

# Using Film in Teacher Training: Opinions, Insights, and Recommendations

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## Abstract

*Film has been widely used in teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Film has also been used with teacher candidates of various subjects. Yet, the use of film with EFL teacher candidates is very scarce. Thus, the current study explores EFL teacher candidates' opinions on using film, specifically as an assignment, employing a qualitative research design. The study was conducted with 38 EFL teacher candidates selected through convenience sampling and who were enrolled in a 4-year ELT program. Open-ended questions were administered to the participants to select their opinions on the use of film as an assignment, to find out the insights they have gained about the teaching profession, and suggestions for using film in EFL teacher training. The results were analyzed through thematic analysis and revealed that EFL teacher candidates had positive and favorable opinions on using film as part of an assignment because they could focus due to the questions provided, employ critical thinking, and though that it was an efficient assessment alternative. The insights they have gained about the teaching profession was the realization that teaching extends beyond the classroom, that it is compelling, and the possible impacts teachers can have on students. Among their suggestions of using film with EFL teacher candidates were suggestions related to teaching in general and suggestions focusing on the target language. It is hoped that the use of film suggested and the results of this study will contribute to a wider use of film with EFL teacher candidates.*

**Keywords:** Film in Teacher Training, Alternative Assessment, Foreign Language Teaching, Teacher Training, Assessment

## Introduction

Film is regarded as a mode of public pedagogy that helps one extend how they think about education, reaching beyond schooling and involving aspects of meaning and affect, and thus, is an example of cultural and pedagogic technologies. Film, in that sense, enables students to connect theory examined in class with a variety of social matters depicted in film (Giroux, 2011). Various benefits of film used with college students are grabbing and focusing students' attention, giving a chance for freedom of expression, making learning fun, decreasing anxiety and tension, enhancing critical and creative thinking, and increasing class discussions, among others (Berk, 2009; Fennell, 2013).

Interaction with teacher educators, university supervisors, school mentors and students, aid teacher candidates to experience the teaching profession. Due to the Covid-19 outbreak, observing practicing teachers in the classroom was not possible, leading to the question regarding how to show pre-service teachers (PTs) samples of incidents discussed during the online lessons. This led to the idea to use Film as a replacement for in-class observations. Little research is carried out with regard to using film with foreign language teacher candidates. The available research focuses on the effects of film on improving PTs' language skills. Furthermore, most of the previous research with teacher candidates does not take into account the use of film as an assignment.

## Literature Review

Film has been used at college level in various fields and also in teacher training with favorable outcomes. Bluestone (2000) reported that none of the college students watching film in her psychology courses saw it as unfavorable. The benefits that surfaced were that students thought more realistically and in greater depth about issues discussed in class. She concluded by stating that “Film analysis, when linked with key themes and issues covered in class, not only can increase students’ engagement in the course but also can help develop connected learning experiences and critical thinking skills” (pp. 146). This view is also supported by Fennell (2013) who added that film helps to make abstract topics and ideas more concrete and enables students to see theories in action. Gregg, Hosley, Weng, and Montemayor (1995) point out that films help stimulate interest and reduce monotony indicating that information can become vague when students are equipped with theories and concepts; however, when placing this information in “the life of a character in a film” (p. 33) it becomes more comprehensible and significant.

A study on the use of film with pre-service teachers (PTs) of social studies established that teacher candidates had positive views indicating that film makes learning enjoyable and aids retention and also improves creative and critical thinking skills (Kaya & Çengelci, 2011). Another study with pre-service science teachers on the use of film found that teacher themed films not only improved their self-efficacy but also their attitudes towards the profession (Kaşkaya, Ünlü, Akar & Sağırılı, 2011). In a study with pre-service science teachers, it was revealed that the use of film can increase both their efficacy beliefs and their science teacher efficacy beliefs. It is pointed out that it is important to show PTs the difference between practice at faculties and the real classroom, which can be achieved by teaching through films, accompanied with suitable activities, therefore, film is regarded as a fundamental tool in teacher training (Elmas, Turkoğlu & Aydogdu, 2019).

Delamarter (2015) conducted a study on how to decrease or limit the effects of practice shock PTs may experience. He aimed to examine “the effects of expectation confrontation and intentional reflection on the teaching expectations of two undergraduate

pre-service teachers” (p. 2). The participants were enrolled in a course that analyzed and deconstructed popular Hollywood teacher movies. Based on participants reflections he established that expectation confrontation combined with structured reflection could potentially reshape PTs’, possibly unrealistic, expectations of teaching. Film has also been established to be a powerful tool in engaging PTs in reflection practices. Tan (2006) asserted that film does not only interest and motivate but that it also stimulates reflection and adds that “films, when appropriately chosen, are ideal in triggering the PTs to reflect on an issue of concern, ponder on the meanings and implications for themselves, and finally change or modify their values, beliefs and actions” (p. 485).

The use of film in teaching English as a foreign Language (EFL) is very common. King (2002) put forward that “learning English through films compensates for many of the shortcomings in the EFL learning experience by bringing language to life” (p. 510). Film is regarded as “a cultural artifact as worthy of study in foreign language classrooms as canonical texts of literature” (Kaiser, 2011, p. 233). Via film, students encounter “realistic situations” and are exposed to the “living language” in real life contexts where they can hear colloquial English and a variety of native speakers and have the opportunity to see language in use and encounter paralinguistic and nonverbal behaviour (Harmer, 2007; King, 2002).

Concerning the benefits of using film in the EFL classroom, Holden (2000) indicated that it not only aids development of listening and communicative skills but also allows for realistic and entertaining linguistic and cultural input, stimulating learner involvement which he argued “commercially available listening material has failed to do so” (p. 40). Roell (2010) added that while thought-provoking drama expands cultural knowledge, authentic language in the film improves learning the target language.

Herrero (2016, p. 192) listed the following benefits of using short films and films in the foreign language classroom:

- improve language skills (for example by building vocabulary, increasing attainment in writing, and

- improving the aural and oral competences);
- foster visual and media literacies;
- nurture critical thinking and creativity;
- promote cultural understanding and communication across cultures;
- support lifelong language learning.

In a study with EFL teacher candidates in an oral communication class, Seferoğlu (2008) found that film, apart from improving their speaking and listening skills, among others, it also helped teacher candidates to become aware of cultural issues and improved their critical and creative skills. However, she adds that the prospective teacher in the study indicated the use of film did not particularly help to improve their grammar and writing skills. Additionally, only those who watched a teaching themed film reported that their understanding of the teaching profession improved. More than half of the teacher candidates, presumably those who did not watch a teaching themed film, thought that film did not contribute to their understanding of the teaching profession. It is emphasized that students should watch a film with a purpose by completing relevant tasks. A further study using film segments in reading classes with EFL teachers established that film clips added to the participants' speaking and listening skills, improved their pronunciation and vocabulary knowledge. In addition, PTs were reported to have positive ideas on using film (Akhmedova & Yaylı, 2019).

Given this paucity of investigation into the use of film with prospective EFL teachers, to fill in the gap in the literature, the present study attempted to explore:

- pre-service EFL teachers' opinions on using film as an assignment
- insights PTs have gained about the teaching profession through the films they watched
- PTs' suggestions on how to use film in EFL teacher training
- films PTs suggest be used in EFL teacher training

## Methodology

The current case study employed a qualitative research design where participants were asked to respond to an online survey with open-ended questions. In addition, participants whose responses

to the survey were vague or inadequate were interviewed to elaborate on their responses. The data were analyzed with an inductive approach using thematic analysis.

## Participants

This study was conducted at an English Language Teaching (ELT) Program. Students enrolled in the ELT program are trained to become English as a foreign language teacher. Participants of this study were selected through convenience sampling. 38 PTs enrolled in the same elective course, given by the researcher, where the data for this study were collected, voluntarily participated. The participants were either junior or senior students. Prior to the study, informed consent of the participants was obtained and only those who agreed to participate were asked to complete a survey on the use of film in EFL teacher training.

## Intervention

The elective course, where this study was conducted, starts by focusing on the importance of critical thinking in teaching and addresses issues regarding teacher roles inside and outside the classroom, EFL learner goals and expectations, classroom management, use of the native language in the classroom, error correction, and teacher questions. The course is a 2-hour elective course offered to junior and senior students. The evaluation of the course was based on student presentations on classroom observations that made up the midterm and final exam grades. Until the midterm, critical thinking, teacher roles, classroom management, learner goals and expectations were covered and discussed. Students taking this course were required to observe teachers regarding teacher roles and classroom management. Also, they were required to conduct interviews with FL learners on their goals and expectations. After each observation and interview every student presented and reflected on their findings in the classroom and classroom discussions were conducted. Prior to the Covid-19 outbreak, the midterm grade consisted of these presentations. However, due to the shift to emergency-remote teaching at all levels of education in the country, students were no longer able to make

observations in real classroom settings. Courses were conducted mainly with the learning management system provided by the institution, and via Zoom conferences. Thus, there was an urgent need to adapt the midterm assignment so that it could be implemented in an online platform.

In search for a substitute, it was thought that movies depicting teachers could be a replacement for classroom observations and used as a midterm assignment. Therefore, the assignment required participants to watch assigned teacher movies accompanied by four questions focusing on one of the issues covered during the course such as teacher roles in the classroom, teacher roles outside the classroom, classroom management, and learner goals and expectations. Films selection was based on the criteria that they featured teachers' in-class and out-of-class activities and are relevant to the content of the course. These films were chosen from films familiar to the researcher and from those suggested by colleagues.

Films that were assigned to students enrolled in the course were as follows: *Mona Lisa Smile*, *Freedom Writers*, *Dangerous Minds*, *The Ron Clarke Story*, *Beyond the Blackboard*, *Dead Poets Society*, *Detachment*, *Monsieur Lazhar*, and *Mr. Holland's Opus*. Guiding questions were used because they enable the trainer to decide which particular pedagogical points to focus on and give students a purpose while watching a film (Bluestone 2000; Cullen, 1991; Seferoğlu, 2008). In addition, as Fennell (2013) points out, providing students with questions before viewing can enhance their critical thinking. In order to eliminate repetition and boredom during presentations, one film was assigned to 3 to 4 students, each student answering and presenting their responses to a different set of guiding questions. For instance, one set of guiding questions targeted the teacher's role inside the classroom and another set the teacher's role outside the classroom. A further set of questions aimed at classroom management and problem behavior while the final set of questions targeted the goals and expectations of the students in the film and whether these were met.

Participants were required to prepare short presentations basing on the guiding questions provided. After the presentation by three or four

students on one film, class discussions were conducted. The class presentations and discussions were carried out online via Zoom meetings. After all the presentations were completed, participants were asked to respond to a survey with open-ended questions.

### **Data Collection and Data Analysis**

Data were collected after participants completed their midterm assignment of the weekly 2-hour elective course where this study was conducted. Participating PTs were given a link to the survey and asked to respond to four open ended questions at a time convenient to them within a 5-day time span. The first question asked participants to indicate their opinions on using film as a midterm assignment. The second question aimed to obtain the insights PTs have gained about the teaching profession after watching their assigned film. The third question gathered PTs' suggestions on how to use films in EFL teacher training. The final question asked PTs to recommend further films that could be used in EFL teacher training.

Those participants who provided inadequate or unclear responses were interviewed by the researcher to clarify their responses to the survey items. The interview followed a semi-structured format. After analyzing the surveys, it was found that 5 out of the 38 participants needed to be interviewed to enable them to clarify and elaborate on their survey responses in order to provide more detail. For instance, to the first question "What are your opinions on watching a film with accompanying questions and preparing a short presentation as an assignment?" one participant responded "Positive" another responded by writing "Nice" without any details, necessitating further inquiry.

An inductive (data-driven) approach to data analysis was adopted and the data of this qualitative study were analyzed through thematic analysis which allows the identification, analysis, and interpretation of themes that are the key features of the data. Six steps proposed in thematic analysis were followed while analyzing the data. These steps were as follows: familiarizing yourself with the data; generating initial codes; searching for themes; reviewing themes; defining and naming themes, and

selecting “vivid and compelling extracts” as samples (Braun and Clarke, 2006; 2021.; Clarke and Braun, 2017).

## Results and Discussion

In order to get a general picture on the use of film in the context where this study was conducted, at the beginning of the survey participants were asked to indicate if and in which course(s) film was used. 11 PTs indicated that film was used in other courses they had taken. 4 participants indicated that film was used in one of their educational sciences courses to focus on and discuss classroom management issues. 7 participants indicated that film was used in either their language skills classes or literature classes with the aim to initiate a discussion, or prepare an oral or written film critique. However, the majority of participants, 27 out of 38, stated that film was not used in any other courses except the elective course they were taking.

It can be asserted that film is not a common implementation in the institution where this study was conducted. Yet, as the results reveal, PTs had positive opinions about it and gained useful insights.

### PTs Opinions on Using Film as an Assignment

When asked about their opinions on watching a film with accompanying questions and preparing a short presentation as an assignment, PTs revealed a positive attitude, as was also revealed in the literature (Bluestone, 2000; Delamarter, 2015; Fennell, 2013; Tan, 2006). There was no single participant stating a negative opinion about the application. They primarily used adjectives before they explained their opinions and the adjectives they used were as follows: nice, useful, fun, efficient, great, informative, different, educating, and practical. Besides, they also provided brief explanations regarding their opinions which also constituted the data of this study.

Overall, results revealed that participants had favorable opinions about this application because they were able to “focus”, “employ critical thinking”, and regarded it “an efficient assessment alternative”. Many PTs indicated that the questions they were assigned to answer while watching the film helped them “focus”, enabling them to analyze, reinforce, and think critically about the issues covered in class

and presented in the films. One participant associated this procedure with a puzzle and indicated: “It was like looking for the pieces of a puzzle.” Others stated: “I paid attention to issues that I did not pay attention to before” and “I recognized details related to teaching.” The questions they were assigned to answer helped them to focus and gave them an aim while watching the film. These findings support the use of guiding questions because such questions, as proposed by Nugent and Shaunessey (2003), aid students to “understand what they are watching and how the media is related to course content” (p. 5).

As the course started off with exercises on critical thinking, participants reported that they could “employ critical thinking” as they have learned in class while watching the films. One participant stated: “This assignment improved our critical thinking skills.”, while another indicated, and another stated “it made me look at things from a different perspective.” Thus, it seems that students were able to apply the critical thinking procedures introduced during the course which is a benefit of using film suggested by other studies as well (Bluestone, 2000; Herrero, 2016; Kaya & Çengelci, 2011). The quotation “we could analyze the issues we learned in class” from a participant also supports the proposition by Bluestone (2000) who stated that “Film analysis, when linked with key themes and issues covered in class, not only can increase students’ engagement in the course but also can help develop connected learning experiences and critical thinking skills” (p. 145).

This application was also regarded “an efficient assessment alternative” because, as one PT wrote, “I think it is effective because the films are based on teaching and we were given guiding questions.” One participant indicated that “it was an assignment aimed at learning rather than grades.” Other participants regarded it an efficient way of assessment because they thought it to be student friendly, more fun than an ordinary assignment, and indicated it had a debilitating effect on test anxiety. It seems that such an assignment had a debilitating effect on test anxiety especially when classes and exams had to be carried out online. One PT stated “I didn’t feel any test anxiety”, another indicated “It eased off the intensity of the exam week.” Using this application

seems to have reduced this pressure. Berk (2009) and Fennell (2013) have also pointed to the anxiety reducing nature of using film in the classroom. In the present context, it seems that using films as an assignment also reduces anxiety experienced in test or exam situations. Thus, such an assignment can be an alternative in both face-to-face and online teaching to help reduce test anxiety that some students may experience. Furthermore, considering Perry's (2018) argument that assessment at tertiary level should move beyond traditional methods, consisting of essays, exams and quizzes, using film as an assignment in teacher training might serve as an alternative way of assessment.

It was also regarded as student friendly and more fun than an ordinary assignment because, as expressed by one PT, "rather than doing research for days and writing pages-long essays we were able to do presentations where we could freely express our opinions." As also indicated by Berk (2009), the proposed outcomes of film as making learning fun and providing an opportunity for freedom of expression have been revealed in a situation where film was used as an assignment.

As a final note, two participants even admitted to watching all the films in addition to the one that was assigned to them because they found this implementation very efficient and "eye-opening". Even though PTs were not able to observe actual teachers in real classrooms, the films seemed to have been a substitution. Therefore, when pre-service teachers do not have the opportunity to make observations in real classroom, films can be an alternative replacement.

### **Insights Gained Regarding the Teaching Profession**

In the second open ended question, participants were asked about the insights and contributions they have gained as a result of watching their assigned film. Their responses yielded the following themes: "teaching extends beyond the classroom", "teaching is compelling", and "teacher's impact on students".

Some PTs indicated that they realized that the teaching profession extends beyond the classroom. As one participant indicated, "being a teacher is not only limited to the boundaries of the classroom

walls." Others said: "Teaching is not limited to the classroom and a teacher can touch upon a student's life outside the classroom.", "Being a teacher is not just teaching in front of the blackboard." and "A teacher needs to provide help, both psychological and in terms of course content, inside and outside the school and classroom." It is obvious that PTs gained an understanding that teacher responsibilities are not limited to the classroom. This understanding might be the result of the nature of the films used. All the films focused on teaching, teachers and students. For example, Seferoğlu (2008) found that her participants did not find the feature films they watched helpful to understand the teaching profession. She used films in her communications course with a focus on the target language. Thus, teaching themed films in particular seem to create an understanding of the teaching profession as opposed to films that are not teacher themed.

PTs indicted that "teaching is compelling", requiring ongoing effort and persistency. What emerged was that participants realized that a teacher should never give up, be persistent and solution oriented. As one participant indicated:

"Unfortunately, not all of us will be teaching in perfect classrooms with all the basic equipment. Not all of our students will be smart or come from prosperous families. We should never give up despite any inadequacy or lack of facilities; we should do our best to touch their lives and provide them with a good learning environment."

Some participants emphasized effort and persistency stating, "we need to spend much effort on our students and we should never give up on them." Participants have also mentioned the "teacher's impact on students". PTs indicated that the actions of a teacher can have both constructive and destructive consequences, thus, requiring the teacher to be aware of his/her rights and boundaries. One participant reported: "I have seen that a teacher can create good or bad changes in a person's life." Another participant disclosed: "I have recognized that we can impact our students' life, ideas, and even perspectives and that even a slight comment can affect them." As one participant indicated "despite all these hardships, I believe that touching the life of a single student is invaluable." It is inevitable

for a teacher to affect a student one way or another. Therefore, it is important for prospective teachers to realize the consequences teachers' actions or words can have. In addition, becoming aware of the possible hardships of the teaching profession may help PTs to establish realistic expectations and an understanding of the profession. These findings may also suggest, as Delamarter (2015) asserted, that the use of film may ease the shock that teacher candidates may experience during their practice teaching and assist PTs in developing sound and realistic expectations of the profession; positively impacting their well-being, both personal and professional.

**Suggestions for using Film in EFL Teacher Training**

When participants were asked how film should be used in EFL teacher training their suggestions were related to teaching in general and to teaching the target language. It was suggested that not only films but also short video clips and documentaries could be used. The suggestions they provided in terms of teaching in general are as follows:

- Create an authentic learning environment by using films that are based on real teachers and real events.
- Show what it is like to be teaching in an actual classroom.
- Display the difficulties a novice teacher may encounter and provide ideas how to overcome these difficulties.
- Focus on and discuss classroom management strategies and teaching techniques.
- Initiate discussions and enhance teacher

candidates' critical thinking skills though discussions.

- Provide insights on classroom atmospheres in different countries and social contexts which in turn could lead to gaining different perspectives.
- Participants also suggested the use of film with a focus on the target language. Their suggestions to use film to improve PTs target language skills were as follows:
  - Expose PTs to authentic language samples.
  - Improve PTs listening comprehension, pronunciation and vocabulary.
  - Increase PTs awareness to the pragmatics of the target language.
  - Improve PTs writing skills (by having them write essays on tasks that are based on the film).

Considering Horwitz's (1996) argument that non-native foreign language (FL) teachers should be considered as advanced language learners, PTs suggestions of focusing on the target language used in film is important and seems to indicate the need for further or even on-going language instruction. Thus, FL teacher trainers could design tasks that aim both at working on the target language and on issues related to teaching in general.

**Films Suggested by PTs**

As a final question, PTs were asked what films about teaching they would suggest to be used with prospective teachers. They suggested films in English, films in another language and a documentary. Participants' suggestions are presented in Table 1 below.

**Table 1 Films Suggested by the Participants**

Films in English	Films in another language	Documentaries
Gifted	The Class (Entre Les Murs)	Daughters of Destiny
The Great Debaters	To Be and to Have (Etre et Avoir)	On the Way to School (İkiDil Bir Bavul)
Good Will Hunting	The Chorus (Les Choristes)	
Whiplash	Like Stars on Earth (Taare Zameen Par)	
Coach Carter	Another Round (Druk)	
Bad Teacher	3 Idiots	
School of Rock		
The Kindergarten Teacher		
Stand and Deliver		

In addition to the films suggested by the researcher and the participants of this study, Trier (2000) provides a list of school films with the oldest produced in 1933 and the newest produced in 1999. Nugent et. al. (2003) and Roell (2010) also provide a list of films that can be used in teacher training. It is hoped that these films will be of use to teacher trainers wanting to employ film in their classes.

It should be noted that before using these films with PTs the teacher trainer should watch and decide whether they are appropriate regarding the target language or issues related to teaching that are aimed to be focused on. Tasks and or questions should be prepared accordingly.

### Conclusion

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, PTs were not able to conduct classroom observations as a requirement of the elective course where this study was conducted since all teaching was done online at all levels of education. The results of this study suggest that the lack of being in a real classroom can perhaps be compensated by using films that focus on teaching and are relevant to the content of the course. Also, using film as an assignment can be implemented to decrease or perhaps eliminate any test anxiety PTs would feel during a test and act as an alternative way of assessment.

The favorable opinions of PTs to use film as an assignment, indicate that they would benefit from it. Using film along with guiding questions can help PTs focus on the targeted issues and think critically about them. It has been suggested that questions should be provided to viewers to help them focus and make the viewing process more effective. Several PTs indicated that they had already watched the film assigned to them but that the questions they were provided helped them to focus on the points related to teaching in particular. They indicated that when they initially watched that particular film, they did not watch it “through the eyes of a future teacher”. Therefore, there is no harm in assigning students films that they have already watched considering that you give them a point to focus on which they did not consider during the initial viewing of the film.

PTs usually mention the so-called shock they experience when they start to teach in a real classroom

because what is written in the books or is taught by teacher trainers does not always match the reality. The insights reported by the participants seem to have expanded their understanding of teaching. As Long and Pope (2016) asserted, films with representations of teachers enable PTs to encounter various teaching personalities and approaches and “expand their understandings of the contexts in which teachers function. ... Thus they enrich and support the ongoing process of identity formation” (p. 27). Although films may not authentically reflect what is going on inside and outside the real classroom, carefully chosen films can be a satisfactory replacement.

PTs enjoyed the way film was used as an assignment in their elective course and added that it could be used in various ways such as to exemplify various classroom atmospheres, initiating discussions regarding teaching techniques and classroom issues. Furthermore, they suggested to use films to enhance their target language skills through various language specific activities that focus on grammar, vocabulary, speaking, listening and/or writing. Kamhi-Stein (2009) asserts that prospective nonnative English-speaking teachers would benefit from training aimed at developing their language proficiency, which would also lead to a positive professional identity resulting in “enhanced instructional practices”.

It can also be argued that using film with PTs may have an indirect effect on their future teaching. Nugent and Shaunessy (2003), anticipate that PTs might use film in the same manner in their future classes. Russel (2013) goes further and suggests that prospective teachers should be instructed on the advantages and proper use of film in order to incorporate film in their classrooms.

The use of film, as suggested in this study, can be employed with foreign language teacher candidates of languages other than English as well. However, due to the fact that this study is limited to 38 participants and to the use of film as an assignment, further research is needed aiming at the use of film focusing on the target language and also issues related to teaching. Finally, it is hoped that the list of films provided by the researcher and the participants of the study will be of help to teacher trainers of PTs in various areas.

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