and the null hypothesis was rejected, denoting that movies had significant effects on learning English idiomatic and everyday expressions among Iranian EFL learners.

4. Discussion

The study was intended to test the hypothesis empirically; hence, the following hypothesis was the foci of the study: Movies have no significant effects on learning English idiomatic and everyday expressions among Iranian EFL learners.

The results of data analyses revealed that movies were effective in learning English idiomatic and everyday expression among Iranian EFL learners. Given its many benefits and advantages, movies are considered among the best techniques in teaching English. The benefits of using movies in EFL classroom concern providing authentic language input and a stimulating framework for classroom discussions. Movies also provide a realistic view of the language and culture providing insights into the reality of life of native English speakers (Florence, 2009). When movies are integrated into foreign language classes, they can capture the students' attention towards the target language; increase the students' motivation to learn the language; supply good material to teach conversations; and improve the students' awareness of the target language culture (Zhang, 2013). Moreover, Khan (2015) believed that the 'visuality' of movies can facilitate comprehension and understanding for the language learners in an ideal visual context, which makes it an effective language-teaching tool. Indeed, movies offer a variety of methods and resources for teaching the target language, helping students to improve their listening and communicative skills. Obviously, through showing movies to the learners, they have exposure to what occurs in the real world or in a relatively natural context (Hayati & Mohmedi, 2011; Pegrum et al., 2005) including an opportunity of being exposed to different native speaker voices, slangs, reduced speeches, stress, accents and dialects.

The results of this study concerning the effect of movies on learning English are in line with a number of studies including Herron and Seay (1991) as well as Weyers (1999) and Ismaili (2013) who studied the effectiveness of movies in listening comprehension of the EFL learners. They came to the conclusion that movies are effective in increasing listening comprehension. Furthermore, Ruusunen (2011) claimed that movies can help to learn different areas of language. Oral communication, writing, vocabulary, grammar and even cultural aspects learning can be improved through using movies as a teaching tool in EFL classrooms. Saburi et al. (2015) maintained that learning lexical items can also be positively affected by movies. Parallel with the findings of these studies, Goctu (2017) suggested that EFL learners have positive attitude towards the integration of movies in the classroom and thus, this type of attitude can strengthen their motivation to learn English.

On the other hand, some researchers believed that foreign language films might inevitably bring a certain frustration to language learners who have not achieved a high proficiency level (Hayati & Mohmedi, 2011; Pegrum et al., 2005). Parallel to these few studies, Ruunsunen (2011) referred to an issue which might be of concern to those prefer using movies in English classes. He claimed that some of the learners believed that movies are time-consuming and certain teachers held that in some occasions finding the relevant movies are difficult.

5. Conclusion

As several studies indicated (Fernando, 1996; Gibbs, 1980, 1992; Honeck, 1997), developing a clear understanding of figurative language, students can further comprehend texts that contain metaphorical and lexical meanings beyond the basic word level. Moreover, a strong knowledge of idioms will help the students to be better speakers and negotiators since native speakers of a language use idioms all the time and idiomatic usage is so common in every language that it seems very difficult to speak or write without using idioms. Thus, the main conclusion which is drawn from the results of this study is that movies can play a significant role in learning such expressions which are a part of everyday life of the English native speakers. As movies are interesting and motivating to almost all learners and make the class atmosphere different from the traditional classes, students like them and prefer that movies are integrated into their classes.

Concerning the discussion and conclusion that is reached, the findings can have pedagogical implications for foreign language teachers and learners. By being aware that using movies can help L2 learners learn English idiomatic and everyday expressions better, can motivate the teachers to integrate movies in their classrooms with more enthusiasm. Also, the fact that L2 learners like movies and presumably have positive attitude towards learning English through watching movies, teachers

become motivated to use this technique more in their L2 classrooms. Findings of this study can also encourage syllabus designers, curriculum developers and material designers and developers to include movie clips which are in line with the topic of the units included in the EFL textbooks.

It must be noted here that in order for the findings of this study to be pedagogically valid and applicable, first of all, they must be subjected to replication and empirical validation. It is, then, that results and findings can be generalised to other populations.

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