

Invited Article

## The Use of Films As a Multimodal Way to Improve Learners' Comprehension Skills in Reading in English Language and Literature Department at Selçuk University<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** One of the greatest challenges of an English teacher in English as a foreign language context faces is that English is not used authentically in the settings in which students live. Thus, learners do not have many natural opportunities to be exposed to the language or use it in authentic interaction. To fulfil the educational potential of language teaching, learners' language acquisition and knowledge of the target language through foreign language classes can be enhanced by implementing teaching methods such as multimodality as a socio-semiotic approach in language teaching and learning. Film is widely used as a teaching material in foreign language classes as one of the most important ways of multimodality in terms of supplying both social and semiotic features of a target language thanks to its qualities. This paper analyzes the effects of using film in the EFL classroom. It reveals its effects on developing students' comprehension skills in reading. The study was conducted on a sample of two groups: an experimental and a control group taught conventionally. The study was carried out at English Language and Literature Department of Selçuk University. The participants in this study were sophomore students at B1+ level aged 19-21. The results of the study have shown that there were significant differences between experimental and control group of students on using film incorporated in the teaching material. The study concluded that a visual context helps students enhance and improve their comprehension skills in reading.

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### 1. Introduction

#### 1.1 Statement of the Problem

Educational frameworks are at present working through the challenge of distinguishing the new learning and literacies that are required to effectively take place in and contribute to 21st

<sup>1</sup> The findings used in the study rely on the findings of Yürük's PhD Dissertation in progress supervised by Dr. Sarıçoban.

century society. This requires thought of how best to get ready learners for the technological, social, cultural and political changes they confront with in a world that is progressively portrayed by local diversity and worldwide connectedness. In this manner, notwithstanding building up the abilities to comprehend different communication modes and communicate with various audiences, we should engage learners in observing and evaluating the communication frameworks to which they have contact. For both instructors and educational frameworks, this requires a movement and widening as far as what we esteem as literacy practice. If chosen with proper length and fascinating topics, films, which are purposeful and engineered to students' learning requirements and proficiency levels (King, 2002) can give pleasant language learning chances to EFL students in a non-native teaching environment.

## ***1.2 Literature Review***

The world and the type of communication relied upon most within multimodality has shifted away from language based communication to more visual-based communication, but many language courses ignore or downplay the visual and continue to give the language-based texts primacy. It makes sense that there would be resistance to decreasing focus on the word in favor of the visual when it seems that keeping most or all of the focus upon word-based texts is still not producing skilled learners. We definitely cannot afford to stop teaching word-based literacy but need to include within our instruction at least some attention to visual communication to broaden student literacy.

Using the film medium in language instruction, specifically narrative film is a viable way of increasing our students' multimodal literacy without detracting from their instruction in word-based literacy. Although visual communication and persuasion have been utilized throughout history in different ways, current technology has allowed the visual to become the prominent means of communication to which we are exposed.

Indeed, many definitions of literacy have now been intentionally broadened to include multiple types of skills and communication. Lemke (2007) defines literacy as “a set of cultural competences for making socially recognizable meanings by the use of particular material technologies” (71). This definition is not mode-specific at all, but instead rather broad, and George and Shoos (1999) shed light on why such a broad definition is appropriate:

If literacy is henceforth linked to technology, it is by definition changing and changeable as technologies evolve... If literacy is intimately connected to intertextuality as awareness and understanding of the relationships among texts and between texts and readers, then literacy is never fixed or finished. Instead, it entails an ongoing re-evaluation and reformulation of the cultural and textual terrain as that terrain itself, including the positions of readers, shifts. (124)

It is consequently appropriate that language instruction, if its purpose is indeed increasing student literacy, reevaluate the definition of that literacy that it seeks to in still on a regular basis to account for this changing of technology. Lemke (2007) explains,

All literacy is multimedia literacy: You can never make meaning with language alone; there must always be a visual or vocal realization of linguistic signs that also carries non-linguistic meaning... Signs must have some material reality in order to function as signs, but every material form potentially carries meanings according to more than one code. (41-50).

As Hill (2004) also describes, because of this shift to visual communication, “many students arrive at the university with apparently little experience with the written word” (“Reading” 107). As Hill continues, “A major goal of the educational system is to help students develop the abilities necessary to comprehend, interpret, and critically respond to the textual forms that they will encounter as members of the culture... Our educational institutions should be

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spending at least as much time and energy on developing students' visual literacies as these institutions spend on developing students' textual literacy". ("Reading" 108)

What is needed is a way to increase both types of literacy at the same time, and even better, through an approach that utilizes students' increased experience in visual communication to help them better understand the language-based communication with which they are less familiar. In essence, what is needed is to broaden existing analytical frameworks that are taught to language learners so that they represent the full spectrum of modes of communication. From this perspective, using films and other multimedia instruments are essential and efficient ways to fulfil the needs of learners in terms of creating competent learners in communication.

### ***1.2.1. The Use of Film as an Authentic Material in Foreign Language Classes***

The use of authentic materials in teaching English as a second or foreign language has long been the focus of many studies (Aziz & Sulicha, 2016; Koban, 2014; Koban Koç, 2015). Akdemir, Barın and Demiröz (2012) state that "in order to overcome the difficulties of teaching English in a country where it is not the primary language for communication, the best and the easiest way is to enhance teaching with authentic and original materials". (p. 3967).

The utilization of films as teaching material has expanded quickly since the 1970s. Ismaili (2013) calls attention that films expand the scope of classroom teaching strategies and assets furthermore broaden the educational programs. Champoux (1999) underlines that film scenes can make it less demanding to teach abstract themes and ideas on account of their visuality. Likewise inexperienced students can profit by films due to their greater feeling of reality. Allan (1985) likewise highlights the realistic samples that the films empower. Joining both auditory and visuality makes film a thorough tool for language instruction. The visuality likewise supports the students: it helps learners by supporting the verbal message and gives a centre of consideration while they tune in.

Additionally, classroom exercises and methods connected with utilizing films as a teaching instrument let learners go beyond what they can experience in a class with traditional techniques. As far as language learning and teaching, films are fluctuated and adaptable tools since they give learners an assortment of language and cultural experiences. Also, in a confined classroom environment, learners do not have the opportunity of exposing to authentic target language and speech forms.

In addition, film-related activities motivate learners to participate learning process actively because of real-life language usage. To some degree, films give learners legitimate target language that they cannot experience outside the classroom and films incorporate a few components that a course book cannot teach. Learners have the opportunity to investigate the issues of appropriateness and pragmatics while watching likewise phonetic, paralinguistic and nonverbal conduct. At the point when these characteristics of films are contemplated, films might be thought as a superior language teaching aid than a course-book only teaching environment both for instructors and learners.

### ***1.2.2. Advantages of Using Film to Teach Languages***

Films may be used in the foreign language education in two ways: first, films can serve as a model of language use, in particular as a vehicle to improve listening comprehension, enrich vocabulary, and develop translingual competence; second, as a model and reflection of the target cultural artifacts, values, and behaviours, and therefore a vehicle to develop students' transcultural competence.

The use of film in the classroom or as an outside school activity can uphold the motivation of the learners, because of its playful component. Using films through specific task activities provides an ideal vehicle for active learning, as well as encouraging interaction and participation. The communicative potential of its use has been commended; it

- facilitates comprehension activities that are perceived as 'real';
- creates a curiosity gap that facilitates the exchange of opinions and ideas about the film;

- helps to explore non-verbal elements;
- improves oral and aural skills (Altman, 1989);
- provides meaningful contexts and vocabulary, exposing viewers to natural expressions and natural flow of speech.

There are many ways of using films in the classroom and it will depend on the film itself:

- Fiction films tell a fictional story or narrative
- Documentary films are a visual expression attempting to ‘document’ reality
- Short films are generally longer than one minute and shorter than 15 minutes

The versatility of its use allows incorporating film in different types of learning sessions in the classroom (Sherman, 2003). For example:

- It is possible to screen complete films or short extracts of films (clips).
- Films can be used just for enjoyment, creating a positive atmosphere in the classroom, which can enhance motivation.
- Films can provide a stimulus for other activities, such as listening comprehension, debates on social issues, raising intercultural awareness, being used as a moving picture book or as a model of the spoken language.

In short, films make meaning through a powerful combination of different modes of communication such as written text on the screen, spoken language, moving images, music and sound effects. When these features of the film are taken into consideration, films are excellent examples of multimodal texts.

### ***1.3. Aim of the Study***

The purpose of this study is primarily concerned in contributing to the quality of the process of teaching and learning through the use of media, particularly using films in English language and literature classrooms. It aims at finding out whether the film as a multimodal way improves learners’ comprehension skills in reading. The design of the study is a quasi-experimental one that aims to gather quantitative data about the participants.

## **2. Method**

The design of the study is a quasi-experimental one that aims to gather quantitative data about the participants. A group of participants was formed from regular classes at the department and a survey was conducted for the purpose of making descriptive assertions. Two groups were formed as experimental (n=27) and control groups (n=25). According to the proficiency test results, the level of the participants was B1<sup>+</sup> so, the groups were accepted homogeneous.

For the experimental part of the study, the film “Elizabeth: The Golden Age” were used as an extensive reading material as well were chosen for both groups (control and experimental). At the beginning of the experimental study, students who watched the film or read the book were determined and but not included in the study before forming the control and experimental groups. Traditional teaching procedures and classroom activities were used for the control group. The students in control group only read the book. However, the students in experimental group first read the same book with control group then watched the film of the book. Students in both groups were given one-month period to read the book. For the quantitative part of the study, data were collected through a questionnaire. At the end of the implementation, students in experimental group received the questionnaire which aimed to get students’ attitudes towards using films in their language class.

### ***2.2 Participants***

This study involved 52 sophomore students at English Language and Literature Department of Selçuk University. The students ranged between 19 – 21 years of age. This study was carried out in two groups. First group was chosen as *Control Group* that only read the book included in the study, whereas second group was constituted *Experimental Group* that both read

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the book and watch the film of the book. For the study, 52 students from regular classes (M:16 and F: 36) were chosen randomly. 32 of the students in these groups attended preparatory classes at their high schools. The proficiency level of the students attended in the research is B1<sup>+</sup> level.

### 2.3. Sampling Procedures

This study is primarily concerned in contributing to the quality of the process of teaching and learning through the use of media, particularly using films in English language and literature classrooms. This is a quasi-experimental study that aims at finding out whether the film as a multimodal way improves learners' comprehension skills in reading. In the experimental part of the study, the film *Elizabeth: the Golden Age* which was used as an extensive reading material as well was chosen for both groups (control and experimental). In this research, according to participants' interests, educational departments and their proficiency levels, the work (the book and the movie version) named as *Elizabeth: the Golden Age* was chosen as the material for that part of the study. For the experimental part of the study two groups were formed as experimental and control groups. First of all, a survey research was conducted for the purpose of making descriptive assertions about some population. The proficiency level of the participants included in the study was B1<sup>+</sup> so, the groups were accepted homogeneous. While creating control and experimental groups, students who watched the film or read the book were determined and not included in the study.

At the beginning of the study, both control and experimental groups were introduced to the book. Both groups were given a short list of vocabulary words and phrases used in the book and the reading class went on with a cover picture of the book and its title for discussion, then to make the students ready to read; they were given pre-reading questions for a brainstorming activity.

Then, both groups were given one month period to read the book. At the end of the reading process, the control group was given post-reading questions as the post-test of the study. One lesson hour (50 minutes) was given the students in control group in order to answer post-reading questions.

After reading the book at the end of one month period, the experimental group students were introduced the movie trailer and the core theme in class. All through film class, students viewed segments (7 segments) of ten-to-fifteen-minute video material. So, four lesson hours (200 minutes) were arranged for the implementation of film viewing section. As the students watched the tape, the teacher stopped occasionally to check comprehension. During this time students had "while-watching" questions, which purpose to check comprehension but also force students to better concentrate on the film. Then, students in experimental group answer the post-reading questions in one lesson hour.

#### 2.3.2. Instruments

In this study, the film *Elizabeth: the Golden Age* was used and as an extensive reading material, the book version was given to the participants. In this research, according to participants' interests, educational departments and their levels obtained from the results relying on the proficiency test, the work (the book and the movie version) named as *Elizabeth: the Golden Age* was chosen as the material for that study. In the experimental part of the study, the control group and the experimental group read the book within the prescribed time and the experimental group watched the film in pursuit of reading the same book. Then both groups were given post-reading questions as the post-test of the study including vocabulary (7 items), ordering the events in the story (9 items), True /False questions (9 items) and multiple-choice questions (14 items) in order to see whether there was a significant difference between experimental and control groups. The post- reading questions used in the study were examined by some experts except from the researcher in order to measure and provide validity.

In the quantitative part of the study, data were collected through a questionnaire. At the end of the film viewing implementation, the experimental group only received the questionnaire

which aimed to get students' attitudes towards using films in their language class. The data for this study were collected through a 15-item 5-point Likert type questionnaire. The format for the questionnaire was inspired from the study of Tuncay (2014) including items related to authentic language usage (Items 1,3,8,12,13,14), grammar and structure (Item 7), perceptive and receptive skills (Items 4,5,6,15), appreciation of target language and filming arts (Items 10,11), vocabulary and authentic expressions (Item 9) and critical thinking skills (Item 2). The reliability coefficient, Cronbach alpha of the questionnaire was 0.86.

### **2.3.3 Research design**

At the beginning of the study, both control and experimental groups were introduced to the book. Both groups were given a short list of vocabulary words and phrases used in the book and the reading class went on with a cover picture of the book and its title for discussion, then to make the students ready to read; they were given pre-reading questions for a brainstorming activity.

Then, both groups were given one month period to read the book. At the end of the reading process, the control group was given post-reading questions as the post-test of the study. One lesson hour (50 minutes) was given the students in control group in order to answer post-reading questions.

After reading the book at the end of one month period, the experimental group students were introduced the movie trailer and the core theme in class. All through film class, students viewed segments (7 segments) of ten-to-fifteen-minute video material. So, four lesson hours (200 minutes) were arranged for the implementation of film viewing section. As the students watched the tape, the teacher stopped occasionally to check comprehension. During this time students had "while-watching" questions, which purpose to check comprehension but also force students to better concentrate on the film.

After watching the film, students in experimental group were given the same post-reading questions with the control group.

In the quantitative part of the study, data was collected through a questionnaire. The questionnaire which aimed to get students' attitudes towards using films in their language class after film viewing section was administered to experimental group only. The questionnaire was administered by the researcher. Subjects received oral instructions about how to complete the questionnaire, and were encouraged to seek clarification of any items they did not understand. This questionnaire took about 50 minutes (a class hour) to complete, including about 5 or 10 minutes' initial explanation. The questions were carefully gauged with this amount of time in mind to ensure that they could be completed.

## **3. Results**

In this part, there are findings and interpretations related to the results of the perception and attitude scale among the students in experimental and control groups. Findings and the interpretations were evaluated according to the data obtained in accordance with the sub-problems of the research.

### **3.1. Statistics and Data Analysis**

In the following table, there are findings and interpretations related to the results of the perception and attitude scale among the students in experimental and control groups.

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Table 1.

The Opinions of the Students for “the Attitude Scale for Using Films in the Language Classrooms” in the Experimental Group after the Implementation (N=27)

ITEM	The Answer Options										$\bar{x}$	S
	I Strongly Disagree		I Disagree		Neutral		I Agree		I Strongly Agree			
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%		
Item 1	6	22.2	5	18.5	7	25.9	6	22.2	3	11.1	2.62	1.36
Item 2	7	25.9	4	14.8	1	3.7	11	40.7	4	14.8	3.03	1.50
Item 3	5	18.5	3	11.1	3	11.1	10	37.0	6	22.2	3.33	1.44
Item 4	5	18.5	2	7.4	8	29.6	7	25.9	5	18.5	3.18	1.35
Item 5	4	14.8	3	11.1	3	11.1	8	29.6	9	33.3	3.55	1.45
Item 6	4	14.8	5	18.5	4	14.8	11	40.7	3	11.1	3.14	1.29
Item 7	3	11.1	1	3.7	3	11.1	15	55.6	5	18.5	3.66	1.17
Item 8	3	11.1	1	3.7	4	14.8	13	48.1	6	22.2	3.66	1.20
Item 9	3	11.1	1	3.7	3	11.1	11	40.7	9	33.3	3.81	1.27
Item 10	3	11.1	1	3.7	5	18.5	10	37.0	8	29.6	3.70	1.26
Item 11	2	7.4	1	3.7	3	11.1	10	37.0	11	40.7	4.00	1.17
Item 12	3	11.1	1	3.7	8	29.6	6	22.2	9	33.3	3.62	1.30
Item 13	4	14.8	2	7.4	6	22.2	10	37.0	5	18.5	3.37	1.30
Item 14	6	22.2	4	14.8	6	22.2	6	22.2	5	18.5	3.00	1.44
Item 15	6	22.2	6	22.2	4	14.8	7	25.9	4	14.8	2.88	1.42

According to the results of the study, students think that using film in a language classroom may be beneficial for them in general. The responses of the students to item 3 in the questionnaire related to learners' attitudes towards using film in language classroom showed that using film helped them gain knowledge of how the authentic language is used in various contexts and settings (59.2%). Also 62.9% of the students think that (item 5) using film improved their receptive skill (listening). In addition to improving their receptive skills, to learn more about

grammar and structure, film is very beneficial for them (item 7) because most of the students (74.1%) responded positively to that item.

When the pragmatic features of a film are taken into consideration, 70.3% of the students found using film in a language classroom helpful in terms of improving how TL is used for different functions and purposes within a context. The responses of students gave to item 9 showed that using film helped them not only to learn more about grammar and structure but also vocabulary and authentic expressions (74.0%). The results of item 10 (66.6%) and item 11 (77.7%) showed that students appreciated filming as a branch of art. They think that filming as an art showed them the way to understand and appreciate the life in target language country. More than half of the students (55.5%) could understand the difference between the artificial use of TL in a non-native environment (classroom) and natural use in a native environment because they think that using language in a native environment is more beneficial to learn a language.

Table 2.

The Results of Independent t-Test for the Repeated Measurements Related to the Academic Achievement Scores of the Students in the Experimental and Control Groups

<b>Group</b>	<b>N</b>	$\bar{x}$	<b>S</b>	<b>sd</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>p</b>
Experimental	27	79.61	7.45	51	3.96	.000
Control	25	71.94	8.38			

According to Table 2, it was found that the groups where two separate systems are employed differed from each other between pre-implementation and post implementation and different teaching methods had significant common effects on the academic achievement scores in the repeated measurements ( $t_{(51)}=3.96, p>.05$ ). This finding indicates that the implementation through the method of using films as a multimodal way has various effects on increasing the academic achievement scores of the students.

It was found that the groups where two separate systems are employed differed from each other between pre-implementation and post implementation and different teaching methods had significant common effects on the academic achievement scores in the repeated measurements ( $t_{(51)}=3.96, p>.05$ ). This finding indicates that the implementation through the method of using films as a multimodal way has various effects on increasing the academic achievement scores of the students. It is understood that the implementation of using films as a multimodal way in the experimental group ( $X=79.61$ ) which gained profit in their academic achievement scores prior to experiment was more effective on increasing the academic achievement scores than the students in control group ( $X=71.94$ ).

#### 4. Conclusion

Teaching in a foreign language can be challenging in terms of planning. A foreign language teaching environment ought to be flexible, changing and propelling. Learners may have diverse proficiency levels so it might be hard to arrange a lesson as indicated by these distinctive proficiency levels. Right now, utilizing films as a part of language can be considered as an amusing and attractive vehicle. Learners in a non-English speaking environment may profit by utilizing films as a teaching instrument on account of authenticity and real-life language.

Films have been effectively connected to numerous courses in order to offer a wide assortment of learning styles or modalities (Birch & Gardiner, 2005). Learning styles are characterized as cognitive, affective, and psychological behaviours that serve as moderately stable pointers of how learners perceive, cooperate with, and react to the learning environment. Learners feel more relaxed in an environment which mirrors their predominant learning style (Sankey, 2006).

Learners have a preferred learning modality, namely, visual, aural, read/write or kinaesthetic, while numerous learners are multimodal (utilize a blend of these modalities).

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Individuals likely utilize distinctive cognitive strategies to process verbal and visual media. Some proof proposes that individuals learn abstract and new concepts all the more effortlessly when displayed in both verbal and visual structure (Champoux, 1999). Other empirical research demonstrates that visual media make concepts more accessible to an individual than text media and assist particularly with later recall (Champoux, 1999: 2-3).

As indicated by Allan (1985) it is essential to attempt to adventure all the positive sides that a film can offer on language teaching. Case in point, multimodality is clearly an awesome piece of films, and it can help additionally the weaker students follow the film and comprehend what is happening. There are non-verbal signs and multimodes in a film, for example gestures, facial expressions, eye contact, posture, proximity, appearance and setting. All these components have essential impact on the film and may help or, on the other hand, also possibly hinder viewing the film.

King (2002) proposed that “utilizing films as a part of education is a reviving learning experience for students who need to enjoy a reprieve from rote learning of unending English vocabulary and drill practices, and replace it with something realistic, a dimension that is absent in text-book oriented instruction” (p.512). In the event that chosen with proper length and intriguing points, films, which are intentional and tailored to students' learning needs and proficiency level can give pleasant language learning chances to EFL students in a non-native teaching environment. Kabooha (2016) explains “well-selected movie materials could enhance students' language learning process and increase their motivation to learn the target language” (p.248).

In spite of the fact that film is a valuable instrument to motivate learners and make the lesson enthralling, there are a few elements that ought to be kept in mind when utilizing films as a part of a foreign language learning and teaching process. These components are deciding on the suitable film, classroom exercises and making full utilization of the film. While selecting the suitable film, the proficiency level of the learners and the intelligibility of the film are essential. The film ought not to be beyond the current level of learners and ought to be adequately comprehensible. Depending on student proficiency levels, instructional and curricular goals and an assortment of various classroom exercises ought to be arranged and sorted out. By doing this, film is helpful for the course or class and it can dispose of the situation, where the film is thought pretty much as a time-filling component with no specific pedagogical goals.

### **4.1. Recommendations for Further Studies**

This study was carried out with the second year (sophomore) students at Selçuk University, English Language and Literature Department who were at B1<sup>+</sup> level. The study was applied to only one level of learners. For a further study, other proficiency levels may be taken into account and similar methodological implementations can be applied to those groups of learners. In this study, the film *Elizabeth: the Golden Age* was used and as an extensive reading material, the book version was given to the participants. In another study, the number of materials (film and book) may be increased in order to enhance validity and reliability of the study.

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