Improving English Writing Skills of Non-Native Undergraduate Learners with The Help Of Movies Supported By Online Technologies

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to find out the effectiveness of integrating into teaching English writing movies which are supported by online technologies. Using movies in English classes has become the interest of many teachers and educators, as films are believed to be very effective, appealing and motivating authentic materials. Filmic approach somehow creates a natural English language teaching (ELT) environment in the classroom and makes the instruction of English enjoyable, particularly in terms of learners. Mixing motion pictures and online technologies both of which have a very crucial role in students' life, would be fun and innovative. This study focused on teaching writing through the use of films and contemporary educational technologies among undergraduate learners. The action research was designed at Qafqaz University in Azerbaijan among 32 intermediate level students in the School of Languages. The learners were divided into experiment and control groups which were almost at the same English proficiency levels.   The research involved a questionnaire consisting of 10 questions with participation of 32 learners. The study is expected to be helpful for English teachers in terms of employing movies and online technologies effectively in writing classes, not to mention it is likely be a helpful material for further researchers in this field.

Key words: English language teaching, writing skill, movies, wikis, online instruction, motivation

Introduction

It is an undeniable fact that presently visuals, such as pictures, videos or movies are exposed to learners much more than in the past. Besides this, Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) have become almost the most important part of people's life. Indeed, whatever becomes popular in people's life is normal to be brought into the classroom environment. Nowadays transforming exercises into virtual environment is the current trend for the ELT publishers. For instance, the ELT textbook *Q-skill for Success* (Earle-Carlin, 2015) does not have a work

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book, instead, all book users have to register to the book's online website and do all exercises online. Moreover, *English File* (Oxeden & Latham-Koenig, 2014) offers an e-book for students which is available in I-pads or tablets for Android. In today's ELT books videos are considered as an essential part of teaching and learning and there are watching video tasks and based on them interactive activities almost in all e-versions of ELT books. It could be said that the current trend on a global scale makes publishers feel it is almost compulsory to produce online versions of their books and practices. Although the integration of motion pictures and ICT into education is not new, with the availability of internet bringing them in the educational process has become more interesting and much easier for educators and language teachers. Movies are mainly considered as an authentic source in English classes. They are used to improve all main language skills (listening, reading, speaking and writing) and sub-skills (such as intonation, pronunciation and so on). Movies are crucial sources for those who learn the language, as the language spoken in movies comprise daily language. The greatest advantage of movies is their support to the enhancement of listening competence, not to mention that students find out how language is used by its natives. An extra advantage of movies is that learners can remember and learn vocabulary and its correct use in sentences. Moreover, in terms of pre-writing activity, such as brainstorming or developing critical thinking, or making writing instruction fun, movies play an essential role. This study aims to investigate the role of watching movies which are supported by contemporary educational technologies (Wikis) in writing instruction; especially, the study examines whether the filmic approach in language instruction encourages undergraduate students to enhance their writing competence.

Literature Review

Movies

Being considered as authentic materials, movies have been supported by many researchers and language teachers.   Authenticity is defined as "exposure to real language" which is not prepared specifically for English Language Teaching but in its original community (Widdowson, 1990). This exposure enhances students' motivation, supports learners with authentic information from the foreign culture, which is believed to be related to the learners' needs and causes more creative teaching in the classroom. Movies, therefore, are employed in order to teach vocabulary, listening and speaking, reading and essay writing (Ergenekon, 2016).

Butler et al (2009) states that movies enhance learners' curiosity in learning and ESFF (English Speaking Foreign Films) allow students to notice native dialogues, they also make the learning material attractive and give a chance to learn the cultural context (Brown, 2010). Gruba (2006) asserts that for vast majority of students' films are their first connection to the English-speaking culture. Apart from being beneficial materials for the development of speaking skills,   with the help of the movies learners are exposed to different types of conversation features, such as accent, speech pace, pronunciation, tone and so on (Webb, 2010). When students

are watching English movies with English subtitles, they can learn some new words, idioms and phrases used in the movies. As for the listening competence, Wang (2015) argues that films support this skill with visual aids. In listening practices, they may not find it easy to focus their concentration long enough once they are exposed to the long communication. Movies can provide much more knowledge for listeners and can keep listeners' concentration focus on the listening. Perumal (2013) suggests that in understanding novels movies play an important role. Thus, films can be used in reading classes to improve the general comprehension of the reading passages.

Regardless of the fact that integration of media such as movies, TV and so on are mainly believed to be beneficial for listening and speaking skills, there are a few articles and studies about the integration of motion pictures into writing classes.

Masiello (1985) supports the view that employing movies in university writing lessons help learners brainstorm ideas around particular subjects, such as relationship in a family and in this way writing students can examine, brainstorm, and create more productive writings. Moreover, he mentions that, as learners watch movies with great attention, they also learn how to watch, and it helps students to become sharper writers. Also, since movies are a type of the mass media, they provoke the skill of analysis, improve learners' consciousness and assist them to get new ideas for essay lessons (Saeideh & Sepehran, 2014). It is known that in essay writing critical thinking is essential, so movies could be used to improve students' critical thinking which would be automatically reflected in an essay paper. Dupuy (2001) notes that films are helpful authentic sources as they visualize characters, events, story, narration, and words in the context and it can be used in informative argumentative and reaction-response compositions. Kasper (2000) emphasizes that with the help of movies relative associations between causes and effects are easily imagined and understood by learners, which also helps them write a well-organized coherent essay.

Basri (2011) in his study demonstrated "Tsunami Japan" documentary film as an example to this statement and Haris & Abdullah (2013) believes that natural disaster and technology documentary films are useful for writing news text. In addition, documentaries on natural world, environment, and animal or habitat life or cities were suggested to be used in writing classes to make students' writings better (Hutahaean & Ernidawati, 2013).

Another analysis investigates comparisons between four kinds of documentaries - expository, observational, interactive and reflective - and essay writing (Snow, 2012). Capability of listening and interaction of new ideas used in writing, are mutually depended, which was deduced by Morley and Lawrence (1971). They assume that with the help of movies relative associations between cases and consequences are easily imagined and comprehended. In a research conducted by Moss (1987) right after watching a daytime soap opera in the class, learners were asked to write compositions which express their feelings and ideas. In this way, students were prepared to feel more confident in writing their further essays. What is more, according to Masiello (1985), showing movies in the classroom makes students learn how to watch and observe meticulously, which causes

them to be more careful and sharper writers. Indrasari (2010) reached a conclusion that the film *The Postman Pat and Surprise Present* enhanced learners in terms of social function and generic structure of narrative text. Tristy (2010) used a movie ("All about animals") as a helpful means to improve productivity of students to write a report text. In the study done by Anggraini & Radjab, (2014) the video multimedia demonstrated a development in narrative text writing in the matter of structure, coherence, content, vocabulary and grammar. Baratta and Jones (2008) held a research on the use of movies as an important means in academic writing pedagogy and the development of academic writing teaching and learning. In their study they figured out three important points with respect to the integration of films as a unique and interesting way to enhance students' writing skill. Firstly, movies attract learners' attention and their interest, therefore, they lead to effective teaching and learning. The next important finding is that learners learn the subject in a visual way, which makes complex information easy. Finally, in the third finding most of learners appreciated the movie approach and emphasized its aid in learning academic essay writing.

On the other hand, some researchers mentioned that movies may have some detrimental effects on learners such as imitating bad behaviors of actors (Sargent, 2005), or learners may forget the general aim of the movie because they might be attracted by the movie stars, which may cause them not to give their concentration on practices (Ying & Zhang, 2012). According to Mirvan (2013), since films are mainly longer than an hour, it can be dull for language learners to watch them fully.

Online Technologies and Writing about Movies

As for the online technologies, it is irrefutable that they give us endless chances, as the amount of the Internet resources are surely limitless for English language instruction. Darasawang & Reinders (2010) manifest that in terms of learner autonomy online learning is very crucial. According to Gardner's multiple intelligence theory, we can reach a conclusion that for students it can be challenging to understand everything due to different teaching methods, that is to say, as instructors may not have sufficient time or ability to meet specific needs of learners. Brush, Glazewski, & Hew (2008) point out that Internet efficiently provides learners with an access to the digital knowledge. In the process of learning, E-learning assists students to figure out learning topics, solve problems, and find solutions to the issues, also it makes the acquisition of knowledge more appropriate. Also, as a motivator tool, internet with its perfect opportunities can be seen as a very important factor (Swathi, 2014).

Developments in ICT devices are broadly considered as having high capacity for improving the instruction of foreign language writing (Warschauer, 2010; Ming, Nicholas, & Chin-Ying, 2016). In particular, wikis and blogs are considered as perfect technologies for writing skills in the Web 2.0. Blogs and wikis have changed the dynamic of the writing process in EFL and are regarded as an effective approach to teach writing competence to speakers of other language (Vurdien, 2013; Lin, Li, Hung, & Huang, 2014). They are really essential technologies in terms of

collaboration, interaction, sampling, social activities, critical thinking and so forth. In wikis and blogs users can share their opinions, integrate different opinions and discuss them and develop new opinions which at the same time cause improve individual learning. Spell check helps the writing technique. For contemporary learners it is much more natural and inspiring to write in social media than on-paper. Instead of a teacher who not only supports the writing process, but also assesses, which is not very pleasant for students, online technologies provide help without assessment, which helps remove the anxiety. Last, but not least, students become more autonomous and cooperative, less dependent for idea generation and correction on teacher. Therefore, wikis can be seen as an essential tool for developing new ideas in different context and individual learning (Moskaliuk, Kimmerle, & Cress, 2012).   Nevertheless, not all learners may support collaborative writing in wikis or blogs, as some students may not be acquainted with the system or some of them may not wish to demonstrate their writings in public (Raitman, Augar, & Zhou, 2005).

Tuncay (2014) held a research with 100 EFL preparatory school students at a university whose EFL skills were at intermediate and pre-intermediate level. Watching movies was integrated in their syllabus and they used multimedia for activities. It was found that the approach was beneficial, as students listened to authentic language in authentic environments, they observed the target culture and developed critical skills (comparing their own culture to the target one), their listening, speaking and writing skills improved, as did their vocabulary and grammar components.

Hadjerrouit (2014) involved in his study 16 students enrolled in a course on Web 2.0 technologies in teacher education. They were taught writing with the help of WIKIs and then a questionnaire was offered to them. The students were globally satisfied with their wikis and the potentialities of MediaWiki to foster collaborative writing. However, responses to open-ended questions revealed a number of problems that need to be addressed. First of all, MediaWiki lacks a user-friendly editor that may facilitate collaborative writing. It also lacks advanced functionality that supports the development of more usable wikis. Secondly, most students think that the discussion page is not good enough to promote genuine communication and critical reflections. As a result, students still value face-to-face dialogue, and discussions by means of other communication channels as well. Not only students, but also (and, probably, especially the older generation) teachers may have difficulties while dealing with WIKIs.

To sum up the literature review, using movies to trigger effective writing is beneficial in several ways:

- Linguistic: teaching authentic language, enriching students' vocabulary and improving their grammar skills; supporting comprehension, dealing with various genres (news, documentary, and fiction), providing linguistic background for writing, introducing the target culture together with language, dealing with text peculiarities (structure, coherence, topic and main idea)

- Pedagogical: visual support, providing content background for writing, effective pre-writing exercise (brainstorming), using authentic materials (linking learning with real life), development of analytical and critical skills;

- Psychological: causing curiosity, attracting and concentrating attention, enhancing interest and motivation.

As for involving contemporary technologies in teaching writing based on movie application, the following benefits can be named:

- Student motivation

- Makes the writing process more communicative and cooperative

- Makes writing easier

- Partially substitute a teacher (provide spelling and structuring support)

- Helps improve ideas as others' thoughts are shared

- Develops individual learning

Research Method

Procedure and participants

Quantitative research was held at Qafqaz University, Azerbaijan. This study aimed at measuring the effectiveness of movies which are supported by online technologies in teaching writing skills at university level.

Two classes from intermediate level (B2), 16 students in each, participated in the action research. Almost equal numbers of both genders participated in the classes. Students were in the same range of age (17-18), all studying in School of Languages at the above-mentioned university.

Two movies, namely "***Ratatouille" and "Blood Diamond"*** were chosen for the experimental group and the content of the movies was related to the content of the writing unit in the chosen book (Ward &Gramer, 2015), which was the same both for the control and the experimental group. On online technology *Pbworks.com* was chosen for teaching, due to its appropriate features both for teachers and students. All learners and the teacher were registered in *Pbworks*. In the experiment, after the instructor taught the writing lesson in the class, learners watched a movie (half of the movie in the class, another half at home) and then they were assigned to do the activities at home which were uploaded to *Pbworks*. All the questions were related to the writing unit topic, just the content of the questions was based on the watched movie. In the experimental group, the learners were able to see each other's responses and also could write their comments. In the control group, as extra materials for the writing lesson (to substitute watching the movie), learners were given to read intermediate-level books, which

were chosen by the teacher. Learners were assigned to write the tasks which were given in the book as homework.

The following activities were some of the activities which were prepared and uploaded to Pbworks:

Activity 1 for the movie (*Ratatouille*) Writing a paragraph.

The aim of the activity: This activity helps students write a paragraph by using descriptive adjectives.

Table 1: Activity for the animation movie "*Ratatouille" (2007)*

Please choose one of these questions and write a paragraph

1. Who was your favorite character in the movie and why?

2. What makes food taste good?

Note: Use descriptive - adjectives that you learned in the class

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Activity 2 Writing an outline for Essay

In the activity, we took one part from the movie "Blood Diamond" (2006). Then, we asked students to write an outline for the given question.

Table 2: Activity for the movie "Blood Diamond" (2006) (Please see Appendix B)

"Why do you think Archer helped Solomon find his family and go to London?"

Write an outline of the essay that you are going to write TOMORROW in the CLASSROOM.

Outline should include THESIS STATEMENT, TOPIC SENTENCES with SUBTOPICS (or examples) and CONCLUSION!

Students wrote their answers in the comment part which was separated for them. They were able to see each other's responses and comments. In this way students could compare their responses with other students' responses and improve their own writings. Feedback was given both online and in the classroom. Blended learning was applied for feedback (See Appendix A and B for sample exercises and answers or for details: *aydinaliyew.pbworks.com)*

The study continued about two weeks. It covered 2 different units of the chosen book. At the end of the two movies the experimental group learners were required to answer 10 survey questions online. Additionally, volunteer students were asked to express their opinion about the instruction of writing through movies and online technologies.

Questionnaire. Questions were designed to find out the learners' attitude towards the movie approach and the application of wikis for the development of writing skills based on watching movies in the target language. They were also expected to find out the difficulties faced during the implemented filmic approach. Different types of multiple choice questions were used.

The proposed questions were as follows:

A. *Strongly Disagree   Disagree   Neither agree nor disagree   Agree   Strongly Agree*

1. To what extent do you agree or disagree that integration of the movies was useful for the development of writing skills?
2. To what extent do you agree or disagree that it was useful to apply educational technologies (Pbworks) to the writing classes?
3. It was motivating to apply movies with educational technologies in terms of improving writing.
4. Applying this method would be beneficial for the rest of the units.

B. Yes   *No*   *Not certain*

1. Were the movies related to the Unit topic?
2. Did the application of the movie help you get an idea about the unit (writing) topic?
3. Do you think that integrating movies into the writing lesson would be beneficial for the rest of the units?
4. Did applying educational technologies (Pbworks) motivate you to spend more time for writing practices? Why? Note: You can choose more than one answer
5. Do you think that applying educational technologies would be beneficial for the rest of the units?
6. Was applying movies with educational technologies a different and innovative way compared to the previous writing classes?

The questions of this survey were uploaded to surveymonkey.com and the responses from participants were gathered and analyzed through the use of an online survey site. The surveys were open for one week.

Findings

The results of the questionnaire demonstrated the expected beliefs about the filmic approach supported by contemporary educational technologies (Pbworks). The given tables indicate the results exposing the number of the participants' responses and their proportion in terms of percentage.

Table 1. Questionnaire results

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly Disagree	Total
To what extent do you agree or disagree that integration of the movies (Ratatouille and Blood Diamond) were useful in the writing class?	3.13%	3.13%	3.13%	25.00%	65.63%	32
To what extent do you agree or disagree that it was useful to apply educational technologies (Pbworks) to the writing classes?	3.13%	0.00%	3.13%	53.13%	40.63%	32
It was motivating to apply movies with activities based on educational technologies in terms of improving writing	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	56.25%	43.75%	32
Applying this method would be beneficial for the rest of the units	0.00%	3.13%	0.00%	53.13%	43.75%	32

	No	Not certain	Yes	Ttotal
Were the movies related to the unit topic?	3.13%	15.63%	81.25%	32
Did the application of the movies help you get an idea about the unit (writing) topic?	0.00%	21.88%	78.13%	32
Do you think that integrating movies into the writing lesson would be beneficial for the rest of the units?	3.13%	12.50%	84.38%	32
Do you think that applying educational technologies would be beneficial for the rest of the units?	6.25%	3.13%	90.63%	32
Was applying movies with educational technologies a different and innovative way compared to the previous writing classes?	3.13%	3.13%	93.75%	32

	No because it is time consuming	No because it is complex to write on educational technologies (Pbworks)	Yes because it is innovative	Yes because it is collaborative	Total
Did applying educational technologies (pbworks) motivate you to spend more time for the writing practices? Why? Note: you can choose more than one answer	0.00%	0.00%	59.38%	62.50%	32

Discussion

The responses of learners in questionnaire and volunteers' opinions on teaching writing with the help of the movies and online technologies revealed the expected belief, with respect to usefulness, innovation, motivation, getting ideas for better writing, and improving writing skills. The results of the survey coincide with some recent studies (Anggraini & Radjab, 2014; Baratta & Jones, 2008).

The majority of the respondents either agree (25%) or strongly agree (65.63%) that watching the movies and combining watching the movie with the application of technologies in the activities was useful for writing class (53.13%+ 40.63%). This is reasonably explained by the fact that the majority of the students viewed watching the movies and using educational technologies in the activities was motivating (56.25% + 43.75%). Correspondingly, their expectations for the future application of movies and activities involving technologies were also positive (53.13% + 43.75%).

On the whole, the students (81.25%) thought that the movie selection was good. However, one student (3.13%) thought the movies were not related to the topic under study, while five students (15.63%) were not sure about it. This explains that 21.88% of the students were not certain they could get an idea about the topic from them. This implies that it is essential to select the movies well, also to present to students what makes the particular movie useful for the given unit under study.

The questions "Do you think that integrating movies into the writing lesson would be beneficial for the rest of the units?" and "Do you think that applying educational technologies would be beneficial for the rest of the units?" in fact duplicate the Likert scale item "Applying this method would be beneficial for the rest of the units", and so do the answers (12.50% + 84.38% and 3.13% + 90.63%). This means that the answers are reliable.

The majority of the students liked the approach, because they fund it innovative (3.13% + 93.75%), motivating (59.38%) and collaborative (62.50%). None of them mentioned that the process was time-consuming or difficult due to their lack of technical skills.

With respect to volunteers' comments during the study process, they mainly touched on the effectiveness and enjoyable part of both movies and online technologies. They also accepted that compared to the old method, film + technologies approach is innovative.

Conclusion

This research reached the following outcomes and suggestions about the integration of movies and online technologies into ELT writing classes:

- Movies mixed with educational technologies are likely to be useful in the writing instruction from linguistic (authentic language; listening, speaking and writing skill development, enrichment of vocabulary), pedagogical (authentic activities, visual support, learner autonomy, critical and analytical thinking) and psychological points of view (increasing motivation, decreasing anxiety).

- Although movies are really appealing, without a clear purpose in mind it may be pointless to present a movie in the classroom. Therefore, learners may not get anything in terms of language competences if they are shown movies without any preceding, accompanying and following exercises.

- Watching movies is an appropriate way to get ideas for writing essays.

- Chosen movies should be related to the unit content.

- Online technologies (e.g., Pbworks) are useful in terms of collaborative writing. They are also helpful for learners who are not satisfied in the classroom with instructors' teaching method.

- It is highly probable that it will be difficult for language instructors to find sufficient time to deal with registering learners to the chosen online technology or designing a web page for learners. It is highly recommended that one student from the class is chosen who is good at technology and can help instructor for registering or administrating the web page. Today almost all learners are better than teachers in terms of using technology and in all classes we can find a technophile (a person who is interested in modern technology and enjoys using it) learner.

- As there are many online websites on the internet, it is better to use fixed online technology in order to become professional in using this page. In fact, it will take a long time to learn features of any online web-site for education.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Screenshot from students' answers 1 (Ratatouille) (2007)

Choose one of these questions and write a paragraph? (This paragraph will be graded) DEADLINE: 04.03.16 13:00

1. Who was your favorite character in the movie and why?
2. What makes food taste good?

Note: Use descriptive - adjectives that you leared in the class.

💬 Comments (Show all 68)

Anar Məmmədli said
at 11:10 am on Mar 4, 2016

* What makes food taste good ? *

"Anyone can cook" -If you remember,this phrase belongs to Gusteau.However,not every person is able to cook the same things. Of course,experienced cook can do his job better than amateur.However,everyone can make his meal tasty.Here are some tips: First, add suitable ingredients for every meal. It's highly probable that,your meal will taste better.Next, you can use natural products to make your meal delicious.They are not only taste well,but also are useful for our health.Finally , the most necessary ingredient - love.You can cook with great eagerness.Maybe it seems to you like a cliche.However, it's fact that if you cook a meal with love,its taste will be different for you while you're eating.

Aydin Aliyev said
at 2:40 pm on Mar 7, 2016

Appendix B

Question and a student's answer for the movie Blood Diamond. (2006)

Outline (B2-12)

last edited by 👤 Aydin Aliyev 12 months ago

"Why do you think Archer helped Solomon find his family and go London?"

Write outline of essay that you are going to write TOMORROW in the CLASSROOM.

Outline should include THESIS STATEMENT, TOPIC SENTENCES with SUBTOPICS (or examples) and CONCLUSION!

DEADLINE: 01.04.16 13:00

Kənan Abdurəhmanov said
at 10:45 am on Apr 1, 2016

"Why do you think Archer helped Solomon find his family and go London?"

THESIS: Archer gaves great message with helping to black raced man Solomon to find his family and go London.

TOPIC 1: First he want to steal diamond and escape from Sierra Leone, but on his way in, he has a sudden change of heart and suddenly his conscience comes into play.

SUBTOPIC 1.1: This might be called as a human instincts which try to help others when they are in trouble.

SUBTOPIC 1.2: His religious beliefs make him avoid from sins.

TOPIC 2: These diamonds export from Solomon's country.

SUBTOPIC 2.1: Archer thought that these diamonds belong to local people.

SUBTOPIC 2.2: It would be injustice to workers get such diamonds easily.

CONCLUSION: For those following reasons, when Archer was wounded, he thought that he is in wrong way and he try to help Solomon to live a life he deserves.