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THE PEDAGOGICAL POTENTIAL OF AUTHENTIC FILMS IN DEVELOPING STUDENTS' INTERCULTURAL AWARENESS IN EFL CLASSROOMS

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Abstract. Intercultural awareness is an important component of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education because learners need to understand how cultural values, social expectations, and communication styles influence meaning. Authentic films provide valuable opportunities to explore these dimensions through realistic dialogue, nonverbal communication, and culturally situated interactions. This paper examines the pedagogical potential of authentic films in developing students' intercultural awareness and discusses practical strategies for integrating audiovisual materials into EFL classrooms. It argues that structured film-based activities can encourage cultural comparison, critical reflection, perspective-taking, and respectful communication. Particular attention is given to film selection, guided viewing, post-viewing discussion, and the prevention of cultural stereotypes. The paper concludes that authentic films can strengthen intercultural learning when they are combined with clear educational objectives, appropriate language support, and reflective classroom practices.

Keywords: authentic films, intercultural awareness, EFL classrooms, cultural learning, audiovisual materials, language teaching, critical reflection.

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary English language education requires learners to develop not only linguistic competence but also the ability to understand cultural differences and communicate respectfully with people from diverse backgrounds. Language is closely

connected with cultural practices, social relationships, values, and expectations. Consequently, learners who study grammar and vocabulary without examining cultural context may experience difficulties interpreting authentic communication.

Intercultural awareness refers to the ability to recognize cultural similarities and differences, understand that people may interpret situations in different ways, and reflect critically on one's own assumptions. It is an important foundation for intercultural communicative competence because it encourages learners to approach unfamiliar practices with curiosity rather than immediate judgment.

Authentic films are valuable educational resources because they present language within recognizable social situations. They combine spoken dialogue with facial expressions, gestures, tone of voice, physical distance, and environmental context. These features help learners observe how communication operates beyond the literal meaning of words.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the pedagogical potential of authentic films in developing students' intercultural awareness in EFL classrooms and to identify practical strategies for their effective use.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Byram (1997) emphasizes that intercultural communicative competence involves attitudes of openness, cultural knowledge, interpretative skills, interaction skills, and critical cultural awareness. This framework suggests that students should not merely memorize facts about other countries; they should learn to interpret cultural practices, compare perspectives, and question assumptions.

Authentic films can support these objectives by presenting characters in situations involving greetings, requests, disagreements, celebrations, family relationships, and educational interactions. Students can examine the relationship between language choices and social context while considering how different participants understand the same event.

Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) highlight the importance of interpretation, reflection, and intercultural engagement in language education. From this perspective, cultural learning is an active process in which learners investigate meaning rather than passively receive information.

Films also provide multimodal input. Learners can observe the interaction between speech and nonverbal communication, making it possible to analyze aspects of meaning that are difficult to explain through written dialogue alone. Nevertheless, films are constructed representations rather than complete descriptions of a culture. Their educational use must therefore include critical discussion of perspective, context, and possible stereotypes.

THE PEDAGOGICAL VALUE OF AUTHENTIC FILMS

The first major advantage of authentic films is their ability to contextualize language. Students encounter expressions within particular relationships and communicative situations. They can identify formal and informal language, politeness strategies, humor, indirect requests, and conversational conventions.

The second advantage is the development of cultural observation skills. Learners can examine how characters greet one another, express disagreement, respond to invitations, or communicate respect. By comparing these situations with familiar practices, students can recognize that communication conventions may vary across communities.

The third advantage is perspective-taking. When students analyze why a character behaves in a particular way, they learn to consider different interpretations before making judgments. This can strengthen empathy and help learners understand that misunderstandings may arise from differing social expectations.

The fourth advantage is critical cultural reflection. Teachers can encourage students to examine whether a film presents a balanced representation of its characters

and whether certain groups are portrayed through stereotypes. Such analysis helps learners distinguish individual experiences from broad cultural generalizations.

However, watching a film alone does not guarantee intercultural learning. Without guidance, students may focus only on the plot or interpret a character's behavior as representative of an entire society. Therefore, films should be accompanied by purposeful tasks that connect observation, interpretation, and discussion.

PRACTICAL STRATEGIES FOR EFL CLASSROOMS

An effective film-based lesson can be organized into three stages.

Pre-viewing stage. The teacher introduces the topic, explains the situation, and presents essential vocabulary. Students discuss a guiding question related to the cultural theme. For example, before watching a scene involving an invitation, learners may discuss how invitations are expressed and accepted in different social contexts. This stage activates prior knowledge and encourages predictions.

While-viewing stage. Students observe specific features of communication. They may record examples of polite expressions, identify gestures, or note moments when a character's words and facial expressions convey different meanings. Short excerpts can be replayed to support detailed observation. English subtitles may be used when necessary to improve comprehension.

Post-viewing stage. Learners discuss the characters' intentions, compare cultural practices, and consider alternative interpretations. Role-play activities allow them to adapt expressions to new situations, while reflective writing encourages them to explain what they learned and which assumptions they reconsidered.

A cultural observation chart can be particularly useful. It may include the setting, participants, purpose of communication, verbal expressions, nonverbal behavior, and possible interpretations. Students should distinguish observable details from their own assumptions and support their conclusions with evidence from the film.

Teachers can also organize group discussions comparing selected scenes with Uzbek cultural practices. Such comparisons should emphasize both similarities and differences and recognize that cultures are internally diverse. Neither Uzbek society nor English-speaking communities should be represented as culturally uniform.

CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Several challenges may affect the use of authentic films. Rapid speech, unfamiliar accents, idiomatic expressions, and complex cultural references may make comprehension difficult. Teachers can address these challenges by selecting short excerpts, introducing essential vocabulary, providing guiding questions, and replaying important scenes.

Another challenge is the risk of cultural stereotyping. Students should be reminded that fictional characters cannot represent every member of a community. Teachers should encourage alternative explanations and invite learners to question how films construct cultural images.

The suitability of materials is also important. Film excerpts should correspond to students' age, language proficiency, and educational needs. Teachers should consider content sensitivity, accessibility, copyright requirements, and the availability of subtitles.

Assessment should focus on more than factual recall. Students can be evaluated through reflective journals, short presentations, role-plays, and written interpretations. Useful criteria include the ability to identify cultural details, explain communicative intentions, compare perspectives respectfully, and support interpretations with evidence.

CONCLUSION

Authentic films offer significant pedagogical potential for developing intercultural awareness in EFL classrooms. They present language in context and enable learners to observe the interaction between verbal communication, nonverbal

behavior, and social expectations. Through structured viewing, cultural comparison, and reflective discussion, students can develop greater awareness of cultural diversity and become more thoughtful communicators.

The effectiveness of film-based instruction depends on careful material selection, clear learning objectives, appropriate linguistic support, and teacher guidance. Films should be treated as resources for inquiry and critical interpretation rather than as definitive descriptions of national cultures. When these principles are followed, film-based activities can complement traditional language instruction and support the development of interculturally aware English language learners.

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