

## A Suggestion on Using Animated Movie as Learning Materials for University Liberal Arts English Classes

<sup>1</sup>HyeJeong Kim

<sup>1</sup>Prof., College of General Education, Kookmin Univ., Korea  
[naa4907@kookmin.ac.kr](mailto:naa4907@kookmin.ac.kr)

### Abstract

*This study's purpose is to suggest a pedagogical method based on using animated movie in liberal arts English classes and to examine the direction that using animated movie as learning material should take. To this end, in this study, the content understanding and expression concentration stages using animated movie are presented. After students learned in class through animated movie, two tests were conducted to investigate the change in learners' acquisition of English expressions. As a result, subjects' learning of English expressions showed a significant improvement over time. An open-ended questionnaire was also conducted to ascertain learners' satisfaction level and their perceptions of classes using animated movie, with learners' satisfaction found to be high overall (77.1%). Students identified the reasons for their high satisfaction rate as the following: "fun and a touching story", "beneficial composition of textbooks", "efficient teaching methods", "sympathetic topics", and "appropriate difficulty". When using video media in class, instructors should maximize and leverage the advantages of video media, which are rich both in context and in their linguistic aspects.*

**Keywords:** *Animated Movie, Content Understanding, Expression Concentration, Liberal Arts English Classes*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The need for authentic learning materials to improve practical communication skills has emerged. For this reason, video media, such as films, animated movies, dramas, sitcoms, talk shows, and CNN News, are being actively used in many educational environments. It has already been proven that video media are authentic teaching materials; indeed, instructors with experience using them would all agree. Among diverse video media, animated movie is one that anyone can easily access in terms of genre and topic.

Above all else, including video as class material, such as animated movies, is significantly attractive to students. It is clear that animated movies featuring events, relationships among characters, and interesting stories are engaging learning materials, in contrast to study materials that are densely populated with general English expressions. However, instructors have many things to consider when using animated movies in class. After selecting an animated movie as a textbook, teachers should focus on the following questions: "What should be taught in the animated movie?" and "How should it be taught?". Furthermore many instructors may think it is necessary to teach the practical expressions in animated movies. However, the real advantages of

---

Manuscript received: April 28, 2022 / revised: May 23, 2022 / accepted: June 5, 2022

Corresponding Author: [naa4907@kookmin.ac.kr](mailto:naa4907@kookmin.ac.kr)

Tel: +82-2-910-5947

Associate Professor, College of General Education, Kookmin Univ., Korea

Copyright©2022 by The International Promotion Agency of Culture Technology. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0>)

animated movies are the contexts and situations in which these expressions are used appropriately. If the purpose of the class is learning practical expressions, there are many textbooks that deal solely with practical expressions; thus, there is no real need to use animation materials in those EFL classrooms.

If instructors do want to use animated movies, they need to utilize their advantages. In animated films, there are characters, relationships, events, and conflicts and their resolutions. The films' value resides the useful expressions used among characters, and in a variety of situations and within rich contexts. It is somewhat concerned about grammatical analysis or Korean interpretation of practical expressions by concentrating on expressions without relevance to events and contexts while using animated movie. To more deeply understand a certain character's expression within a specific context, one must first understand the flow of events within which these expressions emerge; it is also necessary to comprehend the intentions of the characters using these expressions. In other words, understanding the flow of events, the rich contexts, and characters' thoughts in general - and then learning specific expressions in the process of coming to understand them - is one way to leverage the advantages of animated movies.

Therefore, this study intends to offer a pedagogy for teaching English using animated movies to utilize fully the advantages of video media. In the context of a college-level liberal arts English class, this study will present a learning activity focusing on content understanding that induces students to understand fully the contents and specific situations of an animated movie. Additionally, this study also presents an expression intensive activity in which students learn specific expressions during the content understanding stage. As such, this study examines students' satisfaction levels and their responses to their class in which an animated movie was used. Finally, this paper considers the preferred method for using an animated film as teaching material by analyzing learners' perceptions on animation forming part of their curriculum.

## **2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

Currently, research on animated movies and English education is ongoing. Furthermore, research categories vary widely, from focusing on linguistic improvements through animated movie [1], to developing teaching/learning models using animated movie [2], to exploring culture through animation [3], and even to emphasizing the contextual approach of animated films [4].

One such study, on the relationship between animated movies and communication skills [5], investigates how using animated movies affects learners' communication skills; this study's setting was that of learners in a tourism English conversation class and used the Disney film, *Frozen* (2013). This work reports that animated movies improve learners' motivation overall, including factors such as confidence, interest, and participation. Another article explores the affective aspect of learning using animated movies [6], reporting that using animation positively affected learners' interest in class. Furthermore, it demonstrates that video media could also be extremely effective regarding the affective aspect of learning.

According to another study, which emphasizes focusing on a film's situation and narrative [7], a learning approach based on the story helps learners understand meaningful language samples. In addition, an academic article of the same vein [8-9] asserts that instruction based on video media should focus on content and context, and that it should expose language to learners in context.

## **3. METHODS**

### **3.1 Participants**

This present study was conducted over the course of 15 lessons for a duration of 4 months, from early September to mid-December 2021. The class met once a week for two-hours. This research selected students

who were taking “film English liberal arts classes” at K University in Seoul. The total number of participating subjects was 83, consisting of 18 first-year students (21.7%), 29 second-year students (34.9%), 21 third-year students (25.3%), and 15 fourth-grade students (18.1%). Subjects’ majors were diverse, including corporate management, software, architectural design, automotive engineering, media, visual design, spatial design, jurisprudence, nanoelectronics physics, image design, food nutrition, accounting, sports health rehabilitation, English literature, and Korean literature.

On the first day of class, this study conducted a simple survey to identify students’ English learning using visual medias. For the question, “Have you ever learned English through visual media such as movies, dramas, or animated movies, talk shows, etc.?” , 93.9% (78 students) answered “yes”. In response to the question, “Which video media did you use most for learning English?” , the answers were as follows: movies or animated movies (31 students, 37.3%), dramas or sitcoms (22 students, 26.5%), talk shows (15 students, 18.1%), news (10 students, 12.1%), and others (5 students, 6.0%). The survey results thus showed that students had a lot of exposure to English learning using video media, and that from among many video media, they had a stronger preference for films and animated movies.

The textbook used in this study was Screen English Mona [10], which is based on a coming-of-age film. The animation’s protagonists, Mona, finds her own identity in the process of going through her own difficult journey. Interesting event developments and abundant content are judged to be suitable as textbooks for this study.

### **3.2 Procedure**

When using animated movie, this study induced learners to grasp the flow of events, understand the content, and learn English expressions in the process of understanding the film’s content. The research process consisted of a pre-class stage, a class activity stage, and a post-class stage.

#### **1) Pre-class Stage**

In the pre-class stage, after students watched a scene from the movie being studied on that day, the instructor either gives a simple 5-question quiz to assess learners’ overall understanding of the storyline, or presents a simple OX question using Kahoot! to get an overview of the movie’s events.

#### **2) Class Activity Stage**

The class activity stage consists of a content understanding stage and an expression concentration stage. In the content understanding stage, learners are encouraged to understand the film’s content more deeply by discussing and analyzing in earnest their thoughts and the relationships between the events and characters in the film. In the expression concentration stage, students concentrate on the useful expressions that describe a specific character’s thoughts or feelings, or they explain a specific event in this process.

##### **(1) Content Understanding Stage**

The content understanding stage consists of an activity to identify the characters’ personalities or characteristics, discussion activities, and “If I were a character!” activities. Specifically, in this stage, tasks analyze and discuss the characters’ personalities and their intentions, understanding their feelings in a specific situation, understanding the characters’ beliefs and the causes of the conflicts among them, considering how one would act if one were a specific character, and what kind of comfort one would give to the other. In this phase, group discussion activities are also actively conducted. The main focus is on the causes of conflicts among the characters and their conflict resolutions.

“If I were a character!” are tasks to better understand a character’s psychology through empathy. After the film’s midway point, Maui, a demigod, appears as Moana’s assistant. He is narcissistic and full of bravado; at one point he confides in Moana about his heartbreaking secret: his parents dumped him into the sea as soon as he was born. This detail helps students understand Maui’s personality better, which helps them understand what Maui had been doing. Upon hearing Maui’s tragic story, Moana offers her heartfelt condolences. Here, “If I were a character!” activities can assist learners focus more on content. In this scene, students are asked to consider what kind of comfort they would give Maui if they were Moana. Through this process, learners can better understand Maui’s position, as it has been shown thus far.

### (2) Expression Concentration Stage

The expression concentration stage is a time when students focus on and learn specific expressions from the activities in the content understanding stage. In this phase, a workbook attached to the textbook is used. The workbook summarizes the expressions learners need to acquire in the chapter, along with grammatical explanations. In addition, exercises accompanied the workbook for students to learn the useful patterns in the movie. Learners can focus on specific expressions by answering exercise questions and creating their own sentences that express their experiences or thoughts by using specific patterns.

### 3) Post-Class Stage

The post-class stage is the review stage in which learners watch a scene from the day’s movie without subtitles. The instructor summarizes the film’s content and reminds students of specific expressions related to this. The instructor takes time to organize the content and expressions again by giving a 10-item quiz.

## 3.3 Data Collection

This study’s purpose is to examine an efficient method for teaching English using animated movies in English classes at liberal arts universities, and to analyze learners’ responses to this approach. As a method for using animated films, an activity for learning English expressions based on understanding the movie’s content was presented. This study refrained from requiring learners to memorize specific expressions, regardless of the situation and context in the movie. This approach allows students to learn specific expressions based on a sufficient understanding of the film’s content.

To determine whether class activities using animated movies positive affected learners’ expression acquisition, the first and second tests of English expressions were conducted. The first test was administered in the fourth class, which is considered as an early stage in which learners are adjusting to the class. The second test was given in the tenth week of class, the time in which students are sufficiently adapted to the teaching method. Both the first and second tests consisted of 15 questions in the form of an achievement test.

The questions were multiple-choice, such as reading a given dialogue and then selecting the words or phrases that fit the context, filling in the blanks with words that fit the context, and finding expressions that could be in reply to the other person’s dialogue. Both the type and number of questions in the first and second tests were the same. By analyzing the results of the two tests, this study tried to identify what impact a learning method centered on content understanding using animated movie has on learners’ acquisition of English expressions.

A questionnaire using Google Survey was conducted in the thirteenth week of class to understand students’ responses to and perceptions of their English classes that use animated movies. To ascertain students’ satisfaction level, a Likert 5-point scale was used, and the specific reason for their satisfaction level was presented as an open-ended question.

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 The Result of First and Second Test

The first and second English tests were given to determine the degree of progress a group shows in learning English expressions while adapting to a teaching method that uses animated movies. To compare the results of the first and second tests, a paired sample *t*-test was performed using the SPSS program. The results are shown below in Table 1.

**Table 1. *t*-test results of the first and second tests**

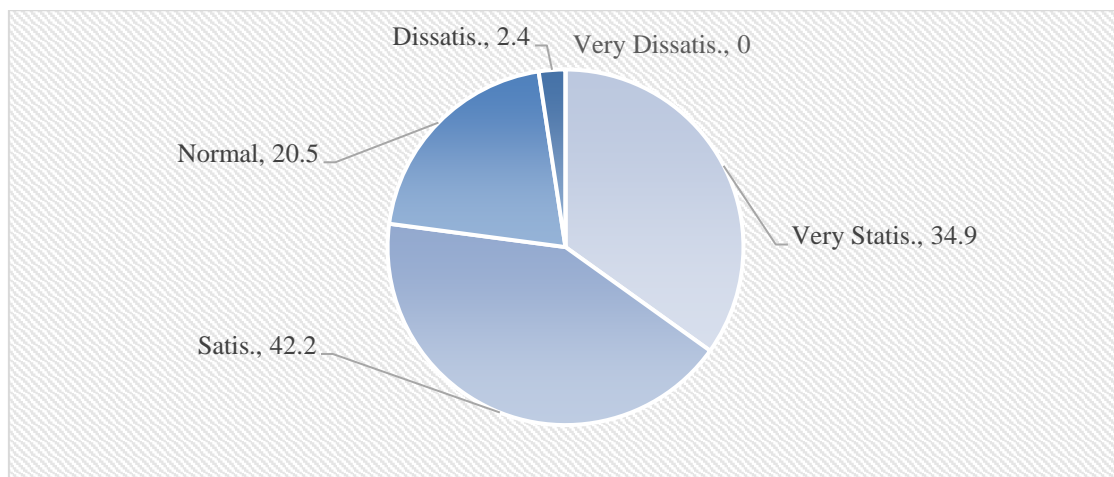
Test	N	M	SD	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>d</i>
First	83	10.07	4.75	-14.69	.001	.85
Second	83	12.93	5.26			

\**p* < .01

The first and second tests were administered to ascertain the pedagogy's effect on learners' acquisition of English expressions. The results showed that learners had a significant improvement of 2.86 points, on average, while participating in a class that used an animated movie ( $t=-14.69$ ,  $p=.001$ ). Furthermore, the effect ( $d=.85$ ) was significant. Thus, it is clear that the content-understanding-oriented class method demonstrates a clear difference in students learning English expressions over time.

### 4.2 The Results of Questionnaire

Students' satisfaction level with this class, which used the Disney animated movie, *Moana*, was surveyed. The results were shown in Figure 1: 34.9% (n=29) reported "Very Satisfied", 42.2% (n=35) "Satisfied", and 20.5% (n=17) "Normal". Only 2.4% (n=2) reported "Dissatisfied"; 0% reported "Very Dissatisfied. Overall, a strong majority of students was either "Very Satisfied" or "Satisfied" with the use of animated movie in their English class (77.1%).



(Note. Stais. = Satisfied, Dissatis. = Dissatisfied)

**Figure 1. Learner satisfaction with this class using an animated movie (%)**

The reasons stated for being satisfied with this class were quite diverse. The specific reasons were categorized based on semantic units, and the reasons given by students for their satisfaction are the following: the film

presented fun and a touching story, beneficial textbook composition, efficient teaching method, sympathetic topics, appropriate difficulty level, and other opinions. The specific reasons for student satisfaction with this class are detailed in Table 2 below.

**Table 2. Reasons for satisfaction with this class using an animated movie**

Category	Specific Reasons
fun and touching story	- Above all else, the animation itself is so much fun. Full of interest. - I am satisfied with both the fun and touching story of the animation.
beneficial textbook composition	- The visual beauty, the moving story, and the theme song are all perfectly composed. - The textbook has various interpretations, comments, and examples. - The textbook is composed of a script book and a workbook, so I can learn enough on my own with the detailed explanations. - The textbook is very convenient for self-study, and there are many additional explanations, so it is easy to understand the content.
efficient teaching method	- I liked the class that focused on the content of the movie itself. - I think it is very effective to learn English expressions after first grasping the positions of the characters alongside the flow of events, rather than just memorizing English expressions out of context. - I was very impressed with the activity of transforming Moana's and Maui's disagreement into a modern Kakao Talk conversation. Thanks to this, the English expressions I used were learned clearly.
sympathetic topics	- I really like the touching message that the film is trying to convey. - I really liked that <i>Moana</i> had all the fun elements of animated movies, plus interesting stories and topics that I could understand. - The topic that touched my heart very much was about the character who had an unstable situation. I am also nervous about putting myself on the job market.
appropriate difficulty level	- The content of the class was not difficult and the English expressions were also not difficult to learn, so it was easy to understand. -The learning difficulty was appropriate. -The content of the class was easy to understand, so it was very good for learning.
other opinions	-The behind-the-scenes stories, cultural explanations, and rich materials that the professor provides are interesting. - It was so great because I was able to learn English expressions that are often used in real life.

The most common reason that learners are satisfied with the use of animated movies in class is that animation itself has an interesting and moving story. Because this is the most significant advantage of using video media, the instructor needs to leverage the fun and moving stories of animated films. Teachers also need to design class activities that focus on either the story development or the flow of events so that learners can enjoy the movie itself even more. Also, discussing which scenes are the most touching and why is a great way to approach the movie's content in a more interesting way.

The next most common reason for satisfaction with this class pertains to the beneficial composition of the textbook. Some students reported that it was convenient to study on their own through the various examples and detailed explanation in the script book and the workbook. Furthermore, the data demonstrate that learners place an important value not only on the enjoyment of the movie itself, but also on how easy it is to learn using the accompanying textbooks. Teachers also need to carefully consider the selection of textbooks when using video media in their classes. It is necessary for them to check whether the textbook is well organized for easy self-study.

Third, another reason for satisfaction with this class is its efficient teaching method. In this class, the focus was on understanding the film's content, and learners were encouraged to learn English expressions related to

it in the process of analyzing and understanding the movie's content. Learners responded positively to this teaching method. Student opinion that the English expressions were learned clearly through group activity, which focused on the film's content and the characters' feelings, is strongly consistent with the purpose of this study. Understanding the content first and then learning the related English expressions can be more meaningful method because learners fully understand the context in which the expressions are used. Students can also fully grasp the intention of the character who used the expression.

Fourth, an important reason for satisfaction was engaging with a topic that can be empathized with. Learners supported Moana's journey through her hardships, and they came to see what she was realizing on her journey, together. Learners can apply these experiences to their current situation in a good way. The reported opinion that the theme of Moana touched a student's heart because he himself was also nervous while looking for a job, reflects this well. Instructors need to recognize that using video media is not simply for acquiring English expressions, but also for learning about topics that can be sympathized with.

Finally, being at the appropriate level of difficulty was suggested as another reason for learners' satisfaction. Students reported that the movie's content was easy to understand and the difficulty of learning was appropriate to their level. This indicates that learners consider both the film's content and the learning difficulty when assessing their satisfaction level regarding the class using movies as part of its teaching method. Teachers naturally consider the difficulty level of the learning objectives and class materials, but teachers also need to be aware that the difficulty of the movie's content is also a factor when using animated movies in class.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

Video media, which is currently in the spotlight as an authentic learning material, is actively being used in many English education settings. At this point, when video media use is being taken for granted, it is necessary to consider the true meaning and role of video media utilization. Therefore, this study intended to examine the direction of animated movie application by suggesting a teaching method using animated films in university-level English classes. This study emphasized content understanding activities, which focus on the flow of events and the psychology of the characters. Additionally, this paper suggested an expression-concentration learning activity that enables students to learn expressions related either to specific events or to scenes in a certain context.

Two tests were conducted with the aim of understanding how these learning activities affect learners' acquisition of English expressions. As a result of the first and second English expression tests, the second test scores were higher than the first test scores, which was a significant difference. Regarding the activities that emphasized understanding an animated movie's contents, it was confirmed that there was a clear difference over time in learners' acquisition of English expressions. An open-ended questionnaire was also conducted to evaluate learners' satisfaction level and their perception of the class using video media. A strong majority of students reported a high satisfaction level, with this class using animated movie (77.1%). Reasons for such satisfaction were given as the following: fun and a touch story, beneficial textbook composition, efficient teaching method, sympathetic topics, appropriate difficulty level, and other opinions. Thus, it was found that learners judge the use of video media based on whether it is a fun or moving story, or whether the movie's theme is sympathetic. In addition, this study found that students think that the expression learning method based on understanding a film's content is effective. In fact, they prefer it to just memorizing practical English expressions regardless of context.

When selecting video media to use in class, instructors need to consider the following factors: enjoyment level, fun events and moving stories, and topics with which the students can empathize. They should also recognize that it is helpful to focus on the flow of events in the film and ensuring a sufficient understanding of

the content before acquiring practical English expressions. One of the greatest strengths of video media is that there is an event, a conflict and a context, and various characters' expression of psychological states and intentions in an appropriate context. When using video media in class, instructors should maximize and leverage not only the advantages of video media but also their linguistic aspects.

## REFERENCES

- [1] M. J. Im, "A Suggestion About the Use of Salience in Learning Multiword Expressions Through an Animated Movie," *STEM Journal*, Vol. 21, No. 2, pp. 1-22, May 2020.
- [2] K. A. Kang, J. Y. Lee, and C. B. Hwang, "Development and Application of English Teaching-Learning Model Utilizing Animation Film in Elementary School," *Studies in English Language & Literature*, Vol. 44, No. 3, pp. 197-219, Fall 2018.
- [3] S. H. Lee, and M. K. Kang, "A Study on the Role of Culture in the Animation, Zootopia: Based on Pop-Culture References and Easter Eggs," *STEM Journal*, Vol. 20, No. 3, pp. 71-90, Fall, 2019.
- [4] H. J. Kim, "Using Animation for Effective Grammar-Focused Learning: With Reference to a Situation-Based Approach Using Context," *STEM Journal*, Vol. 19, No. 1, pp. 21-41, Spring 2018.
- [5] J. J. Jung. "Developing English Proficiency by Using English Animation," *Cartoon and Animation Studies*, Vol. 37, pp. 107-142, December 2014.
- [6] J. H. Han, "The Effects of Animated Films on Elementary Students' Listening Comprehension and Their Interest in English Learning," *Explorations into Future Education*, Vol. 41, No. 2, pp. 1-18, December 2020.
- [7] B. Adair-Hauck, R. Donato, and P. Cumo-Johanssen, "Using a Story-Based Approach to Teach Grammar," in J. L. Shrum and E. W. Glisan (Eds.), *Teacher's Handbook, Contextualized Language Instruction*, Heinle & Heinle, pp. 146-171, 2000.
- [8] C. Herron, H. York, C. Corrie, and P. S. Cole, "Story-Based Video Instructional Package Versus a Text-Based Instructional Package in the Intermediate-Level Foreign Language Classroom," *CALICO Journal*, Vol. 23, No. 2, pp. 1-27, June 2006.
- [9] H. J. Kim, "A Pragmatic Study of Conversations in Movies and Textbooks," *STEM Journal*, Vol. 12, No. 1, pp. 3-22, Spring 2011.
- [10] Y. H. Kang, *Screen English Moana*, Gilbeot EasyTalk, pp. 10-137, 2017.