Beyond Reasonable Doubt: A Case Study of Using Movies to Enhance Students' Critical Thinking Skills

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Abstract—**Movies** are powerful tools that help build up learners' language proficiency in the English as a foreign language (EFL) classes. They also can be used to engage students in discussions, debates, and argumentative circles as part of raising their critical thinking skills. One feature of critical thinking skills is the ability to distinguish between the facts and opinions. For the purpose of this study, the movie *12 Angry Men* was chosen. The researchers for this study used the potentials of this movie to enhance the understanding of the students regarding critical thinking skills but in particular how to distinguish between facts and opinions. A group of 22 adult EFL learners were the subjects of this study. The findings of this article support the idea that a well-chosen movie can enhance the understanding of the EFL learners when it comes to learning some aspects of critical thinking skills.

Index Terms—**12 Angry Men**, **Critical thinking skills, English as a foreign language, Facts, Opinions.**

I. Introduction

The purpose of this article is to familiarize the students with new techniques of teaching critical thinking skills with English as a foreign language (EFL) learners using movies. Movies are powerful tools that help build up student's pronunciation and vocabulary. Many studies and findings showed the importance of using movies in classrooms as a main source for language learning due to its impact in increasing students' language capacity and skills (Kabooha, 2016). Not only language but also movies impact and enhance students' capacity in critical and creative thinking.

Many instructors and teachers are nowadays looking for new strategies and methods to add more variety to the class activity, and one way to do so is by using movie that has authentic language. However, this is a delicate task, and the teacher should always be careful in selecting the appropriate movies that suit the students and their level of understanding. Blending movies into the teaching context is challenging for most of Iraqi teachers. Students of most universities and schools of Iraq are being taught the passive language that is, grammar, vocabulary, and detailed information without being taught to be creative thinkers.

Most of our students are still being passive in receiving their learning; therefore, there is always a need to employ new procedures and new experiences for the new generation. Through using movies, the students get the chance to be exposed to new vocabulary and expression as well as informal language. It is also a significant tool to enhance the students' critical thinking by making connections between students' interest and the world. This is in line with the constructivist approach that emphasizes the concept that learning is based on context, beliefs, and attitudes of the learners and their ability to share knowledge with their own world (Marashi and Jafari, 2012).

Despite all the positive sides, there are some challenges too such as the fact that critical thinking is not easily known and applied into language learning. It is a process of familiarizing the students with the required skills such as in the words of Facione "(identifying) the intended and actual inferential relationships among statements, questions, concepts, descriptions, or other forms of representation intended to express belief, judgment, experiences, reasons, information, or opinions"(Facione, 2015, p. 5).

The major concern of this study is to show the effect of using movies in classroom in improving the students' higher order and critical thinking and enhancing the quality of EFL teaching. Besides that, the major point of the study is to encourage students to be debaters and to be good critical thinkers and to increase their level of understanding. Using new ways of teaching will encourage students to voice their opinions freely and to understand and respect others' opinions.

Employing movies not only encourages students to build up dialog and conversation among themselves but also teaches them the true purpose of dialogs as McCambridge (2003) says, "The primary of dialogue is not to win but rather to come to understand the opinions of others" (p. 388). Movies that serve a pedagogical purpose can be applied in both Iraqi universities and high schools. This is important, especially because Iraqi students are not being taught these

skills, and they have to rely on themselves to learn them. This study has not been conducted before in Iraq, and teachers have not been encouraged to use movies to enhance critical thinking skills.

A. Critical Thinking: What and Why

What is critical thinking and why is it important? "Critical thinking is the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action." (Scriven and Paul, 1987, p. 1) In simpler words, we can say that these skills are "the process of analyzing information in an objective way, in order to make a judgment about it," (*Oxford Learner's Dictionaries*) according to the Oxford dictionary, and this definition is the one most suitable to our case study here.

As vital as it is, teaching critical thinking is challenging for most of EFL teachers, and it is not an easy task. The students need to be taught how to analyze the problem or point of discussion, what to look for, and how to distinguish between facts, opinions, and prejudices. For this, they need a certain background that helps them connect their previous knowledge to what they are about to learn. Hence, acquiring knowledge by the students through fostering methods that develop their active thinking and independent learning is a necessary step for teaching and enhancing critical thinking skills (Stefanova et al., 2017).

It is also hard to find curriculum that is based on critical thinking, and sometimes there is also a resistance among students against thinking deeply beyond the content of the topic. Besides this, it is difficult to find movies that incorporate critical thinking in a way that serves teaching goals as Anderson (cited in Ekahitanond, 2011) mentions there are the "risks, such as propaganda. Movies can be biased, distorted, partial, uninformed, excessively violent, or manipulative. Thus, the teacher's choice is very significant. Realism, including social and moral problems" (p. 155). Another challenge can be some students are not interested in watching movies for the purpose of learning.

One way to reach this goal is through watching movies that foster discussion and argument inside the class. Despite all the challenges, it is still worthwhile to use movies in classrooms as many studies show their impact on language learning and critical thinking. The use of movies also allows students to make connections between what they have learned and the outside world and it teaches them to solve problems through making their own decisions by analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating the situation and connecting it with a larger context (Snyder and Snyder, 2008).

There are also other studies that have focused on the positive impact of employing movies in EFL classes. For example, Seferoğlu (2008) states that movies provide an engaging basis for discussion inside the classrooms, and Tognozzi (2010) mentions that the integration of movies in English classes attracts the attention of the student toward what is being taught. Ekahitanond also in the article called "learn, think, act: Using movies to develop critical thinking skills" argues that movies enable students to freely engage in a discussion and express their likes and dislikes. At the same time, teacher can make sure that the questions of how and why are thought about properly by students.

It is also important to experiment with different approaches and find one that is suitable for the class as King (2002) as cited in Ekahitanond (2011) mentions that there are two main approaches in showing the movies to the students: the first one is the using clips and scene by scene approach in which a particular scene or a number of scenes that are appropriate for discussion can be shown for specific purposes. And the other approach is viewing the whole movie using instructional language.

The film *12 Angry Men* is a good representation of the art of argumentation and debate, and thus it presents a great opportunity for discussion, presenting opinions and defending and forming personal arguments to defend one's point. The researchers for this study used the potentials of this movie to enhance the understanding of the students regarding critical thinking skills but in particular how to distinguish between facts and opinions and how we design those.

B. Research Questions

For the purpose of this research, the researchers tried to answer the following questions:

Can using movies help students to better understand the concept of some of critical thinking skills, namely distinguishing between facts and opinions?

II. Methodology

This was a case study conducted by two teachers on the grounds of the English Language Center which is part of the Higher Committee for Education Development, Prime Minister Office. The two researchers were co-teaching a class of 22 students. The students were government employees, aged 28–45 years. The level of English proficiency for this class was low-intermediate based on a placement test that was conducted for the purpose of sorting the level out. This is a general English teaching course designed to improve the English level proficiency of the government employees that lasts for 6 weeks.

There was a careful selection for some clips of the classic movie the *12 Angry Men*, adapted from a teleplay of the same name by Reginald Rose and directed by Sidney Lumet in 1957. This study is focused on aspect of critical thinking that is fact and opinion. The teachers carefully chose few clips that contain expression that may be fact or opinion. The purpose of the selection was for students to firsthand experience the existence of the two concepts together at the same clips, see how perspectives may change, how some announcement that in the previous scene was thought as fact turned to opinion and vice versa.

Before watching the clips, teachers presented some activities in class to see if students are aware of the meaning of the facts and opinions. The class started by running a discussion while doing an activity. The activity involved statements from daily life to measure what they consider facts and how they can distinguish the facts from self-generated opinions. Then, we asked them to come up with definitions of both terms and stating the differences/similarities between them.

Then, the participants were told that they would be given handouts of an imaginary murder case. All the statements that were presented as facts in the court in the movie were put in this handout, and the students needed to come to a unanimous decision whether the defendant is guilty or not. The students were the jurors in this case.

After discussing their reasons, the teachers gave a brief introduction to the movie and told students that the imaginary case was taken word by word from the movie itself. Then the teachers played specific scenes to familiarize the students with the characters, the setting, and part of the discussion of the "facts" presented in the court.

III. Result and Discussion

In the second part of the activity in which the class students role-played as a juror, at least half of the participants voted guilty for the defendant. There was a debate between the guilty and not guilty voters, and they attempted to persuade each other based on what was presented to them. While the not-guilty voters stated that they could not trust the testimony of the witnesses, the guilty verdict givers stated that the court had presented a thorough investigation. At this point, they were sure of the facts of the case.

After watching the first clip in which one juror is swayed to Henry Fonda's side after examining the knife, the teachers asked the students if they are satisfied with the characters' reasoning and why yes or not. In general, it took watching different clip lengths in which the jurors in the movies discuss the supposed "facts" of the case for our students to be able to distinguish the facts and opinions. At this point, they could make a list of the things they thought are not fact but are represented as 'facts' in this court drama movie. Voters changed verdicts, and there was a debate ensuing the discussion as what they thought the reasons are behind the idea of having a jury in a court.

Teachers asked students to go back to their original list of similarities and differences between the fact and opinions and if they still find the list correct or changeable. They ended up by rewriting their definition of facts and opinions. Some students stated that it is easy to "mix" statements as facts while they are only personal opinions. Participants agreed that sometimes opinions are used interchangeably with facts, especially if presented by people of authority and influence in the community.

Students expressed positive feedback for this experience; they find the movie engaging and relevant because they are not talking about the legal point of the crime itself which is something very specific to the field of law but they invest in the movie because they can analyze what happens when misinterpretation happens and why these misinterpretations happen. Some students who had misconception about factual statement and its difference with opinions, especially collective verdicts of the society, stated that the debate, activities, and discussion of the movie had added to their knowledge.

IV. Conclusion

This case study can be a proof that movies can have an impact in fostering the students' critical thinking skills. The core of critical thinking is evaluating the sources before forming a judgment, and this particular movie's theme was dealing mainly with that. The students could have been given handouts and been lectured about what facts and opinions meant, but the use of the movie encouraged their active participation and thinking. Having students look at and investigate a movie in a deeper way also taught them that they can do that with any other movies or sources of information outside the class and that they can connect it to what they know and the outside world. Another positive aspect is that the activities engaged the students in discussion among themselves. It captured their attention till they felt that they had learned the concepts. By the end of the class, they were 22 happy students and critical thinkers.

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