



The Impact of Silent Short Films on Enhancing EFL Students' Speaking Skills

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تأثير الأفلام القصيرة الصامتة على تحسين مهارات التحدث لدى طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلفة أجنبية

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Abstract:

This study examines the effect of using silent short films on enhancing English-speaking skills among undergraduate students. The primary objective was to determine whether visual and contextual cues in silent films can improve students' speaking fluency, vocabulary retention, and communicative confidence. A quasi-experimental design was employed, involving 20 fourth-semester English students, with data collected through pre- and post-tests, and classroom observations. The results indicate a significant improvement in students' oral performance, including increased fluency, accuracy, and participation. The study also demonstrates that silent short films facilitate contextual understanding and effective vocabulary usage. The findings support the integration of silent short films as an instructional tool in language teaching to foster communicative competence.

Keywords: Silent short films, speaking skills, English language teaching, communicative competence, vocabulary retention.

المخلص

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى بحث أثر استخدام الأفلام القصيرة الصامتة في تنمية مهارات التحدث باللغة الإنجليزية لدى طلبة المرحلة الجامعية. وتمثل الهدف الرئيس للدراسة في التحقق مما إذا كانت الإشارات البصرية والسياقية في الأفلام الصامتة يمكن أن تسهم في تحسينطلاقة الطلاب في التحدث، والاحتفاظ بالمفردات، وتعزيز ثقتهم في التواصل باللغة الإنجليزية. وقد اعتمدت الدراسة المنهج شبه التجريبي، واشتملت على عينة مكونة من 20 طالباً من طلبة الفصل الدراسي الرابع بقسم اللغة الإنجليزية، حيث جمعت البيانات من خلال الاختبارات القبلية والبعدية، بالإضافة إلى الملاحظة الصفية. وأظهرت النتائج وجود تحسن ملحوظ في الأداء الشفهي للطلاب، تمثل في زيادة الطلاقة والدقة والمشاركة داخل الفصل الدراسي. كما بينت الدراسة أن الأفلام القصيرة الصامتة تسهم في تعزيز الفهم السياقي والاستخدام الفعال للمفردات. وتدعم هذه النتائج دمج الأفلام القصيرة الصامتة كأداة تعليمية في تدريس اللغة بهدف تنمية الكفاءة التواصلية لدى المتعلمين.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الأفلام القصيرة الصامتة، مهارات التحدث، تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية، الكفاءة التواصلية، الاحتفاظ بالمفردات.

Introduction

Speaking is one of the fundamental skills that language learners strive to develop. It is also an essential component of daily communication, as a person's ability to speak fluently often shapes the first impression others form about them. According to Bahadorfar and Omidvar (2014, as cited in Brown & Yule, 1983), speaking is a skill that is frequently used to evaluate students in everyday situations. However, many learners find this skill particularly challenging, as it requires continuous practice, effort, and time to master. For instance, Meinawati,

Rahmah, Harmoko, and Dewi (2020, as cited in Syamsurizal, 2015) found that students often hesitate to speak due to fear of making mistakes, lack of ideas, or concern about being ridiculed by their peers.

To address these challenges, the integration of technology into the classroom has become increasingly important. Traditional teaching techniques are now often supplemented or replaced by technological tools that engage learners through multiple intelligences and skills (Bahadorfar & Omidvar, 2014). As Kasapoglu-Akyol (2010) highlights, technology plays a significant role in the twenty-first century, particularly as younger generations grow up immersed in it. Films, in particular, are powerful tools for capturing students' attention and creating a stimulating learning environment. Boucha and Hamadi (2020) note that short films have recently gained popularity as teaching resources, with German teachers using them to diversify classroom activities.

The teacher's role remains crucial in motivating students to overcome speaking anxiety and to foster creativity and critical thinking. A dynamic and enjoyable classroom environment can be established by adopting innovative teaching strategies such as silent short films (Nengsih & Sari, 2012). As Bahadorfar and Omidvar (2014) further emphasize, the use of technology helps learners focus more on the subject matter rather than the difficulties of the task, thus reducing stress and enhancing engagement.

Silent short films, in particular, are highly effective in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. Because they rely on visual storytelling rather than dialogue, they encourage students to interpret meaning through images and body language. Boucha and Hamadi (2020) argue that integrating silent short films into the classroom increases students' interest, participation, and motivation to speak. Similarly, Boufroua and Labreche (2019) highlight that such films reduce anxiety and create a supportive learning environment, ultimately improving students' speaking outcomes.

Statement of problem

Many EFL learners experience significant difficulties when speaking; often feeling anxious, stressed, or insecure when giving presentations or engaging in discussions. According to Krashen's affective filter hypothesis, negative emotions can act as filters, blocking comprehensible input and hindering language acquisition (as cited in Chen, 2020). This research addresses how silent short films may help learners overcome speaking anxiety and improve oral communication skills.

Research questions

1. To what extent do students benefit from watching silent short films in enhancing their speaking skills?
2. What is the impact of silent short films on students' speaking performance, including fluency, vocabulary, and pronunciation?

Research hypothesis

It is hypothesized that the integration of silent short films into classroom instructions positively influences students' speaking performance, including fluency vocabulary acquisition, and pronunciation, also increases their motivation to participate.

Research objectives

This study seeks to shed light on modern methods of teaching English through technology. The main objectives are:

1. To explore the effectiveness of silent short films as a method to develop students' speaking skills.
2. To examine whether silent short films can improve students' oral practice.

Scope and Delimitation of the Study

This study is limited to third-semester students at the Faculty of Languages and Translation, Misurata, Libya. Its scope is confined to investigating the effectiveness of silent short films in improving students' speaking skills within this specific academic context.

Literature Review

Silent short films are considered a modern technique to enhance students' speaking skills and encourage them to communicate more effectively. This chapter reviews previous literature on speaking skills, the difficulties associated with learning to speak a foreign language, the role of technology in education, and the potential of silent short films as a teaching tool.

Speaking Skill

Language is the primary means of communication, consisting of sounds and written forms that convey meaning. It allows individuals to share information, ideas, and emotions. Rahayu (2015) emphasized that language is not only crucial for daily communication but also serves as an essential tool for international interaction. English, in particular, is regarded as a global language, motivating many learners to study it for academic, professional, and personal purposes (Hayati, 2015).

English language acquisition requires mastery of the four basic skills: reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Among these, speaking is often considered the most important, as it enables learners to communicate their thoughts and feelings directly. Zuhriyah (2017, as cited in Sepahvand, 2014) argued that speaking is often prioritized by learners for reasons such as personal satisfaction, social interactions, and career opportunities.

However, speaking is also one of the most difficult skills to master. Learners often struggle due to fear of making mistakes, limited vocabulary, and lack of confidence (Megawati & Mandarani, 2016). Many learners experience anxiety and shyness, which prevent them from speaking in front of others. To overcome these challenges, teachers must provide a supportive environment, using encouragement and positive reinforcement to help students speak more fluently and confidently (Megawati & Mandarani, 2016, as cited in Mueen, 1992).

Difficulties of Speaking a Foreign Language

Speaking a foreign language involves numerous psychological and linguistic barriers. Fear, timidity, and concern about making mistakes are common obstacles that reduce students' confidence (Nijat, Atifnigar, Chandran, Selvan, & Subramonie, 2019). To address these issues, learners and educators have proposed strategies such as engaging classroom activities, strong teacher-student relationships, and supportive environments.

Activities like silent short films, taboo games, and hot seat exercises can help learners reduce anxiety and increase participation. Akter (2019) noted that traditional approaches in ESL classrooms are often insufficient, and therefore innovative methods—such as using films—are essential for simplifying the learning process and making it more effective.

Technology in Education

Technology has become an indispensable part of modern education, shaping both teaching and learning practices. Eady and Lockyer (2013) highlighted that technology is now an integral component of teachers' professional resources, supporting them in facilitating student learning. As the educational system evolves, technology enables learners to engage more creatively with curricula (Arvindhan, 2019).

The use of modern tools has been shown to make classrooms more interactive, enjoyable, and efficient. Raja and Nagasubramani (2018) found that students' engagement and learning outcomes improve significantly when technology is integrated into teaching. ESL learners, in particular, benefit from modern tools that promote faster and more enjoyable learning.

Teachers' Use of Technology

Although technology plays a central role in education, teachers remain key facilitators of learning. They are responsible for motivating students and creating an environment that fosters curiosity and engagement. Carstens, Mallon, Bataineh, and Al-Bataineh (2021) argued that technology motivates students by making learning relevant to their everyday technological experiences. Teachers can choose from various tools—such as projectors, digital platforms, and online resources—depending on the needs of their students (Arvindhan, 2019).

The Importance of Technology in Language Learning

Technology has proven particularly valuable in ESL classrooms, where it is used to enrich the curriculum, deliver instruction, and support overall learning processes (Arvindhan, 2019). By providing visual aids, online platforms, and multimedia resources, technology enhances comprehension, increases motivation, and accommodates diverse learning styles.

Silent Short Films

Silent short films represent one of the most engaging technological tools available to teachers. Hutapea and Suwastini (2019, as cited in Sudiran, 2015) stressed the importance of visual aids in creating interactive and effective classrooms. Shabiralyani, Hasan, Hamad, and Iqbal (2015) further emphasized that visual aids make lessons more engaging and memorable.

When used strategically, films and videos provide repetition, reinforce material, and improve student engagement (Williams & Lutes, 2007). Cruse (2006) found that educational films help create shared knowledge, improve discussion, and enhance comprehension. Silent short films, in particular, encourage students to interpret meaning through body language and music. Gestures play a central role in conveying emotions and ideas (Altun, 2019), while musical accompaniments increase engagement and emotional connection (Altman, 2004; Miller, 1982).

Silent short films also provide students with opportunities to speak freely, narrate what they observe, and express themselves without fear of being wrong. This makes them a powerful tool for developing speaking skills and reducing anxiety.

Related Studies

Several studies have highlighted the effectiveness of silent short films in improving speaking skills:

Kim (2014) investigated the use of a Charlie Chaplin silent movie clip in developing oral proficiency among Korean undergraduates. The study found significant improvements in discourse, vocabulary retention, syntax, and grammatical accuracy in the experimental group compared to the control group.

Boufroua and Labreche (2019) conducted a study at Mohammed Seddik Ben Yahia University, Algeria, with 40 first-year EFL students. Results showed that silent short films increased student engagement.

Methodology

Research Design

This part presents the methodology adopted in this research. To address the research questions, a mixed-methods design was employed. The quantitative approach was used to measure the outcomes of the intervention, while the qualitative approach was used to analyze students' performance. Specifically, a quasi-experimental design was applied for data collection and analysis.

Participants of the Study

The participants were 20 students enrolled in the third semester of the English and Translation departments at the Faculty of Languages and Translation. Convenience sampling was used to select the participants. They were divided into two groups: a control group (10 students) who continued with traditional methods, and an experimental group (10 students) who participated in activities using silent short films.

Research Instruments

The study employed one main instrument: a pretest–posttest experimental design. An oral test was administered to measure the students' performance before and after the intervention. Dimitrov and Rumrill (2003, p. 159) stated that *"pretest–posttest designs are widely used in behavioral research, primarily for the purpose of comparing groups and/or measuring change resulting from experimental treatments."*

The oral test included two questions:

1. May you introduce yourself?
2. What is your favorite film?

Data Collection

Permission was obtained from the instructor of Listening and Speaking III to work with third-semester students from the English department. The researchers administered the oral test, asking students the two prepared questions, and their responses were evaluated.

Data Analysis

Data were collected through both qualitative and quantitative methods using the quasi experimental design. Pretests and posttests were conducted, and the results were statistically analyzed to determine differences before and after the intervention with silent short films.

Ethical Considerations

Approval was obtained from the heads of the English department. Participants were informed of their right to voluntarily participate or withdraw from the study at any stage. Additional permission was secured from the instructor of Listening and Speaking III to conduct the experiment with this group of students.

Results and Discussion

The experiment was conducted from May 4, 2025, to June 22, 2025, over seven meetings involving third-semester students. The purpose of the study was to examine the impact of silent short films on students' speaking skills. Based on the qualitative analysis, the findings indicated that the use of silent short films positively influenced students' speaking performance in terms of fluency, vocabulary mastery, pronunciation, grammar, and self-confidence.

At the beginning of the experiment, most students experienced difficulty understanding the activity and demonstrated limited speaking ability. During the first meeting, students appeared hesitant and lacked confidence when asked to express their ideas orally in English. In fact, only one participant, Student 7, attempted to produce a sentence. This finding suggests that students were initially unfamiliar with speaking activities that relied on

silent visual media. Moreover, students' reluctance to speak may have been influenced by anxiety and fear of making mistakes in front of their classmates.

However, in the second meeting, students began to participate more actively with guidance from the instructor. Although some students still demonstrated shyness, they showed greater willingness to retell the story presented in the film. In particular, Students 5 and 7 displayed noticeable improvement in confidence and participation. These findings indicate that repeated exposure to speaking activities using silent short films gradually reduced students' anxiety and encouraged classroom interaction.

Furthermore, by the third meeting, students demonstrated improvements in fluency and vocabulary use. Student 5 was able to speak fluently and used vocabulary accurately, whereas Student 10 showed fluency despite making several grammatical errors. At the same time, peer correction emerged during classroom interaction, as students collaboratively corrected mistakes such as the incorrect use of *sheeps*. In addition, students acquired new vocabulary items, including *woodpecker*, *sparrow*, and *nest*. Therefore, these findings suggest that the visual context provided by silent short films facilitated vocabulary acquisition and supported students in expressing ideas more effectively.

Similarly, the fourth meeting showed further development in students' speaking performance. Students 6 and 10 demonstrated remarkable improvement in fluency and pronunciation, while Student 8 also showed greater fluency compared to previous meetings. Consequently, the improvement observed across meetings indicates that continuous speaking practice through visual media contributed to the enhancement of students' oral communication skills.

In the fifth meeting, students initially encountered difficulties because of unfamiliar and challenging vocabulary presented in the film. Nevertheless, after rewatching the film and searching for the meanings of unfamiliar words, students performed more effectively. Student 5, for example, demonstrated substantial improvement in fluency, pronunciation, and grammar. Although some lexical errors remained, such as the use of *bird child* instead of *chick*, students still showed progress in constructing and communicating ideas in English.

Likewise, during the sixth meeting, most students performed confidently and fluently. Student 2 showed improvement in pronunciation, while Student 5 maintained fluency despite making minor grammatical errors. As a result, students appeared increasingly comfortable speaking in front of the class and expressing their ideas orally. This finding further suggests that the consistent use of silent short films contributed to students' confidence and speaking motivation.

By the seventh meeting, students demonstrated their highest level of performance throughout the experiment. They showed significant improvement in vocabulary mastery, fluency, pronunciation, and self-confidence. For instance, Student 7 successfully used expressions such as *pull out* and *fell out*, whereas Student 4 applied more advanced vocabulary, including *highest mountain* and *run out*. These examples indicate that students had developed greater ability to use varied vocabulary and expressions in spoken communication.

Overall, the findings revealed substantial progress in students' speaking skills throughout the seven meetings. Initially, only a small number of students actively participated in speaking activities. However, by the third meeting onward, most students became more engaged, motivated, and confident in speaking English. Thus, the findings suggest that silent short films created an interactive and enjoyable learning environment that encouraged students to communicate more actively. In addition, the use of silent short films appeared to support vocabulary development, pronunciation improvement, grammatical awareness, and speaking fluency. The visual and contextual nature of the films helped students understand meaning more easily and stimulated them to describe actions, retell stories, and express opinions. Moreover, peer interaction during the activities contributed to students' learning process, as students corrected each other's mistakes and shared vocabulary knowledge collaboratively.

In conclusion, the results of this study indicate that silent short films can be considered as an effective teaching medium for enhancing students' speaking skills. The use of engaging visual media not only improved students' linguistic abilities but increased their confidence and motivation to speak English in the classroom too.

Quantitative Analysis of Students' Performance

Figure 1 shows the overall performance of students in the test.

Figure 2 shows the performance of the experimental group.

Figure 3 shows the performance of the control group.

The results demonstrated clear differences between the two groups. Students in the experimental group improved notably in vocabulary retention, grammar, fluency, pronunciation, and self-confidence. In contrast, the control group showed limited progress.

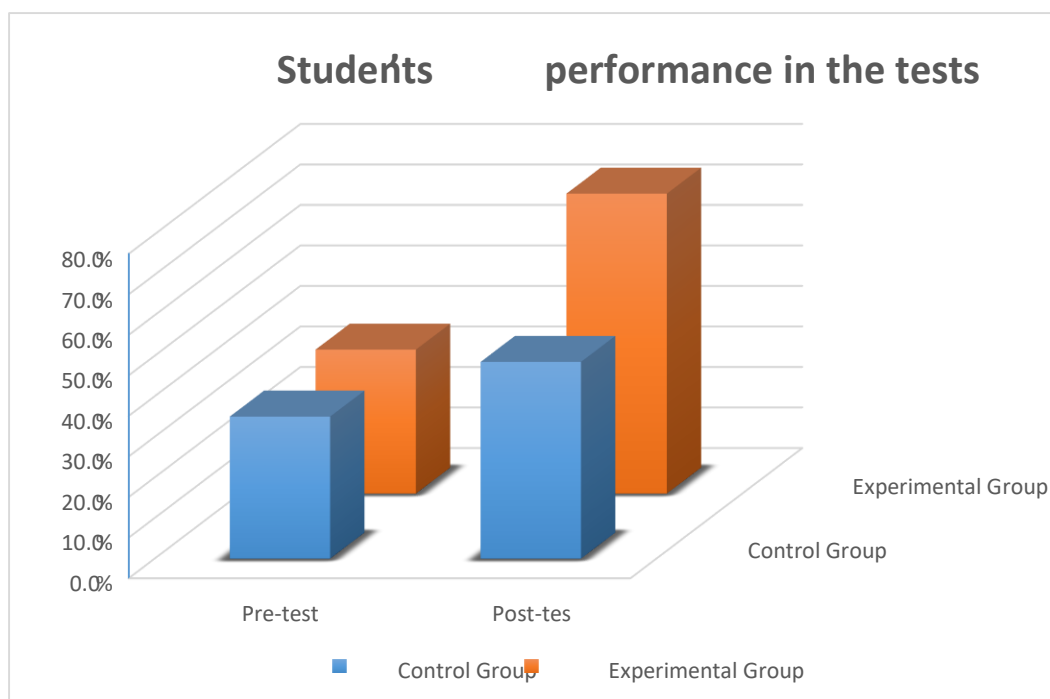


Figure 1: Students' Performance in the Test

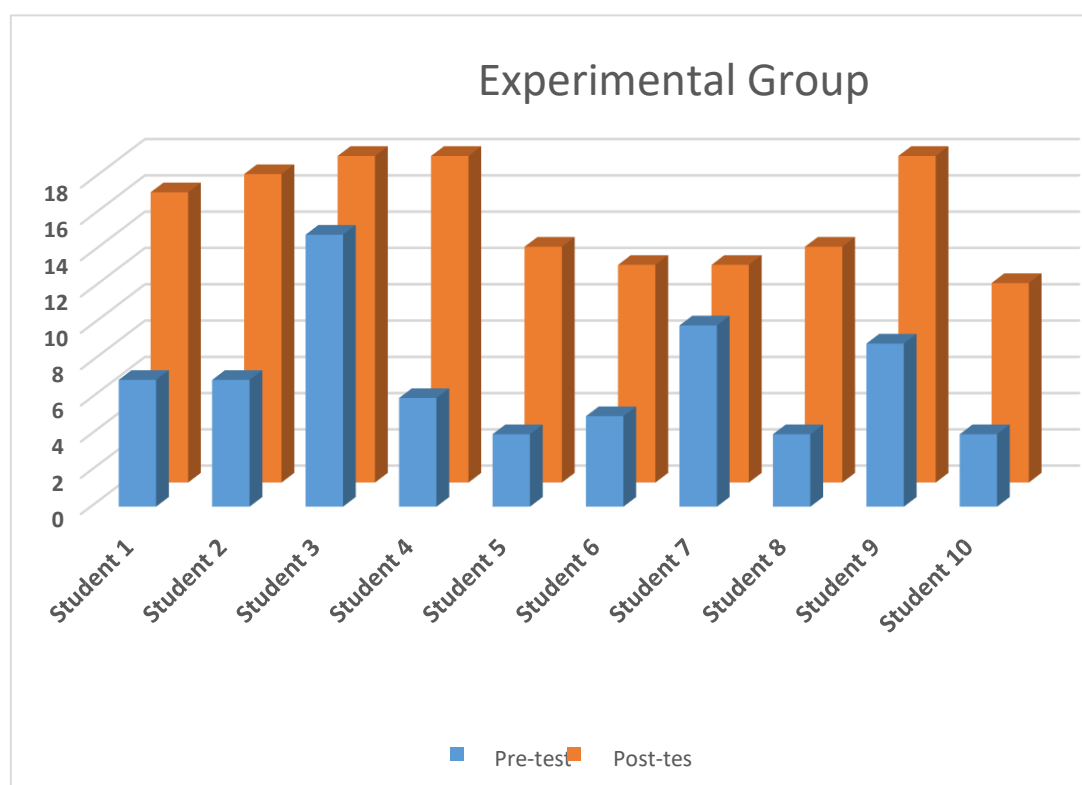


Figure 2: Students' Performance of the Experimental Group.

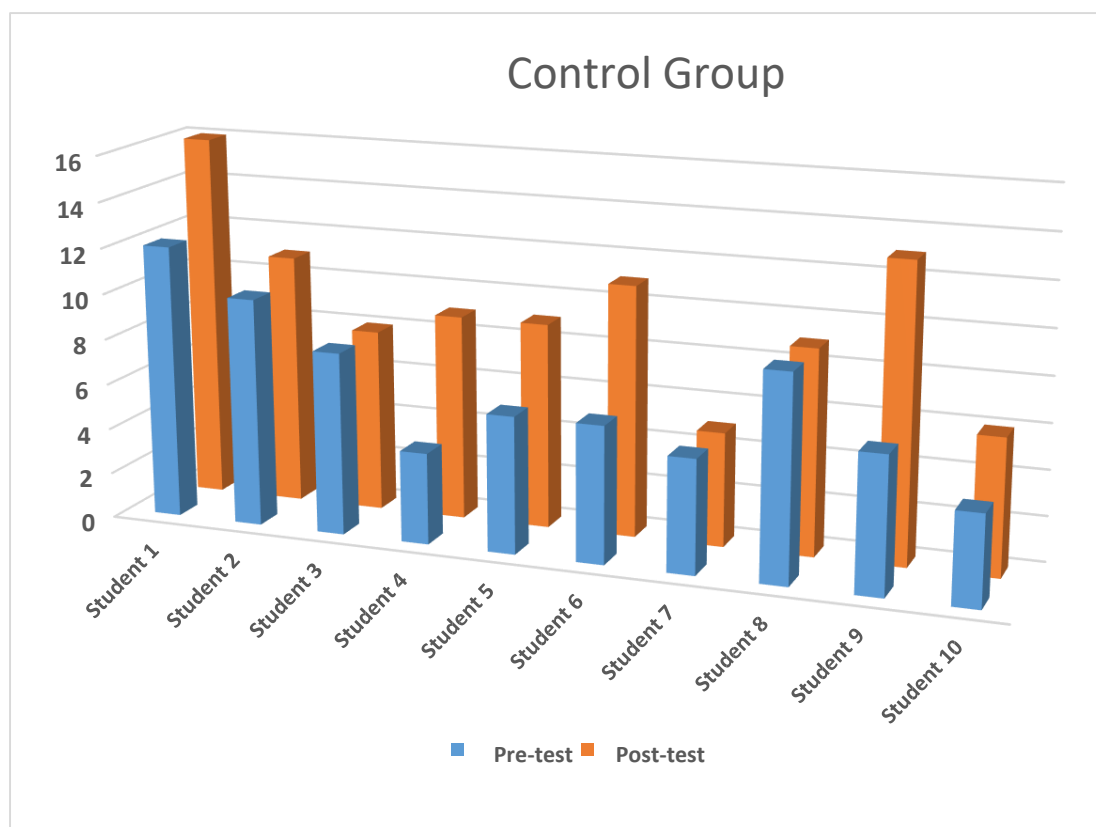


Figure 3: Students' Performance of the Control Group

Conclusion and Recommendations

The primary aim of this study was to investigate the impact of using silent short films in language teaching and learning, with a particular focus on students' speaking abilities. The findings demonstrated that students were not only interested in this technological tool but also recognized its educational value.

This study is the first of its kind conducted at the Faculty of Languages and Translation, Misurata University, to examine the effectiveness of silent short films in enhancing speaking skills. The technique provided students with opportunities to freely express themselves and practice oral communication in an engaging way. The study offers two main contributions:

1. Silent short films were shown to improve students' speaking skills, particularly fluency, pronunciation, and grammar. Retelling the story reinforced these aspects of oral production.
2. Silent short films introduced an innovative classroom technique that motivated students, created an enjoyable learning atmosphere, and increased participation.

The research comprised two parts: a theoretical section and a practical section. The theoretical part explored speaking difficulties and how technology, specifically silent short films, can address these challenges. The practical part involved collecting and analyzing oral test data, supporting the hypothesis that silent short films enhance students' speaking performance.

Limitations of the Study

This study encountered some limitations that should be acknowledged. First, several participants missed lectures, while others were passive or less expressive, which may have influenced the results. Additionally, students' moods and levels of motivation varied and may have affected their engagement and performance during the experiment.

Recommendations for Further Research

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are suggested:

1. Since the experiment demonstrated positive effects, teachers are encouraged to integrate silent short films into classroom instruction to motivate students and foster active participation.
2. Future researchers interested in the same topic should design a well-structured experimental plan and consult a wide range of participants.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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