

Students' perceptions of watching English movies with English subtitle in improving vocabulary

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Abstract

Mastering vocabulary is the fundamental of learning English. However, learning vocabulary is challenging for high school students, especially for those who find traditional learning tools not attractive. English movies with English subtitle are commonly used because it is accessible and contextual. The purpose of this study was to explore grade 10 students' perceptions of watching English movies with English subtitle for their vocabulary improvement. While many previous studies explored perceptions of this learning strategy in college setting. However, it is needed to explore in high school settings. This research used a mixed-method approach with the questionnaire and interview as the instruments. The respondents were 39 students from grade 10 in a public school in the Philippines. The results showed that students have positive perceptions on English movies with English subtitle for vocabulary improvement, as it helps to enhance vocabulary, understanding of the movies, contextualized and flexible learning tool as well as to improve speaking and listening skills.

Keywords: English movies; English subtitle; vocabulary

INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary is the fundamental component in learning language, including English. It is the basic component of mastering language skills, namely speaking, listening, reading, and writing (Taratika, 2021). However, most of language learners find that learning vocabulary is challenging (Hestiana & Anita, 2022). This might be due to lack of motivation, improper use of learning tools to learn vocabulary, complex language, factors of environment, and learning process barriers (Hasan, 2024). The growth of technology makes language learning media easy to access, such as videos, games, music, and movies (Masduqi & Khairunnisa, 2024). Fauzi and Muljanto (2021) stated that English movies are popular tools for learning English. Furthermore, Hashim and Aziz (2022) mentioned that using English subtitle in movies is an effective learning



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tool to learn vocabulary.

There are several studies explored about perceptions of English movies with English subtitle can improve vocabulary among college students. [Hestiana and Anita](#) (2022) showed that English subtitled movies are potential learning media for college students in increasing vocabulary and English proficiency. [Andriani and Angelina](#) (2020) stated that English subtitled movies help in understanding context, increasing motivation and vocabulary among English Education college students. [Nurfauziah et al.](#) (2023) found that the use of English subtitled movies significantly helps college students enhance their vocabulary. These studies show English movies with English subtitle are valuable learning tools which are offering advantage to improve vocabulary among college students. However, students' perceptions are needed to see the effectiveness of English movies with English subtitle as a learning tool for vocabulary improvement for high school students.

The purpose of this study was to explore students' perceptions from grade 10 on the watching English movies with English subtitle for vocabulary improvement. While many previous studies have explored the students' perceptions of watching English movies with English subtitle on vocabulary improvement, those studies were mostly conducted in college settings. However, it is also needed to explore and focus in high school settings. The novelty of this study focuses in students' personal opinions and experiences among of high school students of watching English movies with English subtitle to improve vocabulary and giving further insight how media exposure could be implemented in vocabulary learning.

Literature review

Vocabulary in English learning

Vocabulary is essential in learning English ([Rao, 2019](#)), to carry out the other English skills ([Mandasari & Aminatun, 2020](#)). Without an adequate vocabulary, communication and interaction will be limited. The large of vocabulary determines the successful language mastery of both ESL and EFL learners ([Sidgi, 2024](#)). Vocabulary makes it easier to understand reading, speaking in a foreign language, following conversations, and giving answers ([Nurfauziah et al., 2023](#)). Therefore, learning tools that provide words in real-life contexts are essential for vocabulary learning.

Students' perceptions

Students perception is the process of obtaining information, whereby they attempt to observe the information with their sense, allowing them to give meaning and interpret the information provided. However, each students have different perceptions. They have different way of understanding the same thing. Perception is also influenced from external and internal factors ([Sakti et al., 2023](#)), where background, feelings, experiences and cultural factors are part of internal factor, while environment, belief, and stimuli is external factor ([Priska et al., 2022](#)).

The use of English movies with English subtitle for vocabulary improvement

[Fauzi and Muljanto](#) (2021) stated that English movies are interesting and popular learning media to learn vocabulary. They are not only for entertainment but also a valuable learning tool ([Datulio, 2023](#)). The use of English influences in the field of language training such as oral skills, vocabulary, and grammar ([Kord et al., 2022](#)). Additionally, vocabulary in English movies is closer to real-life situations which can help in reinforcing retention and developing a comprehensive command of language,

including idiomatic expressions and slang words.

Subtitled movies are audio-visual media that contain visual, text, and audio. English subtitled movies help the students in picking up and understanding new vocabulary (Br Simamora & Oktaviani, 2020). English subtitle in movies helps students understand the written form of audio from the movie they watch (Lestari & Yosintha, 2022). According to Monida et al. (2024) that English subtitle can help improving vocabulary, word recognition, and listening comprehension for the students. Learning vocabulary with English subtitled movies is fun, motivating, and also correcting the pronunciation and the spelling words in the same time (Bostanci, 2022).

English subtitle in English movies as a tool to connect spoken and written language for improving vocabulary

English subtitle enable students to connect spoken language and the written form. According to Fikri et al. (2021), English subtitle acts as an intermediary that strengthen the connection between pronunciation and spelling. As the students watch English movies with English subtitle, they are simultaneously seeing and hearing the words, which speed up the recognition of vocabulary, spelling, and sentence structure.

Watching English subtitled movies as a contextualized learning tool

Watching English subtitled movies can increase students' vocabulary. They are often contain a diverse expressions and terms that are commonly used in daily life. For instance, in a study conducted by Sari and Aminatun (2021), it was shown that using English subtitled movies as a learning tool can help students understand idiomatic expressions and slang that are not commonly found in academic textbook. In addition, a study by Laoli et al. (2025) showed that contextual understanding also increased when students are exposed to variety of communicative situations in English subtitled movies. It allows students to foster a better understanding of the way English is used in a variety of situations.

METHOD

Respondents

The quantitative data were 39 students from Grade 10 in a public school in the Philippines. They were filled out the questionnaire through Google Form. Meanwhile, the qualitative data were obtained from interview with 5 students from the questionnaire respondents.

Instruments

This study used a mixed-method approach to collect quantitative data and qualitative data. This approach was used to obtain a detailed and clear overview of students' perceptions of English movies with English subtitle for vocabulary improvement. The questionnaire and interview were applied as the instruments of this research. The questionnaire was used for collecting the quantitative data. The questionnaire was based on theory by Gibson (1950) in Proctor and Chong (2020) which involves three concepts namely selection, reaction, and interpretation. It was consisted of 10 items that represents students' perception to their understanding of the advantages of English subtitle and English movies, also their attitude of watching English subtitled movies.

In order to support the questionnaire findings. The research was conducted semi-structured interview. This interview aimed to get in-depth qualitative data about students' perceptions, the obstacle while using this method, and the effectiveness of

English subtitled movies The interview questions consisted of 5 questions. The data of instruments were analyzed in quantitative and qualitative ways to get a clear overview of students perceptions of this learning media.

Data Collection

The quantitative data were collected through close-ended questionnaire, to obtain a general overview of students' perceptions of learning vocabulary through English subtitled movies. It arranged using Likert Scale 5 points, namely Strongly Disagree (SD), Disagree (D), Neutral (N), Strongly Agree (SA), and Agree (A). The questionnaire statements consisted of 10 items adapted from [Andriani and Angelina \(2020\)](#), divided through Google Form, and distributed directly to the 39 students.

The qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interview to find in-depth information of students' perceptions in learning vocabulary through English movies with English subtitle. The interview was conducted through group discussion with 5 students. The main questions were 5 questions. It was adopted from [Andriani and Angelina \(2020\)](#).

Data Analysis

The data from the questionnaire were compiled and analyzed with Ms. Excel. The data were analyzed descriptively by calculating the frequency and percentage of the students' response to the questionnaire in order to get an overview of students' perceptions.

$$\text{Percentage} = \frac{n \text{ (frequency)}}{\text{Number of respondents}} \times 100\%$$

Table 1. Percentage category table of questionnaire

Percentage range	Category
81% - 100%	Strongly agree/ very good
61% - 80%	Agree/ good
41% - 60%	Neutral/ fair
21% - 40%	Disagree/poor
0% - 20%	Strongly disagree/ very poor

The interview data were analyzed by thematic analysis which was derived from [Braun and Clarke \(2006\)](#). First, the researchers transcribed the recording interview and generated initial codes were obtained from the interview. Then, they organized the codes into the main themes. At last, they interpreted the data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Students' perceptions of English movies

The data from questionnaire were calculated on frequency and percentage to see students' perceptions of watching English movies with English subtitle in improving vocabulary:

Table 2. The questionnaire results of calculation of students' perceptions on English movies with english subtitle for vocabulary improvement

No	Statement	SD		D		N		A		SA	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1	I often watch English movies with English subtitle	3	7.7	2	5.1	6	15.4	10	25.6	18	46.2
2	I feel excited and motivated to learn vocabulary when I watch English movies with English subtitle.	2	5.1	1	2.6	9	23.1	20	51.3	7	18
3	Using English subtitle makes me enjoy the movies.	2	5.1	1	2.6	6	15.4	12	31	18	46.2
4	I prefer learning new vocabulary through English movies with English subtitle to other methods.	3	7.7	3	7.7	9	23.1	11	28.2	13	33.3
5	English subtitle helps me to learn new vocabulary.	2	5.1	1	2.6	3	7.7	12	31	21	54
6	I find that English subtitle in movies helps me to connect the spoken language to the written form.	2	5.1	0	0	3	7.7	15	38.5	19	48.7
7	I feel like vocabulary learned from movies is easier to use in real-life situation.	2	5.1	1	2.6	7	18	14	36	15	38.5
8	Sometimes I pause and search the meaning of new vocabulary that I do not know the meaning in a dictionary that appears in English subtitled movies, and I take a note.	3	7.7	4	10.3	9	23.1	15	38.5	8	20.5
9	I find difficulty in understanding vocabulary in English movies although there is English subtitle.	7	18	10	25.6	9	23.1	9	23.1	4	10.3
10	I feel tired and confused when I watch the movies while reading English subtitle.	16	41	10	25.6	5	13	4	10.3	3	7.7

SD= Strongly Disagree, D= Disagree, N= Neutral, A= Agree, SA= Strongly Agree

In general, quantitative results indicated that the majority of grade 10 students response showed that most of the items showed that the agreements were more often chosen, indicated that the students have good perceptions on English movies with English subtitle to improve their vocabulary. For instance, in the first statement, respondents gave 71.8% of agreement that they often watch English subtitled movies. The third statement showed that 77.2% of students agree indicated that they have good perception that using English subtitle makes them easily to enjoy the movies. Statement number five indicated that 85% of students agree showed that they have very good perceptions that English subtitle helps to learn new vocabulary. The sixth statement showed that 87.2% of agreement, indicated they have very good perception that using English movies with English subtitle help in connecting spoken language with written form. The seventh statement showed that 74.5% of students agreed that vocabulary from English movies is easier to use in real-life situations. Meanwhile, the second item said that 69.3% of agreement, 23.1% of neutral, and 7.7% of disagreement which was indicated that most of the students motivated to learn English vocabulary by English movies with English subtitle. While there were 23.1% of students who chose neutral, it can be concluded if each student has differences of motivation level in using their own vocabulary learning tool.

On the other hand, the lowest level of agreements was in the eight and fourth items. The fourth item indicated that 61.5% of students prefer use English movies with English subtitle to learn vocabulary. The eight item showed that 59% of students use that method to learn vocabulary. It indicated that each student has their own learning style and tool to learn vocabulary, whether they combine the use of English subtitle movies with other learning tools or they use different way. In addition, item nine and ten are negative statements. It could be seen from the ninth item which had 43.6% of disagreement, 23.1% of neutral, and 33.4% of disagreement about the difficulty in understanding the vocabulary from movies even there is English subtitle.

While item ten, 66.6% of disagreement, 13% of neutral, and 18% of disagreement, indicated that they disagree with this statement that they feel tired and confused in reading English subtitle and watching the movie at the same time. This might be due to the cognitive challenge of processing written and spoken language. While the study by [Andriani and Angelina \(2020\)](#) found that the respondents which from college students, they did not experience such fatigue. They feel comfortable in reading and watching at the same time., which reflects a higher cognitive readiness. So, it showed that students' perceptions of the enjoyment and effectiveness of using English subtitle depends on their age or language experience.

Furthermore, to explore further data about students' perceptions of English movies with English subtitle for vocabulary improvement, the interview was conducted with 5 students. It also aimed to strengthen the data obtained from the questionnaire. The interview results were divided into four categories: The advantages of using English subtitle in English movies, the use of English movies with English subtitle as a contextualized and flexible tool, the vocabulary learning strategy from English movies with English subtitle for vocabulary improvement, and the obstacles in learning vocabulary using English movie with English subtitle.

The advantages of using English subtitle in English movies

The first category of the interview results was about the advantages of the use of English subtitle in English movies. The respondents' answers were the following:

"Watching movies with English subtitles has a very big advantage to me because it does not only expand my vocabulary but it helps me understand the movie well as my second language is English too." (R4)

"It helps me being direct and connected to the movie." (R2)

"Watching movies with subtitles is very effective for me because it helps me expand my vocabulary and comprehension on the English language." (R3)

"...because the English language is the international language where everyone uses it... Because sometimes or oftenly the Filipino language is very rare to choose to the others. But when I was to choose if it is Filipino or English, I would choose English." (R5)

According to the respondents' answers they get impacts of using English movies with English subtitle. The use of that learning tool helps them expand their vocabulary. It also helps them being directed and connected to the movies, so it increases their engagement to the movies and keep directed to the movies because of the existence of English subtitle. Additionally, using subtitle in the target language also helps to strengthen the retention of English as an international language, as they were used to see and hear English. In general, English movies with English subtitle proved to be effective learning tools, which can help students in improving their vocabulary, be engaged to the movies, increase understanding to English as the international language (Adrefiza et al., 2024).

The use of English movies with English subtitle as a contextualized and flexible tool

The second category was about the use of English movies with English subtitles as a contextualized and flexible tool. The students' answers were as following:

"For me, watching English movies with English subtitles is very effective for me because when they have a dialogue with each other, we can know what to respond when they talk to us like that or something..." (R5)

"...It helps me be more fluent on speaking English." (R3)

"It helps me understand the context of the movie better..." (R3)

"For me, watching movies with English subtitles has a very big advantage to me because it doesn't only expand my vocabulary but it helps me understand the movie well as my second language is English too." (R4)

Based on the respondents' responses that English movies with English subtitle is helpful to learn and strengthen understanding pronouncing and spelling of English words. It is due to when they watch English movies with English subtitle they can hear the characters' dialogue and read the subtitle. It helps them to connect the spoken language and written form which also increases their listening skill. In addition, it helps them to learn vocabulary more contextualized. The real-life dialogues in English movies allow new vocabulary to be easier to understand and memorize. The students can learn the words' meaning as well as knowing how and when the words are used properly in various situations, so they can improve their speaking through this tool (Laoli et al., 2025).

The vocabulary learning strategy from English movies with English subtitle for vocabulary improvement

The third category was vocabulary learning strategies that the students get from English movies. It could be seen on the quotes from the respondents' answer in the interview:

"My father literally made me watch cartoons and movies with English subtitles and English dubs, and I enjoyed it and I took some words and made it my own and I understand them, and now I use it as my vocabulary in my daily life and the essays." (R1)

"I very much apply that new word that I have learned in my daily life. For example, I have learned a new word in this day and I keep talking about it or using it in any statement that I can. So, I can enhance more my vocabulary by that technique." (R2)

"There are words that are hyperbolic or words that I cannot define because those words are

new for me and are very unfamiliar...., to research about that word or even discover that word in a dictionary to enhance my English vocabulary more." (R2)

In accordance with the students' responses that they apply the vocabulary picked from the movies in daily life and writing such as essays. It is easier for them to apply because the language used in movies is easily found in real-life conversations. For instance, in cartoons, they often use simple and clear language, so it provides comprehension in English for students. In addition, based on students' responses, consistent in doing repetition and making their own vocabulary list allow the newly learned vocabulary is more deeply memorized (Arochman et al., 2023).

The obstacles in learning vocabulary using English movie with English subtitle

The last category was the obstacles of using English movies with English subtitle in learning vocabulary. Although English subtitle helps the students in learning vocabulary in English movies. The students sometimes find obstacles such as understanding the meaning if the words are too complex and uncommon. They have difficulties in understanding unfamiliar words, hyperbolic, riddles, and quotes. Those complex or uncommon words are often confusing as they contain implicit meanings that cannot be understood just by the text. It could be seen from the respondents' answers from the interview:

"For me, I don't have any problems in watching or in the vocabulary, but sometimes I get a little confused when the characters use riddles and quotes to what it means." (R1)

"Learning some words that are very unfamiliar to us and very difficult to define or such words that are hyperbolic..." (R2)

"For me, the challenges in watching movies with subtitle are also understanding the words that are really hard or unfamiliar to me..." (R3)

"The other challenges that I face when watching or like the subtitles is when there are not familiar words...especially when they use some hyperbolic ones." (R5)

Moreover, the interview also revealed about how they are overcoming those obstacles while learning vocabulary using English movies with English subtitle. The respondents' answers were the following:

"...I go into social media and search up what those riddles and quotes mean so I can get the context of what they are saying. (R1)

"...In a way, that you should research it on the internet or find that word in a dictionary book. So, to further enhance your vocabulary in English." (R2)

"...Everything I can only understand the meaning of it, when I ask my friend, an international friend." (R5)

They have other ways to solve the uncommon words besides using English subtitle. One of them is using social media or a dictionary book to search the words to find the meaning of those words. In addition, discussing or asking explanations to native speakers can be an effective way to understand the difficult words, because they ask directly to the English native speakers (Wahyuni & Afrianti, 2021).

Discussion

The quantitative and qualitative results indicated that watching English movies with English subtitle gives advantages to improve vocabulary and other English skills. Andriani and Angelina (2020) found that the respondents were helped to obtain new vocabulary through English movies with English subtitle. English subtitle help the students to enhance their vocabulary knowledge (Hashim & Aziz, 2022). The use of English subtitle is a tool to expand vocabulary (Maulida & Warni, 2024). Furthermore, the questionnaire and

interview results also showed that the use of English movies with English subtitle help them to connect the spoken language with the written form. Li (2024) and Alabsi (2020) said English subtitled movies help the students to connect the words they hear from the spoken language with the written form as well as learning to correct pronunciation, spelling, and improve listening skills. Therefore, it could be concluded that watching English movies with English subtitle gives important role on students' English learning. It helps students to obtain new vocabulary, connect the spoken and written English, make the learning process are more successful and engaging.

The use of English movies provides interesting vocabulary learning because they provide real-life context conversations which make the students easy to understand and memorize the new words they are picked. The students can learn the words' meaning as well as knowing how and when the words are used properly in various situations, so they can improve their speaking and communication skills (Kadwa & Alshenqeeti, 2020). English movies provide contextual learning which the words in English movies often find in everyday conversations (Maulida & Warni, 2024). Additionally, English movies with English subtitle make it easy to enjoy the movies. Lei (2023) also found that using English subtitle can make enjoy the movies and understand the storyline more, and keep being directed and connected to the movies.

Moreover, even the use of those learning tools is effective in learning vocabulary. The students can still find difficulties as well as encounter unfamiliar and complex words. Thus, in general, the existence of English subtitle in movies helps them to understand the vocabulary in English movies, it could be difficult to know the meaning such those words just by the text. They combine variety of learning sources to understand such as social media, internet, dictionary book or online, discussion with the expert or native speakers. So, the vocabulary leaning process through English movies with English subtitle become more independent and active.

CONCLUSION

This study indicated the perceptions of the students towards using English subtitled movies is advantageous to improve students' vocabulary. The findings showed that students have positive perceptions on improving vocabulary through English movies with English subtitle because learning vocabulary from English movies make it is easier to apply the vocabulary learned to real-life situations. So, it boosts the process of mastering new vocabulary and also speaking skill. Additionally, English subtitled movies also can help the students in understanding and being directed to the movies. It also helps connect the spoken language to the written form, which increases their understanding in pronunciation and spelling as well as increases listening skills.

However, the students sometimes find the difficulties in learning vocabulary using of English movies with English subtitle. Although the subtitle helps to understand the movies, the complex and uncommon words still difficult to understand just by the text of subtitle. It needs additional sources to understand it. Furthermore, for future research, it is suggested to focus on integrating the use of English subtitle for vocabulary improvement with English skills such as listening, speaking, reading comprehension or writing.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

Author 1: Conceptualization, methodology, collecting data, and writing-original draft; **Author 2:** Supervision, reviewing, validation, and manuscript editing; **Author 3:**

Collecting data, reviewing, validation; **Author 4:** Refining methods and manuscript.

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