



**THE EFFECTS OF WATCHING ENGLISH SUBTITLED MOVIES ON L2  
VOCABULARY LEARNING AMONG COMMUNITY COLLEGE LEARNERS**

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## ABSTRACT

This study examined the effects of watching subtitled English movies on vocabulary learning. Fifty-four students from a Community College who participated in the study were randomly assigned to experimental and control groups with 28 and 26 participants respectively. Both groups were presented with the same English movies but the control group watched the movies without subtitles, while the experimental group watched the movies with subtitles for three consecutive weeks. The participants completed the Vocabulary Knowledge Scale (VKS) pre-test, post-test and delayed test, as well as questionnaire. Results from t-tests (pretest:  $t(52) = -1.233$ ,  $p = 0.223$ , post-test:  $t(52) = 1.717$ ,  $p = 0.094$ ) revealed that both groups progressed significantly from pre-test to post-test. The findings revealed that with or without the appearance of subtitles, the participants in both groups managed to improve their vocabulary learning. T-test results for delayed test mean scores shows a significant difference between the experimental and control groups;  $t(52) = 4.032$ ,  $p = 0.000$  which shows that the participants in the experimental group remember more words than the control group. This shows that the use of subtitles helps participants to retain the words longer. The questionnaire analysis revealed that the respondents were favorable towards the use of subtitles in the movies. It can be concluded that using English subtitled movies can help improve students' performance in vocabulary learning and retention. This study implicates that English language teachers should consider the use of English subtitled movies as a pedagogical resource to enhance vocabulary learning among their students.





## **KEBERKESANAN MENONTON FILEM DENGAN SARIKATA BAHASA INGGERIS TERHADAP PEMBELAJARAN PERBENDAHARAAN KATA DALAM KALANGAN PELAJAR KOLEJ KOMUNITI**

### **ABSTRAK**

Kajian adalah bertujuan untuk mengkaji keberkesanan menonton filem berbahasa Inggeris dengan sarikata dalam pembelajaran perbendaharaan kata. Seramai lima puluh empat pelajar dari sebuah Kolej Komuniti dibahagikan secara rawak kepada dua kumpulan iaitu kumpulan rawatan dengan 28 peserta dan kumpulan kawalan dengan 26 peserta. Kedua-dua kumpulan ini menonton filem yang sama selama tiga minggu berturut-turut tetapi kumpulan rawatan menonton filem dengan sarikata manakala kumpulan kawalan menonton filem tanpa sarikata. Para peserta melengkapkan ujian pra, ujian pasca dan ujian kelewatan serta soal selidik. Keputusan dari ujian-t (ujian pra:  $t(52) = -1.233$ ,  $p = 0.223$ , ujian pasca :  $t(52) = 1.717$ ,  $p = 0.094$  menunjukkan terdapat peningkatan yang signifikan antara kedua-dua kumpulan dari ujian pra ke ujian pasca. Keputusan ini menunjukkan bahawa terdapat peningkatan dalam pembelajaran bagi kedua-dua peserta dalam kumpulan rawatan dan kawalan walaupun tanpa kehadiran sarikata. Hasil ujian-T untuk skor min ujian kelewatan pula menunjukkan terdapat perbezaan yang signifikan antara kumpulan kawalan dan rawatan;  $t(52) = 4.032$   $p = 0.000$ . Ini menunjukkan bahawa peserta dalam kumpulan rawatan mengingat lebih banyak perkataan berbanding dengan peserta dalam kumpulan kawalan. Ini menunjukkan penggunaan sarikata membantu peserta mengekalkan perkataan lebih lama. Berdasarkan analisis soal selidik, responden menunjukkan sikap positif terhadap penggunaan sarikata dalam filem yang ditonton. Justeru, dapat disimpulkan bahawa penggunaan sarikata sebagai alat pembelajaran perbendaharaan kata dapat meningkatkan prestasi pelajar dalam pembelajaran dan pengekalan perbendaharaan kata. Kajian ini merumuskan bahawa sarikata dapat memberikan faedah sebagai salah satu sumber bahan pedagogi.



## CONTENTS

	<b>Page</b>
<b>DECLARATION OF ORIGINAL WORK</b>	ii
<b>DECLARATION OF DISSERTATION</b>	iii
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENT</b>	iv
<b>ABSTRACT</b>	v
<b>ABSTRAK</b>	vi
<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS</b>	vii
<b>LIST OF TABLES</b>	xii
<b>LIST OF FIGURES</b>	xiv
<b>LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS</b>	xv
<b>LIST OF APPENDICES</b>	xvi

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1	Introduction of the Study	1
1.2	Background of the Study	4
1.3	Problem Statement	5
1.4	Purpose of the Study	8
1.5	Research Objectives	9
1.6	Research Questions	9
1.7	Significance of the Study	10
1.8	Limitations of the Study	11
1.9	Operational Definition	12

1.9.1 Subtitles	12
1.9.2 Vocabulary	13
1.9.3 Retention	14
1.10 Summary	15

## CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction	16
2.2 Theoretical Framework	17
2.2.1 Dual Coding Theory	19
2.2.2 Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning	20
2.2.3 Information Processing Theory	22
2.3 Understanding Subtitles	24
2.4 The Impact of Vocabulary in Language Learning	26
2.5 Studies on Subtitles and Vocabulary Learning	29
2.5.1 Subtitles and Content Comprehension	31
2.5.2 Subtitles and Vocabulary Development	33
2.5.3 The Impact of Different Types of Subtitles on Vocabulary Learning	35
2.5.4 Authenticity of Materials	38
2.6 Research Gap	40
2.7 Conclusion	42

## CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction	43
3.2 Research Design	43
3.3 Population and Sample	45
3.4 Research Instruments	46
3.4.1 The Vocabulary Knowledge Scale Test	46
3.4.2 Pilot Study	48
3.4.3 Questionnaire	49
3.5 Validity and Reliability of the Instruments	52
3.6 Materials	53
3.7 Data Collection Procedures	54
3.8 Data Analysis Procedures	57
3.9 Summary	59

## CHAPTER 4 ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction	60
4.2 Statistical Test	61
4.2.1 Differences in Tests Mean Scores Between Experimental and Control Group	61
4.2.1.1 Comparison of Pre-Test Mean Scores Between Experimental and Control Group	61
4.2.1.2 Comparison of Post-Test Mean Scores Between Experimental and Control Group	64
4.2.1.3 Comparison of Delayed-Test Mean Scores Between Experimental and Control Group	67

4.2.2 Analysis Of Mean Scores Between The Same Groups	70
4.2.2.1 Mean Scores Analysis for Pre-test and Post-test of Experimental Group	70
4.2.2.2 Mean Scores Analysis for Post-test and Delayed-test of Experimental Group	72
4.2.2.3 Mean Scores Analysis for Pre-test and Post-test of Control group	73
4.2.2.4 Mean Scores Analysis for Post-test and Delayed-test of Control Group	74
4.2.3 Analysis of mean scores using Repeated Measure ANOVA	75
4.2.3.1 Repeated measures ANOVA for Experimental group	76
4.2.3.2 Repeated Measures ANOVA for Control Group	78
4.3 Analysis of Questionnaire	79
4.3.1 Personal Information	80
4.3.2 Students' Preferences	82
4.3.3 Student's Opinion and Level of Satisfaction on Watching English Subtitled Movies	84
4.3.4 Additional Information	87
4.4 Summary	88

**CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

5.1 Introduction	89
5.2 Discussion	89
5.2.1 Discussion on Research Question 1	90
5.2.2 Discussion on Research Question 2	91
5.2.3 Discussion on Research Question 3	93
5.3 Research Limitations	94
5.4 Recommendations	96
5.5 Conclusion	97
5.6 Implications	99

**REFERENCES**

100

**APPENDICES**





## LIST OF TABLES

Table No.		Page
2.1	Comparison of Retention Rate	18
2.2	Nation's Significant Aspect of Knowing a Word	28
3.1	Research Design	45
3.2	The Participants	46
3.3	The Vocabulary Knowledge Scale	47
3.4	The Likert Scale	51
3.5	Test of Reliability	53
3.6	Duration Summary	55
3.7	Framework of Analysis	58
4.1	Tests of Normality for Pre-test Scores	62
4.2	Pre-test Mean Scores of Experimental and Control Groups	63
4.3	The Summary of T-Test Results for Pre-Test Scores Between Two Groups	64
4.4	Tests of Normality for Post-test Scores	65
4.5	Post-test Mean Scores of Experimental and Control Groups	66
4.6	The Summary of t-test results for post-test scores between two groups	67
4.7	Tests of normality for Delayed-test Scores	68
4.8	Delayed-test Mean Scores of Experimental and Control Groups	69
4.9	The Summary of T-Test Results for Delayed-Test Scores Between Two Groups	70
4.10	Paired Sample Statistics in Pre-Test and Post-Test Mean Scores of Experimental Group	71



4.11	Paired Sample Statistics in Post-Test and Delayed Test Mean Scores of Experimental Group	73
4.12	Paired Sample Statistics in Pre-Test and Post-Test Mean Scores of Control Group	74
4.13	Paired Sample Statistics in Post-Test to Delayed Test Mean Scores of Control Group	75
4.14	Multivariate Tests for Experimental Group	76
4.15	Post Hoc Test for Experimental Group	77
4.16	Multivariate Tests for Control Group	78
4.17	Post Hoc Test for Control Group	79
4.18	Demographic Details of Respondents in Experimental Group	81
4.19	Students' Preferences	83
4.20	Student's Opinion and Level of Satisfaction on Watching English Subtitled Movies	86



## LIST OF FIGURES

Figures No.	Page
2.1 Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning Model	21
2.2 Conceptual Framework	23
3.1 Questionnaire: Section A	50
3.2 Questionnaire: Section B	50
3.3 Questionnaire: Section C	51
3.4 Questionnaire: Section D	52
3.5 Research Procedure	56
3.6 Data Collection Procedure	57
4.1 Outliers Test for Pre-Test Scores	62
4.2 Outliers Test for Post-Test Scores	65
4.3 Outliers Test for Delayed-Test Scores	68





## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

MOE	Ministry of Education Malaysia
SKS	Sijil Sistem Komputer dan Sokongan
SPL	Sijil Pelancongan dan Pengembaraan
SPM	Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education Training
VKS	Vocabulary Knowledge Scale





## LIST OF APPENDICES

- A VKS Test (Movie 1)
- B VKS Test (Movie 2)
- C VKS Test (Movie 3)
- D Questionnaire





## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION



#### 1.1 Introduction of the Study



In this global era, vocabulary is central to second language learning. As language develops, the sophistication of technology also grows. There are many opportunities available that can be utilised in vocabulary learning. One of the fortuities is by watching subtitled movies. Thus, this study focuses on the use of English subtitled movies as a tool for vocabulary learning. It is imperative for the researcher to investigate the effectiveness of subtitles in vocabulary learning and retention as the results later can be used as guidance to help L2 learners enhance their vocabulary learning. The use of subtitles is expected to have a positive impact on vocabulary learning as L2 learners need to have an ample repertoire of vocabulary in order to be able to use the language in both written and spoken aspects. Laufer and Hulstijn





(2001, p. 1) state that “all second language learners and teachers are well aware that learning a second language involves the learning of a large number of words”.

Vocabulary has an indispensable role in developing L2 speaking, reading, writing and listening skills. Without adequate vocabulary range, L2 learners encounter problems and difficulties in applying the language skills stated earlier. Communication in L2 will not be meaningful if the students do not possess a wider range of vocabulary to express the messages. McCarthy (1990) mentions that regardless of how well the students learn grammar and how successful the pronunciation they master, but without precise words, L2 communication cannot happen in any meaningful way.



media, teaching methods have been enhanced. L2 teachers and learners use various strategies to learn vocabulary; one of the powerful strategies in this modern era is through the use of multimedia technology especially in facilitating authentic communication (Shabani & Zanussi, 2015).

Gorjian (2014) explains that the use of multimedia technology like television, computers, networks, video cassettes and interactive multimedia boosts teachers' teaching efficacy by providing authentic materials. In fact, previous researchers have highlighted on the usefulness of multimedia on language learning due to its authentic input. TV, computers, network, radios and many other technologies have provided L2 learners with more opportunities to increase language learning. Cakir (2006) stated in





his research that the use of video and TV had tremendously evolved due to its effectiveness in communicative aspects.

However, the need to learn thousands of words can be tough especially for weak L2 learners and this may demotivate them. Gray (1999) declares that the motivational aspect should be taken into consideration to ensure L2 learning takes place as motivation, emotion and socio-cultural factors may influence the manner of human processes information. Vocabulary learning does not only involves memorising the written form of a word, its sound and meaning but it also involves the ability to retrieve them from memory (Gregory & Parry, 2006).

From the cognitive perspective, the success of retrieval depends mainly on the effective use of short-term and long-term memory. In addition, it is vital to create brain-compatible learning environments in order to enhance the likelihood that students will remember what has been learnt. Moeller, Ketsman and Masmaliyeva (2009, p. 2) explain that “to quickly and easily access vocabulary as needed in oral and written communication, language learners must internalise the vocabulary and store this information in long-term memory.”

Stevens and Goldberg (2006) define short-term memory as a memory that allows humans to store information for about five to twenty seconds depending on its worthiness determined by the brain, while long-term memory is information stored for over an extended period of time if the brain determines the information is worthy to recall and emotionally significant. Stevens and Goldberg (2006) explain that teachers







have difficulty to convince that learning has occurred if the students cannot demonstrate what they have learnt through performance measures.

## 1.2 Background of the Study

The basis for this study is the English language level in community colleges in Malaysia. In addition, the community colleges are one of the Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET) institutions under the Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE) which offer certificate and diploma level of education. Community Colleges also grant lifelong learning courses for the community depending on their needs. The main purpose of the existence of community colleges is to provide opportunities to those who are not selected to pursue their studies in Polytechnics or other academic institutions.

During the duration of the course, students need to take two compulsory English courses (i.e. Communicative English and Workplace English) in order to graduate. Certain programmes offered require students to take additional English courses. Students are expected to perform well in both courses as a preparation for their employment later. However, students face difficulties in performing the tasks in English classes. Typically, community college students do not possess good grades in their *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* (SPM). The minimum admission requirement to community college is to pass SPM. Students also need to get at least one credit in any subjects to enrol in the course. They have to go through four semesters of study period which is equivalent to two years.





### 1.3 Problem Statement

According to the record from Department of Polytechnic & Community College Education, 90% of community college students scored a poor grade in English paper in SPM. Thus, this figure shows that most of the community college students are learners with low level of English proficiency. This is supported by the research conducted by Mohini Mohamed et al. (2008) which revealed that despite various efforts done to promote the use of English, the general level of English proficiency among Malaysian students is still low. Despite the numerous efforts done by the department to help these students to be better in English learning, students still struggle to communicate and write confidently. From the researcher's observation, students have difficulty not only in spoken English, but in writing as well due to lack of vocabulary.



In community college, the curriculum designed focuses on the communication aspect. All continuous assessments designed require students to accomplish them orally. 80% of the marks are given through continuous assessment, while another 20% is derived from Final Examination. From the researcher's observation and experience in teaching two different community colleges for almost 10 years, the students in community college have difficulty in using simple English sentences and phrases.

For example, in *Communicative English* course, one of the topics is *Greetings and Introductions*. In this topic, students are taught to greet and make self-introduction, yet, they are unable to even talk about themselves. Most of the time, the researcher has to provide them with the vocabulary needed to express themselves.





Having asked the students, it is found that the reason for that particular situation is they have small repertoire of vocabulary.

On top of that, these students have difficulty to store and retain the vocabulary into their memory even after being taught several times. They tend to forget the words easily. For example, when they are asked to recall the target words that they learnt in previous classes, it was hard for them to retrieve those words. In fact, they have difficulty to retrieve the words for future use. As a result, very little can be accomplished by the students if they do not possess certain words required for the assessment.

Based on the observation and experience of the researcher, the community college students have negative attitudes towards learning English as they do not regard the importance of learning English. They attend a two-hour English class per week, unprepared as they do not see the need to learn the language. They use English only when they are in class but when they are outside the class, they switch to Malay language because they will feel more comfortable speaking in their mother tongue.

Ambigapathy Pandian (2002) and Fauziah et al. (2005) point out that the meagre use of English outside the class is one of the reasons for this phenomenon and it is attributed to the culture and nature of Malaysian students. As a result, they tend to forget the words learnt because they think it is not important to their life. Due to the fact that community college students have a poor command of English, the researcher helped them to learn and retain the words learnt so they can apply the knowledge for task completion in order to improve their communication skills.





For that reason, this study aimed to explore the effect of watching English subtitled movies, in helping community college students to expand their vocabulary range and help them to retain it in order to successfully complete the given tasks, as well as to instil the interest in improving their English for the sake of their future.

Teaching English nowadays requires a variety of strategies in order to attract learners' attention to cater to the needs of 21<sup>st</sup>-century learners. Since the use of multimedia and technology is becoming more pandemic, therefore, it can be used to support teaching and learning. The use of audio-visual is becoming a popular tool in second language learning. Garnier (2014) stresses that audio-visual material allows L2 learners to gain authentic input from the real and meaningful communicative situations. This is in agreement with Gorjian's viewpoint. Gorjian (2014) highlights that multimedia tools help to display contents, deepen comprehension and enhance lexical and grammatical learning of L2 learners in the classroom.

Thus, the use of movies in classroom learning seems to provide positive effects on language learning as it is not only rich in authentic materials (Khalid, 2001) but a source of enjoyment and pleasure (Al-Sarhan, 2013). Etemadi (2012) agrees with the statement that movies are not just for entertainment, but they are also useful for learning. Accordingly, in line with Gray (1999), Cakir (2006), Shabani and Zanussi (2015), and King (2002) also state that movies provide more pedagogical choices in L2 learning as they offer rich resources of intrinsic motivation for learners.





However, watching the movies alone may be challenging especially for weak L2 learners. Therefore, video materials, TV programs and movies have been enhanced with subtitles either in the mother tongue or target language in order to assist L2 learners comprehend the materials better (Karakas & Saricoban, 2012). According to Etemadi (2012, p. 239), “subtitles of various languages are also called for assisting comprehension and language learning.” The National Center for Technology and Center for Implementing Technology in Education (2010) affirmed that subtitles can enhance vocabulary acquisition.

Previous researchers have provided findings on the effects of subtitles in motivating L2 learners and its impact on their speech as well as they are able to learn new vocabulary (Zanon, 2006; Etemadi, 2012; Gorjian, 2014). By using subtitled English movies, learners are not only exposed to words and phrases, but they will also learn how to pronounce words and expand their vocabulary range.

#### **1.4 Purpose of the study**

This study aims to investigate to what extent of watching English subtitled movies affects L2 vocabulary learning. Hence, it is also to examine whether or not this strategy affects students' vocabulary retention. It is the purpose of this present study as well to find out the students' perception of English subtitled movies as a tool in vocabulary learning.





## 1.5 Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To examine the effects of watching English subtitled movies on vocabulary learning.
2. To examine the effects of watching English subtitled movies on vocabulary retention.
3. To explore students' perceptions of the use of English Subtitled movies as a tool of vocabulary learning.

## 1.6 Research Questions



Based on the objectives of the study, the following research questions are formed:

1. Does watching English subtitled movies contribute to vocabulary learning?
2. Does watching English subtitled movies contribute to L2 word retention?
3. What are the students' perceptions of the use of English Subtitled movies as a tool of vocabulary learning?





## 1.7 Significance of the Study

The context of this study is focusing on the students in community college. Therefore, the results of this study can provide a noteworthy insight on the impact of the use of English subtitled movies on vocabulary learning to be used by educators, specifically, lecturers in community college.

Firstly, the findings of this study might encourage second language educators to employ the use of subtitled movies as one of the strategies to improve learners' vocabulary learning. Educators should benefit the existing technology, in this study, subtitled movies, and do not stick to a certain or typical concept of employing teaching materials. Additionally, this study might be helpful for course designers to attain new ideas to incorporate a part of subtitled movies for vocabulary learning activities.

This study is also to help L2 learners understand what other strategies are available for them to use in order to broaden their vocabulary repertoire. This study might enlighten learners' perception on what strategies they could employ to develop their vocabulary knowledge.





The use of English subtitled movies is a viable alternative and variation in vocabulary learning. It is hoped that this study can increase students' input and retain them for later purpose. The findings of this study may contribute to the existing research on the use of bimodal subtitled movies in enhancing vocabulary learning.

### **1.8 Limitations of the study**

Like other studies, this present study has its limitations. Firstly, the population for this study is limited to community college students. The total number of community colleges around the country is more than 100 colleges. Thus, the findings of this study cannot be used to generalise the impact on other students. Only 54 students participated in this study, therefore, the results later do not represent the general population. Besides the population, time is another limitation in this study. In community college, the student intake is thrice a year, hence reduces the chances for the researcher to conduct an in-depth study. Consequently, only three movies were used as a treatment in this study due to time constraints.







## 1.9 Operational Definition

In order to clarify the variables involved in this study, it is essential to comprehend all terms used. This section describes the related terms in this study.

### 1.9.1 Subtitles

The terms subtitles and closed captions are frequently confusing. National Captioning Institute provided a more detailed definition on both terms. According to National Captioning Institute, captions can be construed as “the process of converting the audio portion of a video production into text which is displayed on a television screen (as cited in Zarei, 2009, p. 67). On the other hand, subtitles are defined as “the permanently affixed onscreen text that represents the narration, dialogue, music, or sound effects in a program. Subtitles are typically placed at the bottom centre of the television screen” (as cited in Zarei, 2009, p. 67).

Zarei (2009) explained further on the differences between the two terms. Captions are intended for deaf audiences, while subtitles are intended for hearing people who do not understand the language spoken in the films or movies. Captions are usually used to assist the deaf and hearing-impaired audiences by describing all





parts of the soundtrack not only the dialogue but the background noises and other audio cues as well, such as phone ringing, door knocking and music chanting. On the other hand, subtitles describe the text for spoken words of the characters.

Despite the differences, those terms are now used interchangeably. The term subtitle refers to both subtitles and captions. Thus, in the context of this study, the researcher refers to subtitle as only the translation of the spoken word in the films or movies intended for non-hearing problem people to avoid confusion.

### 1.9.2 Vocabulary



Learning a language cannot be separated from learning the vocabulary. Vocabulary enables the speaker to express themselves or situations better. Lessard-Clouston (2013), in his book, *Teaching Vocabulary*, defines vocabulary as “the words of a language, including single items and phrases or chunks of several words which convey a particular meaning, the way individual words do” (p. 2). Stuart (2005, as cited in Alqahtani, 2015) categorised vocabulary into two categories; receptive and productive vocabulary.





Receptive vocabulary refers to words recognized and understood by the learners when they come across the words through the context. This type of vocabulary is related to text reading. On the other hand, productive vocabulary is the words used during speaking and writing activity. Productive vocabulary is regarded as an active process where learners are required to show the ability to spell or pronounce the words.

### 1.9.3 Retention

When a learner learns a new vocabulary, it is important to retain the vocabulary in mind for further retrieval. Hence, it is crucial to understand the definition of retention that will be scrutinised further in this study. Souleyman (2009) described retention as a more complex process that is beyond eliciting the past experience from memory. Retention includes “phases of memorizing or learning, retention, recall, and recognition. This development is described as evolving from noticing, intake, and storage in the short-term memory and later in the long-term memory (the more permanent one) and to start with an intake, input is needed” (p. 108).





## 1.10 Summary

As far as this study is concerned, it is understandable that using subtitled movies is seen to have a positive impact on language learning, mainly, vocabulary learning. Although there are arguments on the impact, this should not hinder the teachers and learners to utilise this approach as one of the tools to improve vocabulary acquisition.

