

FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF ENGLISH TEACHERS AND CULTURE EXPLORERS: AN INSIGHT INTO THE BENEFITS OF WATCHING ENGLISH MOVIES WITH SUBTITLES FOR UNIVERSITY FRESHMEN

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***Abstract:** For English learners, learning about the cultures of other English-speaking nations is incredibly helpful. They benefit from having the chance to comprehend the cultures associated with the language they adore in addition to improving their English study skills. One step in this process of culture research is watching English-language movies, which is made much simpler by the use of subtitles. Through the investigation of first-year students' attitudes and opinions, this research aims at exploring and reflecting on the function of English movies with subtitles in teaching and studying English at the university level and pointing out the difference between two types of subtitles, in terms of how they can facilitate English teaching and studying. To conduct this research, the quantitative method was used, with the help of a survey questionnaire.*

***Keywords:** movies, English, subtitles, teaching, studying.*

I. Introduction

To be able to acquire foreign language communication competence, learners must hone their basic English skills such as speaking and writing (the “productive skills”), listening and reading (the “receptive skills”), along with learning to communicate with native speakers orally and through writing. However, it would be a mistake

if learners neglected the culture, lifestyle and behavior of the native people living in the country where the target language is spoken (Aktaş, 2005) [1]. Therefore, it can be said that the most effective way for foreign language learners to optimize their study experience is to learn the language in its native country. Nevertheless, that is not always easy to do, so using movies in that foreign language for learning purpose

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is a suitable approach. Movies play the role of the most effective audiovisual tool for understanding the culture of the target language because learners can see, hear and witness the context of expressions and words (Demirezen, 1990) [3]. Although the content of movies may be fictional, it is the reflection of real life. Learning a foreign language in such a convenient way in connection with the real environment helps to attract learners' attention. In the process of watching movies, viewers combine both audiovisual and visual activities, which helps create favorable conditions for them to improve listening and reading skills. Besides, learners' speaking and even writing skills can also be improved by learning from conversations in different environments, the combination of gestures and speech, formal or informal expressions, stress and intonation, etc. (Chan and Herrero, 2010) [2]. For English learners, especially those who have just started to learn English and often find it difficult and exhausting to watch a movie in a foreign language while not understanding the characters' lines, the use of subtitles helps a lot because it integrates what is seen with what is heard.

This study was conducted to:

- Gain some insight of the benefits of using English movies in teaching and learning English
- Explore different types of movie subtitles
- Find out learners' opinions and attitudes towards the effectiveness of using English movies with subtitles in teaching and learning English.

II. Theoretical background

2.1. *Benefits of using English movies and their subtitles in teaching and learning English*

Teachers often find it challenging to combine all the basic English skills in their teaching. However, when using movies in the teaching process, teachers can tackle many diverse aspects of these skills.

Listening and Speaking Skills

Gilmore (2007) [4] stated that people who can develop good content when communicating in their native language are also able to do the same when using the foreign language they are learning. According to Katchen (2003) [5], the dialogues in the movies help enrich the viewers' language because they gain more communication ideas from the characters' reflexes, depending on the movie content. Those who have few ideas in communication might gain additional knowledge in this way, and those who can already deploy their communication skills in their mother tongue can even discover fresh approaches in the way the language is used in the movie and draw lessons for their own English communication so as to make it as native-like as possible.

Besides, unlike English lessons with the use of short conversations, movies with a variety of dialogues ranging from formal to informal ones can be used in teaching and learning English so that learners have more opportunities to be exposed to real-life conversations. Even less receptive learners can benefit from such exposure (Gilmore, 2007) [4].

With the help of subtitles, the content of those conversations is clearly visible in words, making the process of acquiring this knowledge clearer and more convenient.

Writing skills and vocabulary

According to Katchen (2003) [5], when cultivating writing skills, learners need to be facilitated with favourable conditions so that they can practice a variety of exercise. This author also expresses the opinion that some activities such as writing reviews or comments about movies, comparing movies with the same director or writing synopsis for movies are very useful. Moreover, he believes that movie subtitles help learners understand the movie content better and they can use the vocabulary they learn from the subtitles in these activities.

According to Yuksel and Tanriverdi (2009) [12], the most obvious benefit of watching movies with subtitles is that learners can witness how vocabulary is used in specific contexts and thereby can acquire rich vocabulary if they continue to be exposed to a variety of different movies and make an effort to memorize their vocabulary. This view coincides with the view of Rosenweig (1979) [10] that with sufficient effort and practice, English learners can make great progress in memorizing and using English vocabulary.

Rosenweig (1979) [10] also indicated that a foreign language learner may have two ways to use vocabulary including “active usage” and “passive usage”. Active use means that learners can remember the word and use it, while passive use means that learners can

recognize the word and understand it but have not actively used it. According to this author, when watching English movies with accompanying subtitles, learners tend to gradually grasp the meaning of the vocabulary, memorize it and then actively use it in the same way as it is used in the context of the film, rather than merely knowing the meaning.

Grammar

According to Larsen-Freeman (1979) [6], there are two ways of teaching grammar namely the “deductive approach” and the “inductive approach”. With a deductive (traditional) approach, teachers provide rules and ask learners to give examples. With an inductive approach, teachers give examples first and then ask learners to infer rules. This approach is novel, encourages learners to participate more actively and can also be implemented in the classroom with the use of English movies with subtitles. In addition, according to Van Abbe (1965) [11], the combination of both listening and watching activities in this method makes learners much more excited than the traditional method mentioned above does because learners can learn grammar structures more efficiently when associating them to a specific movie scene.

Cultural understanding

Every language has a culture attached to it, so to be able to learn a foreign language well, we need to learn about the culture associated with it (Katchen, 2003) [5]. By watching English movies with subtitles, learners can deeply feel the cultural features of English-speaking countries. Learners can discuss

cultural diversity in movies, whether by writing or speaking about it. There is a wide selection of English-language films based on Pujitha's compilation (2016) [8]:

- Action/action adventure (*Indiana Jones, Die Hard, Pirates of Caribbean, The Avengers, The Dark Knight Trilogy, Iron Man, Mission: Impossible, First Blood, The Expendables, Kill Bill, Sherlock Holmes...*)

- Comedy/romantic comedy (*Pretty Woman, When Harry met Sally, My Big Fat Greek Wedding, Annie Hall, Roman Holiday, Sleepless in Seattle, Knocked Up, Love Actually, Notting Hill, Breakfast at Tiffany's, 10 Things I hate about You, She's the Man...*)

- Drama (*The Shawshank Redemption, Good Will Hunting, Casablanca, Citizen Kane, To Kill a Mockingbird, The Godfather, 12 Angry Men, Million Dollar Baby, Raging Bull, A Beautiful Mind, Changeling, Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind...*)

- Horror/Thriller (*Psycho, The Exorcist, The Shining, A Nightmare on Elm Street, The Evil Dead, Poltergeist, Friday the 13th, Night of the Living Dead, Rosemary's Baby, Halloween, Carrie, Jaws, Saw, The Grudge, Candyman, Final Destination...*)

- Musicals/dance (*West Side Story, All that Jazz, Singin' in the rain, Mamma Mia!, Hairspray, Step Up movies, High School Musical series, Camprock...*),

- Crime/gangster (*The Godfather, The Departed, The Untouchables, Road to Perdition, Scarface, The Public Enemy, Goodfellas, Pulp Fiction, Donnie Brasco,*

Gangs of New York, Little Caesar, The Town...)

- Fantasy (*Harry Potter films, The Lord of the Rings, The Wizard of Oz, King Kong, Twilight Saga, It's a Wonderful Life, The Chronicles of Narnia, Pirates of the Caribbean, Star Wars, Percy Jackson, The Hobbit, The Hobbit Princess Bride, Labyrinth...*)

- Animation (*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, Who Framed Roger Rabbit, Toy Story, Shrek, Finding Nemo, Ice Age, Madagascar, How to Train your Dragon, The Lion King, Rango, Brave, Wall-E, Kungfu Panda, Up, Cars, Ratatouille...*)

- Epics/historical (*Gone with the Wind, Titanic, Ben-Hur, The Lord of the Rings, Schindler's List, Gladiator, Spartacus, Saving Private Ryan, Lawrence of Arabia, Elizabeth, Gandhi, Troy...*)

- Science fiction (*Avatar, 2001: A Space Odyssey, Star Wars, Alien, The Matrix, Inception, Blade Runner, ET: The Extra- Terrestrial, Back to the Future, Terminator, Wall-E, A Clockwork Orange, The Hunger Games, Transformers, Jurassic Park, The Thing...*)

2.2. Types of English movie subtitles

As stated by Zanon (2006) [13], subtitles used in movies can be classified in many different ways, but the most understandable are two main categories:

- *Interlingual subtitle*: The original language of the movie is translated into another language. This means viewers watch the movie in the original language but read the subtitles translated into their own language; for example, Vietnamese

people watch movies in English but read Vietnamese subtitles.

- *Intralingual subtitle*: the original language and subtitles of the movie are in the same language. For example, Vietnamese people watch movies in English and also read English subtitles.

Through many studies, it has been found that the use of subtitles in foreign language learning brings positive results (Rokni & Ataee, 2014) [9]. Learners can remember vocabulary in the exact context in which it is used and their listening comprehension skills are also greatly improved. A study conducted by Rokni and Ataee (2014) [9] showed that the listening comprehension of learners who watched movies with subtitles improved much more than that of those who watched movies without subtitles.

Subtitles have positive effects on language learning in general. However, interlingual subtitles are less recommended than intralingual subtitles, according to Holger Mitterer and James McQueen (2009) [7]. The reason is that when learners watch a movie in a foreign language but read the subtitles in their native language, their attention will turn to the subtitles written in their native language to be able to understand the content and this makes it easy for them to ignore the language spoken in the movie. At this point, word pronunciations, grammatical structures as well as phrases are no longer noticed. Therefore, watching movies with intralingual subtitles helps to solve this problem.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research subject

This study aims to understand learners' views and attitudes towards the

effectiveness of using English movies with subtitles in teaching and learning English.

3.2. Research methods

The study was conducted through a survey questionnaire with in-depth questions to learn about learners' activity of watching movies with subtitles in general as well as the learners' attitudes and opinions towards the effectiveness of using movies with subtitles in teaching and learning English in particular.

3.3. Participants

The research involves 100 first-year students of the Institute of International Training at Thuongmai University, who attend the four classes of the subject namely "English 2" taught by the writer. They have newly entered the university and need to have access to the latest innovative, interesting and effective teaching and learning methods which can give them lasting inspiration and motivation on the English learning journey.

IV. Research findings and discussion

4.1. Research findings

Question 1: How often do you watch English movies?

	Number of students	Percentage
Daily	11	11%
Three to five times a week	42	42%
Once a week	24	24%
Once a month	20	20%
Less than once a month	3	3%

The majority of students surveyed (42%) watch English movies three to five times a week. 24% of the students

do it once a week and 20% of students chose the frequency of once a month. 11% of the students watch English movies daily and only 3% do it less than once in a month. This is a positive sign that students have a significant interest in this activity.

Question 2: Why do you watch English movies?

	Number of students	Percentage
To improve English	68	68%
For fun	32	32%
Other reasons	0	0%

68% of the students who are asked why they watch English-language movies say it is to enhance their English, while the remaining 32% do it for entertainment purposes.

Question 3: Do you prefer watching movies with subtitles or without subtitles? Why?

	Number of students	Percentage
With subtitles	95	95%
Without subtitles	5	5%

Most of the students surveyed (95%) express their preference for

Question 5: What is your reason for choosing English subtitles?

	Number of students	Percentage
I want to understand the movie's content	22	41.5%
I want to know the English vocabulary and grammar structures that the characters in the movie use	31	58.5%
Other reasons	0	0%

Of the 53 students who select English subtitles when viewing films, 22 students (41.5%) say they do so in order to comprehend the conversation, and 31 students (58.5%) say they do so in order to learn the vocabulary and grammatical

watching movies with subtitles, whereas only 5% choose to watch movies without subtitles. The reason given for choosing to watch movies with subtitles is that subtitles help students understand what the characters are saying. If they watch movies without subtitles, it is exceedingly difficult for them to understand the words and grammar structures that the characters use due to their limited vocabulary and listening comprehension abilities. The reason provided for the choice of watching movies without subtitles is that students want to challenge their listening ability in situations that mimic real-world conversation. Although this is a terrific motivator, there are still many of challenges for freshmen.

Question 4: What is the language of the subtitles that you choose more often? Why?

	Number of students	Percentage
Vietnamese	47	47%
English	53	53%

47% of the students choose Vietnamese, 53% choose English.

patterns used by the characters in the movie. Vocabulary and grammar are clearly of great interest to the majority of students since they lay the groundwork for viewers to comprehend the speech in a given movie.

Question 6: What is your reason for choosing Vietnamese subtitles?

	Number of students	Percentage
I want to understand the movie content	45	95.7%
I want to know the meaning of English words in the movie	2	4.3%
Other reasons	0	0%

Out of the 47 students who selected Vietnamese subtitles, it can be seen that the majority do so in order to better understand the movie's overall content; by contrast, the number of students who can hear English words but do not understand them

and requires the assistance of Vietnamese subtitles is insignificant. It is clear that the main goal of watching movies with Vietnamese subtitles is to comprehend the content, not to concentrate on enhancing one's English.

Question 7: What is your opinion on the following?

	Totally disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Totally agree
1. I learn correct pronunciation through English movies	0%	0%	0%	1%	99%
2. English movies help me understand English accents and dialects better	0%	0%	0%	2%	98%
3. English movies help improve listening skills better than other media in the classroom	4%	5%	55%	28%	8%
4. English subtitles make it easier for me to understand the dialogues in the movie	0%	0%	1%	41%	58%
5. Vietnamese subtitles help me understand the dialogues in the movie more easily	0%	2%	2%	93%	3%
6. I learn a lot of new vocabulary while watching English movies with English subtitles	0%	0%	2%	93%	5%
7. I learn a lot of new vocabulary while watching English movies with Vietnamese subtitles	5%	68%	17%	6%	4%
8. I revise grammar structures already known and learn many new grammar structures while watching English movies with English subtitles	0%	0%	1%	94%	5%
9. I revise grammar structures already known and learn many new grammar structures when I watch English movies with Vietnamese subtitles.	15%	46%	33%	4%	2%

The results show that most of the students surveyed agree or completely agree that English movies help them improve their pronunciation and gain more understanding of different accents and dialects in English. More than half of the students have a neutral attitude towards the effectiveness of using English movies for improving listening

skills, compared with other media in English class. This stems from the fact that the inclusion of movies in teaching and learning English is an approach that requires a lot of preparation and arrangement because the classroom curriculum is carefully structured with accompanying textbooks and time constraints.

There was almost no difference in the students' opinion about how English and Vietnamese subtitles help them understand the content of the movies better. Most students agree or strongly agree with this view. However, when this criterion is taken into account, Vietnamese subtitles are still favored since they still produce more favorable conditions if the necessity for understanding the movie's content is given top priority.

When it comes to vocabulary learning when watching movies with subtitles, watching English movies with English subtitles is still an option that receives more positive opinions than watching movies with Vietnamese subtitles. This is also completely understandable because when considering the lexical element, especially new words, English subtitles will be more effective than the Vietnamese translation of the words, because it is less likely for first-year students to catch up with the movie's dialogue and identify which English words correspond to specific Vietnamese meanings in the subtitles. The same can be seen for the criterion of "revising learned grammar structures and learning many new grammar structures". It can be said that when it comes to learning vocabulary and grammar structures, students still appreciate the English subtitles with all the words spoken by the characters displayed on the screen in their original language.

4.2. Discussion

It is a pity not to use English movies with the native subtitles, a never-ending source of English resources for teaching and learning English, thus efforts should

be made to reduce the time spent on skippable tasks in textbooks in favor of English movie viewing. Besides, teachers should also play the role of the instructors who select English movies for their students, with the factors such as appropriate content, grammar points, vocabulary richness, accent and dialects taken into careful consideration. When students realize that they may benefit from something that was once thought of as entertainment but is actually an incredibly limitless source of study materials, they will feel more confident. Teachers can also provide clarification on study methods so that students can better self-study in settings other than the classroom.

V. Conclusion

The use of English movies with subtitles, especially English subtitles, in the process of teaching and learning English whether inside or outside the classroom has been shown to be a feasible approach. Although this approach is not very novel, it nonetheless requires extra time and effort from both teachers and students, particularly in the context of the rigorous curriculum at the university level and the strictly prescribed timeframe for each English module. It is hoped that watching English movies with subtitles, which has traditionally been viewed as merely entertaining, will be valued as an effective way to improve the English skills of students in general and university freshmen in particular, and more class time and self-study time will be devoted for this useful activity.

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