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# **EFL Speakers' Perception Towards Using Movies to Learn English at the College of Languages**

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## EFL Speakers' Perception Towards Using Movies to Learn English at the College of Languages

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**ABSTRACT:** Watching films as one of the new tools in teaching English is an obvious example of how today's advanced technology has affected the language learning process. The availability of watching movies at home, on cell phones, and during classes using DVD sets gives English language teachers new methods of enhancing their learners' linguistic competence and proficiency. Thus, using films is an essential step in the process of teaching English as a second language. The current study shows the great significance of watching movies in improving the linguistic skills of English learners at the college level. The current study objective is to answer whether the use of films during teaching the English language is effective or not by explaining why it is effective or ineffective. Using the qualitative research approach, the researcher will interview ten English language teachers in different language colleges regarding their opinions about the advantages and disadvantages of using film in the language teaching process.

**Keywords:** EFL, Movies, College Students, Teachers of English Language, Linguistic Proficiency.

التأثير الفعال لاستخدام الأفلام الإنجليزية في تحسين المستوى اللغوي لدى طلاب كليات اللغات

لغير الناطقين بها

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الملخص: تعد مشاهدة الأفلام الإنجليزية أحد أهم الأدوات الحديثة في تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية لغير الناطقين بها وهو ما يعد إشارة جلية وواضحة للتأثير الإيجابي للتكنولوجيا الحديثة في عملية تعلم اللغات المختلفة. وقد ساعد في هذا الأمر سهولة مشاهدة الأفلام الإنجليزية في مختلف الأماكن كالمنزلة وعلى الهاتف النقال وأثناء المحاضرات من خلال استخدام أجهزة الدي في دي وشاشات العرض الكبيرة، وهو ما جعله من الوسائل الأكثر استخداماً فيما بين أساتذة اللغة الثانية وتحسين المستوى اللغوي للطلاب الدراسة الحالية لتوضيح الفائدة العظمى لاستخدام الأفلام الإنجليزية في تعلم اللغة الثانية وتحسين المستوى اللغوي للطلاب في المستوى الجامعي. ومن ثم فسرؤال البحث هو هل مشاهدة الأفلام الإنجليزية التأثير الإيجابي أم التأثير السلبي على تطور المستوى اللغوي لطلاب كليات اللغات. وقد قام الباحث بإجراء محادثات موثقة مع عدد عشرة أساتذة لتعليم اللغة الإنجليزية من جامعات مختلفة، وإن حرص أن يكون اختياره منصب فقط على الأساتذة المعيّنين في كليات اللغات. وتمحورت المحادثات مع الأساتذة عن فوائد وسلبيات استخدام الأفلام الإنجليزية لتحسين الكفاءة اللغوية لدى طلاب الجامعات غير الناطقين باللغة الإنجليزية. وقد قام الباحث بتجميع هذه المحادثات وتحليلها بنفسه وترتيب ما بها من معلومات للوصول إلى نتائج نوعية مفيدة تخدم هدف الدراسة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: اللغة الإنجليزية لغير الناطقين بها، وسائل تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية، الأفلام الأجنبية، الوسائل التكنولوجية الحديثة في تدريس اللغة، مدرسي اللغة الإنجليزية لغير الناطقين بها.

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# **EFL Speakers' Perception Towards Using Movies to Learn English at the College of Languages**

## **1. Introduction**

In the age of globalization, the English language has become one of the essential tools for turning our vast world into a small village. Thus, many individuals whose native language is not English attempt eagerly to acquire that language. The learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), especially at the college level, show various purposes for their enthusiasm for learning the language. This includes their desire to communicate well with others in different places worldwide, their hope to get better career opportunities, and finally, their need to complete their post-graduation studies where acquiring the English language is obligatory. Nevertheless, the inability of those learners to increase their time of language usage dramatically affects the development of their linguistic competence (Wahyuningasih, 2018).

The last decades have witnessed the introduction of various methods to help teachers and learners progress in the complicated language learning process, especially with grown-up learners. According to Cook (2016), using English movies to teach the language is one revolutionary method that positively influences learners' linguistic competence. Yilmaz (2020) also argues that using the advanced technology of watching movies through DVD sets or online streaming channels links like Netflix, Disney Plus, and others makes the current generation of English learners luckier than the previous generations when such technology has yet to be introduced. The current study shows the positive influence of watching movies on developing learners' linguistic competence. It also shows the disadvantages of using films and the relevant solutions. The researcher limits the scope of the research to address only the university students, aiming at reaching conclusive findings.

## **2. Literature Review**

The last few decades have witnessed the introduction of new methods of teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) based on new technology and advanced inventions in the age of transportation and communication. The traditional method of teaching English from textbooks cannot compete with those new methods, proving their effectiveness and usefulness in enhancing the acquisition of a foreign language. Consequently, teachers of the English language are encouraged to use those new inventions with their revolutionary methods to avoid the problems they used to face with the traditional methods, including the students' boredom and the negative influence of the textbook on encouraging the students, especially the adult ones, to

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involve positively in the process of learning. One of these new methods is using British and American movies to increase the student's fluency and linguistic competence, especially those who enter college with low proficiency in the language.

The grown-up learners of the foreign language face specific cultural difficulties resulting from their native language. Those obstacles make the teacher's job harder and more complicated than his interaction with younger learners whose native languages have not been established culturally in their conscious minds. The use of movies not only helps the teachers win their students' attention and enthusiasm but also expands the classroom setting into new dimensions of interaction, whether among the students themselves in their context or between the students and their teachers. Many studies have addressed the topic to increase its efficiency and decrease any drawbacks to learning. For example, Keddie (2014) stresses the importance of films in introducing the language through a visual context that helps the learners to memorize and quickly retrieve the language vocabulary and expression. Watching the movie motivates adult learners to use their various senses while learning new vocabulary and expressions used in the film. Additionally, Keddie argues that learning new vocabulary through a visual context facilitates memorizing and retrieving, regardless of its complexity and difficulty (P: 12).

Moreover, Gruba (2006) focuses on listening and speaking skills through watching English films, indicating that EFL learners are open to various accents and colloquial expressions used by the actors in various movie scenes. This point helps the learners develop their oral skills by imitating the actors' pronunciation, facial expressions, and gestures. Several learners are greatly influenced by their favorite actors or actresses to the extent that they can easily imitate their performances, including their pronunciation and accent, after watching them immediately. This cannot be compared to the influence of the traditional textbook, where the teacher spends the entire class motivating his learners to practice only a few English expressions. Gruba states that according to most teachers, only 25 % of the students can retrieve those learning expressions after two classes (P: 81).

Kusumarasdyati (2004) stresses the possibility of using subtitles in the learners' native or English language. In both cases, the learners can easily match the spoken and written words, either as being translated into their language or as written in English. This matching process increases the learners' vocabulary stock with practical words used in the actual world. According to Kusumarasdyati, the amount of words learned after watching only one movie equals the entire vocabulary learned

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in one semester using the traditional method of teaching that is based on a colored textbook with pictures and words (P: 15). Unfortunately, in the advanced grades, the new abstract vocabulary can be hardly associated with pictures as in the beginner grades. This traditional problem is entirely solved with films in which the learners are exposed to different types of words through a visual scene that facilitates their ability to memorize and retrieve them.

Both Birulés Muntané and Soto-Faraco (2016) add that the function of using movies with subtitles in teaching English is not limited only to the skill of memorizing vocabulary and linguistic expression. It also increases the students' comprehension and communication skills. This is obvious with adult language learners who have difficulties differentiating between English's newly acquired words and expressions and how to use them in real-life situations. By watching the movie scene, the learners can transfer what they have already watched on the screen into a situation they can act on and mirror. With the use of the new technology of DVD sets, the teachers can easily play the movie several times using the subtitles of the learner's native language in the beginning, then switch the subtitles button to show the same movie in English subtitles, making the whole process more comprehensible and attractive to the EFL learners. Birulés Muntané and Soto-Faraco conclude in their study that using subtitles in the native and target language is more effective in acquiring the language than the traditional textbook, significantly when the learners are grown up. The effect of using technology in repeating the same scene several times cannot be done with the traditional textbook, where the teacher can, in the best scenario, repeat and practice the conversation a few times with selected students. Repeating the scene helps the students to acquire the actors' accents and accurate pronunciation. Birulés Muntané and Soto-Faraco claim that the students can watch the movies and repeat them several times at home, increasing their contact with the language (P: 407). This, of course, helps increase the students' fluency and proficiency in the language.

According to Khoshniyat and Dowlatabadi (2014), using movies to teach English is more effective than the traditional textbook, which is limited to fixed scenarios and situations. Using films with their advanced sound system and photography technology, the learners are introduced to complicated situations and scenes with unlimited vocabulary, syntax, and linguistic expressions. These scenes infiltrate the learners' consciousness, taking them on a digital journey in which they experience language in a natural setting. Such a journey can influence learners greatly more than traditional textbooks with colorful pictures. In other words, Khoshniyat and Dowlatabadi state that watching the story is more enjoyable than reading it in the

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textbook (P: 1002). The range of the language introduced in the film is extensive and more vivid than the context of the language represented in the textbook. The audio and visual effects of the movie encourage the adult learners to imitate and acquire the language without any negative feelings or the lack of motivation that the teacher used to face in a classroom filled with adult learners.

Finally, Li and Wang (2015) conducted a practical study to measure the effect of using films to improve the communication skills of Chinese college students. The study follows a strict procedure: Thirty college students are asked to watch a movie and summarize the film's story through writing and oral presentation. After listening and reading the summaries of the thirty students, the results show a significant improvement in the student's awareness of using English in a comprehensive context. The students also become entirely aware of the cultural differences between the English language communities and theirs. Li and Wang conclude that the traditional way of teaching English to Chinese adult learners has faced many obstacles because of the cultural difference between the Western communities who speak English as their native language and the Eastern culture of Chinese society. Such differences vanish entirely through films as the students become consciously aware of the cultural speech acts of the Western community and how they differ from theirs. Consequently, they acquire the language without feeling any embarrassment or awkwardness that the Chinese ELF learners used to have while learning it in the traditional context based on out-of-date textbooks.

### **3. The Method of Research**

The qualitative approach is recommended for the current study. The researcher interviewed fifty English teachers currently working as professors in colleges of the English language. The current study will address the topic from an entirely new angle. The researcher observes that most English Teachers as a foreign language at the university level are less encouraged to use movies as an essential tool in teaching the language. Nevertheless, all those teachers are convinced of the importance of using films. However, the traditional atmosphere of the college and the unfamiliarity of such use of films in the governmental and private schools makes introducing films as one of the teaching materials of the language less appropriate and suitable during college.

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#### 4. The Study Objective

Thus, the current study will investigate this problem through interviews with around fifty English language teachers from different language colleges. Based on Dunkel's study, the researcher used a questionnaire (see Appendix 1) to collect his data based on the most significant questions regarding using movies while teaching EFL to college students. The questionnaire consists of yes/no questions with an additional two cells. The first is devoted to the teacher to explain why he/she answers the given question positively or negatively. The second cell is optional if the teacher wants to add further notes for his/her answers. This cell proves to be very useful as the teachers' additions are very significant to the topic of the study to the extent that the researcher has quoted some of these notes and inserted them in the content of the study. The participants' names and positions are kept hidden based on their request. Most of them did not reveal the reason for su

ch a request. However, a few indicated their concern about avoiding problems resulting from those interviews. The researcher analyzes all the data to ensure the confidentiality of the participants' data and personal information. All the teachers' answers are classified into four main categories matching basic language skills: speaking, listening, reading, and writing.

#### 5. Discussions

The collected data shows positive views regarding using films in teaching English as a foreign language and its unquestionable influence on improving the various linguistic skills of the EFL college students whose specific study field is the language. As for the listening skill, all the interviewees agreed that listening is the first linguistic skill that shows apparent improvements in the linguistic competence of the EFL learners after using films. Some add that using subtitles is also very helpful in enhancing the learners' ability to listen comprehensively to the target language and match what they have heard to what they can see on the screen. A few comments from some teachers indicate that the influence of using films is not limited to listening skills but also helps improve the EFL learners' understanding of stress, intonation, and accent and their complicated interrelation with the context. In other words, through watching movies, learners can understand how the speaker can vary his intonation to change the statement into a request or a question without changing the structure of the words. According to those teachers, learning such a skill is one of the miraculous effects of using films since this step was challenging and complicated while teaching it through traditional textbooks. They also stated that the teacher may repeat the movie several times until the EFL students can capture the tone of the

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speaker's natural accent. This is shown more in British movies with their strange accents than in American movies. One of the participants claims that:

The use of films in teaching English to college students helps significantly improve the listening skills of EFL learners on both the unconscious and conscious levels. However, the traditional textbook limits the process to the learners' conscious minds. The gap between the results of addressing unconsciousness and consciousness is impressive.

Another applicant states that:

Some of my students complained of their inability to practice the language outside the classroom. I advised them to watch English movies once a day. I also told them that when they could not understand what was happening on the screen, they could repeat the scene as much as needed. Then, I gave them the assignment to write the new vocabulary that they had learned from each movie and come to meet me after six weeks. After only one month, the students were shocked by the improvements in their listening skills to the extent that learning the new vocabulary took a little time than they used to take before watching the movies.

All these responses indicate the positive influence of film on the EFL learners' listening skills. The improvement in the learners' listening competence due to watching movies regularly cannot be compared to the traditional method of listening to audio conversations while reading the text in the book.

Regarding speaking skills, all the participants agreed that watching native speakers of the English language on the screen through different situations enhances the students' speaking skills. It also encourages the EFL learners to speak loudly, imitating the actors' accents. When committing mistakes, the learners correct each other, taking the scene as their documented source of knowledge. Some applicants add that the influence of watching movies goes beyond that function. Movies help the learners master linking words to their most appropriate actual contexts. One of the severe challenges of teaching English to grown-up students is the gap between memorizing separate words and pronouncing them correctly and the actual process of using them to form comprehensive sentences while practicing the language in real life. Watching movies has resolved that challenge entirely. One of the candidates states that:

Advising my students, especially those who fear speaking in front of others because of their low language proficiency, to watch movies regularly shows a



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clear improvement in their speaking skills. I directed them to imitate the actors or actresses and vary the genre of the movies they watch. Consequently, watching romantic scenes, thriller action moments, and dramatic debates all help those students break their shells and speak the language loudly and fearlessly.

Another female participant indicates that:

Watching movies may disadvantage the learners' speaking skills. This is simply because the movie contains inappropriate slang words and sexual expressions that do not suit the formal setting of the learning process. I solve that problem by advising my students to focus on animation and cartoon movies that do not have such features. I also recommended that male learners watch football matches with English commentators broadcasting on sports channels. This delightful recommendation helped them improve their speaking competence with exciting topics and vocabulary.

Thus, watching movies has improved the students' speaking skills to new levels that the traditional method of teaching vocabulary with pictures cannot achieve. For college students, using pictures to enhance their memorization of new words causes them to think they are still children. Nevertheless, using cartoons and animated movies to teach English achieves the same function without causing embarrassment.

Moving to reading skills, few participants only stressed the improvement of reading skills on the part of EFL learners, as watching movies addresses the oral skills of the language, namely, listening and speaking. However, according to some interviewees, the new DVD sets, with their function of showing subtitles, strengthen the learners' reading skills. Before that, the teachers only advise their students to watch movies without translation. Although the learners may have difficulties at the film's beginning, they eventually understand the whole story. However, with the use of subtitles, this problem has been resolved. Though not all the teachers in the current study are aware of that step, few of them are enthusiastic about using subtitles, whether in the native language or the target language, to increase the student's reading proficiency. One of those few teachers who recommends watching movies with subtitles states that:

Ten years ago, advising students to watch movies regularly took much work. Few only accept such advice. Most of them give up after watching three or four movies because of the difficulty of understanding the story. This difficulty kills enjoyment and turns watching movies into a challenging assignment most

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students avoid. They even become less passionate about performing it. The whole process became much easier after the invention of the new DVD sets with their subtitles function. Initially, I advise the students to watch the movies with subtitles in their native language. Then, they can watch the same movie again with English subtitles. After a few months of watching movies daily, they are not required to use their native language subtitles; they can only watch movies with English subtitles. The only exception is science fiction movies because of the complexity of their vocabulary and contents.

Thus, based on the comments of the few teachers interviewed in this study, the researcher can conclude that improving the reading skills of the English language through watching movies is still a fresh area that requires more investigation and research.

Finally, when dealing with writing skills, most teachers indicate that improving their students' writing skills depends mainly on the procedures after watching the movies. To illustrate, teaching the English language takes the entire study year, two semesters. The only function of the holidays and extended breaks during the studying year is to assign the class a list of movies to watch and write their comments on each movie separately. The teachers need to choose the list of films to observe. The movies should contain argumentative ideas and topics without causing trouble or tension to the learners' culture and ethics. Most teachers agreed on choosing films that do not have religious, sexual, or Western paradigms. Such topics can cause several problems, especially with female students who become embarrassed to discuss such content. One of the teachers comments that:

I wrongfully assigned one of the quarrelsome movies to my class to watch and write a report about its contents. The huge debates and trouble caused by this written task choice threaten the whole process of using films in the classroom. I advise my colleagues to carefully choose the list of movies assigned to the learners to watch and write reports about. Cultural conflicts can be destructive to teachers' careers.

Consequently, improving the learners' writing skills is not a direct effect of watching movies. It requires the teacher to be sophisticated in the content and topics of current English movies to decide whether the film is suitable or not. It also requires hard work on the part of the teacher to assign tasks and check them after the learners write them. Correcting the assignment will be challenging for the teachers in classes with more than one hundred students.

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As for the disadvantages of using films as an essential tool for teaching language to university students, recent studies show a limited list of the negative results of using that material. For example, Wells (1982) states in his study the vital role of teachers in choosing appropriate movies for their learners and avoiding conflicting moral ethics, religious issues, or political causes. Another disadvantage is represented in Katemba and Ning's (2018) study, which discusses the importance of learners' consciousness to learning while watching movies. In other words, some learners could not differentiate between the enjoyment of watching movies on one side and the actual learning process while watching the film on the other. The researcher thinks that those two disadvantages are not severe enough to affect the significance of using films as one of the advanced technological materials for teaching the English language, especially for adult learners in universities.

## **6. Findings**

The above discussion shows the effectiveness of using films in teaching English as a foreign language. This effectiveness is shown clearly in the oral skills of the language, namely, speaking and listening. However, the positive impact of using films on reading skills needs more investigation and research. As for writing skills, the teacher needs to assign a writing task for the students after watching the movie. In huge classes, this step can be challenging for the teacher. The disadvantages of using films to teach the language are limited. However, they should be considered seriously. Otherwise, they may negatively affect the whole idea.

## **7. Limitations of Research**

Teaching English linguistic skills to ESL adult learners is one of the essential components of academic research in teaching English as EFL. The researcher believes that, despite the great effort in the current study, it should contain some limitations that can be investigated in future research. One of the significant limitations of the study is limiting its questionnaire to one culture. Making similar questionnaires in various environments and societies will support the conclusion. Similarly, the researcher should shift the focus from adult male learners to female ones. The learners' gender greatly influences the motivation to learn the language at a grown-up age. A third limitation of the study is to enlarge its scope to include different college students from different colleges. All these limitations can be fixed in similar future studies to reach more specific findings regarding using movies to facilitate learning English as EFL.

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## 8. Conclusion

The current study shows the significant impact of using films on teaching college students English as a foreign language. However, this effect is limited to the oral skills of the language, namely, listening and speaking. Using subtitles is very helpful in enhancing the learners' reading skills. However, this step needs further investigation and research. Writing skills demand heavy effort on the teacher's part in huge classes, making the teacher less enthusiastic about performing them in the learning process. Finally, as with any other teaching material, using films in teaching language contains certain disadvantages that the teacher needs to consider. These disadvantages include choosing movies with inappropriate scenes or topics that may cause controversial debates among the students. Another disadvantage is the students' inability to distinguish between watching movies as a part of learning the language and as a means of entertainment. However, according to most teachers interviewed in the current study, those disadvantages do not influence the positive outcomes of watching movies on EFL learners' linguistic competence.

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**10. Appendix 1**  
**The Questionnaire**

N.	The Question	Yes	No	Why / Why not	Additional Notes
1	Is the use of films in your class available?				
2	Are the EFL students watching movies?				
3	Does watching movies influence the learners' listening skills?				
4	Can the EFL grown-up learners acquire the weird accents of the actors/actresses?				
5	Does watching movies influence the learners' speaking skills?				
6	Can the EFL grown-up learners imitate the unique performances of some actors/actresses?				
7	Is using subtitles in the learners' native language while watching the film helpful?				
8	Is using subtitles of the target language, English, functional while watching the film?				
9	Does watching movies influence the learners' writing skills?				
10	Does the use of watching movies inside the classroom cause any trouble?				