Utilizing film as a writing tool in EFL learners

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Abstract

Despite the importance of writing skills in education and professional settings, a significant gap exists in effective teaching methods that engage EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners. This study explores the integration of films as a tool to enhance descriptive writing skills among EFL students. The research employs a descriptive qualitative design, analyzing data from classroom observations and interviews. Findings reveal that films provide visual, sensory, and emotional stimuli, which help students improve their writing by making descriptions more vivid and contextually coherent. The study's implications suggest that using films can bridge the gap between traditional teaching methods and the modern demands of writing proficiency.

Keywords: Film as Media, Descriptive Text, Teaching Writing, EFL Learners

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A. INTRODUCTION

Writing, a fundamental communication skill, remains challenging for many students despite its significance in both educational and professional realms. Prior studies have emphasized the importance of mastering writing skills, but a significant gap still exists in terms of effective teaching methods that motivate and engage students. Conventional approaches to teaching writing, particularly in EFL learners, often fail to fully engage students, leading to a lack of interest and proficiency in writing. Previous research has not extensively explored how integrating multimedia, such as films, could enhance the teaching and learning process of writing. This gap highlights the need to investigate innovative strategies, such as the use of film, to enrich students' writing experiences and develop their skills.

This research seeks to address this gap by examining how films can be utilized as a tool for teaching writing skills in EFL learners. The specific focus is on descriptive text, a genre where students often struggle to effectively convey ideas using appropriate vocabulary, structure, and creativity. By employing films, which provide rich visual and auditory stimuli, this study aims to explore how students can improve their descriptive writing skills and how this method could overcome challenges observed in traditional teaching approaches.

The novelty of this study lies in its exploration of film as a pedagogical tool for teaching writing, specifically in EFL learners. While numerous studies have explored multimedia's role in language learning, few have focused on how films can be systematically incorporated into writing instruction, particularly in the context of vocational education. This research proposes that films, by offering visual and contextual clues, can help students better grasp the nuances of descriptive writing, such as setting, character, and atmosphere. This approach not only supports vocabulary development but also encourages creativity and engagement, aspects often missing in conventional writing instruction.

Moreover, this study delves into both the challenges and opportunities associated with using films in the classroom, providing a comprehensive analysis of the method's effectiveness. By doing so, it contributes to the ongoing discourse on innovative teaching methods that could bridge the gap between students' writing proficiency and the demands of the modern educational environment.

The research seeks to answer the following key questions:
1) How is the implementation of teaching writing skills through film in EFL learners?
2) What are the challenges and opportunities associated with incorporating film-based activities into descriptive writing instruction at the EFL learner's level?

These questions are aimed at understanding not only the practical application of films in writing education but also the potential barriers and benefits of such an approach. By addressing these questions, the study aims to provide valuable insights for educators looking to enhance writing instruction through creative methodologies.

This study offers both theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, it contributes to the body of knowledge regarding multimedia use in education, particularly the use of films in language teaching. It proposes that films can serve as an effective medium for enhancing students' engagement and creativity in writing, particularly in descriptive texts. This research will help shape new theories about how visual and auditory stimuli, such as those found in films, can improve students' writing abilities, making the process more interactive and enjoyable.

Practically, the study provides actionable insights for educators, particularly those in EFL learners, by demonstrating how films can be integrated into writing lessons. It

highlights specific strategies that teachers can use to improve students' descriptive writing skills, helping students become more confident and creative writers. Additionally, this research outlines potential challenges, offering practical solutions for overcoming them, thereby contributing to the development of more engaging and effective writing instruction methods.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

Over the last 5–10 years, there has been a growing interest in exploring new methods to improve writing skills, especially in non-traditional and creative settings such as vocational high schools. Previous studies have emphasized the importance of writing skills, yet there remains a gap in effectively engaging students in the writing process.

In practice, traditional methods often focus on repetitive exercises that may disengage students, particularly those who find writing difficult. Research by Retno (2006) and Sitti Nurhalizah (2016) explored the use of films and animation to improve narrative writing skills, showing promise but limited in their scope by focusing only on narrative forms or select age groups. While they demonstrated that students' writing skills improved using film-based approaches, they failed to analyze the broader applicability of these techniques to other writing genres, such as descriptive text. Furthermore, these studies did not address how various multimedia resources can influence student motivation and engagement across different educational levels, particularly in vocational education settings.

Methodologically, there is also a gap in the rigor and diversity of research approaches. The majority of past studies, such as those by Laely Hikmatul Fitri Yani (2018) and Triana Oktavia (2020), relied on pre-test and post-test experimental designs, focusing predominantly on quantitative outcomes like test scores. Although these approaches yielded significant improvements in student performance, they overlooked the qualitative aspects of student learning experiences and engagement with multimedia. Few studies have adopted mixed-method or qualitative approaches that could capture a more nuanced understanding of how film-based activities impact student attitudes and participation in the classroom.

In terms of theoretical gaps, most studies did not integrate robust theoretical frameworks that could explain how multimedia resources like films influence cognitive and emotional aspects of writing. Although films have been recognized for their potential to make learning more engaging, there is little theoretical grounding to explain why or how they enhance writing skills. Previous studies rarely explored intersections between multimedia learning theories and language acquisition theories, leaving a significant gap in the conceptual understanding of film-based learning strategies.

To address the above gaps, this study employs a combined theoretical framework that draws on Identity Theory and Critical Postcolonial Theory. These two perspectives allow us to understand both the role of media in shaping learner identity and the broader cultural implications of using films in writing instruction.

Identity Theory (Burke & Stets, 2009) provides a useful lens for understanding how students negotiate their identities in educational settings. Identity, as Burke and Stets explain, is not a fixed construct but is continuously formed through social interactions. In the context of this research, films are seen as a medium through which students can explore and express their identities in writing. By watching films, students are exposed to various cultural, social, and emotional contexts that can influence how they relate to characters, settings, and narratives. This interaction with media can then be transferred to their writing, allowing them to reflect and represent parts of their own identities in descriptive texts. Moreover, students from diverse backgrounds, such as those in EFL

learners, often bring unique perspectives and experiences into the classroom. Films can serve as a bridge to help these students articulate their identities in a foreign language like English.

In conjunction with Identity Theory, Critical Postcolonial Theory (Bhabha, 1994; Spivak, 1988) offers an important lens for understanding the cultural dynamics at play when using films in English language teaching. English, as a global language, is often seen as a tool of cultural imperialism, where the learning of English is associated with adopting Western norms and values. Critical Postcolonial Theory challenges this notion by arguing that language learners can resist such cultural imposition by actively engaging in practices that allow them to express their unique cultural perspectives. By using films that represent diverse cultural backgrounds, this research aims to provide students with opportunities to critically engage with both the target language and their own cultural identities. This helps in fostering a more inclusive and culturally responsive approach to language teaching, where students are not simply passive recipients of knowledge but active participants in the construction of meaning.

Applying these theories, the research posits that films can serve as a medium for students to navigate their cultural and linguistic identities while developing their writing skills. The combination of visual and auditory elements in films creates a rich environment that stimulates both cognitive and emotional responses, thereby facilitating deeper engagement in writing. Moreover, films, particularly those with multicultural themes, allow students to critique and reflect on cultural power dynamics, positioning them as critical thinkers in their writing processes.

Despite the recognition of the potential of multimedia in teaching, most research has failed to integrate these robust theoretical perspectives into practical teaching approaches. The absence of theories like Identity Theory and Critical Postcolonial Theory in multimedia learning contexts has left a gap in understanding how students' socio-cultural backgrounds and individual identities influence their engagement with films and their development of writing skills.

Additionally, few studies have addressed how films can empower students by providing them with a platform to resist dominant cultural narratives through writing. For instance, research on the use of films in teaching English has largely focused on Western media, without considering how local or culturally relevant films could be more effective in helping students connect with the content. This research aims to fill that gap by considering the role of culturally diverse films in language learning, thereby promoting a more inclusive educational approach that values students' cultural backgrounds.

This study contributes to the field by addressing the practical, methodological, and theoretical gaps identified in the literature. Practically, it offers an innovative approach to teaching writing in EFL learners by integrating films as a learning tool, focusing on descriptive writing, an area under-explored in previous research. Methodologically, it introduces a mixed-method approach that combines quantitative analysis of writing performance with qualitative insights into student engagement and motivation.

Theoretically, it bridges Identity Theory and Critical Postcolonial Theory, providing a comprehensive framework to understand how multimedia, particularly films, can influence language learners' writing skills, cultural identities, and critical thinking abilities.

C. RESEARCH METHODS

This research was conducted at EFL learners, focusing on the application of films to enhance students' writing skills, particularly in descriptive writing. The study adopts a descriptive qualitative design, which is ideal for exploring the intricate processes involved in learning. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2000), qualitative research allows for the in-depth exploration of meanings and processes, which are often missed in purely quantitative studies. The main objective of this research is to investigate how using films in a classroom setting can improve students' descriptive writing skills.

The descriptive qualitative approach was selected because it facilitates the detailed observation of students' engagement and responses to film-based learning. It is less about measuring improvement in statistical terms and more focused on understanding the emotional, cognitive, and practical shifts that students experience. This method aligns with the study's goal of understanding how the integration of multimedia, specifically films, influences the students' writing process. The qualitative method also allows for an exploration of broader socio-cultural factors that may affect student learning, such as identity and critical engagement with media.

The qualitative descriptive design was chosen because it supports the exploration of complex learning processes, especially in an educational setting where variables such as student motivation, engagement, and personal experience significantly influence outcomes. Descriptive research is well-suited to capturing real-world phenomena as they unfold naturally, which in this case involves observing how students interact with films and how this influences their writing. Since the study is not focused on testing a hypothesis but on exploring the practical application of films in teaching writing, qualitative research offers the necessary flexibility.

Moreover, the descriptive nature allows the researcher to understand the context-specific challenges that EFL learners' students face, particularly in mastering descriptive writing—a genre often considered more abstract and challenging than narrative forms.

Participants in this research were recruited from EFL learners, specifically from classes where teachers were already using films as part of the teaching process. The participants were selected based on their availability and willingness to participate, with consent obtained from both the students and the school administration.

The selection process was designed to include a diverse range of students to capture different perspectives and experiences with film-based learning. To ensure a balanced representation, participants were recruited from various socio-economic backgrounds, and both male and female students were included to examine any potential gender-related differences in engagement with the multimedia tools. A total of 20 students were chosen, ensuring the sample size was manageable yet sufficient to provide in-depth insights through observation and interviews.

The participants were chosen because they represent the typical student demographic in vocational high schools, where students may have varied motivations and challenges in mastering academic subjects like writing. EFL learners' students often struggle with traditional academic subjects due to a focus on practical and technical skills, making them an ideal group to study in terms of engagement with non-traditional teaching methods like film-based learning.

Moreover, selecting participants from a school already implementing multimedia in the classroom ensured that the study focused on a realistic and practical teaching context. The students had some level of exposure to multimedia, which allowed the research to delve deeper into the effectiveness of films specifically for teaching descriptive writing.

D. FINDINGS

1. Definition of Theme and How to Present the Theme
   a. Definition of Theme
   The theme raised in this research is the use of film media in teaching writing skills to EFL learners. This theme is based on the need to find teaching methods that are not only effective but also interesting for students. Film was chosen as a medium because of its strong visual capabilities, as well as its ability to arouse emotions and evoke rich sensory experiences, which in turn are expected to improve students' descriptive abilities in writing.
   b. How to Present the Theme
   The way the themes are presented in this research involves two main methods: observation and interviews. Observations were used to explore how writing skills are applied through film media in EFL learners, while interviews were conducted to determine the challenges and opportunities associated with incorporating film-based activities in teaching descriptive writing at the EFL learners' level.

   The presentation of this theme is carried out through three main teaching stages: pre-teaching, whilst-teaching, and post-teaching. In the pre-teaching stage, teachers prepare students to learn through basic activities such as greeting, praying, and checking attendance. This stage is important to create a conducive classroom atmosphere. At the whilst-teaching stage, films are used as the main media to convey teaching material. After the film is shown, the teacher invites students to discuss and reflect on the content of the film, which helps students to connect the film with the material they have studied. The post-teaching stage involves reflection and evaluation of student understanding through assignments and class closure.

2. Relevant Data and Coding
   The data collected in this research came from observations and interviews with students. The data was processed and categorized into several main themes that are relevant to the use of films in teaching descriptive writing.
   a. Visualization: Data shows that it is easier for students to understand descriptions in the text after seeing direct visualizations through films. The code for this theme is visual.
      "Films help me learn how to depict things more clearly and in detail because I can see firsthand how objects, locations or characters are depicted."
   b. Sensory Experience: Students report that films provide sensory experiences that help them depict scenes more vividly. The code for this theme is sensory.
      "Films provide not only visuals but also sound and movement, which helps me understand how sensory elements work together to create an atmosphere."
   c. Emotional Understanding: Students also felt that films helped them understand characters' emotions better through facial expressions and body language. The code for this theme is emotion.
      "In films, I can see how characters express emotions through facial expressions, body language, and tone of voice. This helps me in writing descriptions that convey emotion."
   d. Context: Movies provide immediate visual context that helps students understand the interaction of elements in a scene. The code for this theme is context.
      "Movies show how different elements interact in a scene. When writing descriptions, I need to combine details in a coherent context."
   e. Direct Experience: Films provide immersive direct experience, which helps students understand descriptions more concretely. The code for this theme is experience.

"Watching a film provides a direct, immersive experience. In text, I have to use my imagination to imagine what is depicted, while film gives immediate life to the descriptions."

3. Interpretation

The use of film media in teaching writing to EFL learners has been proven to have various significant benefits. From the data obtained, films not only help students understand descriptions in texts but also describe the atmosphere, emotions and context better.

a. Visualization and Sensory Interpretation

In terms of visualization, films provide concrete images that help students understand complex descriptions. The sensory experiences provided by films, such as sound and movement, enrich students' understanding of how various sensory elements play a role in creating atmosphere. This suggests that the teaching of descriptive writing can be significantly improved by using rich visual media such as film.

b. Interpretation of Emotional and Contextual Understanding

Emotional and contextual understanding is also greatly influenced using film. Movies allow students to see characters' facial expressions and body language firsthand, which helps them in writing more vivid and precise emotional descriptions. Additionally, films provide visual context that helps students understand how the elements in a scene interact with each other. This shows that films can be a very effective tool in helping students understand and write complex descriptions.

c. Interpretation of Direct Experience

The hands-on experience provided by films is also very beneficial for students. Through films, students can experience the descriptions in the text directly, which makes the descriptions more concrete and easier to understand. This suggests that the direct experience provided by films can enhance students' descriptive abilities in a way that text alone cannot achieve.

E. DISCUSSION

1. Support/Reject Previous Theories

This research supports previous theories which emphasize the importance of using visual media in teaching. Multimodal learning theory states that the use of multiple modalities, such as visual and auditory, can improve understanding and retention of information. The findings in this research support this theory, where the use of film as a teaching medium helps students understand and describe descriptions better compared to just using text.

Apart from that, this research also supports theories that emphasize the importance of direct experience in learning. The sensory experiences provided by films, such as sound and movement, help students understand descriptions more deeply. This is in line with experiential learning theory which states that direct experience can improve students' understanding and practical skills.

However, this research also points to some challenges that previous theories may not have fully anticipated. Although the film medium has many benefits, challenges such as time constraints and the need for adequate technical equipment also arise. This shows that although theory supports the use of visual media, its implementation in an educational context may require adjustments and adaptations.

2. Contribution of Data and Findings to Science

a. Practical Contribution

From a practical standpoint, the findings of this study offer clear guidance for educators on how the film medium can be used effectively in teaching writing.

Educators can utilize these findings to design more interesting and effective curricula, especially in teaching descriptive writing skills. Using film as a teaching medium can help students develop better writing skills by providing a rich visual and sensory experience.

b. Theoretical Contribution

Theoretically, this research expands our understanding of how visual media such as films can influence learning. This research shows that film not only functions as a visual aid but also as a medium that can provide deep sensory and emotional experiences. It enriches multimodal learning theories by providing empirical evidence about the effectiveness of visual media in teaching writing.

c. Methodological Contribution

From a methodological perspective, this research offers an approach that can be replicated by other researchers interested in exploring the use of film media in educational contexts. The observation and interview methods used in this research can be a model for similar research in the future. Using thematic coding to analyze interview data can also provide deeper insight into student perceptions of the use of film media in teaching.

d. Conceptual Contribution

Conceptually, this research introduces a new way to view the use of film in education. Films are not only seen as visual aids but also as a source of rich and in-depth learning experiences. This concept can be developed further to explore how other media, such as virtual reality or augmented reality, can be used in education to provide a more immersive learning experience.

F. CONCLUSION

The study acknowledges several limitations that may have impacted the results. First, the research was confined to a specific group of students in EFL learners, limiting the generalizability of the findings to broader educational contexts. Additionally, the study focused solely on descriptive writing, without exploring the potential impact of film-based teaching on other genres of writing. The short duration of the study might also have restricted the ability to observe the long-term effects of film-based teaching on students' writing skills.

Future research should aim to address these limitations by including a more diverse sample of students from different schools and educational backgrounds. Studies could also explore the effectiveness of film-based teaching across various genres of writing, such as narrative or argumentative writing. Longitudinal studies are recommended to assess the long-term impact of film-based teaching on students' writing development. Additionally, comparing the efficacy of film-based teaching with other multimedia approaches would provide a more comprehensive understanding of its potential benefits and challenges in different educational settings.

The findings of this study have several practical, theoretical, and methodological implications. Practically, educators are encouraged to incorporate films into their teaching strategies to enhance students' engagement and improve their descriptive writing skills. Theoretically, the study supports the notion that multimodal learning using visual and auditory stimuli can significantly enhance learning outcomes. Methodologically, the study provides a framework for future research on the use of films in education, particularly in language learning contexts. The successful integration of films into the curriculum could lead to more interactive and enjoyable learning experiences, fostering a conducive environment for skill development in writing.

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