Using Films to Teach Speaking in the ESL Classroom: A Case Study

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Abstract

Although the Malaysian school curriculum standard has emphasized the need to equip learners with basic skills and knowledge of the English language to enable them to communicate effectively in different contexts, the outcome has turned out to be very disappointing as most of them still fail to verbalize using the language. Malaysian students' failure to speak and respond appropriately in English has always been attributed to the wrong choice of teaching approaches adopted by instructors. On this matter, many researchers have advocated the inclusion of technology such as films or movies in language classrooms as it could increase students' motivation and spoken language proficiency at the same time. The present study investigates the effectiveness of using films as an approach to teach English language speaking skills with specific focus on four voice aspects - pronunciation, intonation, stress and pauses. The study was conducted on twelve pre-selected form four students who were divided into two groups namely control and experimental group. Before the three-month treatment period, they were pre-assessed on the four voice aspects. During study, the instructor used only simulated conversation tape recording and explanation with control group; whereas students from experimental group were taught using selected films. To measure the outcome of the study, the students were required to role-play a few situations. The data reveals that film only gives minor impact on the students' pronunciation. However, it is a good source to help them to improve their mastery of intonation, stress and pauses.

Keywords: Film, speaking, pronunciation, intonation, stress, pauses.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The mastery of English language especially for communicative purposes has been a challenge for many Malaysian students. As a move to produce more proficient students, English language will be made one of the compulsory pass subjects in the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) in line with the second wave of the National Education development Plan in 2016 (Alang, 2013). Nonetheless, a worrying scenario is speculated among our students nowadays that they have been trained to focus more on rote learning and memorizing, which does not help them in learning how to speak. Thus, besides having a good curriculum and policy, there is also

a need for teaching approaches that could trigger the sense of creativity, interest and awareness towards the importance of English language use.

Developing students' language usage particularly on speaking proficiency has always been the main concern of many language instructors in English as a Second Language (ESL) contexts, including Malaysia. It is important to let students be aware that learning English speaking skills is not just solely about memorizing dialogues and speeches, but more importantly to understand the vocal and non-verbal aspects, as well as its functions in real life conversations. Along with this, various teaching approaches have been discovered and applied by many ESL researchers and instructors to help their students to achieve language competency. In comparing the effectiveness of the different instructional approaches, the use of technology in language classrooms has been widely proposed as it could increase students' motivation and language proficiency (Warschauer & Meskill, 2000). One of the suggested methods is the use of film strips. Besides the aspect of authenticity, film is a good source to teach speaking skills as it could stimulate students' interest. Bahrani and Tam (2011) postulate that exposing ESL students with extensive input from fluent native or non-native speakers (such as via film or movie) is one of the most important ways of improving ESL learners' speaking proficiency. In addition, Sherman (2003) states that our eyes receive input faster than ears. Hence, if a piece of information is sent in two forms, voice recording and animation, one will be able to receive the information transferred through animation more rapidly compared to voice recording. This could explain why the use of film in teaching English speaking skills should be encouraged.

2.0   FILM AS A GOOD SOURCE TO TEACH AND LEARN VOICE ASPECTS

Wong (1987) argues that listeners presume spoken English to follow a fix set of patterns of rhythm and intonation. Therefore, speakers need to employ these patterns in order to have effective communication. If the rhythm and intonation are different from the listeners' expectation, the listeners will have difficulty in interpreting the speaker. For instance, we can see the distinction between the usage of correct and inappropriate intonation in the film "My Fair Lady" where we can concentrate on one of the intonation practices between Professor Higgins and Eliza Doolittle. As for the sentence "How kind of you to let me come." the correct intonation patterns applied would be the one articulated by Professor Higgins, which is " ‖ How kind of • you | to let me • come ‖ ." The incorrect version of intonation patterns was the one uttered by Elizabeth, " ‖ How kind of • you | to let me • come ‖". The underlined words are the words that are stressed on. In these two syntactically same sentences, the differences lie in the stress and intonation applied by the film characters while articulating them. Professor Higgins placed correct stress on the suitable words, which are "kind", "you", "let", "come", in order to convey the correct meaning of his utterance, which is to express his gratitude towards the listener for her kindness in allowing him to attend certain event. Besides that, he also used suitable intonation while uttering the sentence. On the other hand, Eliza placed wrong stress on the sentence, where she placed stress on every word except "to". In this case, it might cause confusion for the listener and the intended message might not be delivered effectively. According to Ayres and Miller (1994), if the pronunciation of a speaker is diverged from the expected standard, the audience or listener might not be able to understand the meaning of the mispronounced word. Therefore, dialogues extracted from good English films are effective

means for coaching students in practicing their skills of speaking and communicating in the real situation. Moreover, by using suitable films with good English pronunciation, speaking skills can be learnt in a more entertaining and interesting way in ESL classrooms.

3.0   PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study attempts to ascertain the effectiveness of using films in the teaching of speaking skills in ESL classroom. Thus, it is conducted to meet the following research objectives:

i.   To identify the differences of students' mastery of speaking before and after watching films in the ESL classroom.
ii. To examine the students' improvement in terms of their pronunciation, intonation, stress and pauses after watching films in the ESL classroom.

4.0   SUBJECTS

The study was conducted on form four students in a national secondary school in Selangor, Malaysia. The subjects were selected from two classes namely Form 4 Azam and Form 4 Budi, which consisted of 34 and 36 students respectively. Although all the students were involved in the study, but only six students were pre-selected from each class to be assessed for the purpose of data collection at the end of the study. This was done using the purposive sampling method where only those who scored the lowest marks in their School-Based Oral Assessments (SBOA) were selected. Based on the assessment record, these twelve students from the two classes obtained the lowest marks in their SBOA. With that, any differences recorded before and after the study would be an indication or measurement of achievement. The two groups of subjects were labelled as Group A (G-A) and Group B (G-B). Assessments on the students were carried out via a role-play activity after the treatment period.

5.0   METHODS AND DATA COLLECTION

This study used a quasi-experimental design where group A was named the control group and group B was named the experimental group. Before the three-month treatment period, the twelve students were pre-assessed on the four voice aspects such as pronunciation, intonation, stress and pauses via speaking activities conducted in the class. An oral assessment checklist (OAC) was used to assess the students speaking skills. The rating on the different voice aspects was based on the adapted 'band descriptors' used in MUET (Malaysian University English Test).

During the treatment period, the instructor used only simulated conversation tape recording and explanation with students in G-A and the remaining students in the same class; whereas students from G-B were taught speaking skills using films. The films which were selected for the purpose of treatment for G-B include 'My Fair Lady', 'The Day After Tomorrow' and "Home Alone 2". These films were chosen mainly because the students were

familiar with the themes as highlighted in the English curriculum specification such as 'people' and 'environment'. After showing each film to the students, a ten-minute to twenty-minute clip was extracted from each film for the teaching of different voice aspects in speaking. Then, the instructor assigned the students into groups to role-play the situations which were similar to the content portrayed in the clips. The students were allowed to replicate the dialogues used in the film clips. As for G-A, the students were also asked to conduct role-plays based on the same situations given to G-B. The first two role-plays were treated as practices for the students. Assessment on the students' oral skills was based on their third role-play. All the role-plays were recorded but only the performances of the 12 students were transcribed and assessed individually. Each of the students' performance in terms of the four voice aspects such as pronunciation, intonation, stress and pauses was rated using the same OAC.

6.0 FINDINGS

6.1 Students' Mastery of English Pronunciation

In terms of their accuracy of pronouncing individual sounds, reduced vowels and distinguishing similar sound, there was basically no significant difference between both groups' performance in pre-test and post-test. Nonetheless, while assessing the students' accuracy of pronouncing combination of sounds, students from G-B showed minor improvement with two of them managed to obtain a Band 3 (highly fluent and accurate). Students in G-A did not show any improvement in this criterion. Lastly, for their clarity in articulating all sentences in the role-play dialogue, the results witness a more noteworthy improvement in students from G-B after the treatment where three of them managed to obtain a Band 3 in the post-test. In general, there was not much of improvement achieved by the students in the treatment group.

As an instance to show the minor improvement in pronouncing combination of sounds, student A1 (from Group A), for example, who acted as Dan pronounced the word "always" as /ˈɒweɪz / instead of the correct pronunciation /ˈɔ:lweɪz/; while student B1 (from Group B) was able to pronounce the word precisely.

Table 1: Comparison of Students' Mastery in English Pronunciation Before and After Treatment

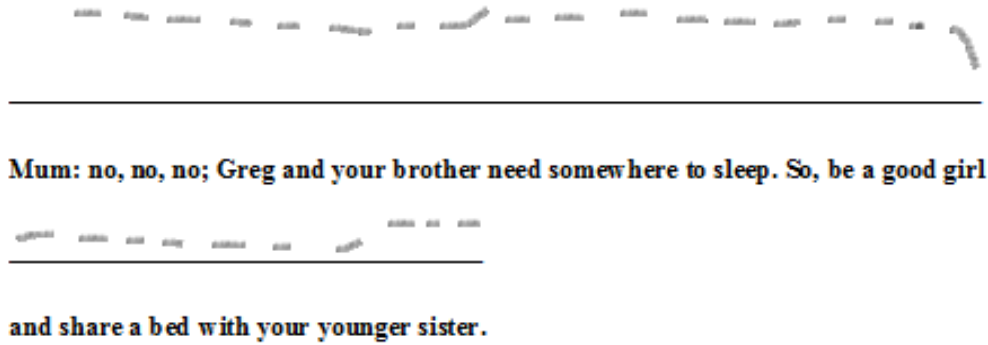| Pronunciation	Group	Band 1		Band 2		Band 3	
		Pre-Test	Post-test	Pre-test	Post-test	Pre-test	Post-test
Pronounce individual sounds accurately	G-A	4	3	2	3	-	-
	G-B	3	2	3	4	-	-
Pronounce combination of sounds	G-A	2	3	4	3	-	-
	G-B	3	1	3	3	-	2
Pronounce reduced vowel words correctly	G-A	5	4	1	2	-	-
	G-B	6	4	-	2	-	-
Can distinguish between similar sounds	G-A	1	-	5	6	-	-
	G-B	2	-	4	5	-	1
Clearly articulates the sentences in the dialogue	G-A	5	5	1	1	-	-
	G-B	4	-	2	3	-	3

6.2 Students' Mastery of English Intonation

The first criterion which was being assessed under the aspect of intonation (Table 2) was the students' ability to use correct intonation in expressing their emotions in the role-play. Post-test results recorded an obvious increment of students from G-B with five of them obtained a Band 3. On the contrary, there was no changes in the performance of students from G-A. A similar situation was also witnessed in the assessment of the usage of intonation in indicating intentions. Besides that, the results also evidently indicate that the use of film is effective in guiding the students to use correct intonation patterns in making statements, apply level tone in appropriate situations and use suitable intonation while giving and refuting opinions. As a conclusion, the use of film can be deemed a useful and effective tool in helping students to learn the appropriate intonation in speaking.
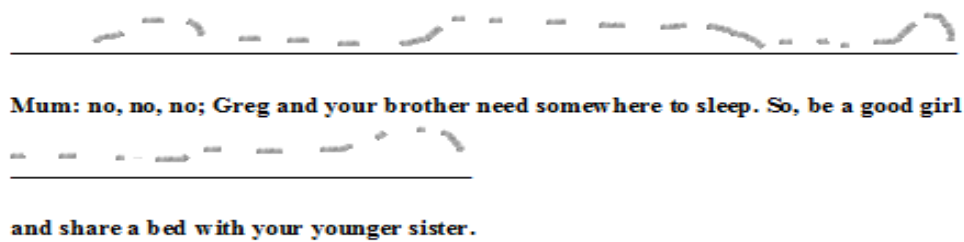
Table 2: Comparison of Students' Mastery in Intonation Before and After Treatment

| Intonation	Group	Number of students					
		Band 1		Band 2		Band 3	
		Pre-test	Post-test	Pre-test	Post-test	Pre-test	Post-test
Use correct intonation in expressing emotions	G-A	6	5	-	1	-	-
	G-B	6	-	-	1	-	5
Use correct intonation in indicating intentions	G-A	5	6	1	-	-	-
	G-B	5	-	1	2	-	4
Use correct intonation patterns in making statements	G-A	5	5	1	1	-	-
	G-B	6	-	-	2	-	4
The use of level tone in appropriate situations	G-A	6	6	-	-	-	-
	G-B	6	-	-	1	-	5
The use of suitable intonation while giving and refuting opinions	G-A	4	5	2	1	-	-
	G-B	5	-	1	3	-	3

The following example demonstrates a noticeable difference in the use of intonation in expressing emotions before and after treatment by student A3 (from group A) and student B3 (from group B). In the role-play, both of them acted as a mum. It was noticed that there was too much of level tone in A3's dialogue. For the part "no, no, no;" the tone remained level, showing no emotions. This part of dialogue was supposed to reflect "mum" as a firm and strict character. Therefore, there should be a raising tone at the first "no", and a falling tone at the last "no", to show her emotion of being forceful and slightly angry.

Mum: no, no, no; Greg and your brother need somewhere to sleep. So, be a good girl

and share a bed with your younger sister.

B3, on the other hand, was able to produce a rising tone at the first "no" and a falling tone at the last "no", showing her firmness.

Mum: no, no, no; Greg and your brother need somewhere to sleep. So, be a good girl

and share a bed with your younger sister.

This is another example which shows improvement in the use of correct intonation patterns in indicating intentions. The dialogues were taken from student A1 and B1, who played the role as Dan. A1's dialogue is shown below:

Dan: Ok fine, I'm sorry my little sister.
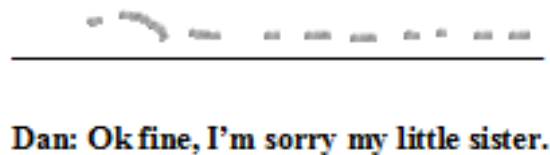
In this dialogue, a big part of the sentence was presented in level tone. It failed to show the intention of Dan who was actually intended to apologize in a sarcastic manner. In order to show this intention, the proper way would be putting a rising tone at both "ok" and "fine", to show his obedience to the grandmother, and also to show that he was actually being pretentious and insincere towards the apology made. Besides that, the word "little" should also be emphasized by placing a rising tone, to show sarcasm by putting more stress on the sister's young age. On the contrary, B1 was successfully brought out the intention of the character "Dan" through the use of intonation. His dialogue is as follows:

Dan: Ok fine, I'm sorry my little sister.
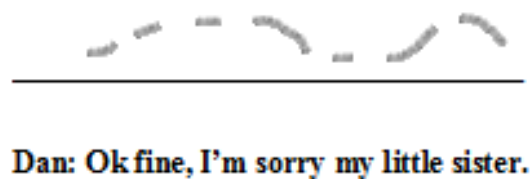
6.3   Students' Mastery of Stress Placement

In assessing the students' ability to produce correct simple word stress (Table 3), all the students from G-B performed a highly accuracy in stress placement while role-playing the dialogue in the post-test. Similar result was also recorded for the students' production of complex word stress, specifically on compound words. With respect to the production of sentence stress and the ability to articulate words slightly longer to show emphasis, the students who received the treatment also showed an encouraging level of improvement. The overall results signify that the students in experimental group achieved a high level of improvement in stress placement after using movie clip to learn speaking skills.

Table 3: Comparison of Students' Mastery in Stress Placement Before and After Treatment

Stress	Group	Band 1 Pre-test	Band 1 Post-test	Band 2 Pre-test	Band 2 Post-test	Band 3 Pre-test	Band 3 Post-test
Produce simple word stress correctly	G-A	4	4	2	2	-	-
	G-B	4	-	2	-	-	6
Produce complex word stress correctly (stem + affixes)	G-A	6	6	-	-	-	-
	G-B	6	6	-	-	-	-
Produce complex word stress correctly (Compound word)	G-A	1	3	5	3	-	-
	G-B	4	-	2	1	-	5
Produce sentence stress correctly	G-A	5	6	1	-	-	-
	G-B	6	-	-	1	-	5
Articulate the words slightly longer to show emphasis	G-A	6	6	-	-	-	-
	G-B	6	-	-	2	-	4

The following is an example which shows students' improvement in terms of stress placement. This dialogue was produced by student A5 (Group A) and B5 (Group B), who acted as Kate. In comparison of the both, it is clear that student B5 placed the primary stress at the accurate position of the compound word "sunrise", which is at the first syllable of the word.

(A5) Kate: Fine! I hope I'll never see your face again when the sunˈrise tomorrow!
(B5) Kate: Fine! I hope I'll never see your face again when the ˈsunrise tomorrow!

6.4   Students' Usage of Pauses

As presented in Table 4, most students from G-B obtained either Band 2 or Band 3 in the post-test and none from G-A obtained a Band 3 in this aspect. This again indicates that film is a good source to teach students on the use of appropriate pauses in communicating with others. Students from treatment group only showed a moderate improvement in their ability to pause to indicate separate thought. However, among the five criteria being assessed, students from G-B demonstrated the greatest improvement in using adequate pauses to allow audiences to absorb

the information being conveyed and using pause to allow turn taking of conversation to take place. The majority of them (5 to 6 students) were able to show a highly relevant use of pauses in their conversation. On the other hand, they didn't improve in the skills of creating rhythm through consistent interval of pauses and using spontaneity pauses to look natural in the conversation.

Table 4: Comparison of Students' Usage of Pauses in Speaking Before and After Treatment

| Stress | Group | Number of students | | | | | |
| | | Band 1 | | Band 2 | | Band 3 | |
		Pre-test	Post-test	Pre-test	Post-test	Pre-test	Post-test
Pause to indicate separate thoughts	G-A	6	4	-	2	-	-
	G-B	6	2	-	3	-	1
Have adequate pauses to allow audiences to absorb the information being conveyed	G-A	6	6	-	-	-	-
	G-B	6	-	-	5	-	1
Creates rhythm through consistent interval of pauses	G-A	6	5	-	1	-	-
	G-B	6	6	-	-	-	-
Use spontaneity pauses to look natural	G-A	6	6	-	-	-	-
	G-B	6	6	-	-	-	-
Pause to allow turn taking of conversation to take place	G-A	5	-	1	-	-	-
	G-B	6	-	-	1	-	5

The following extracts contrast the ability of the control group and the experimental group's students in the second aspect of stress (the use of adequate pauses to allow audiences to absorb the information being conveyed). In the conversation between mum (A3) and granny (A2), there was no pause during the interval of the conversation.

Mum: Dan…

↕ **(no pause)**

Granny: Danny, how many times do I have to remind you not to be rude to your sister? She is still young.

Conversely, for group B's performance, B2 who acted as the granny leaved approximately a 2-second gap after A3's dialogue.

Mum: Dan…

↑
↕ **(2 seconds)**
↓

Granny: Danny, how many times do I have to remind you not to be rude to your sister? She is still young.

7.0 CONCLUSION

The data reveals that the subjects from the treatment group attain only slight achievement in two criteria under the pronunciation aspect, which are accuracy in pronouncing combination of sounds and clarity of sentence articulations in the dialogue. Thus, the use of English movie only gives minor impact on students' pronunciation. In contrast, the data shows that the students achieved significant improvement in the aspects of intonation, stress and pauses after the treatment.

The present study provides language instructors with the idea of using film or video technology as an alternative method in teaching voice aspects in the English language classroom. Apart from this, it could also transform English learning experience into a more fun, exciting and meaningful process. As a suggestion for better classroom practice, teachers should discuss with their students in advance pertaining to the genre or types of movies they are interested to watch in class. Additionally, teachers could guide their students to pay attention only to one voice aspect at a time after judging their immediate speaking need and weaknesses in different voice aspects, instead of asking them to pay attention to every single detail in the movie. It might distract the students' focus. To conclude, the teaching and learning of English should not be confined to the use conventional methods only such as printed text, pre-recorded audio and in-context video clip which follows the syllabuses and topics of textbooks rigidly. The whole instructional process can be made attractive and stimulating.

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