

IJACT 19-12-6

EFL College Students' Learning Experiences during Film-based Reading Class: Focused on the Analysis of Students' Reflective Journals

Jiyeon Baek

Assistant Professor, Seowon University, Korea

E-mail: bjy0429@seowon.ac.kr

Abstract

In the age of information, newly produced knowledge is mostly written in English. Therefore, there has been a strong demand for English language learning in the EFL context. However, most EFL learners possess a lack of interest and motivation in the text-based reading class. In this educational context, film is one of the most widely used materials in English reading classes considering that modern learners are predominantly familiar with various audiovisual materials. The purpose of this study is to investigate how Korean EFL learners experienced in the film-based reading class. Specifically, this study aims to analyze the EFL students' perceptions about the class and learning strategies that they used during the class. In order to comprehensively interpret the EFL learners' experiences in the classroom, a coding system consisting of five categories was developed: report, emotion, reflection, evaluation, future plans. The results of data analysis showed that the use of movies in English reading classes had positive effects on reading comprehension and inference of word meaning. The most frequently used learning strategies were affective strategies which helped them control their emotion, attitude, motivations and values, whereas memorization strategies were rarely used. In this respect, this study suggests that the use of movies in the EFL reading classroom encourage students' attention and help them obtain and activate schema which is useful in gaining a better understanding of text-based reading materials.

Keywords: English reading class, Language learning strategies, Movie appreciation, Reflective journals

1. INTRODUCTION

Reading is an essential skill for EFL learners because they expect to achieve strengthened reading skills in order to gain greater development in all academic areas as well as their language learning (Anderson, 1999) [1] and make greater progress in finding a job. Carrell (1983) [2] also pointed out that reading ability is an important area in EFL learning in that newly produced knowledge is mostly written in English. However, reading is considered the most difficult and complex task for most foreign language learners (Adams & Collins, 1985) [3].

Considering this perspective, English reading-related subjects have been the focus in most liberal arts courses at the college level. Despite the efforts to provide learning opportunities, there are still challenges that need to be improved on in liberalized English education. Most English reading classes at colleges remain teacher-centered and focused on sentence syntactic interpretation, that is, understanding the sentence structure

Manuscript received: September 26, 2019/ revised: October 09, 2019/Accepted: October 28, 2019

Corresponding Author: bjy0429@seowon.ac.kr

Author's affiliation

Assistant Professor, Seowon University

and meaning of the words based on the grammar translation method (Yang, O & Kim, 2009) [4]. In this educational environment, it is difficult to encourage learners to interact with text-based English materials and critically analyze information. Learners often focus on sentence interpretation, and this may lead them feeling bored with English reading activities. In addition, this type of text-based reading class undermines learners' interest and learning motivation in English reading considering that modern learners are predominantly familiar with communicating through visual images.

In order to respond to the needs of learners, various audiovisual materials have been used in English classes, and film is one of the most widely used materials in English reading classes (Kang, Lee & Hwang, 2018) [5]. Avgerinou & Pettersson (2011) [6] claim that film-based English classes can foster learners' interest and develop their critical thinking skills on cultural subjects as they can be exposed to natural and real language which is used in authentic situations and cultural contexts. In addition, many other studies on the model of reading classes using movies have been conducted in the educational context of Korea (Kang, Lee & Hwang, 2018; Kim, 2004; Yum & Kahng, 2007) [5], [7], [8]. However, most of the previous studies have been focused on how English reading classes that use movies as a supplementary material affected learners' motivation and academic achievement based on the quantitative data such as test results and surveys.

Based on the limitations of the previous studies, the purpose of this study is to investigate how the EFL students experienced in the film-based English reading class. Specifically, this study also aims to analyze how they perceived the class and what learning strategies they used during the class.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Using Movies in English Reading Classes

Teaching English reading in the EFL context has become more challenging as learners, so-called "the image generation", are more familiar with visual aids rather than texts. In other words, they possess a lack of interest and learning motivation in English reading. In this educational context, movies can play a crucial role in the EFL teaching and learning process as movies can be effective language teaching methods and resources. For instance, movies provide an interesting and stimulating framework which can facilitate comprehension and production of the target language (Weyers, 1999) [9]. In this respect, movies can be effective motivators for EFL language learners. Herron and Hanley (1992) [10] also argue that movies can offer background information that activates learners' prior knowledge, and it can assist learners to improve basic language skills: reading, listening, speaking, and writing.

Many studies have reported that the integration of movies as a teaching tool in the EFL classroom has a significant effect on developing the four language skills (Baratta & Jones, 2008; Khan, 2015; Rokni & Atae, 2014) [11], [12], [13]. In addition, movies can be used as a supplementary or extra material in the pre-reading stage, and learners can use the obtained background knowledge during the "while-reading" activity. According to Christine (2015) [14], obtaining and activating schema is useful to have a better understanding of text-based materials.

However, there are not many studies that qualitatively analyze learners' actual learning process. Most of the previous studies have examined the effect of the reading class using movies. Therefore, this study aims to investigate specific learning strategies used by the students doing movie-used reading activities by analyzing reflective journals written by those 35 students who participated in an English reading class for 15 weeks.

2.2 Reflective Journal Writing in EFL learning

According to Boyd and Fales (1983) [15], reflective learning is defined as "a process of internally examining and exploring an issue of concern, triggered by an experience, which creates and clarifies meaning in terms of

self, and which results in a changed conceptual perspective” (p. 100). In this respect, when using reflective journals in learning, learners can consciously monitor their learning processes and develop their learning strategies. In addition, when writing reflective journals, learners have an opportunity to realize problems in the process of learning then learn how to solve those problems they encounter (Moore, Boyd & Dooley, 2010; Schon, 1983) [16], [17]. Therefore, reflective journal writing can be an effective approach to observe students' learning processes and strategies.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Participants

The participants in this study were Korean EFL college students, between the ages of 21-26. The total sample of participants consisted of 35 students (males and females), who were taking an English reading course at a four-year college located in Chungbuk, South Korea. Their level of English proficiency was from beginner to upper intermediate, and their majors varied. This study took place over a 15 week period of time.

3.2 Data Collection

The goal of this study was to examine students' learning strategies that they used during reading activities and the impact of movies on the EFL learners' reading activities. Titles of the movies used in the reading class were *Bohemian Rhapsody* and *Never Let Me Go*, where students could experience and reflect on western cultural heritage and different accents of English. Two types of data collection were used: reflective journals and in-depth interviews.

The main source of data was reflective journals written by 35 students for 12 weeks except during the orientation, mid-term and final examination period. Before they started writing reflective journals, the aims of writing reflective journals, and how and what to write were explained to the students. Commencing the second week of class, students were required to write and submit their journals at the end of the class every week. They were questioned on these three different parts: 1) summary of lesson, 2) self-reflection on learning, 3) future plans. In the self-reflection part, students were asked to write what learning strategies they have used, the strengths and weaknesses of those strategies, and their learning attitudes toward English reading. The weekly submitted journals were checked by the researcher and overall feedback on specific themes was given to the entire class each week. The journals were written in the students' first language (Korean), and they were translated into English by the researcher and proofread by another colleague who is a native speaker of English.

In addition, in-depth interviews were conducted to obtain a clear description of the students' experiences in their written up reflective journals and to support the aspects found in the analysis of their reflective journals. Individual and group interviews were conducted in person. During the semester, individual interviews were conducted with participants who had difficulties with the English reading activities, and group interviews on the overall issues related to English reading were conducted after the semester. All the interviews were conducted in Korean in order to make students feel comfortable and reduce confusion. They were transcribed and selectively translated into English.

3.3 Data Analysis

The data collected from the reflective journals and in-depth interviews were analyzed based on the three elements of the qualitative analysis process presented by Miles and Huberman (1994) [18]. The data analysis consisted of three steps: 1) data reduction, 2) data display, 3) conclusion drawing and verification. First, the data coding system was developed according to themes and concepts in order to organize and meaningfully reduce the mass of data. Once initial categories were shaped, the translated data were read multiple times. Then, core units of the data were selected, minimized, and simplified. Second, once categorization of core vocabulary and expressions of the written up data according to themes and concepts was finalized, the arranged data was read carefully and repeatedly in order to discern systematic patterns and interrelationships. Finally,

the analyzed data were thoroughly revisited, and the meanings derived from the data were cross-checked in order to verify the conclusions emerged from the data.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Categories of code emerged from the data analysis

The coding system consisting of five categories was emerged from the data analysis to comprehensively interpret the contents of students' learning experiences in their reflective journals. Table 1 describes the category system applied to the analysis of the students' reflective journals.

Table 1. Main parameters

Category	Definition
Report	Describing a factual incident, event, class or self-learning
Emotion	Showing positive or negative emotions about or in the process of English learning
Reflection	Reflecting, questioning or realizing
Evaluation	Diagnosing or evaluating class activities, self-learning strategies and English abilities
Future plans	Making plans or setting goals

The first category derived from the analysis is labeled *report*. It describes various factual information or events in terms of English learning experiences. Examples are provided to give explicit insights into this category. A quote from one of the participants' entries addresses what happened in the classroom and how it was helpful for her own learning: "By translating Korean [texts] into English then comparing it with the actual movie script, I was able to discover what I was missing" (Tae-eun, April 10, 2019). In this respect, another participant in this study also stated that "Today, we learned how to use a machine translator in our English learning. First, we wrote our own sentences and compared them with the translation results. I felt it was beneficial" (Jae-eun, April 8, 2019).

The second category is called *emotion*. It shows students' positive or negative feelings about their learning or the process of learning. The following words indicate participants' positive feelings: easy, interesting, familiar, satisfactory, worthwhile and beneficial. One of the excerpts addresses how the participant's attitude toward English changed as classes progressed: "I feel I am getting more and more familiar with English" (Hyeon-ha, April 10, 2019). And another participant commented that "I became more interested in English writing as well as reading throughout this class" (Peter, April 10, 2019). On the other hand, there were several factors that showed participants' negative feelings toward their English learning: difficult, lack of English competency and poor English skills. The following quotes indicate students' negative feelings about their general English skills or negative experiences in the classroom: "I feel I lack English ability" (Yeon-sik, April 10, 2019), "Today's activity was difficult" (Ji-hye, May 13, 2019).

The third category is referred to as *reflection*. This category draws attention to recalling or remembering participants' English learning experiences. The followings are units relating to participants' self-reflection on their learning experiences, and questions or awareness which arose during the process of their learning: "When studying listening, I was used to grasping the overall flow of the content. But in this class, I had to listen and fill in the blank. I found it difficult to listen and write a sentence correctly" (Gyeong-min, March 18, 2019). "English reading used to be a very difficult and boring task for me. But I realized it's not like that. I could easily understand

the English content through the film-based reading activities” (Seung-yong, May 13, 2019).

The fourth category is named *evaluation*. It shows participants' evaluation on their various class activities, learning strategies and English abilities. For example, the statement from Chan-yeop represents a positive evaluation on one of the class activities: “Today, we did a group activity to infer the order of the contents using the texts from a novel. Through this activity, I could enhance my imagination and have a better understanding” (Journal entry, May 13, 2019). He also commented that “I have been studying English vocabulary hard. As a result, I feel I am getting more familiar with English reading.”

The final category is called *future plans*. It describes participants' plans or goals for their future study. The following text in Hyeon-ha's journal represents her future plans for her summer vacation: “Even though my major is English [education], I think English is always difficult for me. I will study hard during the summer vacation by applying the learning methods that I learned in this class” (Journal entry, June 3, 2019). Another participant stated that “I will study some of the unfamiliar words after this class” (Han-byeol, March 18, 2019).

Based on the analyzed data according to the category system, students' perceptions about the English reading class using movies and the learning strategies they used during the class will be presented and discussed.

4.2 Students' Perceptions about the Film-Based English Reading Class

Today's college students tend to be more comfortable with social media rather than texts as they have been exposed to virtual communities or networks since a young age. However, English reading classes at the college level are still conducted based on the Grammar Translation Method. In this educational environment, learners may feel unfamiliar or uncomfortable with the film-based English reading class. Therefore, this study also aims to investigate the EFL learners' perceptions about the English reading class using movies through their learning experiences in the classroom.

The highest frequent core positive and negative responses revealed from the data analysis were as follows:

Positive responses

It was *helpful* to infer unknown vocabulary by recalling scenes from the movie.

It was *easy* to understand the texts based upon the background knowledge obtained from the movie.

It was more *interesting* than the text-based English reading class.

Negative responses

This class was not just a reading oriented class. It was *difficult* to do various activities using movies.

It was *burdensome* to participate in active class activities.

I couldn't actively participate in class activities because I *lack* English abilities.

Participants stated these positive and negative responses in their reflective journals through a comparison of the film-based reading class with the text-based reading class that they participated before. Although the English reading class using movies could be unfamiliar to the participants, many of them responded positively to the use of movies in English reading classes. They pointed out that the use of movies had positive effects on understanding the overall contents and inferring unknown vocabulary. On the other hand, respondents also indicated that they had difficulties in adapting to the new classroom environment and actively participating in the class activities due to a lack of English abilities.

4.3 Learning Strategies Used during the Film-Based English Reading Class

Language learning strategies can be defined as “actions, behaviors, steps or techniques” (Oxford, Lavine & Crookall, 1989: 29) [19], which are employed by the language learners in order to enhance their learning.

Oxford (1990: 17) [20] classified language learning strategies under two main categories and six subcategories: direct (memory, cognitive, compensation) and indirect (metacognitive, affective, social) strategies. Students' reflective journal entries were analyzed based on the Oxford's learning strategy classification. The analyzed data in this study shows that indirect learning strategies were more frequently employed than direct learning strategies by the students who participated in the English reading class using movies.

Affective strategies such as lowering the anxiety, encouraging oneself, taking the emotional temperature, which helps students control their emotions, attitudes, motivations and values were the most frequently used strategies. It seems that students showed interest in the movie-used English reading class which is different from text-oriented reading classes, and they gained confidence by inferring the meaning of unknown words through movie scenes. On the other hand, memorization strategies such as creating mental linkages, applying images and sounds, reviewing well, employing action, which are used to remember information effectively, were rarely employed. It seems that students did not feel the need of memorizing knowledge or information as they obtained the necessary background knowledge for reading activities by constructing the schema through the movie.

5. CONCLUSION

The bottom-up approach in teaching reading comprehension can have limitations in improving learners' reading and critical thinking skills. Considering this perspective, this study employed the top-down approach where movies were used as teaching and learning materials and analyzed how the Korean EFL learners experienced in the film-based English reading class. In order to closely monitor students' learning processes, especially learning strategies that they used during reading activities, weekly submitted reflective journals were investigated. According to the reflective journals, most students considered that the use of movies in English reading classes was helpful, easy and interesting. In addition, affective learning strategies were most frequently used whereas memorization strategies were rarely used. Therefore, this study suggests that using movies in the EFL reading classroom encourage students' attention and help them obtain and activate schema which is useful in gaining a better understanding of text-based reading materials.

REFERENCES

- [1] N.J. Anderson, *Exploring second language reading: Issues and strategies*, Boston: Heinle & Heinle, 1999.
- [2] P.L. Carrell, "Background knowledge in second language comprehension," *Language Learning and Communication*, Vol. 2, pp. 25-34, 1983.
- [3] M.J. Adams, and A. "Collins, A Schema-Theoretic View of Reading," in H. Singer and R.B. Ruddell (Eds.), *Theoretical Models and Processes of Reading*, Newark, DE: International Reading Association, pp. 404-425, 1985.
- [4] J.W. Yang, K.M. O, and E.J. Kim, "A study of teachers' beliefs about English reading on their classroom practices," *Journal of the English Language and Literature*, Vol. 53, No. 2, pp. 157-178, 2009.
- [5] K.A. Kang, J.Y. Lee, and C.B. Hwang, "Development and Application of English Teaching Learning Model Utilizing Animation Flim in Elementary School," *Studies in English Language & Literature*, Vol. 43, No. 3, pp. 197-219, 2018. doi: 10.21559/aellk.2018.44.3.010.
- [6] M. Avgerinou and R. Pettersson, "Toward a cohesive theory of visual literacy," *Journal of Visual Literacy*, Vol. 30, No. 2, pp. 1-19, 2011. doi: 10.1080/23796529.2011.11674687.
- [7] S.Y. Kim, "An effective method of developing and improving reading skills through movies: Using Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets," *STEM Journal*, Vol. 16, No. 2, pp. 3-26, 2004.
- [8] M.S. Yum, and Y.K. Kahng, "An effect of using movies in English on vocabulary power and interest

- in primary English education,” *STEM Journal*, Vol. 8, No. 2, pp. 55-82, 2007. doi: 10.16875/stem.2007.8.2.55.
- [9] J.R. Weyers, “The effect of authentic video on communicative competence,” *Modern Language Journal*, Vol. 83, No. 3, pp. 339-349, 1999.
- [10] J. Hanley, & C.A. Herron, “Using video to introduce children to a foreign culture,” *Foreign Language Annals*, Vol. 25, pp. 419-426, 1992.
- [11] A. Baratta, & S. Jones, “Using film to introduce and develop academic writing skills among UK undergraduate students,” *Journal of Educational Enquiry*, Vol. 8, No. 2, pp. 15-37, 2008.
- [12] A. Khan, “Using films in the ESL classroom to improve communication skills of non-native learners,” *ELT Voices*, Vol. 5, No. 4, pp. 46-52, 2015.
- [13] S. Rokni, & A. Ataei, “Movies in EFL classrooms: With or without subtitles,” *The Dawn Journal*, Vol. 3, No. 1, pp. 715-726, 2014.
- [14] N. Christine, *Teaching reading skills in a foreign language*, Oxford: Macmillan, 2005.
- [15] E.M. Boyd, & A.M. Fales, “Reflective learning: Key to learning from experience,” *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, Vol. 23, No. 2, pp. 99-117, 1983.
- [16] C. Moore, B. Boyd, & K. Dooley, “The effects of experiential learning with an emphasis on reflective writing on deep-level processing of leadership students,” *Journal of Leadership Education*, Vol. 9, No. 1, pp. 36-52, 2010.
- [17] D.A. Schon, *The reflective practitioner*, San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1983.
- [18] M.B. Miles, & A. M. Huberman, *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded resourcebook*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994.
- [19] R.L. Oxford, R.Z. Lavine, & D. Crookall, “Language learning strategies, the communicative approach and their classroom implications,” *Foreign Language Annals*, Vol. 22, No. 1, pp. 29-39, 1989.
- [20] R.L. Oxford, *Language learning strategies: what every teacher should know*, New York, NY: Newbury House, 1990.