

Original Research Article

Teaching of Spanish as a Foreign Language Through Films in an Indian Classroom

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Abstract: Films have been proven to be beneficial in learning and teaching of foreign languages despite being primarily viewed as a form of entertainment. They aid learners in improving their linguistics abilities as well as help enhance the inter-cultural competence. Additionally, it is one of the most effective teaching tools, since cinema has become a vital part of the youths' daily life, allowing teachers to interact with their students more effectively while upgrading the methodologies they employ in the classroom (Auñón *et al.*, 2021). This paper focuses on highlighting the effectiveness of cinema in foreign language (FL) teaching and learning in particular the teaching-learning of Spanish as a foreign language in Indian classrooms at the intermediate level. It also proposes how different cinematographic elements can be integrated with foreign language pedagogy. Additionally, it presents a case study of teaching and learning of Spanish as a FL in an Indian classroom through a film-based teaching module employing the approach of Content-Based Instruction (CBI).

Keywords: Films, foreign language learning, intermediate level, teaching plan, Content-Based Instruction, Indian classrooms.

INTRODUCTION

In the words of Carl J Mora (2012), '... in the process of entertainment films have unwittingly served educational ends and have been instrumental in reflecting, if not forming, cultural attitudes.' Cinema is considered to be one of the most effective modes of mass communication that not only provides knowledge and information but also entertainment to its viewers. It plays a vital role in shaping people's mindsets, emotions, and feelings and has become an essential part of their lives. Additionally, in India, a country of Bollywood with a tradition of other regional cinemas, its impact on the public cannot be neglected. As per the Central Board of Film Certification records, approximately 15 million people watch films daily in India on various platforms¹. Though it is a great source of entertainment, its educational values cannot be overlooked. Over the past decades and with the advent of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), audio-visual materials have been considered advantageous tools in foreign language pedagogy (Jurkovič & Mertelj, 2015).

A film-based curriculum brings authenticity and adaptability to foreign language classrooms (Cho, 2019). The most common advantage of utilizing a film in a foreign language instruction is that it makes the process more appealing, simple, and successful. Its implementation improves learners' oral and auditory comprehension, native accent acquisition, target language vocabulary, and idiomatic ability (Jurkovič and Mertelj, 2015; Albiladi *et al.*, 2018; Goctu, 2017; Kabooaha, 2016; Kalra 2017; Ismaili, 2013). As films are set in a real-world milieu, they induce the understanding of real-life use of the language. Their likeness to reality, as well as conversations based on probable settings, allow the student to fully comprehend the use of language in several contexts, including the semantics of words, various connotations, colloquial

¹Source: <https://cbfcindia.gov.in/cbfcAdmin/certification.php#:~:text=At%20a%20rough%20estimate%2C%20a,or%20on%20the%20cable%20system.>

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expressions, phraseology, gestures, tone of voice, body language, and other paralinguistic elements (Summerfield, 1993; Escudero & Ignacio, 2009; Valadés & Sacritán, 2004). Additionally, it also improves learner's writing abilities. Films arouse pleasure and stimulate thoughts, emotions, and imagination, propagating the motivation in the learners to utilize the target language (Rodríguez-Hoyos & Manrique-Solana, 2015; Cromarty *et al.*, 2023; Albiladi *et al.*, 2018).

As language and culture are inseparable entities, one learning a language is the learner of its culture and vice-versa (Kramsch, 1991). Cinema induces better comprehension of both and transforms into a very engaging medium that intends to enhance the cultural competence of the learner (Barahona-Mora *et al.*, 2021). Furthermore, with the diversity and abundance of sensory stimuli, a film provides the resources and a multitude of strategies for deciphering messages that cannot be addressed in books; therefore, the students can understand the foreign language with the richness of the context (Escudero, 2009).

Moreover, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFRL) recognizes the development of intercultural competence and socio-cultural knowledge as the major objectives of foreign language learning and encourages the application of cinema in various themes acknowledging cinema as a medium of communication.²

In Indian context, cinema holds a significant place in the lives of individuals, serving as a means of escape from the demands of a busy or stressful lifestyle and providing entertainment. Bollywood, in particular, exerts a profound influence on Indian society by shaping social norms and values, dictating fashion trends, and popularizing languages and dialects across the nation.

It functions as an effective tool for cultural exchange, economic development, and identity formation. Consequently, films are intricately woven into the daily activities of the Indian population. Given the extensive impact of cinema on society, its potential role in the teaching and learning of foreign languages demands serious consideration.

Objectives

The objectives of the current study are as follows:

1. To examine the effectiveness of cinema as a didactic tool in teaching Spanish as a foreign language in Indian classrooms.
2. To explore the integration of cinematographic elements into foreign language instruction and learning.
3. To demonstrate how cinema can enhance the teaching and learning experience in Spanish language education.

Research Questions (RQ)

The current study plants the following research question:

1. How effective is the integration of films as a didactic tool in teaching Spanish as a foreign language in Indian classrooms?
2. How do cinematographic elements contribute to enhancing the language proficiency of intermediate Spanish learners in India?
3. How do Indian students respond to activities based on cinematographic elements in ELE classrooms?

Integration of cinematographic elements in FL classroom

Films, an attractive and enthralling didactic tool, bring more vibrancy to the classrooms. It authorizes the teacher to employ various cinematographic elements with flexibility easing the process of FL teaching and learning. Numerous activities spanning from describing scenes, and creating hypotheses to role plays can be prepared bearing in mind the interest, comfort, and language level of the students as well as the objective of the class. Moreover, as the younger generation exhibits a shorter retention span due to the widespread consumption of digital media and short-form content, the integration of movie elements in the language classroom suffices the needs of the students as compared to the presentation of the entire film.

The elements that can be employed in a foreign language classroom are mentioned below:

I. Scenes, Fragments, or Clips

Scenes or fragments from films are among the best resources to use in foreign language classrooms. They are time-efficient and allow teachers to control the amount of content displayed (Cho, 2019). Film scenarios can be recreated or adapted in class through various activities, enabling students to practice different skills in simulated contexts.

II. Dialogues

Dialogues are a direct source of exposure to authentic language. Students can understand how new or learned vocabulary is used in real situations. Based on the time-period the film is set, students become aware of the language's

²Source: <https://rm.coe.int/common-european-framework-of-reference-for-languages-learning-teaching/16809ea0d4>

diachronic and synchronic use. Films expose students to different accents, intonations, and speech rhythms, helping them improve their ability to understand linguistic variations and become familiar with linguistic diversity (Fang, 2021; Auñón & Boussif, 2021).

III. Songs

Songs serve as a holistic tool in teaching and learning of foreign languages. The sounds and music provide an emotional dimension that helps contextualize scenes or emphasize feelings and emotions, reinforcing the understanding of the message and tone. Additionally, using songs as a didactic tool aids vocabulary acquisition, memory retention, involuntary grammar practice, and pronunciation improvement (Aguirre *et al.*, 2016; Carmona *et al.*, 2022; Singh & Villasol).

IV. Subtitles

Movie subtitles are a valuable tool for introducing students to authentic, real-life vocabulary and are indispensable for incidental language learning in students. Various types of subtitles can enhance short or long-term vocabulary retention, general comprehension, and learners' listening skills. (Kanellopoulou *et al.*, 2019; Senguttuvam *et al.*, 2022; Caruana, 2021).

V. Images and Posters

Images and cinematography enable students to interpret non-verbal messages, cultural contexts, and emotions, enriching content comprehension. Movie posters are visually appealing and versatile resources that can be used to enhance multiple skills. Students can engage in activities such as observing and describing what they see settings, characters, emotions, colours, etc. and analyzing and predicting the movie's plot. Incorporating movie posters in the classroom not only boosts students' interest and motivation but also provides a rich source of visual stimuli for various linguistic and cultural activities (Elsner *et al.*, 2013).

VI. Movie Titles

As a versatile resource, movie titles can prove useful in different ways in a FL classroom to stimulate creativity, critical thinking, and the practice of various linguistic skills. Using movie titles in class allows the development of diverse linguistic skills, from writing to oral discussions and translation practice, all while maintaining high levels of interest and motivation among students.

VII. Trailers

Movie trailers are an excellent teaching tool that can be used in multiple ways in foreign language classrooms, as they combine visual, auditory, and narrative elements. They can be useful for improving speaking skills and fostering vocabulary and pronunciation. At the same time, they develop observation and synthesis skills such as summarizing while working on understanding the essential parts of a story (Kartal & Yeşilçinar, 2023). The brevity of trailers maintains students' interest and motivation, making them a suitable tool for enhancing writing skills (Luckel-Semoto and Sugiura, 2024).

VIII. Film Reviews

With their rich, varied, and specific language, film reviews offer opportunities to practice reading and writing skills (Auñón & Boussif, 2021). They familiarize students with diverse vocabulary, grammatical structures, and idiomatic expressions, thereby enhancing multiple linguistic skills.

The appropriate application of the above-mentioned elements can prove to be productive in the language learning process. Films offer a rich sensory and cultural experience that significantly enhances language comprehension and retention. Cinema, with its combination of dialogues, music, sound effects, and visuals, provides an authentic context that helps students understand the practical use of language in real-life situations. Additionally, the teachers can design numerous activities, ranging from scene descriptions and hypothesis creation to role-playing, considering students' interests, comfort levels, and language proficiency, as well as the class objectives.

Content-Based Instruction

Content-Based Instruction (CBI) is an approach to second and foreign language teaching with a prime focus on using authentic and meaningful content as the basis for developing language skills rather than teaching the language itself. The term "content-based instruction" was first used by David Eskey in 1986. However, in 1989, Brinton, Snow, and Wesche published Content-Based Second Language Instruction, which established CBI as a major approach in language teaching. CBI is distinguished by its aim to integrate language and content learning so that learners can acquire both linguistic competence and subject matter knowledge. It is beneficial as it provides a context for language learning, stimulating cognitive development (Pessoa *et al.*, 2007). This approach is considered an effective and realistic teaching strategy that combines language and content learning (Heo, 2006). CBI is acknowledged as a favourable approach due to its immersive characteristic that permits itself to be exploited in various ways. The approach works on various models namely

theme-based, immersion, sheltered, and adjunct models. While designing a CBI lesson a teacher should acknowledge the linguistic, strategic, and cultural objectives of the class. The core of CBI is based on the three language theories: firstly, how information and meaning from the meaningful content are utilized in discourse or texts, secondly, the skills of the target language are not distinct from each other, and they together are involved in all activities additionally, the grammar is considered a component of all language abilities, rather than a separate ability for language learning. Lastly, language is always employed for a certain reason, and transmitting meaning is one of its most important purposes (Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

Case Study of teaching and learning of Spanish as FL in an Indian classroom at intermediate level in Doon University

Participants

The study involved 27 participants, comprising 15 females and 12 males, aged between 19 and 22 years. These students were identified as possessing an intermediate proficiency level in Spanish, as determined by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFRL).

METHODOLOGY

A self-developed, film-based teaching module was implemented in a Spanish as a Foreign Language (SFL) classroom at Doon University, Dehradun, India. The study was conducted in the academic year 2023-24. The module was designed for fifth-semester students enrolled in the 5-Year Integrated MA Spanish program as part of the core course Spanish for Specific Objectives - I. The primary objective of this course is to introduce and develop expressions, grammatical structures, and vocabulary pertinent to specific professional and thematic contexts, thereby facilitating conversation and discussion among students.

Based on the CBI approach, the teaching module was designed using a movie clip of the Argentine historical legal drama *Argentina, 1985*. The movie's storyline follows the trial of members of the military junta that ruled Argentina under the dictatorship of General Jorge Rafael Videla, referred to as the National Reorganization Process. It dramatizes the true story of public prosecutors Julio César Strassera and Luis Moreno Ocampo, who courageously investigated and prosecuted Argentina's military dictatorship during the 1980s, leading to the historic Trial of the Juntas. The film was nominated for Best International Feature Film at the 2023 Academy Awards, highlighting its global recognition and the significance of its theme. It offers a compelling portrayal of a pivotal moment in Argentine history, highlighting the resilience of those who fought for justice and the restoration of democracy.

The justification for the selection of the film *Argentina, 1985* for the Indian classroom is the enduring popularity of courtroom dramas among Indian audiences. Films such as *Pink* (2016), *Jolly LLB 2* (2017), *Rustom* (2016), *Mulk* (2018), *Section 375* (2019), and *OMG-2* (2023), along with OTT releases like *The Trial* (2023), *Guilty Minds* (2022), *Criminal Justice* (2019), and *Sirf Ek Banda Kafi Hai* (2023) have consistently captivated the Indian viewers and established a prominent position within the entertainment panorama. The genre's ability to intertwine fictional narratives with real-life events enhances its appeal by evoking intrigue and emotional engagement. Similarly, *Argentina, 1985* is a compelling and intellectually stimulating film that combines the intensity of courtroom drama with a profound exploration of courage and perseverance. Its universal themes of justice and accountability make it a globally relatable story and an excellent resource for integrating authentic and relevant content into language classrooms, particularly for students interested in history, law, and human rights. The 140-minute-long film is produced and directed by Santiago Mitre starring Ricardo Darín, Peter Lanzani, Alejandra Flechner as the major leads.

The unit was meticulously designed with the dual objective of enhancing the oral proficiency of the students and teaching them to express opinions, while simultaneously introducing the aspects of Argentine society in the 1980s. This dark period of Argentine history is marked with the military junta taking over the country collapsing the democratic system, targeting students, writers, journalists, artists, communist guerrillas or any citizen that was suspected of being left-wing activists. The session lasted for 1.5 hours, and the primary teaching resource was a film clip of 4 minutes and 56 seconds in duration. However, the viewing of the entire film was a prerequisite for the class. To ensure optimal comprehension, the clip was played three times, each with an interval of 10-second. Also, the subtitles were included to aid reading comprehension and providing additional support to students.

At the beginning of the class, students were provided with a purposefully designed worksheet and informed about the objectives. Following this, the film clip was shown three times, during which students were tasked with answering multiple-choice questions to assess their comprehension of the movie clip.

The session then transitioned to a series of subjective questions, aimed at fostering critical thinking and stimulating discussions in the target language. These questions encouraged students to reflect on the contextual significance of phrases

from the movie clip and to analyse broader societal issues. Additionally, students were prompted to evaluate the role of cinema in representing societal realities, engaging them in discussions about its effectiveness and limitations.

At this stage, the instructor introduced the grammatical structures related to expressing opinions in Spanish language to facilitate discussions enabling them to use the Conditional mode (*el Condicional*) and the Subjunctive mode (*el Subjuntivo*). The students were further encouraged to draw parallels between the themes presented in the film and their own cultural experiences, thereby improving their cultural competence.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

In response to RQ1, the integration of films in Indian classrooms for teaching Spanish as a foreign language (FL) demonstrates significant effectiveness, particularly given the general affinity of the Indian population for cinema. Specifically, the session utilizing a film-based didactic unit yielded highly productive outcomes among Indian learners of Spanish as FL. Students actively engaged with the movie clip, sharing their ideas and opinions on the portrayal of society through cinema while exploring the socio-historical context of Argentine society in the 1980s.

Notably, as students enrolled in a degree program in Spanish philology, they were already familiar with the culture and history of Spanish-speaking countries through dedicated coursework, which further contributed to their active participation in the film-integrated classroom. Moreover, as viewing the entire film was a prerequisite for the workshop, this prior exposure facilitated a deeper engagement, resulting in enthusiastic student participation.

The inclusion of reflective and analytical questions significantly enhanced the students' linguistic and cognitive development. Participants developed the ability to express opinions using two distinct grammatical modes in Spanish and demonstrated proficiency in negotiating complex scenarios, such as those depicted in a courtroom setting. Additionally, the session enabled students to identify notable cultural contrasts between Argentina and India, as illustrated in the film clip, thereby fostering a broader intercultural understanding.

One major difference highlighted was the courtroom setting: in the Argentine film, the jury, prosecutors, and the accused sat around a round table, which contrasts sharply with the traditional layout of Indian courtrooms. Students also observed the presence of ashtrays on the tables of judges, prosecutors, and the accused, a practice absent in India, where smoking is prohibited in public and legal spaces. Furthermore, the accused smoking and reading books during the trial were a significant contrast from Indian courtroom norms.

Some students also highlighted cinematographic differences between Argentine and Bollywood films. For instance, they compared the composed and calm delivery of the final petition by Julio César Strassera in the film to the extremely dramatic courtroom sequences typical of Bollywood movies. Through their reflections on the film, students gained valuable insights into Argentine history and societal issues.

In response to RQ 2, this study states that integrating films in the ELE classroom significantly enhances student motivation and active participation compared to traditional teaching methods. Moreover, it makes the content more relevant and meaningful for the students.

In the presented case study, the real-life settings, historical events, and universal theme of the film *Argentina, 1985* served as key motivational factors, encouraging students to engage in group discussions with peers while practicing the target language.

Students were introduced to the vocabulary related to cinema and society and were constantly encouraged to incorporate it during peer interactions, thereby, improving their language proficiency. By drawing parallels between the film's themes and their cultural contexts, students gained a deeper understanding of cinema as a reflector of the realities of society.

Furthermore, discussions on themes such as justice, human rights, and societal representation strengthened the learning experience for the students, fostering a dynamic and engaging classroom atmosphere.

In response to RQ 3, it can be concluded that the researcher observed a highly positive response from the students, which was evident through their active participation during classroom activities. Both student and teacher engagement were notably higher compared to traditional teaching methodology. Furthermore, an increase in student participation in peer discussions and conversations was recorded. When asked, students expressed a preference for the film-based classroom, highlighting that it made the learning process more accessible, enjoyable, and engaging. They also indicated enthusiasm for the continuation of similar classes in the future.

CONCLUSION

The dynamic nature of films makes them a highly effective resource for foreign language classrooms, provided they are carefully selected and thoughtfully prepared by the teacher. Incorporating films into language pedagogy has the potential to transform classroom dynamics, fostering greater interactivity and productivity compared to traditional teaching methods. This approach simplifies the language learning process for both teachers and students. While cinema is already recognized as a powerful didactic tool in language education, meeting the evolving needs of modern students requires the innovative integration of cinematographic elements into the FL curriculum.

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