

Animated Films as a Pedagogical Tool for English Vocabulary Acquisition in Second Language Learners

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Abstract

The study investigates the effectiveness of animated films in enhancing English vocabulary acquisition among ESL learners in Sri Lanka. Research shows how animated films affect vocabulary retention, relevant understanding, and student engagement. The effectiveness of using animated movies as a tool for enhancing English vocabulary among English as a Second Language (ESL) learners has garnered increasing attention in recent years. Thus, this study explores the pedagogical benefits and potential challenges of integrating animated movies into ESL vocabulary learning. Further, the research aims to provide empirical evidence on how animated movies can facilitate vocabulary acquisition, retention, and contextual understanding among ESL learners. A quantitative research approach was used to measure the vocabulary advantage supported by survey responses to measure the pre-tests and post-tests. The study focused on grade 7 students and analyzed subtitle-based learning, learning contingency terminology, mnemonic techniques, and visual effects. The results revealed a significant improvement in terminology performance after the integration of animated films, especially when aligned with the objectives of the course. Conclusions advocate including animated multimedia in ESL education while suggesting positive implications for teachers, course designers, and education policy makers.

Keywords: Animated Movies, ESL, Multimedia in Education, Vocabulary Acquisition.

Introduction

English is widely considered a global lingua franca, playing an important role in education and communication. In Sri Lanka, English is taught as a second language in government schools, yet many students struggle with mastery due to traditional rote-learning methods. Almost all the government schools in Sri Lanka conduct their education in Sinhalese or Tamil as per the demographic demands (Karunaratne, 2003). However, only some schools offer English medium education from grade 6 to students who pass an English proficiency test. The vast majority of students in government schools are educated predominantly with Sinhala as the medium of instruction, while English is taught as a second language. The instructors, who play a significant role, are expected to encourage pupils to demonstrate creative thinking in the classroom, which demands both learning and teaching processes that are suitable for the circumstances in the class. The recent advances in multimedia have introduced animated films as attractive directional devices that merge visual and auditory elements to help learn vocabulary. The study identifies the existing gaps in ESL instruction and proposes a technology-acquired approach using animated films. Grounded in the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (Davis et al., 1989), the study examines how learners perceive and benefit from multimedia content. The main objective is to investigate how animated movies impact vocabulary acquisition, with an emphasis on subtitles, mnemonics, and visual methods.

The Ministry of Education (MoE) in Sri Lanka, in collaboration with several other relevant authorities, has introduced a range of resources to enhance the overall performance standards in the English language component of the Ordinary Level Examination. However, the pass rate in the English language at both Ordinary Level and Advanced Level examinations has been abysmally low (Wijesekera, 2012). Hence, this is one of the major problems that the English Language education in Sri Lanka is facing. Therefore, this research aims to investigate the effectiveness of using animated movies in improving students' performance in English. This study aims to find a workable solution for improving the English language skills by assisting students in vocabulary acquisition. Additionally, the majority of school children tend to study English outside of school and still find it difficult to deal with vocabulary, which suggests that there is a problem with the existing vocabulary learning methods used in Sri Lanka. Therefore, it is vital to investigate the effectiveness of using animated movies in learning English vocabulary among ESL Learners.

Materials and Methods

A quantitative method was adopted. The overall population of the study consists of the number of grade 7 students in the selected government school in the Kandy Educational Zone, which is approximately 400. This research considers 100 students who watched the selected animated movie as the key sample for the study. A pre-tested structural questionnaire was used to collect the data. Four independent variables were measured in the questionnaire: (1) subtitle-based learning, (2) casual learning, (3) mnemonic learning, and (4) visual effects using closed-ended questions. The reliability was confirmed using Cronbach's alpha values. The conceptual framework was designed as follows, and based on that, four hypotheses were developed.

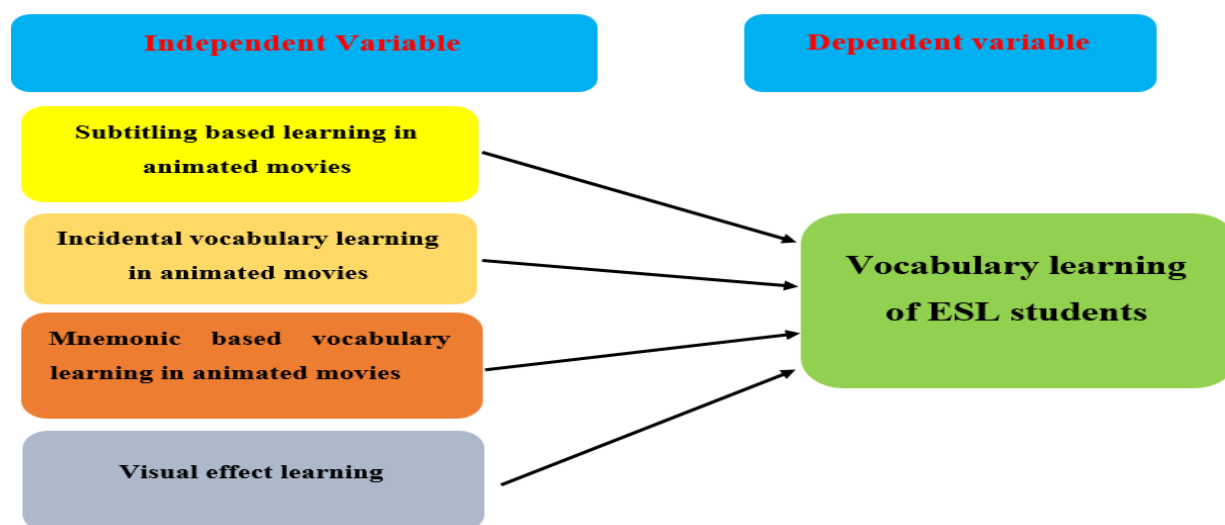


Figure 1

Vocabulary learning of ESL students

H1: Subtitling-based learning in animated movies significantly enhances ESL learners' vocabulary retention compared to movies without subtitles.

H2: Mnemonic-based vocabulary learning embedded within animated movies improves ESL learners' vocabulary recall compared to traditional classroom instruction.

H3: ESL learners exposed to incidental vocabulary learning in animated movies demonstrate a higher rate of vocabulary acquisition compared to learners using conventional vocabulary learning materials.

H4: Visual effect learning integrated into animated movies positively impacts ESL learners' vocabulary acquisition, particularly for visual and kinesthetic learners.

In the data analysis, Inferential Statistics were used to confirm or reject hypotheses (null or alternative) based on the data from Likert-scale questionnaires, which were analyzed using SPSS. Logistic regression analysis was used to examine the strength and direction of relationships between independent and dependent variables.

Results

An inferential analysis was undertaken to examine the effectiveness of learning English vocabulary through animated films among ESL learners, along with KMO, composite reliability (CR) measurement for reliability, and average variance (AVE) tests for construction validity. Logistic regression analysis was used to evaluate the predictive power of several independent variables on the vocabulary acquisition (See Table 1.

Table 1

Results

Hypotheses	Coefficient	p-value	Decision
H1: Subtitling-based learning in animated movies significantly enhances ESL learners' vocabulary retention compared to movies without subtitles.	-0.576	0.461	Not accepted
H2: Mnemonic-based vocabulary learning embedded within animated movies improves ESL learners' vocabulary recall compared to traditional classroom instruction.	0.983	0.040*	Accepted
H3: ESL learners exposed to incidental vocabulary learning in animated movies demonstrate a higher rate of vocabulary acquisition compared to learners using conventional vocabulary learning materials.	1.204	0.011*	Accepted
H4: Visual effect learning integrated into animated movies positively impacts ESL learners' vocabulary acquisition, particularly for visual and kinaesthetic learners.	-0.752	0.052	Not accepted

The analysis showed that subtitle-based vocabulary learning had a negative but statistically insignificant relationship with acquisition (coefficient = -0.576, $p = 0.461$), rejecting H1. Hence, subtitled animated films did not significantly increase the ESL learners' vocabulary retention. Further, incidental vocabulary learning showed a significant positive effect (coefficient = 0.983, $p = 0.040$), supporting H2. This suggests that casual performance for vocabulary in animated films effectively improves vocabulary among ESL learners. Similarly, mnemonic-based learning had a strong and significant positive effect (coefficient = 1.204, $p = 0.011$), supporting the acceptance of H3. This suggests that incorporating mnemonic strategies into animated films enhances the vocabulary acquisition of ESL learners. However, visual effects learning received a negative and insignificant relationship (coefficient = -0.752, $p = 0.052$), resulting in rejection of H4. Although the influence was close to being important, visual effects alone were not found to effectively support the learning of vocabulary. Finally, the study supports the effectiveness of casual and mnemonic-based learning through animated films for terminology development in ESL learners. Subtitles and visible effects, while potentially attractive, did not show a significant contribution to vocabulary acquisition.

Discussion

This study analyzed the impact of various methods of vocabulary acquisition through animated movies on ESL learners, using logistic regression to evaluate hypotheses. H1, which stated that subtitle-based learning significantly improves vocabulary retention among ESL learners, was rejected. The coefficient was -0.576, with a p-value of 0.461, indicating an insignificant and negative relationship. This contradicts several studies in the literature that support subtitling as an effective learning tool. Kusumarasdyati (2018) found that subtitled content helps learners engage more deeply with language material. Borrás and Lafayette (1994) demonstrated that subtitles enhance both language comprehension and production. Grgurovic and Hegelheimer (2020) showed that learners preferred and benefited more from subtitles than transcripts. Similarly, Grignon et al. (2018) found that subtitled and dubbed films outperformed original versions in facilitating comprehension.

H2 concerning mnemonic-based learning was accepted. A positive coefficient of 0.983 with a significant p-value of 0.04 supports the hypothesis that mnemonics embedded in animated movies enhance vocabulary recall. Research has shown that mnemonic devices, such as shapes and structures embedded in animated content, enhance memorization and recall (Danan, 2004). These tools help enhance reading and listening comprehension skills, making mnemonic-based learning a validated and effective instructional method.

H3 examined incidental vocabulary learning and was also accepted. The coefficient of 1.204 and a highly significant p-value of 0.011 indicate a strong positive relationship. Yuksel and Tanriverdi (2009) emphasize that vocabulary acquisition often happens incidentally through reading or listening. Contextual learning is essential, as isolated words may lack clear meaning (Sun & Dong, 2004). This approach mimics natural language acquisition, such as how children learn vocabulary from context-rich situations (Day, Omura & Hiramatsu, 1991) and proves similarly effective for ESL learners.

H4, relating to visual effect learning, was rejected. Despite a coefficient of -0.752 and a near-significant p-value of 0.052, the relationship was negative and statistically insignificant. This outcome contrasts with the literature suggesting that visual materials are beneficial for vocabulary learning. Research by Danan (2004) and others has consistently shown that visual cues support language acquisition and comprehension. The discrepancy may be due to variations in how visual effects were implemented or measured in this study compared to others.

Conclusion

This study has provided valuable insights into the effectiveness of utilizing animated movies in learning English vocabulary among ESL learners. When analyzing the research findings comprehensively, the study has shown the capability of animated movies as a dynamic and engaging tool for vocabulary instruction, which offers diverse learning methods and opportunities for ESL learners to improve their language proficiency. Use of animated movies promotes inspiration, understanding, and vocabulary retention. Based on the findings, it is recommended that teachers integrate animated media into ESL classes to complement traditional teaching methods. Course designers and policymakers should consider adopting multimedia approaches to bridge the existing gaps in language education. Further, this study has laid the foundation for further exploration and innovation in ESL vocabulary instruction, highlighting the potential of animated movies as a versatile and effective resource for language learning. Based on the findings, it is recommended to integrate mnemonic-based techniques, use acronyms, imagery, and other mnemonics within animated content, and to encourage students to create their own mnemonic devices to personalize and reinforce vocabulary learning. Also, it is suggested to adopt strategic uses of visual effects, employ visual cues, animations, and graphics to support contextual understanding, and to design instructional materials that enhance comprehension through well-planned visual elements. Also, conducting Professional Development for Educators by organizing

training programs to equip ESL educators with multimedia teaching skills, with special focus on integrating animated movies effectively and assessing vocabulary outcomes, is recommended.

Acknowledgment

The author expresses gratitude to the school authorities and supervising professors at the Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka for their guidance. Special thanks to participating students and teachers who made this study possible.

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