

# LEARNING THROUGH WATCHING FILMS

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## Abstract

As one of the most important aspects in people's life, education should be treated and improved well. It is so essential because education gives opportunity to have a better life. Therefore, people should think of any better ways to improve the quality of education. One of the ways is through popular culture. As a growing-trend culture, popular culture has been widely known, especially by young people. From the library research conducted, some relevant references have been gathered and the data analysis has shown that it is very acceptable to use films, a part of popular culture to teach. This teaching technique can be used to teach morality and language skills at the same time. Therefore, education institution should be able to accommodate this system in order to succeed in educating.

**Key words:** Popular Culture, Films, Morality, Language

## 1. Introduction

Education is inevitably one of very essential aspects in people's lives. It is so important that everyone is trying very hard to obtain it. Today, it can be seen that education has improved a lot. Every country in the world has been very concerned with this aspect. More and more people in the world have realized the importance of education and its impact in life. As life has begun to be more complicated, people are now facing many difficulties such as economic crisis, unpredictable and radical political atmosphere, destructive doctrines, unfairness and injustice, immorality, etc. Those disadvantageous situations are the signs of degrading in a country.

The conditions described above are actually caused by several factors. One of the causes is education. In other words, it can be said that education plays a very important role in building characters. If it is observed vividly, those degrading conditions happened in societies are certainly related to the individuals' characters. Regarding to characters, it is very important to note that characters can bring ethical actions. In a common sense, an ethical action is an action done by someone that can bring benefits to the others and does not hurt them.

When somebody who is not taught by his or her family through a set of values or who does not acquire any formal education at all will have some serious problems in behaving. Here, it can be highlighted that education can help shape good characters. This can be seen through the educational programs which have been legally put forward and strictly ordered by laws in almost

all of the countries in the world. People are getting more conscious of the use of education in their lives.

However, improving education needs a lot of efforts. As the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (2000) defines, education is “a process of teaching, training and learning, especially in schools or colleges, to improve knowledge and develop skills”. From the definition above, it can be inferred that education is not something instant. It should be obtained step by step. Therefore, it should start from a small scale, that is a family. A family can be the core of daily life education. The first knowledge that people get is of course through their families. There are some basic values of life which function as the foundation of all kinds of education. By applying those main values, one can expect to get better formal education.

It is actually not easy to improve the quality of education in a country. This should be started from every individual in the country. As we know, each individual has a different perception towards something. And again, another problem arouses. This is just like a dead-end job. It is impossible to figure out the most standard way to be applied for the improvement of education in a country.

However, government in every country has been seriously prioritizing education for their people. More and more free-of-charge formal education programs, scholarships, etc. have been offered to the people. But still, it will not run perfectly well if the quality of education is still disappointing. Relating to that, Racheman (2007:130) in his writing entitled *Our Education and Human Resources* states “education is a process of providing all the facilities needed, so that the learners can be trained to be reactive and innovative toward their surroundings”. From the concept above it can be inferred that education should make people become creative. And because of that, conventional ways of teaching needs to be reformed.

Regarding to the attempt of increasing the quality, many experts have been thinking of inventing many teaching methods in order to create a better way to increase the quality of education. Since education involves teaching and learning techniques, it is very fundamental to find out various teaching methods to be applied in education institutions. Therefore, it is urgent to figure out the best way to enhance the quality of education.

It has been empirically proven that culture as one of the most vital elements in a society has played a very important role in many aspects, including education. In relation to cultural perspective, it is significant to visualize the use of popular culture in helping create a better way to teach. People have actually realized that it is very much urgent to seek for the right teaching method to be applied. Films for instance, have become very much popular in daily life. As one of the kinds of entertainment, film is not only effective in getting rid of stressful events, but also functions for certain purposes, one of them is education, particularly in teaching and learning.

However, do they really understand what kind of method which they think is suitable? Will teaching through films be effective to be applied? It seems to be a very hard question to answer for people have different perspective on teaching methods. In other words, teaching methods depends on many factors. Therefore, this study centers on the contribution of culture, particularly the role popular culture to education.

This study focuses of some problems to be analyzed. It is essential to know what popular culture is; what can films do to help teaching and learning; and finally to relate popular culture to the quality of education. All the data needed in this study were acquired by applying a library research. This means all the information required in this study has been obtained from relevant references.

## 2. Defining Popular Culture

Popular culture may not be widely known by many people. This does not mean they have never seen or live in popular culture, but they are not aware of it. The word “popular” does not simply mean well-known or recognized by many people. “Popular” has a more complex meaning. Many people do not notice the existence of popular culture. According to the cultural studies, popular culture actually begins from the common sense which is not rigid or complicated. This can somehow create an opportunity to generate a set of folklore in the future time (Barker, 2000:63). This idea can let us know that popular culture is from individuals in a society who have similar points of view about a phenomenon.

Further, *A Concise Glossary of Contemporary Literary Theory* (Hawthorn, 1994:154) has described “in current critical usage terms such as popular culture, popular literature and popular art typically cover the senses both of ‘for the people’ and ‘of the people’”. In addition, Hawthorn (1994: 32) indicates:

The term *popular culture* refers to the culture of a subordinate group or class which is distinct from the dominant culture of a particular society, dominant in the sense either of more widely disseminated or valued, or in the sense of belonging to and reflecting the interests of a dominant group or class.

From the concept above, it can be concluded that popular culture is pictured as a growing trend which expresses the independence, flexibility and changeable. In order to understand To expose independence means freedom to create, to show, to present, and to be know by many people without being oppressed by a set of strictly rigid and high justification. The term flexibility is used to describe popular culture because it serves different purposes from different angles. Finally it is changeable for it will never be the same from time to time; for one person to the others; and surely for one nation to the others. Popular culture from time to time has become very much influential, jeans, for instance. Jeans are the most common popular culture. Sullivan (2006: 6-7) has stated:

Every subsequent youth movement, from hippie to hip-hop, has claimed blue jeans for itself. And every generation since mid-century has grown into maturity in them. Jeans have been worn by soldiers and protesters, headbangers and hearththrobs, vagrants and presidents. They have been worn on campus and in prison, on horses and Harleys, to the opera and the mosh pit... denim embodies American creativity and rebellion.

From the quotation above, it can be said that jeans are used by all types of people, in anywhere and at anytime. Any now jeans have become a trend in every country. People wear jeans in any occasions. Therefore, people of all ages of all around the world use jeans for formal events or casual events. Such a thing is called popular culture. Besides the phenomenal jeans, there are some more examples of popular culture such as “Barbie Dolls”, “Superman”, “Spiderman”, “Pop Music”, “Hip-Hop”, “Comic”, etc.

### **3. Shaping Education Values**

Another essential classification in popular culture is popular literature or popular art. Popular literature can be classified into some types such as popular novels, popular short stories, popular films, etc. Since this study concentrates on the use of films to teach, it is essential to emphasize films or movies. As a product of popular culture, a film (movie) is a medium for people to communicate with other people by entertaining, comforting, scaring, sharing, and of course educating.

Basically, film has a very special position in every society. Christian Metz, a French film scholar through the book *Teach Yourself: Film Studies* (2003:1) asserts:

Film occupies a dominant place in society and because film is a popular medium, it should be studied seriously. If the film student adopts a serious, responsible and critical approach to film, then film studies becomes as important as any other type of study.

The statement above can prove that films are indeed very influential in many aspects of people's life. Many people only enjoy films/movies as one of the most effective entertainment. But in fact, films can be studied and they can also help people learn things. It has been widely known that films are used to reflect the every aspect of people's lives.

To support the statement mentioned above, Effendy (2008: 27) also says that films can directly show education values to help families educate their children. This opinion lets us know that children actually need to educate well by their families through many ways. One of them is by the use of films. In other words, education can be gained from anywhere as long as the medium is right. Further, Effendi (2008: 28-29) also insists that most of the people who go to the cinemas to enjoy films are teenagers. Such a situation is shown in daily life. Teenagers are now getting more up-dated with the movies on the cinemas.

This can indicate that the teaching of morality and knowledge to teenagers can be very much effective by using films. In addition to that, Effendi (2008:30) asserts that educative content in films can be very useful in picturing the education condition in a country. This can be said that the many film-makers also show concern in the world of education. They want people to see that they can also educate the audience by the products.

However, people normally argue that films with education values are often boring and uninteresting, therefore many teenagers will not be enthusiastic in watching such films. This is not true. It has been empirically proven that films can attract people from all ages. These days, films of all types of genres are enjoyed by many people. This can be seen through Cawelti's point of view (1976: 1) stating many kids and adults keep on searching for a particular excitement in familiar stories such as the detective story, the western, the romance, the spy story and many other types. The perception above can tell that people are actually get interested in films. Nowadays, there are various kinds of movies which can contribute education values to children.

### **4. Morality from Films**

Regarding to the growing of popular culture, more and more education institutions such as public schools, vocational schools, language learning centers, or universities are now trying to apply special teaching program by using films (movies) in order to enhance the students'

communication skills. Therefore, it is very important to motivate them to learn. Harmer (1991: 9) has described:

We have suggested many different factors that may affect a student's motivation, stressing that a strongly motivated student is in a far better position as a learner than a student who is not motivated. Most importantly we have said that both positively motivated students and those who do not have this motivation can be strongly affected by what happens in the class-room.

From the statement quoted above, it can be simply inferred that actually students needed to be motivated so that they will learn well. In relation to that, it is a good idea to use films as the media for teaching. This can be done anywhere (out of the classroom). Students will be motivated by learning many things from the films. One simple thing that they can learn is morality. Education is not about getting knowledge and applying it to work only, but it also covers the ethical actions and behaviors.

All most all the characters portrayed on the films have their own personalities. People learn from the characters how to cope with problems; how to convince other people; how to end the stress, and many more. In other words, the characterization shown on films/movies can give various effects to people's mind set, attitudes, and personalities. Therefore, it is also very much essential that parents or teachers can guide the children to select the right films to watch.

There many films such as "Harry Potter", "The Spiderman", "Captain America", and many other popular films which have become very well-known in many countries. Super heroes are very adored my children. They will try hard to imitate their favorite heroes. This can be seen as a very good opportunity since most of the children will certainly learn that the good deeds done by their super heroes should also be done by them. Teachers or parents can grab this chance to insert as many important good values as possible to the kids. This has been proven more effectively. Besides learning morality values, the children are also encouraged to do ethical actions in their daily lives.

## **5. Language Teaching**

Language is surely a very fundamental item in communication. People learn language not only for communication, but it can also become the identity of a nation. Moreover, learning a global language is certainly required. This is necessarily needed because a global language can allow us to interact and keep in touch with other people from different countries. Therefore, there are more and more formal as well as informal education institutions provide language training for students.

Language teaching as always found in many education institutions is one of the most important sections. Many language teachers, instructors, tutors and lecturers will certainly try very hard to make their students interested in learning languages. However, it is important to know what language teaching method is. A language teaching method according to Nunan (2003:5) is "a single set of procedures which teachers are to follow in the classroom." From the quotation above, it can be inferred that every teacher should have at least some teaching methods when conducting a teaching activity in classrooms.

Teaching languages is not an easy thing to do. Since it is difficult to deal with, it of course requires serious attention and a lot of efforts to create a good language atmosphere. Thus, it is very essential to apply a proper teaching method to teach languages. Regarding to the According to Nunan (2003:10):

What is important, then, is that teachers develop their own preferred classroom practices based on what works best for them in their own particular situation and circumstances and given ... [10]

This is not to say that all practices are equally valid for all learners.

Experiment with different practices. Try out new ideas... [11]

The two statements above can definitely show that teachers must attempt to create a suitable or proper teaching method to be applied when they teach. A classroom usually has students with different skills and abilities. From this basic condition, the teacher should be able to know the condition of the class; how the students respond; what their backgrounds are; and many other essential aspects to learn.

Teachers will have many difficulties if they do not put enough efforts to teaching. In general we can conclude that teachers are required to be creative, critical and unique. A professional teacher must be able to create a nice, comfortable, educative and interesting class. That way, the students will be motivated in learning languages. Since learning languages involves the four language skills, it is expected that every language teacher is going to be well-prepared to use his or her teaching methods which are suitable and useful for the students.

However, it is always worthwhile to try something interesting such as playing films as a way of teaching languages. This is for training language skills (listening, speaking, writing, and reading). Watching some proper and educative “Box Office” films can be considered effective in teaching languages because, besides learning vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, and comprehension, teachers can also instruct and motivate the students to do a “role-play” activity. This kind of activity is very useful to train the students’ speaking skill and improve their self-confidence.

Many education institutions have used some popular films to train the students to speak English well. By doing “role-play” activities, they will be very much fascinated as well as motivated. In relation to the use of “role-play” activity in a class, Nunan (2003:57) in his book asserts:

Role-plays are also excellent activities for speaking in the relatively safe environment of the classroom. In a role-play, students are given particular roles in the target language. For example, one student plays a tourist telephoning the police to report his wallet stolen. The other plays the role of a police officer trying to help the tourist file a report. Role-plays give learners practice speaking the target language before they must do so in a real environment.

From the quotation stated above, it can be concluded that films can provide a lot of opportunities for students to study many things, including the “role-play” activities. Teachers can teach some linguistic aspect from the speech of the films, such as pronunciation, accent, spelling, etc. Nowadays, there are many films which can definitely entertain people from all ages, particularly children and teenagers. Movies such as “Jurassic Park”, “Harry Potter”, “Hulk”, “Batman”, “Sherlock Holmes”, etc. are very incredible. Therefore, they can be used when learning languages.

There are some essential points to be applied when using films to teach languages. First, the teacher must know what subject that he or she teaches and which aspect to be concentrated. For instance, if the teacher is teaching vocabulary, the teacher can play a certain movie and instruct the students to listen carefully to every word spoken by the characters of the film, then jot down as many words as possible that have been obtained while listening to the speech. When the teacher

teaches grammar, he or she can also count on the help of films to show the grammatical points to the students, so that they will understand well in using the grammar in when they speak or write.

Another way that the teacher can try is to ask the students to write as many sentences as possible showing the grammatical points being taught in the class. Besides teaching grammar, teachers or instructors can also guide the students to write or speak after watching a film. In other words, films can be used to train the four language skills that most education institutions find it difficult to deal with.

There are many ways to do it. One of them is to apply the “CASPER” technique (Carroll, Wilson and Forlini, 2001: 80). This method can probably be very much useful to learn by many language teachers or instructors in order to make their students more creative. The following table shows the ways to use CASPER technique in teaching languages through films.

<b>Character</b>	Who is your main character? What does he or she want?
<b>Adjectives to describe character</b>	What type of person is your main character?
<b>Setting</b>	When and where does your story take place?
<b>Problem (conflict)</b>	What does your character want? What is preventing him or her from getting it?
<b>Actions (plot)</b>	What does your character do to get what he or she wants? What happens as a result?
<b>Resolution</b>	How do things finally turn out?

From the table above, it shows that films can be very helpful when they are used to teach languages. In addition to the CASPER technique used in the class, it is also worthwhile to try some essential strategies as suggested by Carroll, Wilson and Forlini (2001:840) such as the followings:

*1. Picture the Action in Your Mind*

As you read, try to picture in your mind how the play would look if it were being performed on stage. Use the stage directions, which appear in brackets, to help you envision the costumes, characters, setting, and action.

*2. Connect the Film to Its Historical Context*

What is the time period and setting in which the film takes place? What are the manners, customs, and morals of the time? Look in the film direction for information about when the play is set.

*3. Summarize the events*

Films are often broken into acts or scenes. These natural breaks give an opportunity to review the action. After each scene or act, ask these questions: Who are the main characters? How are we supposed to feel about them? Have your feelings for them changed since the previous scene or act? Have any new conflicts arisen? As the film nears its end, evaluate whether the action has reached its climax and whether the conflicts have been resolved.

*4. Recognize Dramatic Irony*

The audience sometimes knows more about the characters’ situations than the characters know themselves. This is dramatic irony, and it is another way the playwright creates tension for the audience. For example, a prince may speak favorably about a king, while the audience knows that the prince is actually plotting to have the king murdered.

The strategies above can help the students understand the film they watch and at the same time, they will be trained to think critically. It is essential to note that critical thinking is needed in every student. This technique is more effective than some conventional ways of teaching requiring

memorizing which can definitely lead the students to boredom. It has been observed that many formal or informal education institutions fail to cover this part. As a result, the students lack of communication skills and poor written as spoken language.

Therefore, films should be considered as one of the best items in teaching languages. This way, the students will practice reporting what they have watched in the form of writing or speaking. In order to improve their creativity, they can also be assigned to produce a brief documentary film. This can bring a very good impact to language learning. Besides, it will be very useful to train their communication skill. Carroll, Wilson and Forlini agree that video is a powerful form of communication and it can inform, amuse or entertain the audience (2001:796).

There is no doubt that a teacher should be able to attract his or her students' attention, so that they can study well. This must be seriously applied in education institutions especially language centers. Since language teaching and learning takes time and patience, it will be very useful to try to use films in it.

## 6. Conclusions and Suggestions

Popular culture, especially film has actually played a significant role in every aspect of human's life. It is certainly that popular culture such as films, music, comics, etc. can really attract people's attention, particularly young people. Therefore, it can be said that popular culture can also be used to improve education quality. This is essential because education can change the persons, the society, the nation, and the world.

From the analysis and elaboration above, it can be concluded that there are actually many ways to be applied to teach. However, it is acceptable to attempt the use of films to teach young people. There are indeed many things that people can do when using films to teach, for instance morality teaching and languages at the same time.

Finally, from the discussion above, it can be suggested that language teachers need to know that teaching technique should be up-dated. In relation to that, they can try to teach language skills by using films. That way, they students will be motivated, creative and it will be effective to make them understand.

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