

Use of Films for Teaching Social Values in English Classes at Elementary Level

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Abstract

Embracing the technological advancement in the pedagogic process in Pakistan is relatively a newer phenomenon. It is assumed that this form of informal teaching in elementary English classes tends to entice pupils to grasp social values and augment their coherent social conceptualization. This exploratory study comprised 37 elementary English class students at a private educational institution in Karachi to measure the philosophical notion that contemporary film-based teaching augments social values. An Iranian Oscar Nominee film titled ‘Children from Heaven’ was selected to see the effect it could bring in the students to comprehend and promote the social values. The researchers were inclined to see the change the films could make on the social approaches of young learners; to acquire social values and the extent to which these films could be adopted as part of formal English curriculum. The study found that teaching social values through films is as strong as a tool as the printed curriculum itself. The characters in the films depicting strong social values are inspiring to the English class students in elementary settings of pedagogy. The study concluded that films can develop social awareness and value systems in elementary English students and that a socially-addressed film can lead to practical implementation of the values learnt in personal lives. Inclusion of technology-assisted pedagogy is relatively less time consuming, cost effective and strongly focused on contents to foster social values amongst young learners. Films generate the power to give pleasure to the students and develop their interest in learning and applying social values in their lives.

Key Terms: Films, social values, elementary students, social awareness, use of technology in classes

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Introduction

Technology is an increasingly vital aspect of modern scholastic experiences. It has enabled school teachers to devise their lecture notes as interactive, interesting, and rewarding. Films have proven to improve pupil performance as lessons are more memorable and therefore are retained more effectively. Technology is an excellent method to reinforce lectures and transform dull lessons into attention-grabbing and motivating learning experiences. These films contain color, animated graphics and sound to capture and maintain student attention. Due to technology, students are able to access and explore new concepts and ideas that were previously banished to the pages of books. When properly integrated in classroom instruction and curriculum, technology can be used to address the various learning styles and abilities of students. Attractive and notable pedagogic innovations through films create exciting learning experiences as they cater to individualized need.

The study was carried out to see the effect of showing culturally-rich films as a teaching method to develop elementary students' interest in developing social values. The researchers intended to show significance of the inclusion of films within the elementary curriculum as a vital tool to teach social values to the students. The researchers also intended to understand that elementary students can benefit from this variety of teaching method.

The beneficiary impacts of including technology in formal classes highlighting films as teaching tools for teaching social values are evaluated through literature and its related researches. A good amount of research, many of them cited in the literature review, has been conducted in the similar area especially in the United States and U.K. There seems to be no or very little literature available in the local context. The study comprised displaying socially-vibrant film as independent variable and students' learning in regards to social values as dependent variable. The research question framed was: What is the impact of showing films relating to promoting social values on the elementary students?

The study was restricted to 37 students of formal elementary education in a privately-run educational institution in Karachi. The major interest of the researchers was in gathering opinions of the selected students regarding their views about watching films as a way to improve their comprehension of social values and the impacts of it. The periphery of beneficiaries in the study is the elementary students, teachers, school administration, curriculum developers and the policy makers at an elementary education level. The study was limited to the extent of showing a culturally-rich film followed by questionnaires as an instrument of data collection.

Burns (2003) recommends in research on teaching through films that students would probably be aware of watching films at school as part of learning through them. Secondly, the study assumes that students probably would understand the theme of the film and comprehend the social values displayed in it. The assumptions also include that films are possibly an effective tool for learning social values so the young learners develop interest in them. It is also assumed that the study will open doors for researchers who can widen the parameters of the same study. It will provide guidance to schools authorities in developing policies regarding inclusion of films within the timetable of their respective curriculums to enhance social values among the elementary students.

The study benefits students, teachers, and school administration and curriculum developers. It creates awareness regarding the inclusion of technology emphasizing the use of films as a medium to teach and promote social values. The results of the study give an idea about the importance of films in the teaching learning situation. It also informs policy makers, curriculum planners and teachers how to induct films as teaching methodology to enhance the learning of social values in elementary students. It guides the future researchers to fill in the gaps that may have been left in this research and to address those limitations that the researchers have faced.

Researchers in the educational psychology argue that films provide a quick and direct teaching scenario in which specific scenes with pre-structured dramatization point out important social values. Learners' emotions and behavioral adaptation strategy also get affected through films as emotions are presented in accessible ways where they are easy to identify. Students are able to understand and recognize them immediately and have the opportunity to "translate" film life histories into their own lives. Burns (2003) claims that film experiences act like emotional memories for students' developing attitudes and remain with them as reflective reference points while proceeding through their daily activities, including those related to their role.

Films, along with television, video games, music and the Internet are regarded as pedagogically inspiring tools of popular culture in giving pleasure to its target group (Kincheloe, 2007). Many other studies have shown that showing films that focus on societal concerns are useful tools in improving students' attention towards them (Blasco, Moreto, Roncoletta, Levites & Janaudis, 2006). The two studies mentioned above were the source of inspiration in this direction.

Review of Related Literature

According to Woolfolk (2009), many psychologists are of the opinion that learning takes place depending upon the individual's personal style of learning. For example, some learn visually, some through language, yet some learn through logical-mathematical analysis, spatial representation and many others by musical thinking. Using technology to promote social values provides an enjoyable educational experience for both the student and the teacher. Verbal learning style students will gain when assigned work such as note taking, reading for information, listening, researching and writing. The logical-mathematical student will be at an advantage with tasks such as gathering data, solving problems, predicting, classifying and sequencing.

Kennedy (2011) seconds the opinion of the researchers in the same direction and takes a position that movies provide an enriched experience to learners in forming social values among students in a formal class. Providing visual learners an opportunity to improve their particular learning styles helps them understand why they can perform all types of socially-appreciated tasks more easily than others. Woolfolk (2009) argues that using film-based pedagogy should be used as an engager and facilitator of thinking as it can represent and simulate meaningful real-world problems, situations, and contexts. It can symbolize beliefs, perspectives, arguments, and stories of others. It should define a safe, controllable problem space for students' thinking and for constructing personal representations of meaning.

Bates and Poole (2003) add that film-based instructional technology has become an important part of teaching and learning within the classroom as well as working with fully online environments. Resources for educating and assisting faculty about the best practices for using technology has also become crucial. These resources need to go beyond how to work with specific software and educators need to understand the ways in which these new tools can make a significant difference in student learning. Learning through movies is seen as essentially a social process, requiring communication among learner, teacher and others. This social process cannot effectively be replaced by technology, although technology may facilitate it.

Anyone who has ever seen a film can vouch for the fact that films provide a visual expression and present an effect of reality. When ideas are presented in concrete form, learning is absorbed deeper into the cognition of humans making learning perpetual. In order to support this idea, it is essential to realize that a good film is like a good book and can touch our lives. Film and media form a child's experiences within today's culture. Students turn to films for entertainment,

comfort and guidance. In this context, Vetrici (2004) describes that a film is like any other text and lends itself to rich discussion and analysis like a written text does. The response and communication evoked by teaching through films this way comes in very detailed and lengthy writings by the students in response journals. The engagement of the film helps to get their minds working and keeps them actively involved in the learning process.

Socially-vibrant films have the ability to show the audience an image and therefore can present themselves to the viewer lucidly. Teaching social values through films is especially valuable because it can show interactions, settings, people, and things in a realistic fashion than reading a text can (Bo, 2008). An elementary school student might find reading Jane Austen tedious, but watching the film may provide the student practical meaning to the words in the text.

Grodal (1997) affirms that films have been employed broadly by popular writers to describe and exemplify both theoretical and symbolic understandings of human behavior. Films enable elementary students not only to hear characters' stories, but also to see the settings in which interactions develop to witness social and cultural factors that impinge on client behavior. Films, above all, are narratives about individual and collective stories.

Language, symbols, customs, group traditions, and other fluid, malleable artifacts of culture become animated and comprehensible in the stories of people contending with the realities of living. Applying this theoretical perspective to films, students learn that there is no one universal truth or working principle that can be derived from individual stories, yet there are many truths to be discovered when a person is listening and reflecting (O'Bannon & Goldenberg, 2008). This is a key understanding for student learning to think critically about their application of knowledge. Films give students opportunities to examine sources of meaning to explore ways of thinking critically about those meanings and interpretations developed and embedded in culture.

Selected contemporary films invite the learner to watch and listen to other people's stories, but more than that, to understand how films, used as case studies, can deepen a student's engagement with the subject matter and characters, permitting the student to empathize, identify, develop feelings of closeness, respect, affection, revulsion, fear, anger, and more. Films trigger the imagination at multiple sensory and cognitive levels, frequently transporting the audience to an environment very different from their own (Grodal, 1997; Pescosolido, 1990).

From the perspective of learning and cognition, films as a medium offer a number of qualities that may contribute to the acquisition and retention of knowledge. The multisensory nature of films makes them appealing to students with a variety of learning styles. Further, there is extensive research in educational psychology to support the premise that the formation of visual images is the most effective method for storing information (Ormrod, 1998). Films may, therefore, provide the student with visual images with which to associate course content. Experts in educational psychology also recognize the educational value and power of films to communicate complex archetypes as well as the psychosocial nature of human condition.

This is supported by Kincheloe (2007) who claims that films provide a quick and direct teaching scenario in which specific scenes point out important issues. Emotions are presented in accessible ways where they are easy to identify so elementary students are able to understand and recognize them immediately. In addition, elementary students have the opportunity to “translate” film life histories into their own lives. Film experiences act like emotional memories for students’ developing attitudes and remain with them as reflective reference points while proceeding through their daily activities including those related to their role.

Bo (2008) states that cinema is the audiovisual version of storytelling. Life stories and narratives enhance emotions and therefore set up the foundation for conveying concepts. Films provide a narrative model framed in emotions and images that are also grounded in the students’ familiar, everyday universe. Similarly, this study promotes the notion that when the goal is promoting reflection that includes both cognitive and emotional components, life histories derived from the films are well-matched with the students’ desires and expectations. Learning through aesthetics in which cinema is included stimulates a reflective attitude in the learner. Emotions make learning both more memorable and more pleasurable for students. Generally, films along with television, video games, music and the Internet are regarded as one of the most effective tools in giving pleasure to its target group.

Downey (2003) elaborates that ideas and actions through the use of contemporary film enhances learner’s social competence. The concept of social values is universal and its promotion is an important part of nearly all educational institutions. The teachers, parents, students and school administration are all conceptually aware of the inclusion of technology in teaching and learning situations. On the other hand, they are generally unaware of its process of planning and implementation especially in regards to teaching social values through display of films to elementary students. Films have not been introduced as a source of

inspirations for young elementary school students. School education in Pakistan has not been revolutionized with the idea that films can be an effective source of social communication to impart the concept of social equity and justice.

Method

Frankel & Wallen (2006) state that exploratory research as a component of qualitative research approach deals with phenomena that are difficult to quantify mathematically. These may include beliefs, meanings, attributes and symbols. The present study by definition is exploratory as the researchers were inclined to probe whether films in formal elementary English classes can convincingly impart the social values that are usually taught through lectures. Exploratory studies also go deeper into issues of interest and explore nuances related to the problem at hand. Kumar (2005) categorically describes that qualitative research encompasses a range of philosophies, research designs and specific techniques including in-depth qualitative interviews, participant and non-participant observation, focus group discussions, document analyses and a number of other methods of data collection. Given this range of data types, there are also diverse methodological and theoretical approaches to study design and data analysis such as descriptive survey, phenomenology, ethnography, grounded theory, action research and case studies.

This study employed survey to explore the extent to which a film based on human values could really inculcate amongst the elementary students a sense of belonging to a socially-structured world in which human values are of prime concern. Feelings of sympathy, empathy, devotion, sacrifice, tolerance, patience, endurance, self-reliance, respect and perseverance were the integral components that the researchers had imagined to be explored through the movie. The movie had been selected to measure an accurate portrayal of characteristics in the film that showed humanly sensitive and emotionally rich feelings of social and economic deprivation.

The population of the study was all the students of elementary classes. A sample of elementary school students $n= 37$ was selected who watched the movie 'Children from Heaven' in their usual school hours. The researchers enquired of the instructor whether she had shown any movie prior to the movie selected. None of the students had watched the movie in their school hours to relate to a scholastic concept on social values. The sample represented both the genders in a mixed ability class. The sample age range was 13-14 years. Prior to showing the movie, the researchers conducted two small scale tests of oral English language proficiency and a test of reading comprehension as the movie was translated version into English. This was

done to ensure the sample understood the dialogue amongst the characters. The sample comprised 58% males and 42 % female elementary students.

A consent letter to the principal of the elementary school was sent. The researcher collected the questionnaires after the students had satisfactorily filled them out. Researchers had explained to the samples how they were supposed to fill out the questionnaire after the movie. The researchers assisted three students while they were filling as they were confused with a word in the questionnaire. All correctly-filled questionnaires n=37 were collected. One response was incomplete so it was excluded from the analysis. For the data analysis, SPSS version 20 was used.

Analyzing the answers provided by the students, the researchers found that nearly 100% of the students wrote sacrifice, about 90% of the students wrote love for the family, 85% students valued hard work and nearly 80% of the students wrote honesty an important social value they learnt from this film. Some of the other social values written by students included affection for siblings, generosity, cooperation and sharing. These social values indicated that students had understood many values displayed within the film which presented verbal as well as visual expressions pertaining to real life settings.

In order to ensure ethical considerations, the researcher did not mention the names of any school organization, principal, teachers or students in the study. To the best possible extent, the level of risk or threats to the subjects was reduced. The researcher had assured the participants that any information related to them was not to be used for personal reasons nor was it to be given to others for their personal gains. Information gathered was used to estimate the authenticity and reliability of the research conducted. The subjects' right of privacy was ensured at all levels as coded questionnaires were used to ensure non-exposure and privacy of the subjects. The investigator collected data through legal permission from the school administration and used the data only for academic purposes.

The instrument in the study was a ten-item five-option Likert Scale questionnaire to measure the extent to which a movie could foster the concept of social values in order to enhance elementary students' concepts developed through the movie. Various research studies were examined prior to developing the instrument. Some of the questions were adopted from previous researches. A model research titled 'Grasping the Social through Movies' (2011) conducted in Turkey was used. Three statements in the instrument were modified in the light of suggestions in the research. The statements emphasized preference of students about the various methodologies to learn social values. Another research captioned 'Perceptions of

efficacy in the use of contemporary film in social work education' was also consulted for construction of the questionnaire. The research process adopted for this study comprised two stages: the inquiry stage and the survey stage. Therefore, the questionnaire developed was in two sections. First section comprised a question aimed to find out whether a level of consciousness towards social values could be observed among the students through a film. The survey stage comprised a five-point Likert Scale (strongly disagree, disagree, not sure, agree, strongly agree). Table 1 illustrates the Cronbach Alpha obtained. The main variables in the instrument were: learning social values through a film, use of time in watching film and comparing lecture with film for learning social values.

Validity of an instrument relates to the fact that it purports to measure what it is supposed to measure. Experts in educational psychology further say that content validity is checked by the people who are experts of the relevant field and check the language and format of a questionnaire to ensure that things are in order. An instrument is said to have content validity if it has the capability to measure what it is supposed to measure. An instrument is said to have predictive validity if it poses the capability to predict about the results of the study in future. Likewise, an instrument is supposed to have construct validity if it could directly measure the psychological concept behind that study. Moreover, face validity is the aspect which the potential respondents consider about the instrument as to how valid the instrument is and how it measures what it is actually expected to measure. The tested hypotheses produced the following statistical results of correlation using SPSS version 20.

Table1
Reliability Statistics

Cronbach Alpha	Standardized Item Cronbach Alpha	No of Items
0.774	0.809	10

Results

The obtained results showed that 92% students agreed that the film 'Children from Heaven' had helped them to understand social values in general and only 8% expressed that they were not sure about it. Analysis of the other statements showed that an overall 84% of the students agreed to the statement that films such as 'Children from Heaven' would help them apply social values in their personal lives.

A reason for this could be that the film was about children of nearly their own age. It is also concluded from the evidence that the religious and moral values in the film conformed to elementary students' social and personal life. The movie had significantly

highlighted a sense of sacrifice and tolerance. On the other hand, overall 16% elementary students were still not sure that the movie could do much to teach social values.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on questionnaire responses, majority of students felt the film “Children from Heaven” contributed in a positive way to their learning and understanding of social values. In the inquiry stage of the questionnaire, the fact that students’ penned down the four major values displayed by the film is an evidence of their clarity and comprehension of what was being imparted to them. Proceeding towards the statement section where they had to declare their extents of agreement or disagreement with them, they responded in a manner which showed their agreement towards the idea of showing films as an authentic and positive way of teaching social values.

Over 80% of the students agreed that the film had helped them understand social values. This was very supportive to the study as its main objective was to develop understanding of social values. With regards to the film being a worthwhile use of their time, 92% of the students agreed it was. This statement stands in support for the students’ approval of films being supportive in the curriculum as a valid form of teaching where the students could spend their time learning. With regards to learning social values through the film, the students provided a very encouraging 92% agreement as their opinion towards this statement. This also reinforced what this study wanted to substantiate since its very onset.

A high percentage of uncertainty was disclosed when 68% of the students stated that they were not sure that teacher’s lectures were a good way to teach social values. It would appear from this that the students preferred other methods to learn social values than teacher talks only. 80% of the students agreed that post-class discussions on movie taught social values reasonably. They also appreciated the idea of watching the movie at home with parents to do the home assignment on the movie. There could be several possible explanations for this result. The students’ preference for active learning with discussions could be one. Another could be that they like to discuss social happenings with students of their own age and understanding. They could share their feelings and experiences with any family member witnessing them doing so.

One of the statements inquired whether the students had been inclined to learn more social values after watching this film. 96%, of the response were in favor.

A reason for this appreciation could be that the students wanted the teacher to show them more films regarding the development of social values. Application of the values through this film was the focus of the last statement. 84% of the students

agreed that this film would assist them in applying the values they learnt in their personal lives. Students may have responded in this manner due to the fact that this film's main characters were nearly the same age as they were and the connection therefore was formed naturally.

Films, whether used in the classroom or as part of take-home assignments, bring to life contemporary human problems. Selected films, properly introduced and guided by the instructor, can serve to further educational goals, engage students through their senses, emotions, intellect, and imagination, draw them into the lives of the characters portrayed and consequently inculcate social values within their personalities.

It appears from these results that students of elementary classes could benefit from the inclusion of films within their curriculum to learn social values. The purpose of this study was to contribute to one of the major practical fields of pedagogy: teaching social values through films. This research has depicted the effect of showing films on the teaching of social values and argued that 'showing films' is an important tool for teaching social values in order to contribute to the development of social principles. As a matter of fact, analysis of the student survey indicates that showing films actually helps the students to build upon social values by arousing their interests on this direction. If films have been seen as agents of pleasure, why are they not used as powerful strategic tool to create social awareness regarding moral standards?

This study reveals that films can be utilized as a strategic tool to create social awareness regarding moral standards when employed competently in an elementary class of English. The study stresses that that morally-rich film can be used and incorporated in the curriculum. Films should be chosen according to the likings of the students, for if they do not like the films, it is quite possible that they will not be able to relate social values that the teacher assumes are related to it. The timing and length of a film are vital factors which need to be considered as this can lead the film showing to be monotonous and boring, thereby destroying the purpose of it.

The study also recognizes the need for class discussion of the major points that the film addresses so that themes and ideas promoted through the film are unanimously understood. The researchers believe that the benefits of showing films in education especially for teaching social values must be given due recognition within the elementary education curriculum and the schools must take this activity as a vital force for the holistic development of the students.

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