

Vocabulary Acquisition through Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle: A Classroom-Based Study

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ABSTRACT




The study explores the integration of the 2019 Netflix film *The King* as a classroom-based intervention among the 70 undergraduate engineering students from SRM Institute of Science and Technology during the Communicative English class to enhance their English vocabulary acquisition framed by the Lexical Approach and Experiential Learning Theory (David Kolb, 1984). During the intervention, the students were asked to watch the film *The King* and were asked to write down the unpopular words, find out their meaning, and construct an original sentence using their knowledge. The study was analyzed through a qualitative descriptive observation using the rubric score sheet as data. Findings revealed that the study results in boosting the classroom activity, resulting in increased student engagement in the classroom and the formation of new lexical items. The findings indicate that the movie-based intervention in the EFL classroom can enhance learners' vocabulary skills.

Keywords: *Experiential Learning; Lexical Approach; Vocabulary Acquisition; Film-Based Learning; Rubric Assessment*

INTRODUCTION

Language proficiency recognizes vocabulary acquisition as a universal fundamental foundation that results in listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. In Indian colleges, students often lack vocabulary skills, which causes the lack of English sentence formation. "Vocabulary learning is an influential factor in the acquisition of any language as it directly affects all the four language skills: speaking, listening, writing, and reading" (Jayachandran & Madhavi, 2025, p. 21). In most of the classroom scenarios, teachers use task-based language learning to teach the students, in such a way, movies play a vital role in enhancing English language skills. "Instructors and textbooks use terms and concepts of which students may not have the prior knowledge to provide an adequate context for interpretation. This may lead to reading difficulties for the students. When this happens, students might not be able to comprehend or understand whatever they are reading" (Husin, Shamsudin, & Abd. Manan, 2015). To address some of the concerns raised by prior research, the

researcher developed an intervention for this study. "In recent years, watching movies has emerged as a popular medium for vocabulary acquisition, providing an engaging and accessible way for students to enhance their language skill" (Vasquez et al., 2025, p. 75). By watching films, one can easily acquire language sub-consciously (Krashen 1985, p.4). "Students have the ability in acquiring new knowledge, especially enhancing vocabulary by adapting and applying the authentic contexts just by watching movies" (Vasquez et al., 2025, p. 76). "Media has so much influence on people and people prefer to watch their favourite shows in English language, even if they are watching the show in their native language, they still prefer to read the subtitles in English" (Zahid, Niazi, & Saba, 2025, p.46). According to Yüksel and Tanrıverdi (2009) using of subtitles or captions while watching a film aids a lot in attaining vocabulary, subsequently, they aid the learner integrate a word into a situation. In such a way "Watching English movies as part of the lesson is one approach for students to expand their vocabulary" (Yanti et al., 2025, p. 75). While

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watching the film teacher can point out at certain vocabulary related to the social context in the film. By doing so the learner can be in a position to use the vocabulary in their social life (Alluri, 2018). The study aims to design a film-based classroom activity to follow the intervention with the aim to create a structured experiential learning environment for vocabulary acquisition by following the research questions mention below:

- What effect does a film-based vocabulary exercise based on Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle have on engineering students learning new words in an ESL classroom?
- To what extent do students demonstrate competent vocabulary application through sentence construction following the intervention?
- What is the impact of experiential media-based classroom construction regarding the lexical development of Indian engineering students?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The empirical study by Krishna, Suneetha, and Basha (2022) explores the role of English-language newspapers in developing vocabulary among ESL engineering students. The research explores the idea that traditional classroom instruction alone is not sufficient for lexical growth; therefore, the researchers investigate how authentic materials, specifically newspaper articles, can enhance vocabulary acquisition. A questionnaire was created to test the students' abilities across synonym and antonym recognition, word families, sentence formation, and lexical simplification. The study concluded that the results showed a vast majority (91.5%) of students were eager to acquire vocabulary through newspapers, indicating a strong interest among the students. Gomathi et al. (2017) explores how films enhance vocabulary learning among first-year engineering students in India; the study focused on investigating the English movie *Slumdog Millionaire*. The researcher highlighted the potential of audiovisual media to engage learners in authentic and contextual language exposure. The study's findings revealed that learners benefited from repeated word exposure, contextual understanding, and interactive classroom discussion. Through this film-based activity, students confirmed that the activity is both enjoyable and motivating for their outcomes. Ultimately the study concludes that film-based intervention acts as an effective pedagogical tool for language development,

particularly in vocabulary enrichment. The intersection of multimedia tools like films in the classroom has the potential to spark a dynamic pedagogical resource. Roy (2015), in her study, explores how films can form a conventional, text-bound space into a multisensory and learner-centred environment. The study highlights the value of the VAK/VARK model, referencing Dual Coding Theory, stating how films enhance attention, retention, and emotional engagement, which explore more on learning through a blend of auditory and visual stimuli. However, a clear gap emerges in the study's theoretical analysis. While the study mentions the importance of learning styles and experimental engagement, Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory, which systematically maps the learning process through four stages, is noticeably absent. This theoretical gap limits the pedagogical potential of the study. Therefore, this study aims to bridge the gap by applying Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory to structure a film-based vocabulary and lexical learning intervention. By aligning viewing, reflection, conceptualizing, and applying vocabulary tasks to Kolb's learning stages, the study offers a structured, experience-driven approach to vocabulary acquisition through film in the classroom activity.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Lexical Approach

Michael Lewis's Lexical Approach states that "lexis is the basis of language". "The lexical approach can be summarized in a few words: language consists not of traditional grammar and vocabulary but often of multi-word prefabricated chunks" (Lewis, 1997). In the classroom, the lexical approach often involves activities like concordance work, collocation exercises, and meaning-focused tasks. When this is applied to this study, the Lexical Approach justifies the emphasis on authentic vocabulary from the film *The King*. The students were asked to identify the unpopular words from the movie dialogues and use them in their sentences. The study encouraged the students to treat these items as meaningful units. For example, instead of rote-memorizing the word "tyrant" from a word list, students visualize it used in the historical fiction on the screen, helping them grasp its meaning more effectively. As Lewis said, "Language consists of grammaticalized lexis, not lexicalized grammar". Therefore, the study allows the learners to first observe the meaning in the

context and then articulate that understanding through sentences.

Experiential Learning Theory

According to David Kolb's experiential learning theory, the cycle consists of four stages. Concrete Experience (CE), Reflective Observations (RO), Abstract Conceptualization (AC), and Active Experimentation (AC).

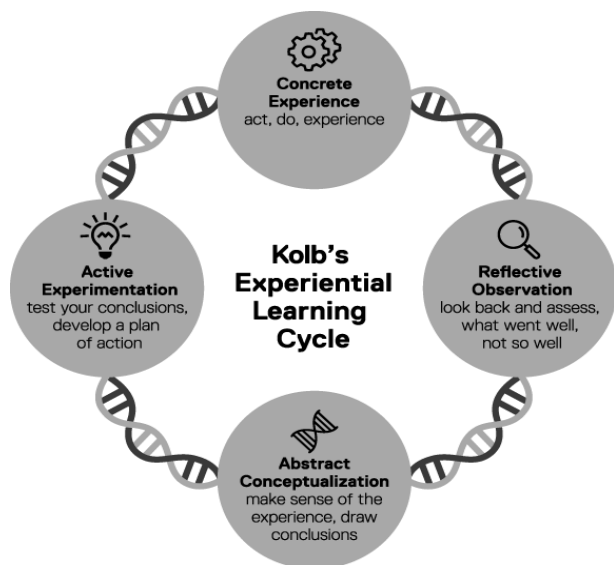


Figure 1. From Toronto Metropolitan University (Kolb's experiential learning cycle)

In the context of the study conducted in the EFL classroom, Kolb's cycle can facilitate effective task design. For instance, the movie offers the Concrete Experience. Students learn a new language naturally by observing their interactions with it. The following activities, such as noticing words and discussions, fall under Reflective Observation where the students think about the language use. The explanation of the meaning and lexical patterns constitutes Abstract Conceptualization forming explicit knowledge for the words. Finally, Active Experimentation represent student produce sentence with the target vocabulary as they apply new knowledge in communication. By explicitly aligning tasks to Kolb's stages, the study aims to cater to multiple learning preferences and ensure a complete experiential learning process in the classroom.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

During the Communicate English class, 70 undergraduate engineering students at SRM Institute of Science and Technology, Kattankulathur, were involved in the study. All were

non-native English speakers; their proficiency was intermediate. The activity was conducted during one of their regular classes. The students were asked to watch the movie *The King* and were instructed to watch the film in English with subtitles. Ethical protocols were followed during the intervention.

Procedure

The intervention lasted over 120 minutes and was structured as a task-based language learning activity in the classroom, with the following procedures: During the introduction and pre-viewing task, the researcher introduced the film *The King* briefly. "The King is a 2019 epic historical drama film directed by David Michôd, based on several plays by William Shakespeare." The researcher explained the students should watch the film and note down the unfamiliar and intriguing vocabulary. The researcher did not provide a prior vocabulary list. This intervention aimed to draw attention to the English language. During the movie screening (Concrete Experience), the students watched the film with English audio and subtitles. Students were made to sit in groups, but they were instructed to write down the vocabulary words individually, which is new to them. Reflective Observation - After writing down the unfamiliar words, the students were asked to find out the meaning of the words and were asked to frame their own sentence using the word and meaning found. Abstract Conceptualization - The researcher, drawing on the Lexical Approach, led a teaching segment. The researcher, to explain the process, gave an outline for a word by providing definitions, synonyms, and usage examples for the sentences. Sentence Construction (Active Experimentation) - In the final step, the researcher asked the students to construct an original sentence using the targeted word they had learned from the film. Working individually, the students observed and aimed to use the word correctly and meaningfully. The writing task served as active experimentation by allowing students to apply the newly learned vocabulary in a creative and appropriate manner. Rubric Assessment and Observation: Throughout the activity, the researcher used a preprepared rubric to watch the students performances. After the sheets were collected, the rubric was used to grade the student's work on criteria such as accuracy of the meaning, grammar, spelling, and the depth of context usage.

Instrument

The rubric categories were inspired by standard analytic rubrics for vocabulary tasks. No conventional pre-test and post-test were conducted. Instead, data consists of the classroom activity by completed worksheets and rubric scores for each criterion.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Based on the rubric assessment, the score indicates a positive outcome. The majority of the students achieved high performance in major

areas such as grammar and sentence structure. On average, students identified about 10 to 15 new words each. The mean total out of 12 per word for the rubric score was 7.8 (SD = 2.1), proving moderate success for the study. As shown in Table 1, for word meaning, 57% of the students achieved excellent by providing proper definitions. In sentence construction, 86% of the students wrote original sentences. This suggests most of the students could apply the new word wisely and practically, resulting in a key indicator of vocabulary acquisition.

Table 1: Rubric Performance on Vocabulary Task

Rubric Performance - Vocabulary Task N = 70	Excellent (4)	Good (3)	Fair (2)	Poor (1)
Word meaning identification	57%	36%	5%	0%
Sentence construction	43%	43%	10%	0%
Use of contextual clues	50%	36%	10%	0%
Active participation	64%	29%	5%	0%
Overall Vocabulary useage	29%	57%	10%	0%

The classroom-based vocabulary intervention based on Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory and the Lexical Approach explored vocabulary acquisition through the film *The King*. The intervention followed all four experiential stages. Concrete experience was achieved through students watching the film and engaging in immersive real-life language use and emotional context. Reflective observation followed as students discussed unfamiliar words, their meaning, and the usage of the words. In the Abstract Conceptualization, the researcher highlighted common collocations, demonstrating some examples for the students by guiding them. Finally, in the Active Experimentation, students formed an original sentence using the newly learned vocabulary, thereby applying and understanding it by creative language use.

The intervention used the Lexical Approach emphasizing learning vocabulary in meaningful chunks from authentic film dialogues. Phrases like "reign supreme" and "fierce opposition" were encountered and discussed rather than isolating word lists, reflecting Michael Lewis's idea that grammar and vocabulary are inseparable. Students developed a deeper understanding through this contextual learning, and observation revealed increased retention and application. This integration of experiential learning and the lexical approach not only supported diverse learning styles during the intervention but also led to better sentence accuracy and lexical usage. Film-based learning, paired with task-based language learning,

proved to have a significant effect on engaging teaching strategies for vocabulary acquisition in an ELT classroom.

RESULTS

The key outcome of the study is that students enhanced themselves with new vocabulary items and utilized them in their sentences. In numeric terms, analysis of rubric scores showed an average rubric score of 7.8 out of 12 (SD 2.1). Category means: Vocabulary Accuracy (2.3 out of 3), Definition Accuracy (2.0 out of 3), Grammar (2.5 out of 3), and Usage (2.0 out of 3). In general, students formed some basic sentence-making grammar, scoring the highest, and usage, the lowest, making it a bit lower where some sentences only partially demonstrated the lexical meaning. Most learned words, like "Ajar," "Leige," and "Endeavour," were successfully mastered by over 70% of students, resulting in high rubric scores. The students' engagement indicated 95% of the students contributed at least one or three words during the assessment, and 95% of the students completed the classroom activity worksheet fully. Not only quantitative outcomes were evident; qualitative outcomes also emerged. The researcher was able to observe that by the end of the intervention, students began to use the learned words in discussions with their friends. Students came out with the positive comment in the following session, saying the lexical words are helping them in possible ways. Moreover, several students reported reviewing the film later on their

own to find more diction using the English subtitle. Looking into previous research, the intervention's result implies that the vocabulary exposure was not fleeting. According to the students, they felt more confident encountering English in media after this intervention.

CONCLUSION

The intervention demonstrated that film-based classroom activities that combine an experiential learning model with the lexical approach can effectively support and enhance vocabulary learning for EFL engineering students. Students actively engaged with new lexical words by watching the film *The King*, reflecting on meaning and usage, and experimenting with language, mirroring Kolb's learning cycle. The study's observation analysis and rubric assessment revealed that most students adopted new lexical words and used them appropriately in writing, confirming that meaningful language learning took place during the intervention. These findings are in range that supports the broader literature that film and media aids are valuable in vocabulary outcomes, and they increase learners motivation when they are integrated into classroom cases. The study also suggests pedagogical implications for practice for EFL practitioners, explaining that incorporating films into the teaching can serve multiple pedagogical goals, as it motivates learners, provides contextual input, and aligns with lexical pedagogy. When doing so, it is beneficial to accompany viewing with active tasks such as notetaking, writing sentences, and discussions to transmit from passive reception to production. In summary, the intervention of watching the film *The King* was not merely entertainment for the students; it also provided the students a model for vocabulary teaching that is both theoretically grounded and promising. By making "lexis" the core focus within an experiential framework, teachers can create memorable learning cycles that help students internalize new vocabulary meaningfully.

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