

Using Multiple Intelligence Activities and Film to Stimulate the Communicative EFL Learner

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Abstract

The present Action Research (AR) study investigates the impact Multiple Intelligence (MI) activities and film can have on EFL students' conversational skills. The participants were adult language learners who had moved to the UK for academic and/or professional purposes. The majority of the students were accustomed to a teacher-centred learning environment where most of their L2 input derived from their coursebook. The combination of MI and film in the learners' language lessons aimed to stimulate their linguistic competence and conversational interaction in a student-centred environment. The multimedia used in the study was chosen with educational objectives in mind and the activities were to fulfil pedagogical language learning issues.

Keywords: multiple Intelligence, films for language learning purposes, L2 conversational skills, multilingual language learning contexts

The use of film in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom has been known to be an effective language teaching tool. This form of media can be considered contextually rich (Kaiser, 2009), engaging (Malingier & Rossy, 2003; Yu, 2009), able to provide genuine input, to serve as a motivational language learning source (Mishan, 2004), and to decrease anxiety when using the foreign language (Lee, 2009). The advantages are especially evident in multilingual contexts, where the learners do not share the same L1, or first language, and need to communicate with their peers using a less formal linguistic system. More specifically, through the integration of films in language learning programs, students can see how people communicate in real life in different conversational contexts since films “help bring the outside world into the classroom” (Tomalin, 1986, p.9). This was the inspiration of the present action research (AR) study, which aimed to introduce film in the language classroom and accompany it with Multiple Intelligence (MI) activities (Dryden & Vos, 2005) to stimulate and increase L2 communication in the classroom.

The AR study took place in a multilingual context where the participating students had moved to the UK for academic and/or professional purposes. In their previous learning settings, they were exposed to teacher-centred learning environments where their main source of language input was their coursebook. The students had expressed difficulty communicating with native English speakers outside the classroom, but found it difficult to release the formal communication style they had acquired in their home countries. Their lack of confidence in communicating in an informal manner made them reluctant to interact with their peers in the classroom unless they shared the same L1. Students' own hesitation deprived them of constructive L2, (second language), input and development. The integration of films was prompted to assist students in becoming more comfortable in communicating in an everyday informal communication style and, incidentally, develop their linguistic and cultural competence. More specifically, the study focused on the following research questions:

1. How can the stimulation of film and MI activities change the classroom and communicative dynamic in a multilingual context?
2. To what extent can films allow learners to comprehend and observe the context of discourse and language, and how can they affect learners' L2 interactions?

Literature Review

The Use of Film in the Language Classroom

It is broadly understood among EFL practitioners that when teaching oral skills, coursebooks mainly focus on formal language, rather than informal elements, such as small talk or daily conversational interaction. Educational settings that are coursebook-driven lack authentic everyday speech, which can arouse feelings and opinions, and create an opportunity for discussion in the L2 classroom (Katchen, 2003). The coursebook focus sets obstacles when the practitioner aims to create an environment where the language learner is encouraged to deliver a conversation similar to that they would have in their L1. King (2002) has argued that films are a refreshing learning experience for learners who need to take a break from rote learning of continuous English vocabulary and drill practices. Films are also considered a good opportunity to replace teacher-centred learning with something realistic and relatable, a dimension that is often missing in coursebook-oriented teaching. A number of studies have revealed that films can become an integral part of the curriculum due to their significant effect on the development of basic language skills (Baratta & Jones, 2008; Yaseen & Shakir,

2015). It has also been argued that films are insightful means of teaching due to the fact that they reflect people's way of life in terms of variety, authenticity and contemporaneity (Sufen, 2006). Films can strengthen audio and visual perceptions simultaneously and can present paralinguistic features found in the L2 (Arthur, 1999). Films can capture the learners' attention (Tognozzi, 2010); increase motivation to language learning (Ruusunen, 2011); provide promising material to teach conversations (Martín & Jaén, 2009); and improve the students' awareness of the L2 target culture (Zhang, 2013; Arthur, 1999). Despite the pedagogical advantages, there are pitfalls to using films if their execution is not done with the educational perspective in mind and if the selection of the film tends to be for entertainment purposes rather than learning. Keene (2006, p.223) cautions the use of films, as they are mainly used in the learners' home for entertainment, escapism and relaxation, all of which encourage a passive form of viewing. This requires the teacher to facilitate interactive viewing (Kabooha, 2016). King (2002) also stresses the importance of choosing appropriate films that are not too complex for the level of understanding of the students, and not offensive in content.

Combining Film and the MI Approach

Utilizing MI activities is a way to suggest an alternative to a traditional classroom setting. The MI approach has been embraced by practitioners as it gives them the opportunity to address an array of ways in which people learn (Shore, 2004). One can observe the effect MI has on language learners in Chen and Gardner's (2005, p.79) work, where the authors have elaborated on the types of intelligence:

1. Linguistic intelligence, describes the ability to perceive and generate spoken and written language,
2. Logical-mathematical intelligence, involves the ability to appreciate and utilize numerical, abstract, and logical reasoning to solve problems,
3. Musical intelligence, which entails the ability to create, communicate and understand meanings made out of sound,
4. Spatial intelligence, which refers to the ability to perceive, modify, transform, and create visual and/or spatial images,
5. Bodily-kinesthetic intelligence, deals with the ability to use all or part of one's body to solve problems or fashion products,
6. Naturalistic intelligence, concerns the ability to distinguish among critical features of the natural environment,
7. Interpersonal intelligence, describes the ability to recognize, appreciate and contend with the feelings, beliefs, and intentions of other people,
8. Intrapersonal intelligence, involves the ability to understand oneself including emotions, desires, strengths, and vulnerabilities and to use such information effectively in regulating one's own life.

The theory of MI offers eight kinds of learning and teaching approaches. Teachers can stimulate and ensure an assortment of activities so that students can embrace their full potential in the language learning process (Bas, 2008). The primary importance of the implementation of the MI theory is that it is possible to give language learners a chance to use their predominant strengths and capabilities in order to foster learning (Spirovska, 2013). Currie (2003) suggests that if practitioners are familiar with the intelligence profiles of students in a language classroom, they can develop a range of activities addressing students' needs. According to Arnold & Fonseca (2004), when MI methods are applied in the language

classroom, teachers are better able to explore the areas of personal meaningfulness and recognize the differences inherent in their students.

Offering language learners diverse learning experiences provides them with robust education and opportunities to spherically learn in a world that sees constant change and diversity (Kagan & Kagan, 1998). According to Hamurlu's (2007) findings, MI-based instruction can increase students' achievement in English language learning and create a positive effect on students' attitudes towards the language. Hall Haley's (2001) research showed teachers were profoundly affected by MI approaches and felt a shift in their teaching experience, in paradigm, to a more learner-centred environment. The same study also indicated that language learners displayed a keen interest in MI concepts and showed positive responses to the increased variety of instructional strategies. By taking MI a step further and combining it with the use of films, one may argue that with inexpensive equipment and easily acquired skills, practitioners and language learners can employ a multiplicity of motivating methodologies. According to Yeh (2014), the Multiple Intelligence Teaching Model (MIFT) can best enhance language learners' motivation. The initial purposes of the MIFT model was to 1) enhance L2 learners' linguistic and cultural competence and 2) enhance L2 learners' motivation and encouragement. In the case of the present study, the researcher has humbly attempted to add a third purpose, that of increasing conversational everyday language and self-confidence. Furthermore, there is a gap in the literature, as Yeh's study is the only recent research that focuses on MI and films.

Methodology

The Participants

The AR study took place at a private English language school in London, UK. There were 19 adult language learners in the class, ages 21–36, 12 male and 7 female, from Germany, Italy, Saudi Arabia, Japan and South Korea. The students had moved to the UK for professional and/or academic purposes and wished to improve their English, which would help them settle in the country. All students were accustomed to a coursebook led approach to language learning and teaching and felt self-conscious about their speaking skills. The English language classes lasted for two hours daily. The classroom setting supported a “flexible” U-shape layout where students could sit comfortably and face the television screen. Students were of different educational backgrounds and in the hope of gradually integrating film in the lesson, there were two build-up sessions leading to it. The students had not used films in their language learning in the past; therefore, the practitioner deemed it necessary to prepare the learners in order to avoid any misunderstandings regarding the purpose behind the viewing. The previous sessions focused on the theme of formal education.

Data Collection Methods

The data collection commenced before the film sessions took place in order to record whether there was an increase in students' L2 use and the nature of their language development. The present study included a triangulation of data collection tools, (Fielding & Fielding, 1986; Flick, 1992), which were selected to investigate the integration of films in an MI activity-based setting, and the effect they would have on students' speaking skills. The data collection tools were:

Observations were conducted by the researcher and author during students' group work and film viewing with a checklist sheet, which were used in order to discover the recurring patterns of behavior and language. These patterns

were identified to be appropriate for the context and served to discover students' interactions in the classroom setting.

A reflective journal was an important introspective tool in the research and was selected to provide insights and raise awareness regarding the reality of the multilingual classroom. Field notes were used to document the language produced and attitudes observed whilst monitoring students' discussions.

The field notes were included in the AR design as they were anticipated to serve as a foundation for conceptual reasoning. They were also used to produce meaning and understanding of the students' linguistic situation.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process was based on principles of grounded theory (Strauss, 1987; Glaser, 1992; Charmaz, 2006) and involved a number of readings of the data entries and progressive refining of emerging categories. The procedure was carried out as follows (inspired by Giannikas, 2013):

- The data from observation checklists were analysed on the Excel Data Analysis tool, which gave a list of descriptives to explain the data (Mizumoto & Plonsky, 2016). The process allowed themes to emerge, based on the repetition of actions and keywords indicated on the analysis of the checklists.
- The journal and field note texts were re-read and thoughts were annotated in the margin. The texts were examined closely to facilitate a micro-analysis of data.

The following sections will elaborate on the findings and present the reality of the multilingual language classroom in the scope of presenting students with a student-centred, stimulating L2 environment.

Language Teaching Strategies

For the film sessions the researcher/teacher took Chen and Gardner's (2005) types of intelligence to create the figure below, which was used as guidance for the creation of the lesson plan and MI activities upon which the lesson will be based. The activities derived from the film "*School of Rock*", which was selected as appropriate for the learning outcomes and classroom environment the researcher/teacher wanted to create in the classroom. The activities aimed to tease out the Multiple Intelligences as shown in Figure 1:

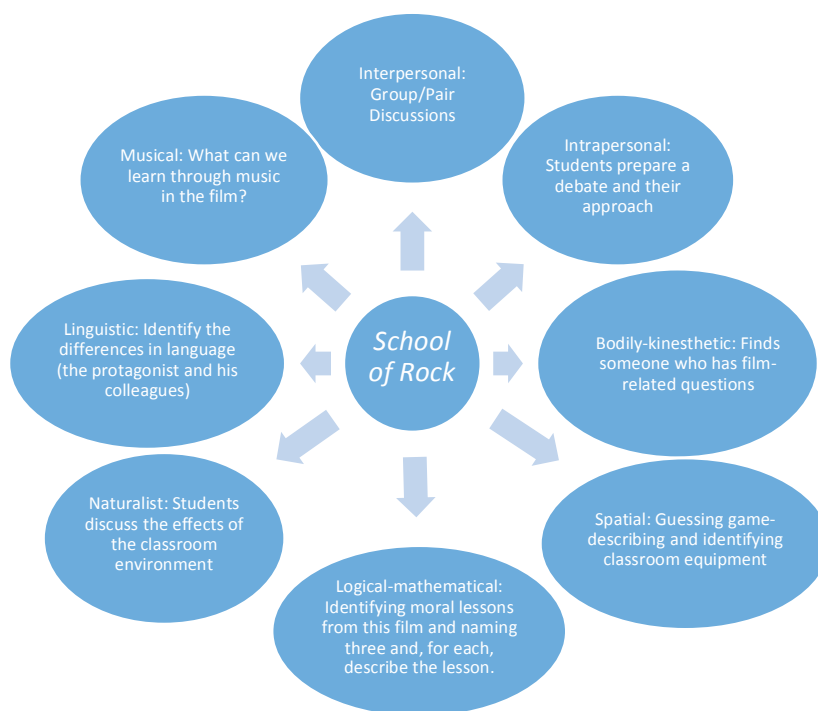


Figure 1. The MI Overview of a Lesson Plan

The MI viewed in Figure 1. were applied in two sessions so as to allow students to enjoy and benefit from the different features of the activities. The goal of the lesson was to provide students with a rich contextual setting that would trigger them to adopt spontaneous ways of using the L2 in a less formal manner. In order for the students to adjust to life in the United Kingdom, it was important that they learn to widen their scope of knowledge outside the coursebook content. The combination of the MI activities and the film was expected to arouse students' interests as something new, exciting and appropriate to their situation.

The AR study focused on a learning-through-doing process with the integration of film, anticipating that the students would be more actively involved. The film sessions supported pause-play activities, where the students saw segments of the film and then worked on various MI activities. The particular approach was chosen in order to ensure students' attention and emphasize the activities as learning tasks, rather than entertainment time. The film was separated into six segments and students were expected to view carefully and then work on their activities. The students were expected to discuss scenes, describe settings and plots, role play, ask each other questions and identify themselves with the characters in the film.

Findings

In agreement with what Stevick (1980, p. 4) observed, "success depends less on materials, techniques and linguistic analyses, and more on what goes on inside and between the people in the classroom". It was vital that the dynamics of the classroom were investigated. Dörnyei and Malderez (1999) have argued that group processes are a fundamental factor and can make all the difference when it comes to successful learning experiences and outcomes. More specifically, classroom dynamics can affect the quantity and quality of classroom discussions among students (Levine & Moreland, 1990), and the extent of co-operation between them (Johnson & Johnson, 1995).

In the case of the current context, the students had been observed to have a friendly relationship with each other; however, there was not a strong dynamic in the classroom. The students preferred to be seated next to the same people, usually next to those who shared the same L1. The following figure gives a visual of the classroom setting:

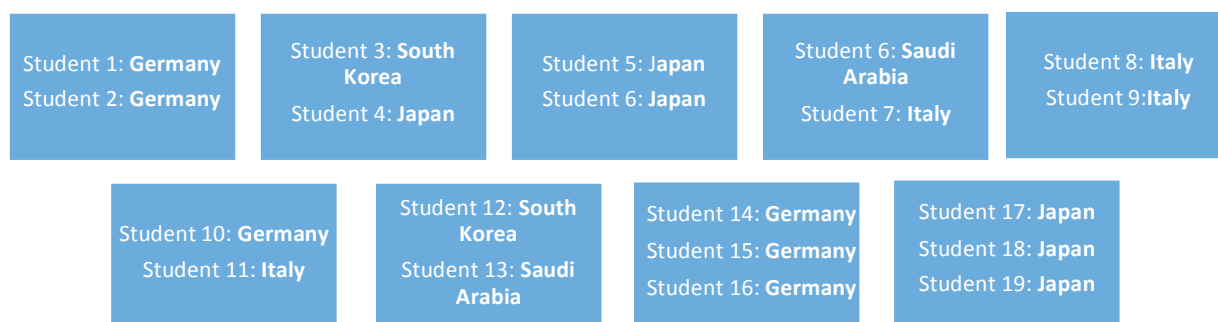


Figure 2. The students' preferred seating arrangement

In order to explore changes in the dynamic of the classroom, before the film began students were requested to be seated differently and work with others. There was an effort to pair students who did not share the same L1 in order to prompt an increase in the use of L2. The seating arrangement was as follows:

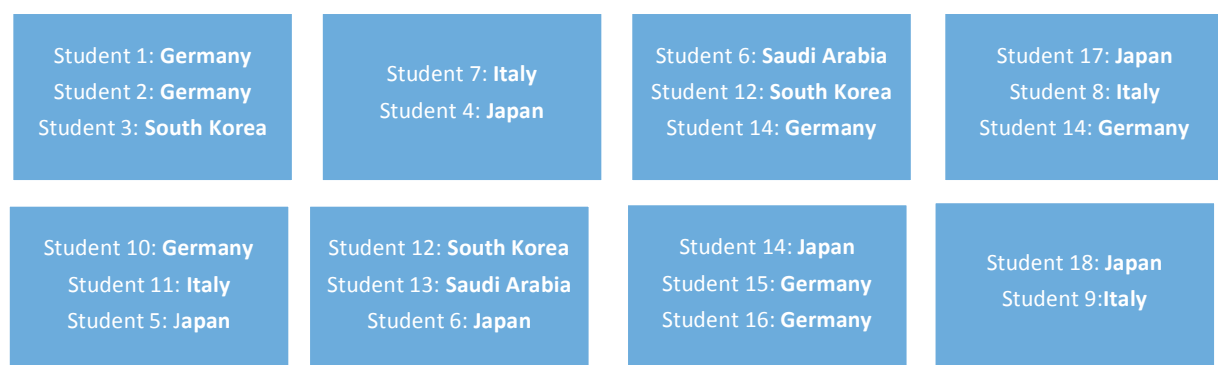


Figure 3. Seating arrangement to increase the L2

Before students were introduced to the MI activities and the film, they were asked to engage in a discussion about their school days. The students focused on what they liked about their time at school and what they would change. The observation data showed that the warm-up served as a good ice-breaker. Students were reluctant when asked to change seats and work with new partners. However, they found the topic intriguing and enjoyed discussing their school “traditions” and learning about different education settings. The activity brought about the participation and interaction of most students and only two (Student 5 and Student 17) were hesitant to be as verbal as their peers. This was an anticipated finding, as Schmuck and Schmuck (2001, p. 49) have argued, “classroom groups begin at different stages, depending on the students” past experiences in school. Students who have previously experienced primarily authoritarian teachers will be at different skill levels from students who have had ample experiences in communicating with one another and in collaboratively working on improving their group work. Nonetheless, it was recorded that even the cooperative skills and attitudes of the quietest students were enhanced and set a positive atmosphere for the film viewing and MI activities that followed.

Before the film began the students were given the activities they would be completing. They were guided through them in order to be aware of the note-taking they would need to execute as they viewed the film. Once the film began the students were observed to be interested and absorbed in the plot. According to the data, when students were asked to work on the first segment, one of the most eye-catching changes was that the students very willingly turned to strike a conversation with their peers and, for the needs of the task, repeated vocabulary they had heard in the film. This approach helped bring the students closer and created a stronger classroom dynamic. There was only one pair that asked for clarification in the first task, the rest of the students made sense of the new vocabulary from the context of the film.

After the warm-up discussion it was explained to the students that they would be watching the film and working on a variety of activities to exercise their conversational skills. Students were assigned roles according to Cohen's (1994) list, which included: 1) making the assignment of the roles such that everybody knew who was in charge of particular elements, 2) accompanying the roles with specific "job descriptions", and 3) assuring that all students were clear about their roles. Students accepted the new class-media and activities with enthusiasm. When the film started the students were observed to not have made notes of the majority of the words, but used them from memory. The sequence of the activities revealed that the language learners gradually increased the length of their discussion and made an effort to use more informal language. Compared to previous sessions, where the discussions were solely related to the coursebook, the film discussions were longer and were carried out autonomously. The discussions during the film sessions needed to be interrupted by the teacher in order to move on to the next task. The teacher gave minimum guidance and left the students to work through the tasks and develop the conversations on their own. It was also observed that students used the language creatively amongst themselves, compared to past performance. Nonetheless, three of the students were observed to lower their voices when they noticed they were being monitored by the teacher.

Table 1 displays how classroom dynamics were observed during the discussions:

Table 1. Field notes on classroom dynamics

Warm-up Activity	Students showed interest and were cooperative. They had smoothly following discussions on the topic and shared information with each other. They found this interesting and meaningful.
Students' Collaboration	Students' collaboration strengthened with each activity. The students were enjoying themselves and the conversations they were having with their peers. This had an immediate effect on their conversations as the participants made an effort to contribute to the discussion.
Informal Discussions	As students watched each segment of the film, they made an effort to speak to their peers in more informal language. This was especially observed among the male students.

Attitude towards MI Activities	The students were willing to complete all the activities and enjoyed being challenged. Two students were observed to be more stressed about the outcome of certain activities more than their peers; however, this did not have an effect on their performance.
Students' Confidence	Students' confidence built up gradually but they 20% of the participants were observed to be reluctant when they were to explain or include the teacher into the conversation.

Discussion

The activities and segments of the film allowed time for students to interact. Additionally, students were given the space and opportunity to express their opinions regarding the tasks.

The visual feature of a film worked as an alternative language teaching tool. With the use of picture, students were able to understand and interpret new vocabulary and language structure in a full visual context. In the case of the current study, the film helped the learners' comprehension and motivation to use new registers and vocabulary. It also enabled them to listen to language exchanges and associate the visual supports, such as facial expressions and gestures, simultaneously. These visual clues helped the students comprehend the nature of the language used in the film.

In Table 2, one can see the students' progress and whether they reached the learning objective:

Table 2. Students' progress

Film Discussion: Students discussed 1) the effect of the classroom environment and one's relationship with their peers and, 2) what is the difference in language among the protagonist and his colleagues?	The students were observed to willingly take part in the conversation and justify their answers. Nonetheless, in the group/pairs of Students 18 & 9, Students 14, 15 & 16 there were dominant students who prevailed and were recorded to lead most of the conversation with the rest of the group agreeing to their thoughts and opinions. All students were able to identify linguistic differences among the characters of the film and explain the reason why the characters were expected to express themselves differently in various occasions.
Debate: What education should look like Students were separated into two groups for this activity and were given a scenario. One group was assigned to be secondary school students and the other group was the school teachers. The two groups debated on what education should be and how it can become more effective.	For the needs of the debate all students were expected to participate, however, three students (Students 6, 12 and 13) took to the stand when making their point on behalf of their group. The rest of the students supported their peers by exclaiming "Yeah!", or "I agree" but most were hesitant to take part in the debate.

<p>Musical: What can be learned through music in the film? Students were expected to complete a listening task with a focus on informal language and the use of music in the film.</p>	<p>Students enjoyed the music they heard in the film and they were able to identify the lyrics and understand the meaning behind them. Half of the students were familiar with the popular songs that were heard in the film and this gave them a sense of familiarity. They were given activities to fill in the gaps when listening to certain songs and as a final task they were to create music/songs of their own about learning English in London. The students proved to be creative and even the most reluctant ones stepped out of their safety net and produced interesting and inspiring work. The students made an effort to use language they acquired from the film.</p>
<p>Spatial: Guessing game-describing and identifying classroom equipment Students were to watch segments of the film and identify various equipment in the classroom and make notes. After they identified up to 10 objects they were to describe the objects without giving away the name for their peers to guess what they were describing.</p>	<p>The students were enthusiastically willing to participate in the game and made an effort to be creative for this part as well. They were not given much time to prepare for how they were going to describe the objects and this frightened them slightly. The reason they were not given time to prepare was so that students were prompted to use the language spontaneously and adopt real-life situations. This was an attempt to pull students away from the rehearsed language they were accustomed to using. All students were observed to be nervous the first few seconds but quickly overcame their fear and enjoyed the game. By the end of the game there were smiles of accomplishment across the room.</p>
<p>Bodily-kinesthetic: Find someone who with film-related questions Students were asked to do the known Find Someone Who task by asking questions from the film (i.e. Do you remember what Jack’s band was called? Why did Jack ask the principal out for drinks?)</p>	<p>The students did not want to stand up at first but became more willing as they realised the meaning of the activity. However, the teacher/researcher needed to closely monitor the students who shared the same L1 as they were observed to ask and answer the questions in their mother tongue.</p>
<p>Logical-mathematical: Identifying moral lessons from this film, naming three and, for each, describe the moral lesson Students are to identify the moral lessons of the film and discuss them in class.</p>	<p>The students shared ideas and had a give-and-take of information with their peers when identifying the moral lessons of the film. They were recorded to work well and come to an agreement with their peers easily.</p>

Conclusion

A large number of students attend language schools across London every year in order to either improve their English or relocate to the UK. Language schools consist of a number of multilingual classes where students come from different L2 backgrounds; however, the vast majority of the students express the need to improve their conversational skills and acquire language that would be used in everyday discussions. Bringing familiar media into the language classroom can be beneficial, as it can motivate the use of informal conversational skills. Some teachers may doubt the use of films because it is associated with entertainment. Nonetheless, the entertainment feature holds many pedagogical benefits that teachers can use and apply in their classes. When combining viewings with MI activities it, can prompt students to carry out discussions spontaneously. This is an approach many learners have not encountered as their language learning experience mainly derives from coursebook-based classes, where the language used is mostly structured. MI activities and films give a more “authentic” touch to the learning context and prompt not only students but teachers to make the commitment to demonstrate and improve their students' achievement level. Additionally, the nature of MI activities and films encourage student autonomy. By using the present data as a sample, one can see that the teachers' involvement was to guide the students with minimum teacher talk and intrusion. Students were encouraged to take responsibility for their learning via leadership roles, giving students positions and tasks of genuine authority, encouraging peer debates and allowing the group to make real decisions.

Nonetheless, the present study is not free of limitations. It was noticed in the data analysis that the lack of the students' perception of the use of films and MI activities, via interviews or questionnaires, was a significant limitation. Students could have shed more light on the effect films and MI activities had on their conversational skills and the use of informal language. Further research is needed in order to investigate the matter more thoroughly and look at the impact films and MI activities can have on conversational skills in a multilingual context, from the participants' perspective. However, it is important to note that such studies give researchers the incentive to continue to track the nature of L2 speaking skills in multilingual contexts.

The present study focused on “real group” discussions, which are a desirable entity, especially in the case of the participants who wished to relocate and settle in a new culture and educational/professional environment. Students showed signs of releasing anxiety when using and increasing the L2. Students relied less on the teacher and more on their own “stored” knowledge and the new knowledge acquired. The classroom dynamics and linguistic intake had short and long-term learning effects, as they gave students the motivation to use different aspects of the L2 and embrace the cultural background of the target language.

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