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The Effect of English-Language Movies on English Language Learning and Vocabulary Development among EFL Students

Reem Fahad Alibrahim

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Abstract: **English-language movies are widely available to learners of English as a foreign language (EFL), yet their educational value depends on more than entertainment or simple exposure. This literature-based research paper examines how movies and closely related audiovisual materials can contribute to English language learning, with particular emphasis on vocabulary development. The discussion draws on research in second-language vocabulary acquisition, incidental learning, captioned video, multimedia learning, and extensive audiovisual exposure. The literature indicates that learners can acquire new words and multiword expressions while viewing English-language audiovisual material, especially when target vocabulary appears repeatedly, when learners already possess enough vocabulary to follow the main message, and when captions or pedagogical activities direct attention to useful language. Movies may also support knowledge of pronunciation, collocations, idioms, pragmatic meaning, and the social contexts in which words are used. However, viewing alone does not guarantee durable learning.**

Fast speech, dense vocabulary, cultural references, dependence on first-language subtitles, and cognitive overload can reduce the value of the experience. The paper therefore argues that movies are most effective when used as one component of a balanced EFL program rather than as a replacement for explicit instruction. Practical recommendations include careful film selection, short focused segments, purposeful use of English captions, repeated encounters with target items, pre-viewing preparation, post-viewing retrieval, and productive follow-up tasks. An appendix provides a sample movie-based vocabulary lesson and worksheet.

Keywords: **English-language movies, EFL, vocabulary acquisition, audiovisual input, incidental learning, captions.**

1. INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary is central to language learning because words carry much of the meaning that learners need in order to understand and communicate. A student may know basic grammar, but communication becomes difficult when the student does not have enough words or does not know how familiar words are normally used. Vocabulary knowledge is also broader than knowing a translation. Learners gradually develop knowledge of a word's spoken and written form, meaning, grammatical behavior, collocations, frequency, register, and appropriate contexts of use. Nation (2013) therefore treats vocabulary knowledge as a multidimensional part of language proficiency rather than a simple list of definitions. Webb and Nation (2017) likewise emphasize that vocabulary growth requires repeated encounters and a combination of meaning- focused exposure and deliberate learning.

For many EFL students, the classroom is not the only place where English is encountered. English is present in films, television series, streaming services, online video, music, games, and social media. Among these sources, movies are particularly interesting because they combine spoken language with images, actions, facial expressions, setting, music,

and a developing story. A learner who hears an unfamiliar expression in a film may also see what the speakers are doing, observe their emotional reaction, and read the expression in captions.

These overlapping clues can make language more meaningful than an isolated word on a vocabulary list.

The educational use of movies is not new, but access has changed dramatically. Learners can now pause, replay, slow down, activate captions, and revisit scenes outside class. This makes audiovisual material more controllable than traditional broadcast television. At the same time, easy access can create an overly simple assumption: if students watch enough English movies, their English will automatically improve. Research on audiovisual input suggests a more careful conclusion. Vocabulary can be learned incidentally through viewing, but the amount learned varies according to the learner, the words, the material, and the viewing conditions (Peters & Webb, 2018; Montero Perez, 2020).

This paper focuses on the effect of English-language movies on general English learning and vocabulary development among EFL students. The term movies is used as the main classroom context, while evidence from television programs and captioned videos is also considered because these forms share important features with films: moving images, spoken dialogue, contextualized language, and optional on-screen text. Research using television episodes or shorter videos can therefore help explain processes that are also relevant to movie-based learning, although the formats are not identical.

The main research question is: How can English-language movies affect English language learning and vocabulary development among EFL students? Supporting questions are:

What kinds of vocabulary knowledge can movies support? Which features of audiovisual input may help learners notice and remember words? How do captions and subtitles influence vocabulary learning? What learner and material factors limit the benefits of movies? Finally, how can teachers use movies in a way that turns enjoyable exposure into purposeful language learning?

The paper is a literature-based study rather than an experimental report. It does not claim to present new test scores or data from participants. Instead, it synthesizes established theory and empirical findings and then applies them to classroom practice. This approach is appropriate because the topic involves several connected areas: vocabulary acquisition, incidental learning, multimedia processing, captioning, motivation, authentic language, and instructional design. The aim is to develop a balanced account that is useful for teachers and students without exaggerating what movies can achieve.

2. SUBJECT / MAIN DISCUSSION

1. Vocabulary as a Foundation of English Language Learning

A large vocabulary supports all major language skills. In reading, unknown words can interrupt comprehension and make even a grammatically simple text difficult. In speaking and writing, limited vocabulary can force learners to repeat general words or avoid ideas they cannot express. In listening, vocabulary knowledge helps learners recognize words quickly enough to follow continuous speech. For this reason, vocabulary development is not a separate decorative part of English learning; it is one of the resources that allows other skills to function.

Knowing a word involves several kinds of knowledge. A learner may recognize the written word embarrassed but fail to recognize it when spoken quickly. Another learner may know that issue can mean a problem or topic but may not know common combinations such as raise an issue or discuss an issue. A learner might understand a slang expression in a comedy but not know whether it is appropriate in an academic presentation. Nation (2013) describes word knowledge in terms that include form, meaning, and use. This broader view is especially relevant to movies because films can present pronunciation, context, grammar, collocation, gesture, and social meaning together.

Vocabulary learning also develops gradually. A first encounter may only create a weak sense that a word is familiar. Later encounters can strengthen recognition, meaning, pronunciation, and the ability to use the word. This helps explain why a single movie scene may introduce useful language without producing complete mastery. Repetition, retrieval, and use are necessary if new vocabulary is expected to remain available after the film has ended. Webb and Nation (2017) stress the value of repeated meetings with words and of balancing incidental exposure with intentional study.

The distinction between receptive and productive knowledge is also important. Students often understand more vocabulary than they can actively use. Movies may first strengthen receptive knowledge because viewers encounter language while trying to understand a story.

Productive knowledge requires an additional step: learners need opportunities to retrieve and use the vocabulary in speaking or writing. A movie lesson that ends when the screen is turned off therefore misses an important opportunity. Follow-up discussion, retelling, dialogue reconstruction, vocabulary notebooks, and short writing tasks can help move selected items toward productive use.

2. Why Movies Can Function as Language Input

Movies differ from many traditional teaching materials because language is embedded in a rich situation. A textbook dialogue may tell students that two people are angry, whereas a film shows tone of voice, facial expression, distance between speakers, movement, and the event that caused the conflict. These visual and narrative cues can help learners infer meaning. They can also make an expression memorable because the expression becomes connected with a character, action, or emotional moment.

This combination can be understood through multimedia learning. Mayer (2020) explains that learning from words and pictures involves coordinated processing across verbal and visual information, while also recognizing that human working memory has limited capacity. Applied to language learning, a film can provide useful parallel information: the learner hears a word, sees an action, and may read a caption. The channels can support one another when the material is manageable. However, too much simultaneous information can also become distracting, particularly for lower-proficiency learners.

Movies additionally provide examples of language that is connected to communicative purposes. Characters apologize, disagree, persuade, joke, complain, hesitate, threaten, comfort, and negotiate. Vocabulary is therefore presented as something people do things with, not simply something they define. This is valuable for words whose meaning changes with context and for expressions that are difficult to explain through direct translation alone.

Another advantage is continuity. A full movie creates recurring characters, places, themes, and problems. As the viewer becomes familiar with the story world, later scenes may become easier to understand. Repeated language can also occur naturally. A key expression, nickname, technical term, or relationship-related phrase may return several times. Peters and Webb (2018) found that frequency of occurrence was one factor affecting incidental vocabulary learning from L2 television, supporting the general principle that repeated encounters matter.

Nevertheless, authenticity is not automatically equal to suitability. Some films containvery rapid dialogue, overlapping speech, dialects, heavy slang, cultural references, or long stretches with little useful language. Others contain vocabulary far above the learners' level. The educational question is therefore not whether a film is authentic, but whether its language, content, and viewing task create conditions in which students can understand enough of the message while still meeting useful new language.

3. Incidental Vocabulary Learning through Viewing

Incidental vocabulary learning occurs when learners acquire some knowledge of words while their main attention is directed toward another goal, such as understanding a story. Nation (2013) treats learning from context as an important source of vocabulary growth, while also arguing that incidental and deliberate learning should complement each other. Movies create a natural setting for incidental learning because viewers normally focus on characters and events rather than memorizing every word.

Empirical work supports the possibility of vocabulary gains from audiovisual input.

Peters and Webb (2018) conducted experiments with Dutch-speaking EFL learners who watched a full-length television program. Their results showed incidental learning at the levels of meaning recall and meaning recognition. Importantly, learning was influenced by frequency of occurrence, prior vocabulary knowledge, and cognateness. The study does not mean that every unknown word in a movie will be learned, but it demonstrates that meaningful vocabulary uptake can occur during extended viewing.

Montero Perez (2020) similarly examined incidental vocabulary learning through video and investigated the role of prior vocabulary knowledge and working memory. The study contributes to a growing body of evidence that audiovisual viewing can produce vocabulary gains while also showing that learners differ in how much they gain. Such findings are important for classroom practice. Two students can watch the same scene, enjoy it equally, and still leave with different amounts of new vocabulary knowledge.

Puimège and Peters (2019) expanded the issue beyond individual words by examining single words and formulaic sequences in English-language television. Their results indicated that both types could be learned incidentally, although learning was affected by learner- and item-related factors. Formulaic sequences are especially relevant to movies because spoken interaction contains many recurring combinations such as I have no idea, give me a break, what do you mean, and it depends on. Learning these units can help students sound more natural and process language in larger chunks.

Incidental learning from movies should therefore be viewed as probabilistic rather than guaranteed. A word that appears once in a confusing scene may leave almost no trace. A word that appears several times, is central to the plot, is supported by a clear image, and resembles a word the learner already knows has a better chance of being noticed and remembered. Teachers can increase the probability of learning by choosing target items strategically and creating additional encounters before and after viewing.

4. Context, Images, and the Construction of Word Meaning

One of the strongest pedagogical features of movies is contextualization. In isolated vocabulary study, learners may receive a word, a translation, and perhaps one example sentence.

In a movie, the same word can be connected with location, action, emotion, relationships, and consequences. These cues may support inferencing. For example, a learner who does not know the verb whisper may understand much of its meaning by seeing one character lean toward another and speak quietly while trying not to be heard.

Visual support can be especially useful for concrete actions, objects, and emotions, but it is less reliable for abstract vocabulary. A picture can show a suitcase more directly than it can show justice, loyalty, or irony. Even with concrete vocabulary, images can mislead when several possible meanings fit the scene. For this reason, visual context should be treated as a clue rather than a perfect dictionary. Captions, teacher explanation, or later confirmation can help learners test their interpretation.

Narrative context may also support memory. Words encountered during a meaningful scene are connected to an event rather than stored as disconnected information. A learner may remember an expression because it was used during a surprising argument or a humorous misunderstanding. This does not remove the need for review, but it can provide a memorable retrieval cue. When a teacher later asks, 'What did the character say when she discovered the truth?' the story itself becomes part of the vocabulary prompt.

Movies can also reveal semantic flexibility. Common words often have multiple meanings, and learners who rely heavily on one-to-one translation may struggle when a familiar word is used differently. Film dialogue gives repeated opportunities to meet polysemous words in changing contexts. A word such as break can refer to damaging an object, violating a rule, interrupting work, or ending a relationship. Seeing these uses in situations can gradually deepen lexical knowledge.

5. Captions, Subtitles, and Vocabulary Development

The words caption and subtitle are sometimes used loosely, but a useful distinction in language learning is between same-language captions and translated subtitles. English captionspresent written English while the viewer hears English. First-language subtitles present a translation while English remains in the audio. Each option changes where learners direct their attention and what kinds of form-meaning connections are available.

Same-language captions can make spoken words more noticeable by giving learners access to their written forms. This can be valuable when students know a word in print but fail to recognize it in connected speech, or when they hear an unfamiliar word but cannot identify its spelling. Captions also allow learners to connect pronunciation with orthography. Hsieh (2020) found that caption type influenced vocabulary learning among low-intermediate EFL learners and that combining audio and written verbal information could support learning more effectively than some single-modality conditions.

Caption design matters. Highlighting a target word can draw attention to its form, while a gloss can provide meaning. Yet attention is limited, and a design that strongly emphasizes one feature may reduce attention to another. Hsieh's (2020) findings illustrate this trade-off: different caption conditions produced different vocabulary outcomes. This suggests that teachers should not assume that simply turning captions on will create the same result for every learning goal.

Sustained exposure also matters. Suárez and Gesa (2019) studied learners who received repeated exposure to captioned television episodes over an academic term. Their findings showed vocabulary benefits for the high-school experimental group, while the university group did not show the same experimental-control difference. Proficiency was an important factor. The result is a useful warning against universal claims: captioned viewing can help, but age, proficiency, prior knowledge, instructional context, and the specific task may change the outcome.

First-language subtitles can be useful when a film would otherwise be incomprehensible, but they may also encourage viewers to read the translation and reduce attention to English word forms. For beginners, translated subtitles can preserve enjoyment and story comprehension. For vocabulary-focused lessons, however, English captions are often more directly aligned with noticing English forms. A gradual strategy can be effective: use stronger support when necessary, then move toward English captions or selective captioning as learners become more capable.

Teachers can also vary caption use across repeated viewings. A short scene might first be viewed for general meaning, then viewed with English captions for noticing, and finally viewed again without captions to encourage recognition from speech and context. This turns captions into temporary scaffolding rather than a permanent dependency. Repeated captioned viewing has been associated with vocabulary learning, although the size and durability of gains depend on learner and item factors (see, for example, research on repeated captioned viewing reported in Computer Assisted Language Learning).

6. Repetition, Frequency, and Vocabulary Retention

A central problem in vocabulary learning is forgetting. Encountering a word once may create familiarity, but familiarity can disappear quickly if the word is not encountered again.

Movies can contribute repeated exposure within a single story, especially when vocabulary is related to a central theme. A courtroom drama may repeatedly use words connected with evidence, witnesses, charges, and objections. A school-based film may repeat language related to assignments, grades, rules, and relationships.

Research on audiovisual learning supports the importance of repeated encounters. Peters and Webb (2018) identified frequency as a factor in incidental learning, while later work on repeated captioned viewing has also reported vocabulary gains. Repetition should not be understood as mechanical replay alone. The most useful repeated encounters can vary the learner's task. On the first viewing, students may understand the scene; on the second, they may notice target words; later, they may retrieve meanings or use the expressions in a new context.

Retention improves when learners are required to retrieve information rather than merely see it again. After a scene, the teacher can remove the captions and ask students to complete a line, match expressions with meanings, explain what a phrase meant in the scene, or use a target item in a different situation. Such tasks make learners reconstruct knowledge from memory. A vocabulary notebook can then record the word, its meaning, an example from the film, a new personal example, and useful collocations.

Spacing also deserves attention. Watching the same scene five times in ten minutes may create strong short-term familiarity, but revisiting selected language on later days can strengthen longer-term retention. A movie unit can therefore recycle vocabulary across several lessons.

Target words introduced in one scene can reappear in warm-up questions, quizzes, role plays, and writing prompts. In this way, the film becomes the starting point of a vocabulary cycle rather than a one-time event.

7. Learning Collocations, Idioms, Phrasal Verbs, and Formulaic Language

Movies are particularly valuable for showing how words combine. Learners often study individual vocabulary items but later discover that native or proficient speakers use conventional combinations. English speakers make a decision rather than do a decision, strongly recommend something rather than highly recommend it in many contexts, and may say run out of time rather than finish the time. These combinations are difficult to master through definitions alone.

Dialogue exposes learners to collocations and multiword units in realistic sequences.

Puimège and Peters (2019) found evidence that formulaic sequences as well as single words can be learned incidentally from television viewing. This matters because formulaic language supports fluency. When learners retrieve a familiar chunk as a unit, they do not need to construct every sentence word by word.

Phrasal verbs are another area where film context can help. Expressions such as calm down, find out, give up, turn down, and figure out occur frequently in conversational English.

Their meanings are not always predictable from the individual words. Seeing a character refuse an offer while saying I turned it down, for example, provides a communicative event that can clarify meaning. Repeated examples can also show grammar, such as whether an object can appear between the verb and particle.

Idioms require even greater care because their meanings may be figurative and culturally specific. A film can make an idiom memorable, but learners still need information about frequency and register. Some expressions in movies are outdated, regionally marked, offensive, highly informal, or deliberately unusual because of a character's personality. Teachers should therefore help students distinguish between understanding an expression and deciding to use it themselves.

Movie-based vocabulary teaching should prioritize useful language rather than every colorful phrase. A dramatic film may contain rare legal, medical, historical, or criminal vocabulary that is important to the plot but not important to the learner's goals. Selection based on frequency, usefulness, learnability, and relevance prevents students from leaving a lesson with a long list of memorable but low-value words.

8. Pronunciation, Spoken Form, and Vocabulary Recognition

Vocabulary knowledge includes spoken form. Many EFL learners have experienced the surprising moment of seeing a caption and realizing that they already knew the written word but had not recognized it in speech. Natural dialogue includes reductions, linking, weak forms, changes in rhythm, and variation across speakers. Movies can help connect the stable dictionary form of a word with the way it sounds in continuous speech.

This exposure can improve lexical recognition even when pronunciation is not the main lesson objective. When a learner repeatedly hears a familiar word in meaningful scenes, its sound pattern becomes easier to access. English captions can strengthen this connection by showing the written form at the moment it is spoken. However, learners should not be expected to imitate every accent or informal reduction they hear. The goal is flexible comprehension and appropriate production, not copying a particular actor.

Movies also demonstrate stress and intonation within phrases. The same words can express sincerity, sarcasm, surprise, or annoyance depending on delivery. This contributes to vocabulary knowledge because meaning in conversation is partly pragmatic. A phrase such as That's great can function as genuine praise or as criticism when spoken sarcastically. Film provides visual and vocal information that a printed example sentence cannot fully reproduce.

9. Grammar and Vocabulary in Context

Although this paper emphasizes vocabulary, vocabulary and grammar are closely connected. Words occur in grammatical patterns, and knowing a word includes knowing something about the structures in which it normally appears. Movies can expose learners to these patterns repeatedly. A learner may notice that suggest is followed by a noun or an -ing form in certain constructions, or that interested commonly appears with in.

This contextual grammar is useful because it is attached to meaning. Instead of learning a rule in isolation, students see why a speaker chose a form in a particular situation. Teachers can use a short line from a movie to draw attention to a pattern without turning the entire film lesson into grammar analysis. The vocabulary item remains connected to the sentence frame in which it naturally occurred.

At the same time, movie dialogue should not be treated as a complete model for every kind of English. Conversational grammar differs from academic writing. Characters interrupt themselves, use fragments, repeat words, and leave sentences unfinished. These are normal features of speech, but students need to understand differences between spoken and written registers. A film can therefore support language awareness when teachers explicitly compare what is natural in conversation with what is expected in formal writing.

10. Motivation, Engagement, and Learner Autonomy

One reason teachers choose movies is that students often find them engaging. Narrative creates curiosity: viewers want to know what happens next. Emotional involvement can sustain attention for longer periods than disconnected exercises. When students care about characters or themes, they may also become more willing to discuss scenes and search for unfamiliar expressions.

Motivation is educationally valuable, but enjoyment should not be confused with learning. A student can enjoy a two-hour film while paying little attention to English, particularly when first-language subtitles carry most of the meaning. The teacher's task is to preserve the motivational value of the story while adding light but purposeful language work. Too many pauses and worksheets can destroy the viewing experience; too little guidance can turn class time into entertainment.

Movies can also encourage learner autonomy outside the classroom. Students can learn to choose material at an appropriate level, use captions strategically, record useful expressions, replay difficult scenes, and check meanings after attempting to infer them. These habits transform ordinary entertainment into a source of language exposure. Importantly, students do not need to study every minute of every film. A sustainable routine might involve enjoying most of the movie normally while selecting a few scenes or expressions for deeper study.

Personal choice can strengthen this process. Learners differ in interests, goals, and preferred genres. A student interested in business may gain more useful vocabulary from workplace dramas or documentaries, while another student may engage more deeply with family comedy or science fiction. Teachers can teach the strategy using a shared film and then encourage students to apply it to personally meaningful material.

11. Limitations and Challenges

The strongest argument for movie-based learning is not that movies are perfect but that their strengths can be used while their limitations are managed. The first challenge is lexical difficulty. If too many words are unknown, learners may struggle to follow the plot and have little mental capacity left for learning new vocabulary. Prior vocabulary knowledge has repeatedly emerged as a factor in audiovisual learning (Montero Perez, 2020; Peters & Webb, 2018).

A second challenge is speed. Film dialogue is produced for an audience, not for language learners. Speech may be fast, reduced, emotional, whispered, shouted, or overlapped with music and sound effects. Pausing and replaying can help, but excessive interruption can make the lesson tiring. Short segments are therefore often more useful for intensive vocabulary work than an entire movie watched without a clear purpose.

A third challenge is subtitle dependence. First-language subtitles can make difficult films accessible, but learners may focus mainly on reading their own language. Even English captions can become a crutch if students never practice recognizing spoken language without them. The solution is not necessarily to ban subtitles. Rather, support should be adjusted to proficiency and task, and teachers can alternate captioned and uncaptioned viewing.

A fourth challenge concerns cultural and pragmatic interpretation. A learner may understand the dictionary meaning of an expression but misunderstand its social force. Humor, irony, taboo language, politeness, and references to institutions or popular culture may require explanation. Films also represent particular communities and genres; one character's speech should not be generalized to all English speakers.

A fifth challenge is inappropriate or low-value vocabulary. Movies may contain profanity, violence-related language, specialized terminology, or expressions that are rare outside a fictional setting. Teachers must consider age, institutional expectations, cultural context, and learning goals when selecting material. Editing or choosing short scenes can avoid unnecessary content while preserving linguistic value.

Finally, the research base itself requires careful interpretation. Studies use different languages, proficiency levels, video genres, lengths, caption conditions, tests, and definitions of learning. A finding from a French documentary viewed by university students cannot automatically be transferred to every EFL classroom or every Hollywood film. The consistent conclusion is not that one viewing method is always best, but that audiovisual input can support vocabulary when conditions are favorable.

12. The Teacher's Role in Movie-Based Vocabulary Learning

Teachers add value by turning exposure into structured noticing, retrieval, and use. Before viewing, the teacher can identify a small number of high-value target items. Pre-teaching every unfamiliar word is unnecessary and can remove opportunities for inference, but pre-teaching a few words that are essential to understanding the scene can reduce frustration. The teacher can also give a simple purpose for viewing, such as identifying why a character refuses an offer or noticing expressions used to disagree politely.

During viewing, restraint is important. Stopping after every unknown word fragments the story and overloads students with detail. A better approach is to allow a first viewing for general meaning and then revisit selected moments. On the second viewing, English captions, a transcript excerpt, or highlighted target items can direct attention to form. Students can infer meanings before receiving confirmation.

After viewing, vocabulary needs active processing. Students can categorize expressions by function, match lines with speakers, complete missing words, explain phrases in their own words, create new examples, role-play a parallel situation, or write a short continuation of the scene. These tasks should require retrieval rather than simple copying. The teacher can then recycle the same items in later lessons.

Assessment can remain low stakes. A short delayed quiz a week later is more informative about retention than an immediate worksheet completed while the scene is fresh. Teachers can assess recognition, meaning recall, appropriate use, or collocation depending on the learning objective. Not every item needs to become productive vocabulary; some low-frequency items may only need receptive recognition.

Teachers should also model responsible independent viewing. Students can be shown how to pause after a scene rather than after every sentence, how to switch captions on only when necessary, how to keep a selective vocabulary log, and how to check whether an expression is formal, informal, regional, or potentially offensive. These strategies help learners continue learning outside class without turning leisure viewing into exhausting study.

13. Selecting Appropriate Movies and Scenes

Selection should begin with learners rather than with the teacher's favorite film. Proficiency, age, interests, cultural context, and course objectives all matter. A movie that is linguistically rich but impossible for students to follow may produce less learning than a simpler film with clear dialogue and repeated everyday language. Familiar genres can also reduce comprehension demands because students already understand common story patterns.

Language density should be considered. Some action films contain long visual sequences with little dialogue; some historical dramas use archaic vocabulary; some crime films depend on specialized slang. For general EFL vocabulary, contemporary stories about school, work, family, travel, or everyday relationships may provide more transferable language. This does not mean other genres have no value, only that their vocabulary profile should match the learning goal.

Short scenes are practical teaching units. A three- to eight-minute segment can contain enough context to be meaningful while remaining manageable for replay and analysis. Teachers can choose a scene with a clear communicative event and several useful target expressions. The scene should ideally provide visual support and allow students to understand the main event even if some language is unfamiliar.

Availability of accurate English captions is another criterion. Automatically generated captions may contain errors, especially with names, accents, background noise, and overlapping speech. Incorrect captions can teach incorrect forms. When possible, teachers should preview the official caption track and compare it with the audio before building vocabulary activities around it.

Ethical and legal considerations also matter. Schools should use films and clips in ways consistent with institutional policy and applicable copyright rules. From a pedagogical perspective, the teacher should avoid distributing full copyrighted scripts when a short teacher-created worksheet or brief excerpt is sufficient. The focus should remain on learning activities rather than reproducing the film text.

14. A Practical Teaching Framework

A useful movie lesson can be organized into five stages: prepare, view for meaning, notice language, retrieve and use, and recycle. In the preparation stage, the teacher introduces the situation and only the vocabulary necessary to prevent major comprehension problems. Students may predict what will happen from a still image or a short description. This activates background knowledge without revealing every target expression.

The first viewing should protect the story. Students watch the selected scene with a simple comprehension goal. Depending on level, they may use English captions, translated subtitles, or no captions. The teacher avoids frequent interruption. After viewing, students compare their understanding with a partner and identify the central event.

The noticing stage focuses on a limited set of vocabulary. Students watch again and locate expressions that perform a function such as refusing, apologizing, describing emotion, or solving a problem. They can use English captions or a short transcript excerpt. Instead of immediately translating each item, the teacher asks students to infer meaning from the scene and then confirms or refines their interpretations.

The retrieval-and-use stage removes some support. Students complete lines from memory, match collocations, reconstruct a short exchange, or use the target items in a new role play. They might retell the scene using five target expressions or write messages that the characters could send after the scene. The purpose is to make learners retrieve and manipulate the vocabulary.

The recycle stage occurs later. A warm-up in the next lesson can ask students to remember three expressions from the film. A later writing task can require two of the collocations. A short quiz can test meaning and appropriate use. This delayed recycling is essential because the educational goal is not recognition during the movie but vocabulary that remains available after the immediate context has disappeared.

15. Discussion of the Overall Evidence

Across the literature, several patterns are clear. First, audiovisual input can produce incidental vocabulary learning. Peters and Webb (2018), Montero Perez (2020), and Puimège and Peters (2019) provide evidence that learners can gain knowledge of words or formulaic sequences through viewing. This supports the use of movies as a legitimate source of language input rather than merely a reward at the end of a course.

Second, the effect is conditional. Learners with stronger prior vocabulary knowledge often have an advantage because they can understand more of the surrounding language and devote attention to new items. Word frequency matters because repeated encounters strengthen learning opportunities. Captions can increase access to written forms and direct attention, but different caption designs support different aspects of learning. Sustained exposure can be valuable, but results vary across learner groups (Hsieh, 2020; Suárez & Gesa, 2019).

Third, movies are especially well suited to aspects of lexical knowledge that depend on context. They show pronunciation, collocation, formulaic language, register, emotion, gesture, and pragmatic force. A vocabulary list can efficiently provide form and meaning, but it cannot reproduce the social and audiovisual richness of a scene. Conversely, a film may provide rich context but insufficient repetition or explicit attention. The two approaches are therefore complementary.

Fourth, pedagogy determines whether movie use remains passive or becomes productive. A learner who watches with first-language subtitles and never revisits new expressions may gain some incidental knowledge, but the outcome is unpredictable. A teacher who selects useful target items, uses captions strategically, prompts inference, requires retrieval, and recycles vocabulary creates stronger conditions for retention. The film supplies meaningful input; instruction organizes attention and practice.

Finally, movie-based learning fits best within a balanced language program. Nation's (2013) approach to vocabulary emphasizes multiple strands of learning, including meaning-focused input, deliberate attention to language, meaning-focused output, and fluency development. Movies can contribute strongly to meaning-focused input and can generate opportunities for the other strands when teachers design follow-up activities. They should not replace reading, conversation, writing, explicit vocabulary study, or feedback.

3. CONCLUSION

English-language movies can make a meaningful contribution to English language learning and vocabulary development among EFL students. Their main strength is the combination of spoken language with visual, emotional, narrative, and social context. This combination can help learners notice words, infer meanings, connect written and spoken forms, encounter collocations and formulaic expressions, and observe how vocabulary functions in real interaction. Research on television and video provides empirical support for incidental vocabulary gains from audiovisual input, while also showing that the gains are influenced by frequency, prior vocabulary knowledge, captions, repetition, and individual differences.

The evidence does not support the idea that simply watching movies guarantees vocabulary growth. Learners may miss unfamiliar words, depend on translated subtitles, become overwhelmed by fast dialogue, or remember expressions only briefly. Some film language is also too specialized, informal, culturally specific, or infrequent to deserve classroom attention.

Effective use therefore requires selection and instructional judgment.

For teachers, the most productive approach is to use movies as structured sources of meaningful input. Short scenes can be selected for linguistic value and relevance. English captions can be used strategically to connect sound and spelling. A small number of useful words and expressions can be revisited through inference, explanation, retrieval, role play, discussion, and writing. Later recycling can strengthen retention. These practices preserve the motivational appeal of film while adding the processes needed for learning.

For learners, movies can become a valuable independent learning resource when viewed actively but selectively. Students do not need to stop at every unknown word. They can focus on understanding the story, choose a few useful expressions, replay meaningful scenes, notice how words combine, and review selected vocabulary later. This approach is more sustainable than attempting to turn every movie into a complete vocabulary lesson.

In conclusion, English-language movies are best understood as a bridge between classroom English and language in use. They can expose EFL students to vocabulary as it sounds, looks, and functions in context. When this exposure is combined with deliberate attention and repeated use, movies can support vocabulary growth and broader language awareness. Their educational value is therefore real but conditional: the strongest outcomes are likely when enjoyable viewing, comprehensible input, strategic support, and purposeful vocabulary practice work together.

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Appendix A: Sample Movie-Based Vocabulary Lesson

Lesson focus: Vocabulary development through an English-language movie scene

Suggested level: Intermediate EFL

Time: 60-75 minutes

Materials: A 4-6 minute age-appropriate English-language movie scene with accurate English captions; teacher-created vocabulary worksheet.

Learning objectives: By the end of the lesson, students should be able to infer the meaning of selected expressions from audiovisual context, identify useful collocations or multiword expressions, explain the target vocabulary in their own words, and use several target items appropriately in a new spoken or written context.

Procedure

1. Preparation (10 minutes). Introduce the setting and characters without explaining the target

expressions. Ask students to predict the situation from a still image or short description. Pre- teach only one or two words that are essential for basic comprehension.

2. First viewing (5-8 minutes). Students watch the scene for general meaning. Avoid pausing.

Ask two or three simple questions about what happened and why.

3. Second viewing with English captions (10 minutes). Students watch again and underline or

record five to eight teacher-selected expressions. They use the scene, facial expressions, actions, and surrounding language to guess meanings.

4. Meaning check (10 minutes). Students compare guesses in pairs. The teacher confirms

meanings, pronunciation, register, and useful collocations. Students correct their notes rather than copying a long definition.

5. Retrieval (10 minutes). Hide the transcript/captions. Students complete short lines, match

expressions to situations, or recall which character used each expression and why.

6. Productive use (15 minutes). In pairs, students create a new dialogue using at least four target

expressions in a different situation. Alternatively, they write a short continuation of the scene.

7. Delayed recycling. At the beginning of the next lesson, students complete a five-minute recall task without looking at their notes.

Appendix B: Sample Vocabulary Worksheet

Movie/Scene: _____ Date: _____

Instructions: Watch for meaning first. During the second viewing, complete the table for the selected vocabulary. Do not copy the subtitle as your definition; explain the meaning in your own words.

Word / Expression	What was happening?	My guessed meaning	Confirmed meaning	Useful collocation / pattern	My new example

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Post-Viewing Questions

1. Which expression was easiest to understand from the visual context? Why?

2. Which expression was difficult even with captions?

3. Choose two expressions that you think are useful in everyday English. Explain your choice.

4. Identify one expression that is informal, emotional, or strongly connected to the situation.

5. Write a short dialogue of six to eight lines using at least three target expressions naturally.

Appendix C: Suggested Criteria for Selecting a Movie Scene

• The scene is appropriate for the students' age and institutional context.

• The main event can be understood without knowing every word.

• The dialogue is reasonably clear and not dominated by overlapping speech.

• The scene contains a small number of useful, reusable vocabulary items.

• At least some target vocabulary is supported by action, emotion, or visual context.

• Accurate English captions are available.

• The scene is short enough to replay without losing student attention.

• The vocabulary matches the course goals and learners' proficiency.

• The teacher has checked slang, profanity, cultural references, and register.

• The planned activity includes later retrieval or reuse rather than viewing only.