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Leveraging English Movies for Vocabulary Enhancement: A Study on Malaysian Secondary School ESL Learners

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ABSTRACT

Vocabulary mastery is fundamental to successful English language learning, yet Malaysian secondary school learners still encounter difficulties in acquiring English vocabulary using conventional instructional methods. This study examines effectiveness of English movies in enhancing vocabulary of Malaysian secondary school ESL learners. A quasi-experimental design was employed to compare a treatment group (n=20) engaged in movie-based learning with a control group (n=20) receiving traditional vocabulary learning instructions. Data were collected via one pre-test and three post-tests across separate sessions. The findings reveal that the treatment group consistently outperformed the control group in vocabulary learning in all three post-tests. Results of independent t-test confirmed significant differences between the two groups (p<0.01). This suggests that English movies serve as an effective medium for vocabulary learning in ESL classes. The incorporation of English movies into ESL lessons can enrich the learning experience, foster a contextually meaningful learning atmosphere, and simultaneously promote learners' motivation in learning and using the language. Future investigations should consider larger and more diverse samples, longer intervention periods, or comparisons of various multimedia resources to investigate the effectiveness of movie-based instructional methods.

KEYWORDS: English Movies, Vocabulary Enhancement, ESL Learners, Multimedia Learning

INTRODUCTION

Today, English holds a prominent status as the leading international language, which is widely spoken globally and has been adopted as a lingua franca in non-native English-speaking countries (Alolaywi, 2023). In Malaysia, English is a second language and a core subject formally taught in schools across primary and secondary levels (Ling & Aziz, 2022). As outlined in the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025 (Ministry of Education, 2015), teachers hold a significant responsibility to ensure that all students can communicate in English to thrive in the globalised world. Given the importance of having English as a part of the Malaysian education system, it is a bridge that all students must cross to access broader opportunities.

One key component of language mastery is vocabulary (Argit et al., 2020; Hestiana & Anita, 2022; Mansoor et al., 2023; Ramli & Rivaldin, 2021). This is further magnified for second language learners due to its role as a primary medium of communication, compared to a foreign language that only uses English in targeted or formal settings. In fact, Tiing et al. (2021) described vocabulary as the "heart" of students' language development in the second language classroom for academic success. It is a strong predictor of second language success (Wong et al., 2020).

However, despite its vital role in ESL classrooms, vocabulary acquisition remains a significant challenge for students whose first language is not English (Farooq et al., 2020). This issue is both relevant and evident in the Malaysian ESL classroom, researchers have identified several key reasons for this challenge. Given that English has been taught since preschool in Malaysia, Wong et al. (2019) unveil that there is an underlying assumption that learners would have possessed a decent level of vocabulary competency. However, there exists a significant gap in Malaysian students' language proficiency, particularly in vocabulary (Benedict & Shabdin, 2021; Sulaiman et al., 2018; Tahir et al., 2020). As highlighted by Kashinathan and Aziz (2021), despite 11 years of formal English language education in school, Malaysian secondary students still face difficulties utilising the language due to weak vocabulary. In addition, Wong et al. (2019) reported that Malaysian secondary students possessed a vocabulary repertoire of only 2000 words, which is alarmingly below the average threshold of 5000 words. The researchers concluded that this inadequacy leaves them unprepared for tertiary education.

The consensus among researchers shows that conventional, teacher-centred methods that rely heavily on textbooks are a significant reason for Malaysian students' vocabulary difficulties, resulting in demotivation and lack of interest towards learning (Chai & Yunus, 2020; Ling & Aziz, 2022; Yaccob & Yunus, 2019). In the 21st century, these passive teaching methods will not be effective in the long run, particularly for secondary students, they need more engagement and real-world context to create opportunities for language production. Apart from that, the Standard-Based Curriculum for Secondary School (KSSM) used for the English Language only focuses on writing, speaking, reading and listening; thus, the teaching of vocabulary is only included on an ad hoc basis resulting in the notable gap in vocabulary knowledge (Tahir et al., 2020). Teaching strategies need to be updated due to the difficulties faced by Malaysian secondary school students, especially in acquiring their vocabulary in the process of mastering their English proficiency.

At the same time, simply increasing vocabulary lessons or their integration into the school curriculum will not suffice; what is truly needed in the ESL classroom is the implementation of a creative approach. Admittedly, Rahman and Chiu (2022) highlighted that vocabulary is indeed tedious and boring, which makes it a lot harder for Malaysian students to acquire from the perspective of second language learners, thus teachers must equip themselves with interesting and new techniques that are relevant to the students. Given the ongoing advancements in technology, incorporating technology not only improves the learning process but also makes it easier for students to comprehend the target language (Basri et al., 2022). Jalaluddin (2023) claims that the use of technology in teaching English has significantly changed the way how it is taught, replacing traditional methods with more engaging and productive teaching strategies involving media such as TV, radio, and movies. Moreover, leveraging the possibilities of multimedia technology in the English language classroom offers many options that enhance both students' learning experience and the pedagogical approaches (Peter, 2023).

The integration of multimedia demonstrated that incorporating multimedia, especially movies, offers ESL students a number of benefits. This is because movies have been shown to enhance a variety of language abilities, including vocabulary development. Given that English is the second language in Malaysia, it is critical to comprehend how movies impact the vocabulary development of ESL students in this nation (Kashinathan & Aziz, 2021). Although there are numerous ways to enhance ESL students' vocabulary, watching English movies is known to be one of the most effective ways of incorporating multimedia in the classroom, which motivates and encourages them. This is because movies provide an immersive experience that exposes learners to authentic, relatable and diverse language content, which makes language and vocabulary acquisition enjoyable and effective (Hestiana & Anita, 2022; Kurniati, 2022; Yaacob et al., 2021). This is particularly valuable for secondary students, as teenagers are generally more receptive to entertainment like movies, which reduces the reliance on external motivation from teachers. As affirmed by Karlina (2022), learners in recent years have been exposed to various types of interactive content, which explains their preference to acquire new vocabulary through interesting and authentic sources like movies. While there is an increasing amount of research on the incorporation of multimedia in language classrooms, specific areas focusing on the use of movies in vocabulary enhancement remain underexplored. Therefore, the current study aims to fill the gap in the previous study by examining the effectiveness of English movies as a particular multimedia tool in enhancing ESL learners' vocabulary in a secondary school from northern peninsular Malaysia. Hence, this study was conducted to gather information for the following research question.

Research Question: Is there a significant difference in vocabulary learning between Malaysian secondary school ESL learners who are taught using English movie clips and those who receive traditional instruction?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Challenges Faced by Malaysian ESL Learners

ESL learners encounter multiple challenges in mastering English, ranging from environmental and pedagogical factors to learners' motivation and linguistic background. Maarof and Malani (2015) highlight that these challenges arise from insufficient active learning, critical and creative thinking skills, traditional teaching methods, leading to limited English language use and vocabulary during

classroom interactions. Nor et al. (2015) further noted that limited vocabulary affects all four language skills as students struggle to express themselves due to limited vocabulary, hindering them from using the English language. Apart from this, achieving proficiency in the language is particularly challenging in multilingual countries such as Malaysia due to the coexistence of multiple spoken languages reduces opportunities for English use, hindering students' ability to build strong vocabulary control (Kashinathan & Aziz, 2021). Many Malaysian students who have studied English as a second language for more than 11 years are still struggling with a good vocabulary mastery. Collectively, these findings reveal that vocabulary deficiency is a persistent barrier to effective communication among Malaysian ESL learners.

The problem is compounded by students' reliance on their first language (L1), which reflects both low vocabulary knowledge and weak motivation to learn English. Yaccob and Yunus (2019) revealed that students felt demotivated to learn when they struggled with textbooks, understanding English materials, and interactions in class. Many students relied on their first language (L1) for spelling and translation thus indicating low L2 vocabulary knowledge. This pattern mirrors Kashinathan and Aziz (2021), who reported that learners revert to their mother tongue due to fear of making mistakes, thereby restricting opportunities to practice English meaningfully. This linguistic dependence not only reduces vocabulary exposure but also contributes to anxiety, low confidence, and demotivation, further impeding ESL development.

Even though a great emphasis is given towards grammar in the form of a language, scholars have increasingly acknowledged vocabulary as equally crucial for communication. Without understanding the meaning of words, students would not be able to utilize the target language effectively (Rahmat & Mohandas, 2020), and having a weak base of vocabulary knowledge will lead to difficulties in mastering the four skills of the English language which are speaking, listening, writing, and reading (Leong & Ahmadi, 2017). Vocabulary functions as the backbone of communication; only by understanding and using words accurately can they convey their intended meaning (Husin et al., 2022). However, the fear of making linguistic errors often leads the students to avoid speaking English altogether, resorting instead to their mother tongue for communication (Kashinathan & Aziz, 2021). This drastically lowers the source of input learners could gain to naturally acquire vocabulary acquisition of their second language.

Given these limitations, several scholars have stressed the importance of more interactive and meaning-focused vocabulary instruction in lessons to strengthen active learning in vocabulary (Dang & Webb, 2020; Kashinathan & Aziz, 2021; Nor et al., 2015). These researchers collectively argue that language classrooms should move beyond rote learning and incorporate communicative, engaging strategies to enhance vocabulary acquisition. Therefore, the recurring issue of limited vocabulary and passive learning practices within English film clips highlights the need for innovative, learner-centered approaches that can provide meaningful opportunities to use and acquire English in authentic contexts.

Teaching Vocabulary in ESL Context

Instructors play a pivotal role in shaping how vocabulary is taught and acquired in the ESL classroom. Chiekezie and Inyang (2021) state that teachers should recognize the importance of incorporating vocabulary when teaching English in a foreign language classroom, which involves selecting appropriate methods and strategies for effective instruction. In today's technology-driven era, it is

crucial for teachers to shift their traditional teaching methods to modern approaches which incorporate the inclusion of multimedia into the classroom context. Building on this view, Tahir et al. (2023), expanded on this by categorizing the two versions of direct and indirect strategies used in teaching vocabulary. Memory, cognition, and compensation are examples of direct tactics, which are normally practiced at school levels as per the traditional method, whereas metacognitive, affective, and social strategies fall under the group of indirect strategies based on a student's everyday engagement of the language. Their study revealed that teachers still rely heavily on traditional methods to reinforce the meaning of words that students have already encountered when teaching vocabulary. These methods are primarily memory-based and include rote memorization practices including reading aloud, vocally repeating words, and paying attention to pronunciation as per the traditional way of teaching and learning. While such explicit methods may be effective at the primary level for basic vocabulary, but as students advance to higher levels, the teaching approach loses its applicability. Tahir et al. (2023) thus emphasized that students should be equipped with independent learning strategies that enable them to acquire and internalize new vocabulary autonomously.

Building on the need to modernize vocabulary instruction, Yaccob and Yunus (2019), through their study, highlighted the transformative potential which can be brought to ESL learners in learning vocabulary using the advantage of the advancement in technology. They stressed the importance of the 21st century learning approach which encourages autonomous and self-directed learning. When lessons are designed around students' interests and supported by multimedia resources, learners are more likely to use the target language actively both inside and outside the classroom. Thus, technology serves not only as a means of increasing exposure to English but also as a way of strengthening vocabulary retention through visual and interactive learning experiences. Many studies have highlighted the effectiveness of audio-visual learning under multimedia approach in vocabulary instruction. Chiekezie and Inyang (2021), for example, examined the role of audio-visual aids in teaching of English vocabulary. Audio-visual aids can help learners more effectively memorise and understand new vocabulary by presenting the contextual connections and relevance of new words through visual means (such as vocabulary pictures, posters, charts, amusing cartoons, and picture books) and auditory means (such as music, recording devices, and melodies), which stimulates learners' interest in classroom learning and fosters a positive and enjoyable learning atmosphere.

Specifically, Fikri et al. (2024), found that the utilization of picture-word associations, where a visual representation is connected to a word, can evidently improve memory and learning in vocabulary acquisition. By linking images to meaning, learners form strong mental associations that facilitate recall and long-term retention, particularly among visual learners. This visual learning method utilizes images to establish strong mental associations, facilitating the recall and retention of new vocabulary for learners, proving that the vocabulary for ESL learners should be taught in a more audio-visual way. The researchers also highlight that technology and media can foster a more relaxed and enjoyable learning environment for the students, which raises motivation and interest in the subject matter. In this regard, audio-visual materials aid in making learning more engaging, fun, and efficient for students predominantly when it comes to increasing their vocabulary in English. These results align with Alolaywi (2023), who observed that the language used in movies aids in everyday communication of a person as it is natural and logical, and one primary goal of seeing a movie is entertainment. Together, these studies demonstrate that integrating visual and auditory elements in instruction not only strengthens vocabulary retention but also sustains learners' motivation, making English learning both effective and enjoyable.

Despite growing evidence supporting multimedia-based instruction, the Malaysian education system continues to place limited emphasis on teaching of vocabulary via audio-visual and multimedia approach. Instead, the system placed more importance on improving student's reading and writing skills (Ariffin, 2021). Educators in Malaysia seem to believe that vocabulary acquisition occurs naturally as the child grows up. Such practices stand in contrast to the principles of multimedia and learner-centered instruction, which emphasize active engagement and contextual understanding. Therefore, to cultivate deeper vocabulary mastery, Malaysian ESL classrooms must adopt innovative, media-rich approaches, such as the use of movies in order to bridge the gap between traditional learning and meaningful language application.

Movies as Learning Media in Classroom Context

As multimedia and technology continue to reshape language education, the integration of movies in the classroom as a pedagogical tool has been gaining attention from educators as it serves as an authentic material which increases the students' motivation and engagement in the lesson. Incorporating movies into classroom practice also helps bridge students out of school experiences with formal classroom learning. Nevertheless, empirical research exploring the impact of movies on English proficiency among ESL learners remains limited (Rajpopat, 2023).

A growing body of research has demonstrated the pedagogical value of movies in improving various language skills. Albiladi et al. (2018), found that using an English-language movie to improve students' language skills encourages creativity and engagement in language learning, boosting their motivation to learn the language. Extending this perspective, Karlina (2022) reported significant improvement in student's learning outcomes after incorporating movies into classroom activities. The experimental research showed that students' learning achievement improved significantly after the use of movies in class and students displayed increased interest in learning, as movies made the subjects more comprehensible and engaging. The finding was supported by an experimental study by Halawa et al. (2021) who found that most students agreed that movies increased their interest towards the lesson and the results showed that English movies had a positive impact on student's speaking skills. The growing consensus among these studies highlights the potential of movie-based instruction to engage learners, a benefit also observed within the Malaysian context.

Within Malaysia, Mazlan & Kamal (2022) and Yaacob et al. (2021) emphasized the effectiveness of incorporating movie-based instruction in enhancing students' English proficiency. Both studies reported that the integration of English movies improved learners' engagement, comprehension, and motivation. Specifically, Yaacob et al. (2021) found notable improvements in speaking, listening, vocabulary, and writing skills among Malaysian ESL students, supporting the view that film-based instruction promotes comprehensive language growth. A qualitative study by Altun and Hussein (2022) revealed that students' vocabulary acquisition was enhanced by the tone and natural delivery of dialogues in the movies which mirrored real-life communication. Such a movie-based approach improved students' speaking skills and understanding of the application of English language in real-life situations, which further demonstrates the global relevance of movie-based instruction.
The effectiveness of movie integration has also been confirmed in international contexts such as Japan and Indonesia (Akmaludin et al., 2023; Ashcroft et al., 2018; Kusumarajni, 2019). For instance, Ashcroft et al. (2018) identified the impact of movies on the vocabulary acquisition of Japanese students. A pre- and post-test was conducted with 187 Japanese university students, and the findings

revealed a significant improvement in the students' ability to recall the vocabulary learnt after watching movies. Similarly, improvement was evident in enhancing vocabulary learning in Indonesia (Akmaludin et al., 2023; Kusumarajni, 2019). Both Akmaludin et al. (2023) and Kusumarajni (2019) investigated the impact of integrating movies into vocabulary instruction among Indonesian secondary school learners, with findings that collectively affirm the positive role of films in language learning. Akmaludin et al. (2023) demonstrated that the use of short English movie clips not only enhanced students' interest in learning but also made it easier for them to acquire vocabulary by contextualizing words within meaningful scenes. Their participants also reported greater confidence in using English during classroom interactions following the intervention. In contrast, Kusumarajni (2019) focused on measurable vocabulary outcomes and found significant gains across different categories of English vocabulary after the intervention.

Research Gap

While studies have shown that multimedia-based instruction can enhance learners' engagement and vocabulary retention (Alolaywi, 2023; Fikri et al., 2024), its practical application in Malaysian ESL classrooms remains limited. Furthermore, research on movie-based learning has primarily explored general language proficiency rather than vocabulary development (Mazlan & Kamal, 2022; Yaacob et al., 2021), leaving a lack of empirical evidence on how movies can specifically support vocabulary acquisition. On top of that the review indicates that most studies in the Malaysian context have primarily focused on primary education (Astuti et al., 2016; Kho et al., 2021; Nasaruddin & Kamalludeen, 2020) and higher education (Benedict & Shabdin, 2021; Mazlan & Kamal, 2022; Mustapha & Hatta, 2018; Zaidi et al., 2022), leaving the Malaysian secondary school setting underexplored. This is a significant gap, as secondary students are at a crucial stage in language learning, as they are expected to expand their vocabulary repertoire to support more complex language skills (Astuti et al., 2016; Mustapha & Hatta, 2018). Hence, addressing this gap is crucial to determine whether authentic, context-rich media such as movies can serve as an effective tool to strengthen vocabulary learning among Malaysian secondary school ESL learners.

Mayer's Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning

Mayer's Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning (CTML) refers to the understanding of how learners achieve meaningful learning of academic material through the combination of words and images within multimedia information (Mayer, 2005). Meaningful learning primarily occurs through appropriate cognitive processing during the learning process, specifically: selecting, organizing, and integrating (Mayer, 2021). Selecting refers to learners focusing on relevant details during classroom instruction (Mayer, 2022). Organizing refers to learners forming a coherent cognitive framework within their brains from received information. Integrating refers to combining information within this cognitive structure with relevant knowledge stored in long-term memory (Mayer, 2022). This processing eventually establishes knowledge within long-term memory that can be applied in new contexts (Mayer, 2024). Figure 1 provides an illustrated explanation of CTML.

Figure 1

Mayer's Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning (Mayer, 2005)
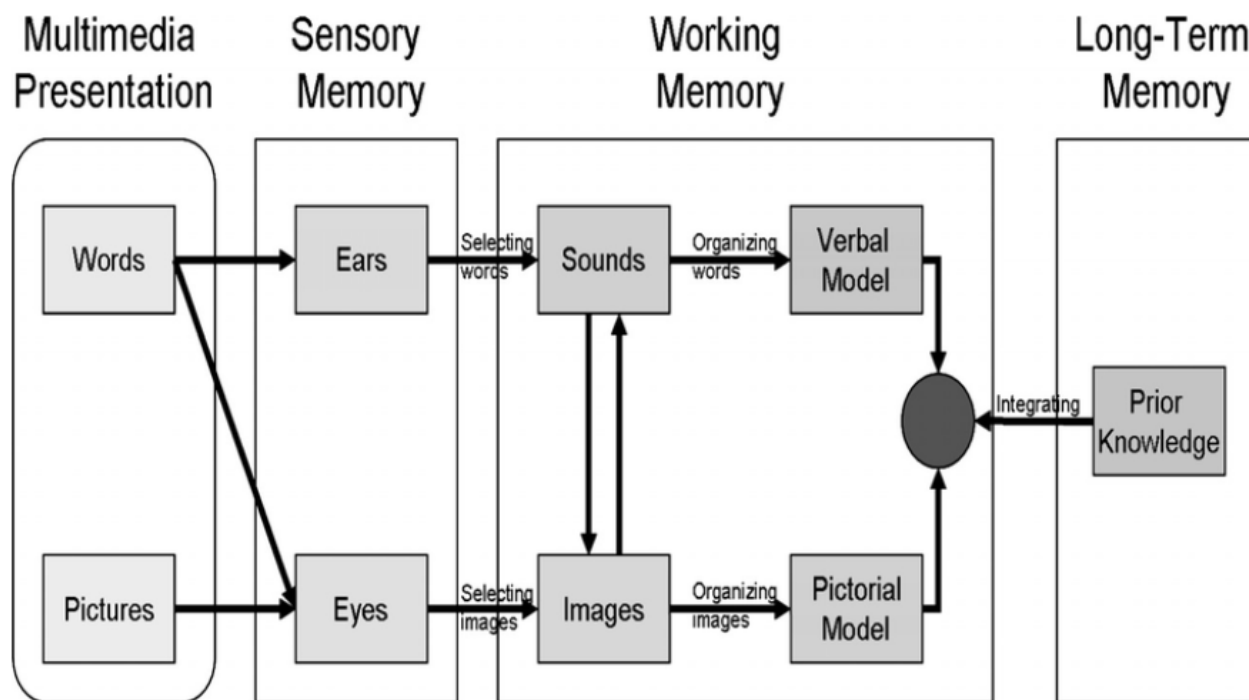
In addition, CTML's core ideas encompass three key assumptions namely dual channels, limited capacity, and active processing (Mayer, 2024). Dual channels refer to humans possessing separate pathways for processing linguistic, auditory, and visual information (Mayer, 1997). Limited capacity denotes that each channel is only capable of processing a finite amount of information at any given time (Mayer, 2005). Active processing explains about selecting relevant information actively, organising it into coherent linguistic and imagery models within working memory. These models will then be integrated with prior knowledge stored in long-term memory (Mayer, 2024).

CTML's three memory stores including sensory memory, working memory, and long-term memory, are crucial throughout the learning process. Sensory memory serves as the initial stage, temporarily preserving the learner's incoming raw multimedia information as complete visual and auditory images (Mayer, 2005). This memory store primarily consists of visual and auditory sensory memory. Visual sensory memory briefly holds the complete visual images captured by the eyes, while auditory sensory memory temporarily retains the complete auditory images received by the ears (Mayer, 2024). Once sensory memory receives input, this information is transferred to working memory. Working memory primarily serves to temporarily store visual, auditory, linguistic, and pictorial information under active attention (Mayer, 2005).

During this process, learners categorise, group, and integrate received information within their minds, thereby constructing a structured and meaningful cognitive representation. That is, pictorial material is processed into pictorial models, or linguistic material is organised into linguistic models. However, the information capacity of working memory is limited, allowing only a small amount of information to be processed at any one time (Mayer, 2024). Hence, long-term memory takes over the processed

and integrated information from working memory for long-term storage, thereby serving as meaningful knowledge that facilitates learners' transfer and application (Mayer, 2005). Furthermore, information from long-term memory can also be reactivated or imported into working memory to enhance the integration and comprehension of information.

When utilising multimedia materials combining words and images, CTML undergoes five key cognitive processes for effective learning: (1) selecting words, (2) selecting images, (3) organising words, (4) organising images, and (5) integrating (Mayer, 2024). First, selecting words requires learners to focus and filter relevant textual information presented in multimedia materials, aiding comprehension. Second, selecting images requires learners to actively involving in selecting and filtering relevant visual information presented in multimedia works for comprehension. Next, organizing words involves learners' structuring of selected textual information within working memory into coherent, organised, and meaningful textual models (e.g., units or propositions) to facilitate understanding of the textual whole. Organizing images is designed to enable learners, after selecting relevant visual information, to organize these images within working memory into a coherent and meaningful visual model (e.g., spatial relationships or identification of key features), enhancing comprehension of the overall visual information. Finally, integration serves to link the linguistic and visual models established in working memory. Simultaneously, learners connect these models to relevant prior knowledge stored in long-term memory (Mayer, 2024). In summary, CTML as a theoretical framework provides more effective scientific cognitive psychological support for ESL teaching. It facilitates the formation of a unified and meaningful psychological representation of multimedia content, which can be stored in long-term memory. This representation guides the design and implementation of multimedia courses, leading to the enhanced effectiveness of second language learning and learners' vocabulary acquisition and retention.

METHODOLOGY

This study used a quantitative research approach to address the research question. Creswell and Creswell (2022) explains that quasi-experimental design offers a strong framework for investigating the impact of interventions in real life, allowing researchers to assess treatments while reducing the influence of unrelated variables. Researchers can compare the results of treatment and control groups using a quasi-experimental research design, which allows efficiency in drawing conclusions about causal inferences in real-world learning environments (Cohen et al., 2018; Gopalan et al., 2020). Due to its ability for a controlled yet practical investigation of the influence of English movies on secondary-level students' vocabulary acquisition, this design was deemed suitable for the current study. To evaluate the impact of the intervention, the researchers used a pre-test and post-test approach.

To ensure the sample selection from the same population, convenience sampling was employed to select a class of form four students from a secondary school in the northern region of Malaysia. Students from the class were assigned into two groups which were an experimental group (n=20) and a control group (n=20). To control teacher variability, all students received lessons from the same English teacher but only the students from the experimental group participated in vocabulary-learning activities using English movies for three weeks. There were no statistical contrasts of the pre-test results between the experimental group and the control group. Before the experiment was conducted, the school and students were required to give their approval to ensure that they understood the purpose

of the research and were willing to take part. To maintain confidentiality and anonymity, no third party was given access to the students' personal information. Before implementing the intervention, all students in the classroom were given a pre-test to measure their proficiency level. Students were then divided into treatment and control groups after collecting their mean scores.

A standardised vocabulary test was conducted as a pre-test to determine each participant's baseline proficiency level. Following that, a chosen English movie divided into three key story points was shown to the treatment group, and post-tests were given after each viewing. This kind of repeated testing led to the possibility of monitoring vocabulary development over time and provide detailed information on how well the intervention worked. Each selected movie clip was segmented into three parts, each lasting from 15 to 25 minutes during the intervention period. At some point throughout the movie clip's playback, the researcher stopped at specific scenes to give more context and vocabulary explanations. On the other hand, the control group was taught the same targeted vocabulary using traditional teaching strategies and instruction. Instead of exposure to the English movie, the control group was required to complete standard vocabulary exercises. Following the intervention period, a post-test assessment was required to be completed by both groups to evaluate changes in students' vocabulary acquisition. The post-test was given three times to increase the reliability and validity of the research findings. An independent t-test was then used to compare the mean post-test scores between the control and treatment groups. The collected data were analysed to determine whether a statistically significant difference in vocabulary acquisition existed between the two groups following the intervention.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Pre-Test
A pre-test was conducted before implementing the treatment. Before the intervention, the test assessed the vocabulary proficiency levels of all participants. The participants were then allocated equally into control and treatment groups. The pre-test included 10 multiple choice questions that were converted to 100%. Participants with pseudonyms from 2 classes with 20 students each, 4A and 4B, were selected. As shown in Table 1, the treatment group (4A), achieved a total of 780 marks. On the other hand, the control group (4B) scored a total of 790 marks. The mean scores for both groups were nearly identical; 4A at 39% whereas 4B at 39.5%. These similar mean scores indicated that both groups started with comparable levels of vocabulary proficiency.

Table 1
Pre-test results

Pseudo Class	Number of Students	Total Marks	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
4A	20	780	39	17.137
4B	20	790	39.5	16.050

Post-Test Results

To evaluate the immediate effects of the intervention (see Table 2), Post-Test 1 was conducted. Group 4A achieved 1220 marks, with a mean score of 61%. Meanwhile, Group 4B earned 880 marks with a mean score of 44%. The results indicated an incredible rise of 56.4% for 4A when compared to the pre-test results of the group which had a mean score of 39.5%. On the other hand, 4B only showed a 11.4% increase from their pre-test mean score of 39.5%. The results stated that performances of most participants in Group 4A were similar due to the standard deviation being reduced to (10.711). Students in Group 4B made irregular progress. This can be seen through the standard deviation which increased to (15.005). These findings are supported by Kurniati (2022), who claimed that students who are taught English lessons through movies tend to perform better compared learners who are being taught with traditional methods. The research concluded that the media components of movies created an engaging environment that enhanced retention of learning. Zulkefly and Razali (2019) emphasized that assisting students in recalling and applying the terms learnt more effectively will enhance their vocabulary acquisition.

In Post-Test 2, Group 4A achieved a mean score of 63.5%, with a cumulative score of 1270%. A slight enhancement can be seen from Post-Test 2 results, compared to the results of Post-Test 1. Group 4B, on the other hand, scored a total of 890 marks with a mean score of 44.5%. This outcome indicated a minor improvement of 0.5% comparing to their performance in Post-Test 1. These results are supported by Kabooha (2016), explaining that students who watch movies in English classes have a notable improvement in terms of their comprehension of vocabulary and ability to recall. The research highlighted on how multimedia technologies are able to encourage deeper vocabulary processing by developing stimulating learning environments. Furthermore, Rahmat and Mohandas (2020) highlighted the drawbacks of traditional learning methods and the importance of having more engaging teaching approaches such as movie-based education, to promote deeper and longer-lasting learning.

In Post-Test 3, a cumulative score of 1480, was obtained by Group 4A, resulting in having a mean score of 74%, that eventually led to a rise from their Post-Test 2 mean score of 63.5%. On the other hand, a total of 920 marks in total, with a mean score of 46% was scored by Group 4B. Comparing to Post-Test 2, Group 4B showed an increase of 1.5% from their mean score of 44.5%. The findings from Post-Test 3 proved the intervention produced a positive effect on the treatment group. The intervention has therefore worked on various skills for the treatment group, which can be seen from its lower standard deviation of 12.732, showcasing a uniform progress among all students. A study conducted by Ashcroft et al. (2018) supports these results by stating that cinematic materials present contextualized real-life input, which enhances a better retention of vocabulary via relating the words to real situational aspects. The same results have also been supported from a study done by Yaacob et al. (2021), who looked at how well English movies act in vocabulary building through the intention of real-life language aspects.

Table 2

Results of post-test 1, 2, and 3

Test	Group	Number of students	Total marks	Mean score	Standard deviation
Post-test 1	Treatment	20	1220	61	10.711
	Control	20	880	44	15.008
Post-test 2	Treatment	20	1270	63.5	12.680
	Control	20	890	44.5	13.945
Post-test 3	Treatment	20	1480	74	12.732
	Control	20	920	46	13.533

The findings of this study support the efficacy of movie-based interventions in improving vocabulary learning compared to traditional learning methods. This is consistent with prior studies on multimedia interventions, particularly those that incorporate music and visual elements, contribute to improved language learning outcomes (Kurniati, 2022). In line with Kabooha (2016), who observed that a more immersive and engaging learning experience is offered by the multimodal input of movies, ultimately resulting in improved vocabulary retention, the results of the post-tests clearly demonstrate the treatment group's superior progress. Additionally, Zulkefly and Razali (2019) asserted that movies tend to provide context, which is crucial for vocabulary acquisition to improve comprehension and retention. The treatment group's steady improvements on all post-tests, including those of children with lower proficiency supports the previous statement. Meanwhile, the slight advancement made by the control group is consistent with a study by Leong and Ahmadi (2017) that claims traditional approaches to be ineffective in meeting students' different learning needs, especially for learners who are weaker. Finally, the significant improvement in the treatment group's Post-Tests 2 and 3 supports the intervention's long-lasting effects. This is consistent with the findings of Zhu (2020), who claimed that vocabulary taught in isolation is less likely to leave a long-term impact on learners compared to contextualized strategies.

Statistical Analysis

To determine the significance of the observed contrasts in results of the study between the treatment and control groups, independent t-tests were performed for each of the three post-tests. In this research, the t-test assessed whether the English movie intervention had a positive effect in terms of the vocabulary acquisition of the treatment group. The raw scores of each post-test from both the treatment and control groups were used to calculate the means and standard deviations for each group. The basis for determining the t-statistics and p-values were formed based on these descriptive statistics. Table 3 illustrates the results of the t-tests.

Table 3

T-test results

Test	t-statistic	p-value	Outcome
Pre-Test	-0.820	$p > 0.05$	Not significant
Post-Test 1	31.701	$p < 0.01$	Significant
Post-Test 2	34.823	$p < 0.01$	Significant
Post-Test 3	51.669	$p < 0.01$	Significant

For pre-test, the t-statistic of -0.820 and a p-value (p>0.05) show no statistically significant difference between the treatment and control groups' mean scores before the intervention, which validates their baseline comparability. A statistically significant difference can be seen between the average scores of the treatment and control groups at this stage through the results of Post-Test 1 that shows the t-statistic of 31.701 and a p-value (p<0.01). The control group obtained a mean score of 44%, whereas the treatment group scored 61%. In Post-Test 2, it can be observed that the difference between the groups reached statistical significance due to the t-statistic value being 34.823 and p-value (p<0.01). The mean score of the treatment group increased to 63.5%, whereas the control group managed to only obtain 44%. In Post-Test 3, the t-statistics of 51.669 demonstrated a statistically significant contrast in the performance between both the treatment and control group (p<0.01). The control group managed to obtain a mean of only 46% whereas, the treatment group achieved a mean score of 74%. The effectiveness of the movie-based approach compared to traditional teaching strategies in vocabulary enhancement can be validated through these results of the study.

The learners' experiences in this study thus extend Mayer's (2014) theoretical framework by demonstrating how the stages of cognitive processing unfold in authentic, multimodal language-learning environments, where auditory and visual inputs interact to promote deeper conceptual understanding. As students engaged with English movie clips, they processed linguistic and visual cues simultaneously, constructing meaning through dual-channel processing. This process parallels the findings of Zainal et al. (2021), who reported that integrating video, audio, and text in group-based literature projects fostered deeper comprehension and learner engagement. The students in this study also demonstrated active meaning-making as they negotiated word meanings from visual and auditory cues. During the first encounter, the movie clips introduced new vocabulary through authentic dialogues and on-screen actions, creating rich contextual input. This exposure occasionally produced cognitive dissonance, as unfamiliar words disrupted prior understanding, prompting learners to hypothesize meanings based on context. Through teacher scaffolding and peer discussion, they achieved schema integration, aligning with Woottipong's (2013) findings that multimedia environments enhance learning effectiveness and motivation. The process culminated in equilibrium, when students accurately recalled and used the target vocabulary in speaking and writing tasks, indicating successful resolution of dissonance and meaningful integration of new lexical knowledge. The findings of this study offer meaningful pedagogical insights for English language teachers and learners in Malaysian secondary schools. Teachers may utilize movies as a multimodal tool to bridge the gap between traditional vocabulary instruction and authentic, real-world language use that improves students' learning outcomes. As asserted by Yaccob and Yunus (2019), one of the main issues in the Malaysian English language classroom is students' limited communication skills as it lacks visual aspect to register the vocabulary in the learner's memory. Thus, teachers may employ carefully selected movie segments to teach target vocabulary that improves engagement and retention. To optimize learning, these segments should be supported with follow-up tasks and briefings that guide students through their working memory, long-term memory and sensory memory to stimulate active meaning negotiation. At the institutional level, policymakers and curriculum planners can integrate such multimodal approaches into the curriculum and pedagogical practices to provide guidance and resources that support the effective use of movies in the language classroom.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, this paper has argued that the adoption of English movies is evidently significant for the enhancement of vocabulary learning among ESL secondary school students in Malaysia. Returning to the questions posed at the beginning of this study, it is now possible to state that the experiment was found to be effective as the treatment group showed significant improvement in their English vocabulary learning. The results postulate the important role of multimedia materials in ESL teaching and learning. Through the integration of audio-visual and multimedia into the instructional practices in ESL classes, teachers can surmount the hindrances of traditional teaching approaches. These innovative practices can open up encouraging learning opportunities and effectively cater to diverse learner needs, contributing to enhanced learning of English vocabulary.

Notably, the evidence from this study demonstrates the possibility of integrating audio-visual aids to make the learning of English vocabulary more captivating to secondary school students, with the hope that it can lead to long-term cognitive retention of English vocabulary. These findings offer valuable insights for English teachers who serve in secondary schools in terms of incorporating innovative approaches in ESL classrooms. We hope that the positive findings could encourage them to view innovation as an avenue to contextualise interactive teaching approaches in their secondary ESL lessons.

Future studies can be extended in several ways. As this study only sampled participants from one school, the sample may not fully represent the diverse backgrounds of students across Malaysia, limiting the representativeness of the findings. It is recommended that future studies should include a larger and more diverse sample from multiple schools across varied geographical locations to capture a broader spectrum of linguistic, cultural, and educational backgrounds on the effectiveness of English movie clips in vocabulary learning within ESL classes. Additionally, future studies should consider the integration of different variables of media, such as genres, length, frequency of movies, and subtitle availability, to investigate and compare their effects for optimal learning of English vocabulary.

While this study adopted an experimental design, further research should consider mixed-method or add qualitative methods. The incorporation of interviews, classroom observations, or focus groups can gather in-depth insights about vocabulary enhancement strategies from teachers' and students' perspectives. These methods could help provide enriched data by uncovering the challenges and benefits of adopting English movies in vocabulary instruction and learning. Next, it is recommended to conduct longitudinal studies, which can provide insights into the sustained effect of English vocabulary gains. Future studies can extend the short-term vocabulary learning by tracking the retention and application of newly learned vocabulary over a delayed period. This step would provide evidence on the durable improvements of lexical competence with movie-based instructional practices.

This study inspires the incorporation of creativity into ESL teaching and learning. The implementation of media into ESL classes can be considered a positive step towards more innovative approaches to enhance vocabulary learning. This initiative calls for greater attention and action to encourage the practices of incorporating different types of media or innovative technologies into ESL learning to foster greater interest and motivation among students in Malaysia. It is therefore recommended to conduct more studies on movie-based methods with students and teachers to understand their needs in the context of English language learning.

Institutional Review Board Statement

The study was conducted according to the guidelines of the ethical conduct and approved by the UTAR Scientific and Ethical Review Committee of Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman (protocol code U/SERC/78-310/2024).

Disclosure of AI Use

The author(s) used OpenAI's ChatGPT to improve the clarity and grammar of the content. All content was reviewed and verified by the authors.

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