

# Impact of Films on Students' Vocabulary Acquisition among UiTM Shah Alam Non-English Major Students

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## ABSTRACT

Given the accelerating pace of globalization, English language proficiency is essential for academic and professional success. However, many non-English major students have difficulty learning language, which limits their ability to communicate effectively. While the pivotal role of English language skills continues to expand, many non-English major students struggle to broaden their vocabulary due to a lack of exposure to appropriate learning strategies. This small-scale study investigates the use of English movies as a learning tool to improve vocabulary acquisition as well as examines the effects of English film subtitling on students' vocabulary acquisition among non-English major students. A quantitative research design using stratified random sampling was employed, yielding 150 participants from non-English major students in UiTM Shah Alam. Data were collected via an online questionnaire distributed through Gmail, WhatsApp, and Telegram, stored in Google Sheets, and analysed in SPSS using descriptive statistics and correlations. Findings showed a significant result which indicates that there are various impacts for students who watch English films with and without subtitles. This displayed that some students agreed that watching subtitled English films help them expand their vocabulary while some see it as challenging due to the different levels of English proficiency. The study is based on Mayer's Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning, that supported the use of multimedia to improve language acquisition. In sum, including films into language learning can be advantageous, yet simultaneously aiding the process of acquiring language. Hence, the study implies that multimedia-based approach can bridge vocabulary gaps particularly in higher education.

**Keywords:** vocabulary, language, acquisition, films, non-English major

## INTRODUCTION

Technology has changed how students acquire new languages by making the process more efficient and engaging. These days, digital platforms provide lessons that combine text, audio and video with feedback to assist learners practice the right skills more effectively (OECD, 2021). According to Shadieff and Wang (2022), the use of text, audio and video may encourage participation and teamwork, which eventually will increase motivation and confidence in language learning. Hence, technology does more than make learning easy.

Besides that, films also help students learn in context by showing how words are used in real situations. When subtitles are added, learners can link spoken words with written forms, which improves vocabulary. Reynolds et al. (2022) claim that English subtitles provide the biggest boost to vocabulary learning. On top of that, films are also interesting with their own storylines, which keeps learners focused and allows repeated exposure. Indirectly, films or movies can turn entertainment into meaningful practice. Combining both, technology and films create a flexible way to learn new vocabulary.

Many non-English majors at UiTM Shah Alam struggle with speaking and writing fluently in English due to lacking in vocabulary skills. Though they understand grammar, but owing to limitation in vocabulary skills,

making it hard for them to choose the right words, express ideas clearly and maintain coherency in writing. According to Sukying (2023), deep understanding of vocabulary is more significant than knowing a lot of words. This is owing to, with deep understanding, it assists in writing and effective communication. Hence, other than learning more words, gaining richer word knowledge is equally important.

In addition, weakness in vocabulary acquisition may also affect students' ability to understand lessons, join discussions and perform well in exams, which can lead to difficulties in securing jobs. Li and Gan (2022) establish that poor in vocabulary skills will influence reading comprehension as well as learning outcomes which indirectly can contribute to unemployment or underemployment among graduates in Malaysia. Many students do not receive sufficient practice in academic vocabulary hence their word knowledge stays basic and uneven (Read & Dang, 2022). To address this, the current research explores how using English movies with subtitles might help improve vocabulary learning for non-English majors at UiTM Shah Alam.

The general objective of this study is to examine the impact of English films on vocabulary acquisition among non-English major students at UiTM Shah Alam, focusing on how films and subtitling strategies contribute to language development. This research aims to identify practical, engaging methods that enhance lexical knowledge and improve language proficiency for academic and communicative purposes.

### **Research questions:**

1. How does the use of English movies as a learning tool improve vocabulary acquisition among non-English major students?
2. What are the effects of English film subtitling on students' vocabulary acquisition among non-English major students?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning**

Richard Mayer's Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning posits that learners process information through two distinct channels, verbal and visual, where verbal channel handles spoken or written language, while visual channel processes images and animations (Mayer, 2005). According to this theory, it highlights that learning will become more effective when instructional materials integrate both verbal and visual elements, allowing learners to construct dual mental representations. Mayer also outlines three core cognitive processes. Firstly, selection, which involves identifying relevant verbal and visual inputs. Secondly, organization which functions as to structure the inputs into coherent verbal and visual models. Lastly, integration, which links the models to each other and to prior knowledge. Therefore, Mayer's theory suited this study as it encompasses multimedia instructional design principles that aimed to enhance comprehension and retention.

### **Vocabulary Acquisition**

Vocabulary acquisition is a foundational component of language proficiency as it enables individuals to construct meaningful expressions and comprehend spoken or written discourse. Patesan et al. (2019) argue that vocabulary learning should focus on contextual usage, including collocations and idiomatic expressions, rather than mere memorization of words lists. Furthermore, this is supported by Wilkins (1972) who established that only limited words can be conveyed without grammar. However, without vocabulary, nothing can be expressed, highlighting the importance of lexical or a person's knowledge of words in a language. Effective vocabulary learning involves repeated exposure, attention to both form and meaning, active engagement and interaction. Nation (2008) and Webb (2007) emphasize that learners are believed to require to encounter words multiple times in order to fully master lexical. Therefore, engagement through meaningful use and negotiation in conversation further reinforces retention and assists deeper understanding (Stirling, 2003; Zimmerman, 1997).

### **Vocabulary Acquisition and Films**

The use of films as a pedagogical tool for vocabulary acquisition has gained considerable support in secondlanguage learning contexts. Vocabulary learning can be achieved through captioned viewing as well as



reading while listening process, which these two methods may enhance the recognition of word forms and grammatical structures (Feng & Webb, 2020; Teng, 2024). According to Albiladi et al. (2018), most educators claim that English films are very effective in helping language development among learners attributable to films enhance engagement. Auberg (2017) as cited in Roslim et al. (2021) also reported that learners show improvements in vocabulary, pronunciation, listening and speaking skills, including express greater motivation when learning through films as compared to traditional methods. Moreover, exposure to native speakers in the real contexts fosters confidence and facilitates both oral and written language development (Kalra, 2017). Thus, films offer a dynamic and rich in context medium for enhancing vocabulary acquisition among language learners.

## METHODOLOGY

This study employs a quantitative research design to determine the relationship between English films, subtitling and vocabulary acquisition among non-English major students. This design is adopted due to its widespread application in language learning, primarily for its efficacy in statistically measuring variables and analyzing data to derive generalizable findings. (Kessler & Cekmegeli, 2025; Hasumia & Chiu, 2024). Hence, structured questionnaire and descriptive analysis were utilized in this study in order to capture the influence of learning tools in vocabulary acquisition and effects of English film subtitling. This study is anchored in empiricist and positivist paradigm which focuses on observable evidence and measurable outcomes. The paradigm aligns with this research as it seeks to establish cause and effect relationships between the use of English films, subtitling and vocabulary acquisition. Therefore, by utilizing this approach, reliability and replicability can be achieved. A total of 150 participants, all of whom were UiTM Shah Alam students enrolled in non-English major courses, were involved in this study. The sample size was calculated using Cochran's formula for sample size estimation:

$$n = \frac{Z^2 P (1 - P)}{E^2}$$

$n$  = REQUIRED SAMPLE SIZE

$Z$  = SCORE CORRESPONDING TO THE DESIRED CONFIDENCE LEVEL

$P$  = ESTIMATED PROPORTION OF THE POPULATION

$E$  = MARGIN OF ERROR  $n = (1.96)^2(0.5)(0.5)(0.08)^2$

$n = 0.96040.0064$

$n = 150.06$

Participants were divided into two strata: science & technology majors and social science majors, using stratified random sampling. Data were gathered via digital platforms such as gmail, whatsapp and telegram, stored in google sheets, reorganized and analysed using spss. Spss perfectly suits this study as it functions to perform descriptive and correlation analyses efficiently which are extremely significant in identifying patterns and relationships among variables (gao et al., 2024; alenizi & adawi, 2024).

Validity of this research is achieved through experts review where the questionnaire was assessed in order to ensure that all items reflected the research questions. Meanwhile, cronbach's alpha was utilized with the aim to measure the questionnaire items to certify the results.

## RESULTS

RQ1: Use of English movies as a learning tool and vocabulary acquisition

Table 1 illustrates descriptive statistics for five items on the use of English movies in sustaining vocabulary acquisition among non-English major students. The mean scores ranged from 2.72 to 2.99 with standard

deviations between 1.01 and 1.17. Item 1 (More exposure to the English language through films/movies helps me improve my speaking and comprehension skills) achieved the highest score ( $M = 2.99$ ,  $SD = 1.06$ ), followed by watching English films helps improve social interaction and linguistic skills, item 3 ( $M = 2.95$ ,  $SD = 1.08$ ). Students also agreed that watching real-life situations in films/movies increases my English understanding ( $M = 2.88$ ,  $SD = 1.11$ ) and that watching a lot of English films/movies with English subtitles helps me understand the English language better ( $M = 2.87$ ,  $SD = 1.17$ ). The lowest mean was watching English films without Malay subtitles improves my English language skills ( $M = 2.72$ ,  $SD = 1.01$ ). Therefore, the results show that movies assist vocabulary growth particularly through exposure, contextual cues and supportive on-screen text.

Table 1: The use of English movies as a learning tool in improving vocabulary acquisition.

No.	Item	Mean	SD
1	More exposure to the English language through films/movies helps me improve my speaking and comprehension skills.	2.99	1.06
2	Watching real-life situations in films/movies increases my English understanding.	2.88	1.11
3	Watching English films helps improve social interaction and linguistic skills.	2.95	1.08
4	Watching English films without Malay subtitles improves my English language skills.	2.72	1.01
5	Watching a lot of English films/movies with English subtitles helps me understand the English language better.	2.87	1.17

RQ2: Effects of English film subtitling on students’ vocabulary acquisition

Table 2 summarizes five indicators of subtitling effects on vocabulary acquisition among students. Mean scores spanned 2.73 to 2.89 with standard deviations from 1.07 to 1.16. Item 2 (Watching English films improves my English pronunciation) recorded the highest mean score value ( $M = 2.89$ ,  $SD = 1.07$ ), followed by item 1 ( $M = 2.81$ ,  $SD = 1.14$ ) indicated that students’ sentence writing structure improved significantly through the vocabulary used in English films. Item 4 ( $M = 2.81$ ,  $SD = 1.11$ ) revealed that students were able to conquer their anxiety by practicing their spoken English after watching English films. Followingly, item 5 ( $M = 2.77$ ,  $SD = 1.08$ ) showed that students’ proficiency was increased through speaking after watching English films. Lastly, item 3 ( $M = 2.73$ ,  $SD = 1.16$ ) scored the lowest indicating that students’ confidence was boosted when speaking after watching English films. In sum, subtitles appear to support form-sound mapping and sentence construction, whereas confidence may require additional speaking practices and feedback.

Table 2: The effects of English film subtitling on students’ vocabulary acquisition

No.	Item	Mean	SD
1	Vocabulary use through English films improves my sentence structure in writing.	2.81	1.14
2	Watching English films improves my English pronunciation.	2.89	1.07



3	Watching English films boosts my confidence when speaking in English.	2.73	1.16
4	Practicing my spoken English after watching English films helps me overcome my anxiety.	2.81	1.11
5	Speaking in English after watching English films increases my proficiency.	2.77	1.08

## DISCUSSION

Pertaining to the first research question: How does the use of English movies as a learning tool improves vocabulary acquisition among non-English major students?, a significant majority of students strongly agreed that movies can be an effective tool to improve speaking and comprehension skills. This supports research that claims films provide real-life language examples and assist learners to understand words in context (Reynolds et al., 2022; Baranowska, 2020). Even so, a limited number of participants did not find movies helpful. This may be due to distinct English levels and one's own learning styles.

Apart from that, the leading score for comprehension matches Mayer's multimedia learning theory, where according to Mayer, combining pictures and words together aids learners to understand better. This proves that films can make learning more engaging. Nevertheless, certain students may find it challenging particularly using English subtitles as it depends on their English levels. Students with strong English competence may benefit from English subtitles while others may find it complicated.

The difference between high scores for comprehension and interaction and the lower score for subtitles indicates that subtitles are effective but not always opted for. This likely stems from students' predominant reliance on textual resources. Despite that, educators may overcome this by utilizing subtitles at first and slowly removing them while performing tasks.

As for the second research question: What are the effects of English film subtitling on students' vocabulary acquisition among non-English major students? student feedback indicated a strong consensus that English films are greatly helpful for improving pronunciation. In other words, it illustrates that listening to real speech and matching it with subtitles assists learners to know the correct sounds. According to Birulès-Muntané and SotoFaraco (2016), subtitles facilitate learners to link sounds with written words, improving phonological awareness and listening skills. Hence, the finding of this study agrees with the study signifying subtitles can influence speech perception and pronunciation.

Beyond these observations, the majority of students confirmed that subtitles assisted them in writing better sentences. This assistance, alongside a reduction in speaking anxiety, was attributed to subtitles, enabling students to better understand grammar and subsequently apply it in their writing. Donaghy (2014) supports that films help to provide actual language and visual context which corroborates understanding at the same time motivates learners. Similarly, exposure to real-life dialogues in movies improves listening, vocabulary and pronunciation including confidence and engagement (Fidelia & Rohmah, 2023). This implies that, films can support both language accuracy and confidence.

Confidence in speaking displayed mixed results, which probably due to a portion of students were very confident while others need more practice. Donaghy (2014) claims that films can motivate learners. However, it is unable to fully remove speaking anxiety especially without practice. In summary, this study supports Mayer's Multimedia Learning Theory which indicates that people learn better from words and pictures together than words alone (Mayer, 2009). Hence, incorporating audio, visuals and text in films or movies helps learners to process language via auditory and visual means, at the same time improving understanding and retention.

## IMPLICATIONS

Films with subtitles can be utilized as an additional aid in English classes, demonstrating proper sentence form and pronunciation. Teachers and educators could create an engaging pair film-watching activity in class which allows students to review films and practice speaking exercises or role-playing based on the films that they have watched. Students are able to implement the correct application of the words or phrases that are presented in the films and more encouraged to exercise conversational skills among themselves in a supportive environment. The Ministry of Education (MOE) should consider adding films as one of the activities in class for students as they can have a significant impact on raising the level of students' English proficiency. In order to ensure that films with subtitles are able to be included in the lesson plan successfully, the MOE need to take into consideration of providing a legal streaming service for the students so the students are able to access these sources easily and without any limitations as it may hinder the self-learning process to students who are not equipped with the available resources.

## CONCLUSION

This study examined how English films and subtitling support language development among non-English majors. In conclusion, students considered films and movies as helpful supplements in improving vocabulary acquisition. They reported strong gains in comprehension, consistent benefits in pronunciation and useful assistance for sentence formation. Even so, speaking confidence and subtitles efficiency showed varied outcomes among learners as these elements were influenced by students' preferences. The study indicates that audiovisual input with subtitles can strengthen listening, pronunciation and word structure when utilized strategically. Films should therefore be viewed as a compliment rather than a replacement for traditional classroom instruction.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Based on the results of this study, a few suggestions can be made to help students acquire vocabulary through the use of English films. The significant differences between the groups who watch films with and without subtitles indicated that by including subtitles may have an evident effect on vocabulary learning. Hence, the following strategies are recommended to maximise vocabulary learning in educational environments.

Future researchers should look into other components of language learning, such as pronunciation, rather than solely focusing on vocabulary acquisition. The frequent imitation of consumed media by language learners suggests that examining their pronunciation could yield useful insights into media's influence on language development. In other words, more thorough findings and the possibility of discovering a wider and variety results can be achieved.

Future researchers should also consider specifying the types of films that are shown to students. By varying the genres, the findings may be broader and more diverse compared to being exposed to one particular genre.

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