

ENHANCING ENGLISH PROFICIENCY THROUGH SUBTITLED MOVIES: A STUDY AT AN ISLAMIC JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL IN ACEH

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ABSTRACT


The influence of employing movie subtitles as a teaching technique for English is examined in this study, with an emphasis on how subtitles help students become more proficient in the language. In light of the potential advantages of incorporating multimedia into the classroom, the study investigated how well English-subtitled films might improve students' understanding and involvement. A sample of 14 seventh-grade students from an Islamic junior high school in Aceh Besar, Aceh Province, participated in the study, which used a quantitative research approach. Tests and questionnaires were used to gather information in order to assess students' perceptions and progress. As demonstrated by a noticeable difference in performance before and after implementation, the results showed that incorporating movie subtitles greatly enhanced students' competence of English. This is evident from the pre-test and post-test scores, which showed a statistically significant improvement after the use of English-subtitled movies. Strong favorable feedback was also noted in the questionnaire responses, with the majority of students concurring that English movie subtitles in language instruction greatly facilitates students' comprehension in learning English.

KEYWORDS: *English Proficiency, Subtitled Movies, Teaching English*

INTRODUCTION

English holds great significance in the era of globalization as it serves as an international language (Kirkpatrick, 2012). It is essential for global communication, making it a compulsory subject for Indonesian students to learn at school (Tathahira & Nahrissy, 2020). However, while some enjoy learning English, others find it challenging and confusing, primarily due to the vast vocabulary they need to memorize (Nation, 2001). This difficulty often leads to students becoming disinterested or hesitant to speak English out of fear of making mistakes (Fitriyasni, 2020; Liu & Jackson, 2008; Netta et al., 2020).

One of the factors contributing to students' struggles is the teaching methods employed by teachers, which greatly affect students' motivation and achievement in



learning English (Mudzakkir & Darmawan, 2024; Richards & Rodgers, 2014). To address this, teachers can adopt various techniques for teaching reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills. Incorporating engaging methods and using authentic materials such as English songs, movies, or real-life conversations can make learning more enjoyable and engaging for students (Afna, 2024; Bokiev et al., 2018; Gilmore, 2007; Nunan, 1999; Otajonova, 2024). For instance, English movies with subtitles are particularly effective as they help students improve their vocabulary, listening, and communication skills (Ismaili, 2013; Mulyani et al., 2022). Films captivate students' attention with their stories, making the learning process more enjoyable for both students and teachers (Ismaili, 2013).

Teachers play a pivotal role in making English learning engaging and effective (Trisnawati et al., 2023). Using media like subtitled movies can be a powerful strategy to motivate students and enhance their learning experience. Integrating subtitled movies into teaching makes lessons more interesting and enjoyable, helping students build vocabulary and improve their language skills (Lestari, 2018; Mulyani et al., 2022). While some debates exist about the effectiveness of subtitles in language learning, many studies have shown that this approach not only enhances vocabulary but also supports the development of the English skills (Birulés-Muntané & Soto-Faraco, 2016).

Many studies support the use of subtitles in teaching English. This research showed that subtitles helped enhance both learners' comprehension and retention (Hsieh, 2019), allowing viewers to connect the spoken word with written text, providing contextual cues that help in understanding both content and language structure (Black, 2021). Furthermore, subtitles serve as an invaluable resource for learners of foreign languages, promoting active engagement with the material and enhancing language acquisition (Tekalp et al., 2023). The visual representation of words enhances auditory input, aiding learners in understanding how words and phrases are used in authentic conversations (Black, 2021). Furthermore, subtitles facilitate understanding of the rhythm and flow of spoken language, which is especially helpful for acquiring conversational fluency (Aksu Ataç & Günay-Köprülü, 2018; Fauji & Zuhriyah, 2022). Subtitled films also boost learners' listening, reading, and writing skills (Omar et al., 2023; Siregar et al., 2023). Thus, incorporating such medias into English language teaching will offer a dynamic and interactive way to reinforce language skills, making it an invaluable resource for both teachers and students, particularly in Islamic-based schools (Habiburrahim et al., 2022). To address this issue, this present study seeks to answer the following question: What is the impact of using English movie subtitles on students' English proficiency in an Islamic junior high school?

LITERATURE REVIEW

MOVIES AS VISUAL AIDS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING

A movie, also known as a film, is a form of visual storytelling that uses moving images combined with sound to communicate narratives, emotions, or information. According to *Encyclopedia Britannica* (2025), "A film, also called a movie or a motion picture, is a series of still photographs on film projected onto a screen using light in rapid succession." According to Monaco (2009), film is a sophisticated form of artistic expression that combines visual images, music, and time-based sequencing to convey meaning and elicit emotional responses. He underlines that the cinematic medium works through a dynamic interaction of visual and audio elements, making it an effective tool for not only narrative but also engaging audiences on various sensory levels. The multimodal characteristics of film add to its usefulness as an instructional resource, especially in language learning environments.

For English teaching and learning, movies are a valuable visual aid that can enhance the learning process (Sánchez-Auñón et al., 2023). They make lessons more engaging and clearer, fostering greater enthusiasm among students (Tekalp et al., 2023). Teachers should use media like movies to create a fresh and engaging classroom atmosphere, boosting students' enthusiasm and helping them better understand the material (Rajpopat, 2023; Walay, 2022). Movies have been found to be effective teaching tools because they stimulate both receptive skills (listening and reading) (Siregar et al., 2023), and productive skills (speaking and writing) (Fauji & Zuhriyah, 2022; Omar et al., 2023).

THE USE OF SUBTITLED FILMS IN EFL TEACHING

Watching films and series with subtitles can aid in learning a foreign language. Since English is the most widely studied foreign language globally, utilizing subtitle-based learning has the potential for significant educational and social benefits (Birulés-Muntané & Soto-Faraco, 2016). English audiovisual media with subtitles is also gaining popularity due to the ease of accessing original-language content with subtitles (Birulés-Muntané & Soto-Faraco, 2016; Chaichompoo, 2019).

In terms of the concept of subtitling, Shuttleworth and Moira (1997, p. 161 as cited in Zhang, 2018) define it as "the process of providing synchronized captions for film and television dialogue." As a type of intralingual or interlingual audiovisual translation, subtitles, usually placed at the bottom of the screen, serves as a textual representation of the dialogue and/or narration that is displayed on screen (Mulyani et al., 2022). They function to aid in audience comprehension, giving individuals who might need more

linguistic assistance or who might not completely comprehend the spoken language access to the film's plot (Díaz-Cintas & Remael, 2007).

Subtitles in audiovisuals have been suggested in a number of earlier research to help with some aspects of second language learning. Research by Vulchanova et al. (2015) found that both intralingual and interlingual subtitles—in the listener's native tongue or the soundtrack's language, respectively—improve vocabulary acquisition and plot comprehension. The study by Mulyani et al. (2022) adds credence to the idea that EFL students view video clip subtitles as a useful and efficient vocabulary instructional tool that enhances their vocabulary and learning processes. Larasati et al.'s (2021) research came to the conclusion that students perceive English-subtitled films as a useful and efficient tool for enhancing their comprehension of spoken grammar, as they provide real-world context examples and facilitate the recognition of grammatical structures.

Further, research by Qazi and Khan (2023) revealed that English language learners benefit greatly from subtitled videos as a pedagogical tool since they enhance their listening comprehension and vocabulary acquisition. The dual-modality presentation (i.e., text and audio) provides essential assistance for understanding spoken language and solidifying lexical information. According to Omar et al. (2023), including English-language films with standard subtitles is an excellent teaching strategy for enhancing EFL students' writing abilities. This approach improves students' comprehension of how language is utilized effectively in everyday situations, helps them acquire vocabulary and grammar, and offers rich linguistic input—all of which help them become better writers. Wahyuningsih and Fitriah (2023) also discovered that students frequently and consciously watch movies with English subtitles in order to increase their vocabulary and comprehension. For improving their English language skills, students consider this practice as a useful, entertaining, and approachable informal learning method.

Subtitles also contribute to the development of an engaging, low-anxiety learning environment that can boost motivation and lessen stress in learners. By stopping to look up new words, learners frequently become more involved with the content and promote incidental vocabulary acquisition. Moreover, the dual presentation of auditory (audio) and visual (text) input helps strengthen lexical and grammatical structures, enhancing language proficiency and comprehension in general (Black, 2021; Tekalp et al., 2023).

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a quasi-experimental research design to examine how English subtitled movies influenced English proficiency by determining whether there was a

significant difference in outcomes between students before and after being taught using English subtitled movies. The study utilized random sampling technique to select the sample, which consisted of 14 of the students from class VII at MTsS Baitul Arqam, Aceh Besar, Aceh Province.

The study used a pre-test and post-test design, supported by a questionnaire to explore the students' responses on the intervention. The pre-test was administered without subtitles, while the post-test included subtitles. The questionnaire was designed to gather students' perceptions of subtitled movies. This questionnaire used Likert Scale starting from Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree in a closed-ended format. For data analysis, the study employed a t-test to determine the significant difference in comprehension between using subtitles and not using them. Additionally, the frequency distribution was analyzed to assess the questionnaire responses of subtitled movies in enhancing students' English proficiency.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

RESULTS

This study aimed to see the impact of the English subtitled movies on students' English proficiency. This section provides the description of the obtained data from the tests and questionnaires. The results of pre-test and post-test are as follows:

TABLE 1. Means of pre-test and post-test

		MEAN	N
Test	Pre Test	7.29	14
	Post Test	9.86	14

Based on the data above, it can be seen that the mean value of the pre-test is 7.29. This indicates the average score of the students before they were exposed to movies with English subtitles. Meanwhile, the mean value of the post-test is 9.86. This represents the average score of the students after they watched the movies with English subtitles. From the result, the mean score increased from 7.29 to 9.86, suggesting that the use of movies with English subtitles may have had a positive effect on the students' English proficiency.

TABLE 2. Results of *t*-test

		PAIRED DIFFERENCES					<i>t</i>	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Dev.	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair	Pre Test Post Test	-.571	.756	.202	-1.01	-.135	-2.83	13	.000

Table 2 shows a statistically significant improvement in the students' scores after using English subtitled movies, as evidenced by the results of the pre-test and post-test, namely the value from 7.29 to 9.86. Since the *p*-value (0.000) was smaller than the significance level (0.05), it rejected the null hypothesis and concludes that there is a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores. This supports the effectiveness of using English subtitled movies in enhancing students' English learning outcomes.

TABLE 3. Results of the questionnaires

NO	QUESTION	FREQUENCY	%	ANSWER
1.	I often watching English movies with subtitles	12	85.8	SA
2.	I do not usually use subtitles while watching movies	7	50	DA
3.	The use of subtitled movies is interesting	10	71.4	A
4.	I do not find the difficulty to understand English by using subtitled movies	10	71.4	A
5.	The use of movie subtitles motivates me to be more active in learning English	10	71.4	A
6.	In my opinion, using movie subtitles provides new knowledge.	10	71.4	SA
7.	Watching English movies with subtitles is more interesting when learning English	10	71.4	A
8.	I am enthusiastic watching English movies by using subtitles	10	71.4	SA
9.	By watching English movies with subtitles, it can help me to improve my listening skills	10	71.4	A
10.	The use of English subtitles in the movies makes me understand English dialogues better	10	71.4	A

Table 3 shows that the majority of respondents had a positive attitude toward using subtitles while watching English movies, as they found it beneficial for learning and understanding English. A significant 85.8% strongly agreed that they often watched English movies with subtitles, while 71.4% agreed that subtitles made learning English more engaging, help improve their skills, and provide new knowledge. Additionally, the respondents were motivated and enthusiastic about using subtitles, as it enhanced their understanding of English dialogues.

DISCUSSION

The findings from the study reveal an improvement in students' English proficiency after being exposed to movies with English subtitles. The increase from a mean pre-test score of 7.29 to a post-test mean score of 9.86 indicates a better performance in English among students. Although the numerical difference may seem modest, the statistical analysis indicates that this improvement is significant, as evidenced by the p -value of 0.000, which is below the established threshold of 0.05.

This result aligns with existing literature that highlights the benefits of multimedia tools, such as subtitled movies, in language learning. Multimedia technologies in language learning are anchored in cognitive theory of multimedia learning by Mayer (2001). This hypothesis suggests that people learn more successfully from words and pictures than from words alone, since the combination of visual and aural input stimulates both channels of working memory. Multimedia resources like films, interactive software, and digital recordings offer rich contextual cues like intonation, gestures, facial expressions, and background noises that can significantly improve comprehension when used in a listening setting.

Moreover, multimedia tools facilitate actual listening experiences, which aid students in processing spoken language from everyday situations, including variations in accents, speech rates, and colloquial usage. They can also provide options for playback, pause, and repeating, which empowers students to take charge of their hearing and boosts their self-assurance and independence. Meanwhile, subtitles provide dual-channel input, combining visual and auditory stimuli, which can enhance comprehension and retention of linguistic elements (Black, 2021; Qazi and Khan, 2023; Tekalp et al., 2023).

Additionally, the findings of questionnaire highlight the positive influence of subtitles in movies on English language learning. A substantial majority of respondents (85.8%) strongly agreed that they frequently used subtitles while watching English movies, underlining their recognition of subtitles as an effective learning tool. This aligns with previous studies suggesting that subtitles enhance learners' engagement with authentic English content (Wahyuningsih and Fitriah, 2023). Furthermore, the findings reveal that 71.4% of respondents agree that subtitles made English learning more engaging and enjoyable. This engagement fosters motivation, which is essential for language acquisition (Tekalp et al., 2023).

The use of subtitled movies is a useful for enhancing English proficiency. Subtitled movies help learners with a dynamic and enjoyable way to improve their listening,

vocabulary, and comprehension skills, while also fostering greater engagement and motivation.

Overall, while the study shows a statistically significant improvement in students' English proficiency after watching English subtitled movies, it is necessary to recognize the study's limitations and evaluate factors that may have limited further learning gains. This study is limited to one school with a short period of intervention. Thus, it may not be generalized to wider population. Further, learners with higher proficiency may have gained less because the material provided here was not sufficiently challenging, while lower-proficiency learners may have struggled to keep up with both audio and subtitle input simultaneously.

Future research may strive for bigger sample sizes and involve students from many different schools (diverse educational contexts) to improve the findings' applicability to a larger population of EFL students, particularly in the Islamic junior high school context. Research might explore the usefulness of several types of subtitles (e.g., L1 subtitles, bimodal L2 subtitles, or even no subtitles) for learners at different competence levels to determine which strategy is most beneficial for specific groups.

CONCLUSIONS

The study concludes that the inclusion of subtitles in English movies significantly enhances English proficiency among students at an Islamic junior high school in Aceh. There are numerous advantages to using subtitled movies, including a dual-channel learning experience and helping students to correlate spoken and written language. They also act as an engaging tool, motivating students and facilitating their understanding of vocabulary and cultural nuances. The majority of students in this study also believed that subtitles play a beneficial role in making English learning more accessible, entertaining, and effective. While there are significant individual differences, our findings highlight the educational importance of subtitles as a useful and entertaining resource for English language development.

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