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ABSTRACT

The current study aimed at examining the effects of subtitled films on the vocabulary development of English as second language (ESL) students. To able to achieve this aim a mixed methods research design was employed. For the quantitative part a quasi-experimental design was implemented through a quantitative research approach. For the qualitative part, after the treatment phase interviews were carried out with the participants in the experimental group. Accordingly, two groups were of focus: control and experimental. One group watched English films with subtitles in English and the other watched the same films without subtitles. A pre-post test was administered in which the pre-test was employed as a diagnostic test to see whether the participants vocabulary knowledge was similar and the post test was administered to reveal whether the student participants had improved their vocabulary knowledge. Thirty ESL students preparing for their O level exams constituted the participants. The findings revealed that films improve vocabulary knowledge. However, when the performances of both groups were compared it was revealed that the group who watched the films with subtitles performed better than the group that watched the films without subtitles. In other words, it was revealed that, the use of watching films with subtitles intensively affected ESL students' vocabulary knowledge. Furthermore, this study revealed that ESL students have positive attitudes towards watching films in language classes in general, and in vocabulary classes in particular.

Keywords: Films, subtitles, vocabulary improvement, English as a second language learning, vocabulary knowledge scale, vocabulary retention.

INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary, as a pillar of the English language, forms a dominant part of the process of learning the English language (Rao, 2019). Not having enough vocabulary knowledge, will lead the English as a second language (ESL) learner to encounter many complications while employing the four language skills, namely, reading, listening, speaking and writing (Leong & Ahmadi, 2017). For this reason, vocabulary is considered to be a vital aspect in the process of teaching and learning a second language. Knowing sufficient words enables learners to express themselves in the language and thus, communicate effectively. It was made evident in the words of Wilkins (1972) that, "without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed" (p. 111). This quote highlights the importance of vocabulary knowledge.

In Pakistani context, the main methodology employed by teachers when teaching vocabulary is through traditional methods and this leads students to cram new words. Students generally memorize a list of vocabulary items for examinations. For this reason, they remain unaware of the contextual use of those words when producing the language in writing and speaking.

Before the students reach high school level (Matric or O level) they are provided with long lists of vocabulary items with their meanings (usually in Urdu) and they are requested to use the words in sentences. The words are usually selected from the glossary list given at the end of their course books. Then at the end of each session or semester they are evaluated in the same manner. Students are supposed to write the meanings of the given words and sentence formation is demanded. They find this task extremely difficult as they do not know the occurrence of words in different contexts. As a result, the effectiveness of teaching and learning vocabulary remains doubtful (Rao & Bensen, 2017). The traditional methods that concentrate on memorizing and drilling do not address the learning styles and strategies of all students.

King's Own Institute in which this study took place was also following the same methodology to teach vocabulary from primary until grade eight at the time the present study was carried out. This is acceptable for the Matric educational system which employs the students' native language 'Urdu' when teaching English.

However, the demand of good English proficiency, especially excessive vocabulary knowledge in English is required for O'level students as the O'level examination desires high proficiency to pass. Since the participants of this study chose to study O'levels, it was important for them to be proficient in English vocabulary to obtain good scores. Using films as a new source of vocabulary teaching in this specific context, would enable students to learn vocabulary in context. In this way, better preparation for the O level examination would be obtained (Rao & Bensen, 2017).

During their academic life, many issues are encountered by the ESL student. These may include weak comprehension, lack of vocabulary, poor grammar and having poor language skills. Watching films are a very helpful source to deal with these factors and improve their language (Andriano, 2019). Films are seen to assist students in many aspects and can be utilized to improve their English skills. It could be a basis that supports the learning process (Oladunjoye, 2017). Therefore, films can be a beneficial source to help eradicate the problems faced by the students while learning a language and thus, help them pass standardized tests such as the O' level. Taking the above into account, this study aims to find out whether the use of English films develop ESL students' vocabulary knowledge. It also aims to explore whether there is any improvement in their vocabulary after watching English films with subtitles and without subtitles. Furthermore, this study aims at revealing ESL students' attitudes towards watching English films especially in vocabulary classes.

Taking the aforementioned aims into account, the following research questions were posed to be answered:

1. Does watching English films with subtitles develop English as a second language students' vocabulary?
2. Is there any significant difference on the performances of English as a second language students' vocabulary knowledge in terms of watching films with and without subtitles?
3. What are English as a second language students' attitudes towards watching films in vocabulary classes?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Vocabulary is considered the core of learning a language (Bellalem, Neddar, Bouagada, & Djelloul, 2018). Two distinctive approaches to teaching vocabulary were emphasized in the literature. Direct or explicit vocabulary learning is concerned with cognizant learning forms when language students learn vocabulary explicitly, either in a particular setting or in separation, through direct guideline in both the implications of individual words and word-learning methodologies. On the other hand, Indirect or implicit learning includes learning the meanings of new words implicitly. This learning takes place when students hear or see the words utilized as a part of various settings (Arramany, Sutarsyah, & Nurweni, 2017). Such as, through daily life experiences, through discussions with others and through extensive reading (Zang, 2019). Unlike the direct vocabulary learning approach, the indirect approach focuses on the active process of learning.

Many strategies have been implemented in the process of learning and teaching of vocabulary. These include word card strategies, flashcards, use of dictionaries, word part analysis, memorization, key word method, cognitive and metacognitive strategies and the incorporation of digital technologies (Kurt & Bensen, 2017). Employing videos and films is seen as a very efficacious method to aggrandize English vocabulary and provide English learners more opportunities while using the language. It is claimed that videos enable students to enhance their learning and acquisition of the ESL words (Adriano, 2019; Arramany, Sutarsyah, & Nurweni, 2017; Ashcroft, Garner, & Hadigham, 2018).

Research in the field of second language acquisition pinpoints that exposure to subtitled videos/films generally enhances the acquisition of vocabulary. Rodgers and Webb's (2017) study of L2 caption use examined the results of 372 students watching a ten-episode TV series, finding that the captions helped students understand even those in difficult episodes. Bellalem, Neddar, Bouagada, and Djelloul (2018) study indicated that using subtitled movies clearly enhances the learning of new vocabulary, and that the vocabulary acquisition of the treatment group was much greater than the acquisition of the control group.

Furthermore, Sadiku (2018) revealed that interlingual subtitles facilitate better vocabulary acquisition for short and long term memory, specifically when they are shown to students in intentional learning environment, i.e. with the assistance and instructions from the teacher. Similarly, a study carried out by Andriano (2019) on the effects of using subtitles in target language vocabulary learning revealed that the use of English subtitled movies could improve students' vocabulary achievement. The study of Suparman (2019) aimed at finding out whether there was any improvement in students' vocabulary achievement after they were taught using a movie. A one group pretest and posttest design were implemented. The data were collected from pre-test and post-test results from first-grade students. The findings indicated that there was a significant improvement in students' vocabulary mastery with the assistance of a movie and that movies could be utilized to facilitate students' vocabulary improvement.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Procedures

A mixed-methods research design employing both quantitative and qualitative data collection instruments was employed (Riazi & Candlin, 2014). Accordingly, a quasi-experimental research design was administered. A

quasi-experimental research design tests casual hypothesis in which treatment is tested for how well it has achieved its objective. Quasi-experimental design allows the researcher to balance internal and external validity (Handley et.al., 2018). Data was collected using a quantitative approach which is very prominent in the field of social sciences because of its standard methods that are seen as a model for carrying out the research (Salvatore, 2015). As the comparison of performances of two groups was one of the main focuses of this study, a quantitative method would effectively answer the research questions posed.

After the selection of the participants, a diagnostic test was administered to both the control and experimental (treatment) groups to obtain the information about their prior vocabulary knowledge. It was also administered to see if the participants had the same level of vocabulary knowledge. A diagnostic test is a test which is employed to discover the strengths and weaknesses and identify the language problems of the students (Zhao, 2013).

After the diagnostic (pre) test, the treatment phase initiated. Participants of the control and experimental groups watched a film in the classroom where students had their regular classes. They had their vocabulary class once a week for a duration of eighty minutes. In each class, there was a warm up session of five minutes followed by a procedure section which included showing the film to the students for thirty minutes, and then a discussion session of twenty minutes. Each class a worksheet was completed. Twenty minutes were given to complete the worksheet in each class. Each lesson plan was finalized with a wrap up session of around five minutes. On the day of the week when students had their vocabulary class, the class was conducted with the control group followed by the experimental group. By doing this, the students of both groups did not have a chance to discuss anything among themselves. The same lesson plan was followed for both the control and experimental group by the same teacher to ensure that the teaching strategies did not vary and hence not to affect the results of the study. A projector was arranged and was attached to a laptop to carry out the class sessions. The only available technological device the school possessed was a projector. Speakers were adopted to ensure optimal hearing. The whole procedure took place over a period of fourteen weeks. The teacher followed an integrated syllabus design incorporating all the four skills (listening speaking, reading and writing) in which the communicative language teaching methodology was of focus. The vocabulary presented to the students was taught in a contextualized manner through the films.

After the treatment phase of fourteen weeks, a post test was administered to both the experimental and control groups in order to examine the progression of the vocabulary of the students from the diagnostic (pre) test to the post test. In addition, after the treatment phase, regarding the qualitative part of the study interviews were conducted. Aspers and Corte (2019) stated that qualitative analysis means a kind of planned, regular and public empirical sense query. It was decided to ask questions to the student participants after the intervention of watching films with subtitles to reveal their attitudes.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data for this study were collected by employing the following data collection instruments:

Vocabulary Knowledge Scale (pre-post tests)

A diagnostic (pre) test was administered before the treatment phase to both the experimental and control groups to ensure that there was no diverse in their vocabulary knowledge of the students. After the treatment phase a post-test was carried out. Twenty-two items constituted the post test. Twenty-two vocabulary items selected from the films were employed in the tests, typed and printed. The post-test was conducted to see whether there was any difference in the vocabulary development of the experimental and control groups. It was also carried out to see if the experimental group performed better than the control group.

A VKS was utilized to analyze the responses of the students according to each vocabulary item, which was used both as the pre-test and the post-test. This was seen to be the most commonly employed scale which specifies the understanding of vocabulary items from least to the most. Wesche and Paribakht's (1996) VKS was adopted. The VKS presented the following options for each vocabulary item:

- A. I have never seen this word/phrase before
- B. I know what this word/phrase means but I am not sure how to use it
- C. I have seen this word/phrase before but I do not know how to use it
- D. I know what this word/phrase means and I can use it in a sentence

(if you choose this option then please fill the next column)

The students responded to a self-report scale of word knowledge per word, categories from “un recognition of a word” to “use the word in sentences”. Therefore, VKS was employed “to capture initial stages or levels in word learning that are subject to accurate self-report of efficient demonstration” (Wesche & Paribakht, 1996). This scale is seen to be one of the most reliable scales to track the vocabulary knowledge of learners. Not many vocabulary tests attempt to measure a learner’s progress along a continuum (Laufer & Goldstein, 2004). However, Wesche and Paribakht’s (1996) VKS, tracks the progress of a learner from total unfamiliarity to superficial familiarity with a lexical item to the ability to use it precisely in production (Tan et al., 2016).

Film

For the treatment phase, an English Film which consists of many episodes “Now You See Me-1 & 2” was selected. The participants of this study were teenagers and teenagers usually find such films interesting. According to Leat and Nichols (1997), thrillers have become a popular teaching strategy. There is a general consensus among teachers that thriller films foster student motivation and engagement in classes. The control group watched the film without subtitles and the experimental group watched the film with English subtitles. The versions were downloaded from Netflix, which is a streaming service and allows customers to watch a variety of films, documentaries, TV shows and so on (Netflix, 2017).

‘Now You See Me’ was released in 2013 and the second episode was released in 2016. It is an American thriller film directed by Jon M. Chu and written by Ed Solomon. It is a sequel to the 2013 film “Now You See Me” and follows the four Horsemen who resurface and are forcibly recruited by a tech genius to pull off an almost impossible heist.

Interviews

Qualitative interviews were carried out to ten of the student participants after the treatment phase. A structured interview schedule with four open-ended questions was prepared to be conducted individually with each of the volunteer student participants. In structured interviews predetermined questions with fixed wording are adopted (Martic, 2018). The interviews were recorded by a smartphone, iPhone 7. The interviews lasted around five to ten minutes (50-100 minutes in total) for each participant. The interview questions were as follows:

1. Do you prefer watching films with or without subtitles? Why?
2. Do you think watching films with or without subtitles will allow you to develop your vocabulary knowledge? Why?
3. Would you prefer to be taught vocabulary the way you used to (traditionally) or like we did in class? Why?
4. What are the possible advantages and disadvantages of watching films with subtitles to learn vocabulary?
5. What are the possible advantages and disadvantages of watching films without subtitles to learn vocabulary?

Before the treatment and after the treatment, two tests were analyzed. In both tests, the responses of the students were collected using a VKS. After data collection, the quantitative data was entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20. For each item, the mean scores and standard deviations were calculated. The mean scores and standard deviations gave information about each item presented in the tests namely, diagnostic (pre) and post. From those results, the highest mean scores for each group in the two tests were obtained. The high mean scores attribute to the greater knowledge of the participants.

After entering the information for each item for the diagnostic and post-test onto the SPSS program, independent samples t-tests were conducted. The first independent samples t-test was conducted for the diagnostic (pre) test to see if there was any difference in the knowledge of the two groups (control and experimental). Another purpose of conducting this test was to check the reliability of the groups. In order to conduct the treatment session, the two groups needed to have approximately the same knowledge. The data for the post-test was also entered on the SPSS program using the same procedures. First, the results of each item in the post-test were entered, and then a test was conducted. This t-test was conducted to see the difference in the performances of the control and experimental groups after the intervention.

For the analysis of the interviews each interview was transcribed one by one employing thematic coding. Data was first coded and sorted into coded classifications then systematical patterns in the data were recognized (Crowe, Inder & Porter, 2015).

Participants and Sampling

The participants of this study were selected through convenient sampling. Convenient sampling allows all the available participants to participate in the study without making any changes and there is no identified criterion for the participants (Saunders, 2012).

The participants for this study were 30 (18 female and 12 male) O’level ESL students between the ages of 15 and 17, studying in King’s Own Institute in Lahore, Pakistan. Fifteen of these participants constituted the experimental group and 15 the control group.

Ethical Consideration

Before carrying out the study, both oral and written consent was received by the participants. All of the participants were aware of the purpose of the study and how the findings would be used. Pseudonyms were employed to anonymize the identity of the participants in the interview. Following this, written permission was received from the institution this research took place.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Word Knowledge Comparison

To be able to reveal whether there was any significant difference between the vocabulary knowledge of the student participants of the two groups, an independent samples t-test was conducted. The mean scores of the two groups were compared. Table 1 illustrates the results of the t-test. The results of the statistical analysis showed that the experimental group (M =2.71, SD = 0.13) and the control group (M=2.58, SD = 0.08) were not statistically different at the beginning of the study. The result of the t-test yield significant value at 0.41 which implies that statistically there was no significant difference among the two groups and that they had equal word knowledge.

From the data presented in Table 1, it is evident that the student participants had nearly equal knowledge of the meaning of the words presented in the diagnostic test (see Table 1). Therefore, we can conclude that the distribution between the two groups was normal.

Table 1: Diagnostic (Pre)Test of Control and Experimental Groups

	Diagnostic/Pre-Test	
	CG	EG
M	2.59	2.71
SD	0.39	0.59
N	15	15
Independent Sample t test		P value = 0.41

Key: N = Number of students M= Mean SD= Standard Deviation CG: Control Group EG: Experimental Groups
After the treatment phase, a post- test was administered to both the experimental and control groups at the end of the treatment session.

Table 2 presents the results of the post-test. Generally, the mean score for the experimental group was higher than the values of the control group. This reveals that the experimental group outperformed the control group. Therefore, it could be said that films have a positive effect on the performance of student's vocabulary learning. The group who watched the film with subtitles performed better than the group who watched the film without subtitles. This could be attributed to the methodology and the selection of the film employed.

Table 2: Post-Test of Control and Experimental Groups

	CG	EG
M	2.97	3.56
SD	.46	2.80
N	15	15
Independent Sample t test	P value = 0.000	

Key: M= Mean SD= Standard deviation N = Number of students CG: Control Group EG: Experimental Groups

The analysis of the data regarding the results of the tests showed that although the control group scored less than the experimental group in the post-test there was an improvement in the performances of both groups from the diagnostic (pre) test to the post-test.

It was made evident from the results of the test that the group, which watched the English film without subtitles scored lower than the group who watched the English film with subtitles. The results of the t-test revealed a significant difference between the two groups. The results of the independent sample t test presented in Table 2, indicated that there was a significant difference in the results of the experimental group (M= 3.56, SD = 0.28) and control group (M=2.97, SD=0.46). This implies that watching films with subtitles help to improve the vocabulary performance of ESL students more than watching a film without subtitles. It was revealed that the use of English films with subtitles had a positive effect on the vocabulary of students.

It is evident from the findings that the vocabulary knowledge of both groups improved dramatically when films were employed as a pedagogical tool to teach vocabulary. ESL student's English language proficiency is seen to be boosted with the employment of films (Rao, 2019). The findings are in line with the results of a study conducted by Saduku (2018) which focused on the effects of subtitling on vocabulary acquisition. The results of this study indicate that interlingual subtitles facilitate better vocabulary acquisition for short and long term memory, specifically when they are shown to students in intentional learning environments, i.e. with the assistance and instructions from the teacher.

These findings expanded the previous researches by examining different factors that may have an impact on vocabulary acquisition through watching films.

Interviews

Vocabulary Development

The purpose of the first interview question was to find out whether students believed watching films with and/or without subtitles develop their vocabulary knowledge. All of the participants appreciate watching films in class. However, when compared to watching films without subtitles most of the students preferred to watch films with subtitles. This is congruent with the findings of Rao (2019), Muntane (2016) and Zulfami (2020). However, one student claimed that 'subtitles hurt my eyes' (Taylor) and that watching films without subtitles is better for one's health and thus, preferred to watch films without subtitles. It seems here that Taylor was concerned about the effects of subtitles on her eyes in terms of health not the fact that it was in English, difficult to read and then comprehend and at the same time follow. The students who were pleased to watch films with subtitles stated that their comprehension of the film is better with subtitles. Several of them also stated that films are more understandable. Rose put forth that 'films with subtitles make you understand the whole film' and 'you don't miss anything' (Kate).

When students were asked the same question regarding vocabulary knowledge, all of them believed that subtitles enable vocabulary learning specifically in terms of mechanical accuracy, i.e. spelling. This was evident in the words of Rose and Matt 'it is easier to learn the spelling of the word' (Rose), 'seeing the word teaches the word' (Matt). One of the participants stressed that she has spelling issues and subtitles abolish this issue. She also highlighted that vocabulary is an important element in learning a language 'I cannot remember how words are written when I hear, the word sounds different and when you write it, it is written different in English', 'learning vocabulary like this helps with learning the language' (Jane).

Traditional or Films?

When the student participants were asked to state their preferences with regard to the traditional methods which concentrate on memorization and drilling, without any doubt all of the participants put forth that watching films in vocabulary classes is more beneficial. This was evident in the words of Taylor 'watching films is better', Rebecca 'I think watching films helps learn vocabulary easier because we can make connections from the film to the words specifically in exams', 'I think films are good. I remember the word easier when I watch a film' (Kate). These utterances show us that students associate the film to the words being taught which is one strategy that should be highlighted. Another point which merged from the interviews is the fact that students are able to store the words being taught in their memories. In the study of Kurt and Bensen (2017) attention was drawn on the significance of the Vine Vocabulary Video App on vocabulary retention. It was shown that when students see and associate words, they are able to remember them easier, specifically in examinations. Saduku (2018) also emphasized that subtitled films facilitate better vocabulary learning for short and long term memory.

Pros and Cons

In the interview questions which sort to reveal the possible advantages and disadvantages of watching films with subtitles and without subtitles to learn vocabulary, it was seen that many points emerged. For the advantages with respect to learning vocabulary with subtitles, the student participants stated that it is easy to learn, it is fun, motivating, they were able to hear the pronunciation and see the spelling of the words, it enables guessing of the word and that they are learning without realizing (subconsciously). This is in line with the study of Sadiku (2018), Zulfami (2020) and Adriano (2019). These words were evident in the words of Jane 'I enjoyed watching the film', Rebecca 'I learned the word and remembered it in the exam but I don't know how', Rose and Matt as aforementioned and Kate 'I guess the meaning of the words in the film'. On the other hand, when the student participants were asked to state the disadvantages of watching films with subtitles even though more pros were addressed. Taylor highlighted that he believed that reading distracted him. He made this clear in his utterance 'While I read, I forget what is going on in the film'. Another issue that was pointed out by Rebecca who was in favour of subtitles was related to the speed of the film. Interestingly, she stated 'by the time I read, the subtitles change but then I got used to it'. Here it could be stated that student reading speed is also developed when they are exposed to reading the subtitles of films. Hence, subtitled films could be utilized to develop students reading skills.

Following the possible advantages and disadvantages of subtitled films, the student participants were asked to state the possible benefits and drawbacks of watching English films without subtitles. Only one advantage merged from the interviews in which Taylor pointed out that 'we only focus on the film not the subtitles'. This utterance could also be stated as a disadvantage of watching films with subtitles. Regarding the drawbacks of watching films without subtitles the themes that arose were the opposite of the advantages of subtitled films. For example, difficult to understand the film, the need to watch the film again and not knowing what word is being pronounced. Jane stated that 'when I watch English films at home, I need to rewind and watch parts again as I miss what is being said. I do not understand'. Similarly, Kate uttered it was 'difficult trying to know which word is said'.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

After the diagnostic (pre) test results, it was clear that there was no significant difference in the English proficiency levels of the ESL students in both groups. The results of the independent samples t-test revealed that the two groups were equal in their word knowledge before the treatment was administered. After the treatment phase, a post-test was conducted to see if there was any significant difference in the vocabulary performances of the groups from the diagnostic (pre) test to the post test and to see whether there was any significant difference regarding the vocabulary knowledge between the groups who watched the films with English subtitles and those who watched the films without subtitles. When the results of the diagnostic(pre) and post-tests of both groups were compared, it was noticed that there was an improvement in the vocabulary knowledge of both groups from the diagnostic (pre) test to the post test. However, the experimental group who watched the English films with subtitles showed more improvement in their vocabulary knowledge as compared to the control group who watched the English films without subtitles. The findings indicated that watching films with target language subtitles could improve the vocabulary development of ESL students especially in this specific context. These findings are generally consistent with current theory in the field. In addition, students had positive attitudes regarding the implementation of films in general and believed that watching films with subtitles enabled them to learn both the spelling and pronunciation of the word, remember the word easier and comprehend better.

Based on the findings of this study, two pedagogical implications can be drawn. First, teachers can employ film-based instructions to improve the vocabulary of their students. Second, activities derived from the films such as class discussions can enhance the comprehension of the target language (L2).

The findings of this study can be beneficial to the people in the education sector who are engaged with course designing, teachers and students. Course designers can benefit from these findings through incorporating movies as an effective tool development and follow or adopt the syllabus of this present study.

This research can lead to further studies related to examining the effects of watching subtitled films in English language classrooms. The following suggestions for further research are posed:

1. More than one film could be employed to see if results vary.
2. Further research could be carried out considering various variables, such as; motivation, age, level, anxiety.
3. Other aspects of the English language could be accompanied with subtitled English films, such as, sentence formation and grammar.

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