Learning English through Movies: Adult English Language Learners' Perceptions

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Abstract—**The use of media in English teaching and learning has received much attention from educators and second/foreign language educators. The use of media includes the use of movies, music, films, and other types of entertainment-related learning resources. However, little has been done to understand the adult language learners' perceptions toward the benefits and challenges of using English movies to learn English. This qualitative research study explored English learners' perceptions regarding the use of movies as English teaching and learning tools. The study focused on what language learners believe are the benefits and challenges of relying on English movies to develop their language competency. The study's results indicated that language learners believed that movies are authentic sources of language learning and can be used effectively to improve language skills including speaking, listening, reading, vocabulary, and writing. Findings also revealed that according to language learners, movies are beneficial in terms of increasing students' cultural awareness.**

Index Terms—**ELLs, movies in education, authentic learning, media in language learning, ESL teaching**

I. INTRODUCTION

Over the past decades, English language has become the most significant and dominant language over the globe (Crystal, 2012). For language learners, learning a new language can be a complex process which requires a huge amount of time and effort. Second language educators have been using different types of English resources to find the most appealing and effective way of learning the language (Cook, 2016). One way that has been used effectively is encouraging language learners to develop their language competencies through English movies. In fact, much attention has been given regarding the effectiveness of using media, specifically English movies, in language teaching and learning. Proponents of using this type of media believe that movies allow for more interactive and appealing ways of teaching and learning English (Tafani, 2009). Other researchers (Kusumaningrum, 2016; Sari & Sugandi, 2015) have argued that watching movies for learning English has some drawbacks because these movies lack instructional and pedagogical intentions.

According to Tafani (2009), the use of English movies as an English learning tool should be encouraged and implemented by language teachers. Many researchers (Ismaili, 2013; Khoshniyat & Dowlatabadi, 2014; Li & Wang, 2015; Qiu, 2017) have claimed that there are several advantages inherent in the use of English movies as means to develop language competency. These benefits include increasing students' motivation, enhancing students' oral and communication skills, and developing their cultural awareness thereby allowing for a more authentic language learning experience.

Accordingly, Khoshniyat and Dowlatabadi (2014) believe that using English movies can empower ELLs with extensive vocabulary lists, syntax, and other language skills that enable them to improve their English proficiency. Even though much research has been done to understand the importance of integrating media into the language classroom and the language learning experience, little work has been done regarding the effectiveness of watching movies specifically for educational purposes. Moreover, little attention was given to explore the perceptions of adult language learners toward using movies to develop language skills. Adult language learners should have a voice in terms of how they perceive watching movies as a learning tool. Thus, the fundamental goal of the present study was to explore adult language learners' feelings and perceptions about why and how English movies should be used to develop English language skills.

A. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to examine how adult English language learners in the United States perceive the effectiveness of watching movies to enhance and develop their language proficiencies. Moreover, this study explored

the benefits as well as the challenges that are usually associated with relying on English movies as English learning and teaching tools. Understanding and exploring these opinions is essential to inform educators and second/foreign language teachers whether movies can and should be used to learn English. Particularly, the study aimed to provide valuable information for adult language learners to start watching movies, not only for entertainment but also for English learning purposes.

B. Research Questions

The research questions that guided the study were:
1. How do language learners describe their experiences using English movies as tools to learn English?
2. To what extent do adult language learners believe that watching movies to learn English is beneficial?

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Previous studies concerning the use of movies as English teaching and learning tools shed light on the effectiveness, benefits, and challenges that are associated with using English to learn or teach English. Researchers have looked at English movies as effective and interactive ways of learning English.

Li and Wang (2015) investigated the impact of using English movies to enhance the English oral skills of Chinese college learners. The researchers used English movies as a part of English course to improve students' speaking and listening skills. After exposing college students to English movies during English course, the researchers provided students with written or oral activities in which they had to summarize or retell the plotlines of the movies. Li and Wang (2015) found that not only students' oral skills but also their cultural awareness have improved. The researchers continued to say that watching movies for educational purposes "enable students to learn the language in a real language environment and find out the cultural differences between Chinese and Western, then students' motivation can be aroused, and flexibility in real occasions will be cultivated, therefore, enhancing the ability of foreign language communication and application." (p. 1100).

Similarly, Ismaili (2013) examined the effect of using movies in English as a foreign language (EFL) classrooms among South East European University students and EFL teachers. With three months period of time, the study tends to examine the effects of using movies to teach and learn English. The participants of the study included two major groups: teachers and undergraduate students. The first group consists of six teachers who were willing to participate in the study. The second group consists of 60 male and female students with age ranging from 18-25. The participants, pre-intermediate and intermediate EFL learners, were assigned to experimental and control groups. The researcher integrated English movies as teaching materials with the treatment group. The control group received more traditional ways of teaching without being exposed to English movies during class time. The results of the study indicated that there were significant differences between the two groups with regard to their language proficiency. In other words, the researcher found that using movies as teaching materials increased students' motivation and improved their language skills. Moreover, Ismaili (2013) investigated FL teachers' perceptions regarding the use of movies as teaching tools. The participant teachers believed that movies can be used effectively to facilitate the learning process, enhance the learning atmosphere, and encourage more student-teacher and student-student discussions, and that helps in developing ELLs language skills.

Kusumaningrum (2016) explored the use and potential benefits of incorporating English movies into English as Foreign Language classes. The study was conducted in Indonesia where the EFL class is a mandatory learning subject in senior high school. The main goal of the EFL classes was to raise the academic level of language literacy. The researcher used English movies as teaching tools because of the fact that some students did not likely enjoy learning a new language with poor learning style and classroom environment. Therefore, Kusumaningrum's study was adopted to answer the questions: How and why English movies can be implemented to teach English as a foreign language to senior high school students? Kusumaningrum (2016) found that using English movies facilitated the learning process and allowed language learners to develop their language skills, like speaking, writing, and listening in more appealing and interactive ways. The researcher concluded that English movies do indeed provide more opportunity to teach and learn English in authentic learning environment.

Khoshniyat and Dowlatabadi (2014) examined the use of Disney movies to teach English idioms to young Iranian EFL learners. The purpose of using Disney movies was to facilitate learning the English idioms and to provide an enjoyable and interesting learning environment. The study included 40 young EFL learners who were divided into experimental and control group. The experimental group was exposed to Disney movies to learn English idioms, while the control group was exposed to traditional ways of teaching English idioms. Both groups were pre and post-tested to examine the effects of Disney movies on their acquisition of English idioms. The researchers found that students in the experimental groups scored significantly higher than the control groups. The study revealed that exposure to movies allowed students to be much more successful at comprehending and retention of idioms. The researcher concluded by saying that using movies to teach English could bring imagination to the world of language learning, and that makes language classes more enjoyable and motivating.

Qiu (2017) studied the effects of utilizing English movies on listening skills of college language learners. The study found that English movies are an effective and beneficial way for improving listening skills of adult language learners.

The study also indicated that English movies increase the authenticity of the learning process and help in decreasing students' learning anxiety. The researcher suggested that English teachers have to consider using English movies to develop learners' speaking and listening skills. The researcher concluded by stating that English movies can provide significant educational reward that make English learning and teaching more authentic and appealing to all language learners.

To sum up, the review of the literature revealed some academic and social benefits of using English movies to teach and learn English. The researchers indicate that using English movies during language classes is an effective exposure English learning strategy.

III. METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research method was used to collect and analyze data for this research study. Qualitative research methods allow researchers to explore the participants' perceptions and opinions regarding the use of American movies to learn English. Moreover, the primary methods of data collection and analysis were interviews. Face-to-face and online semi-structured interviews were conducted with the participants to understand their opinions and thoughts regarding the use of movies to learn English. The semi-structured interviews allowed the researchers to deeply understand the participant's perceptions and provide more opportunity to ask questions based on the participants' responses. The semi-structured interview with the participating language learners lasted between 30 to 60 minutes. These interviews were recorded and then transcribed in a word file. The Interview transcriptions were sent to Dedoose to start the coding process.

A. Study Participants

To understand the benefits and challenges of using movies as an English learning tool, 25 adult language learners were chosen purposefully. The participants were studying at different intensive language programs located in different states in the United States. These intensive English programs serve the academic and cultural needs of international students who were learning English for academic purposes. The participants were studying at different language levels ranging from low-intermediate to advanced language learning. Table 1 provides demographic information about the participants and their English proficiency levels:

TABLE 1
DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION OF THE PARTICIPANTS

Participants language levels	Number
Low-intermediate	7
High-intermediate	9
Advanced	9

Language learners involved in the study differed in their educational background; some of whom were pursuing their bachelors' degree while other were starting their master's studies. The ages of the participants ranged from 18-33 and they came from different ethnic backgrounds, including Hispanic, Arab, and Asian. The study included a mixed gender group with ten females and fifteen males.

B. Data Analysis

For the data analysis, the researchers used Dedoose (https://www.dedoose.com) site to organize and analyze the collected data. Dedoose is an online-based software that helps in coding and analyzing qualitative data. Talanquer (2014) mentioned that Dedoose is a "web-based application that is easily accessible via the Internet and includes the major analytical tools present in modern CAQDAS packages." (p. 85). Talanquer added that the user-friendly interface facilitates collaboration among the research team. Ongoing conversations throughout the analysis process helped the researchers identify initial and final codes and categories that helped in generating themes. Figure 1 represents the analysis process including the first and second cycle coding as well as the generated themes.
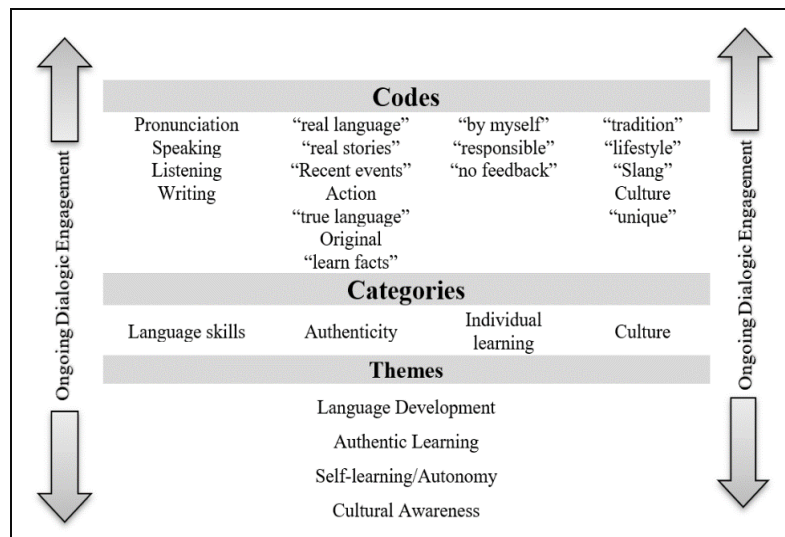
Figure 1. The analysis process including the first and second coding cycle with the generated themes.

IV. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Analysis of data revealed four themes related to adult English language learners' perceptions toward the use of English movies as tools to learn English. These themes reflect the participants' opinions and thoughts of how and why movies are beneficial in terms of language learning. The following sections will unpack each of these themes in detail.

A. Language Development

Previous research on the use of English movies indicated that movies can be used effectively to improve English learners' language. Similarly, the language learners participated in this study believed that their language was developed as a result of watching movies regularly. This was mentioned by almost all the participants and is, thus, presented as a theme. This theme suggests that watching movies to learn English played a critical role in developing and improving the participants' English. In particular, participants described four main language skills that can be developed as a result of watching movies. These four language skills are: speaking, listening, pronunciation, and vocabulary acquisitions.

First, speaking and listening were inextricably connected by participants as an example of their language development. Most of the participants believed that watching movies allowed them to improve their speaking and listening skills. As one learner mentioned, "Since I have been watching movies for a long time, my English language has really been improved in speaking and listening." Another participant mentioned, "I feel that because I have been watching movies for a long time, my speaking and listening abilities have really improved."

Second, pronunciation is another language skill that was mentioned consistently by the participants when describing their experiences of using movies as learning tools. For instance, one participant stated, "I watch movies, so I can learn some new vocabulary and their pronunciation. That helps me a lot improving my own pronunciation." Another participant felt strongly that movies are the most important source for his pronunciation practice:

Besides having fun, I usually watch movies to improve my own pronunciation. I found a really beneficial way to practice my speaking and more importantly my pronunciation skills. I listen to actors and actress pronouncing words and then I immediately say the words aloud twice or three times. My pronunciation has improved significantly because of this method.

Third, the participants were more apt to connect between watching movies and acquiring more vocabulary as evidenced by one participant who mentioned, "Watching movies regularly allows me to know many words that I didn't have the chance to learn in classes. In movies, these words were used by real people. I saw how these words should be used." The participants believed that watching movies helps them increase their vocabulary bank, which is an important aspect of language learning. Interestingly, one participant described movies as "vocabulary gold mine" which includes many new words from which he can learn. This participant indicated:

Movies are the sources of my English learning. Every time I watch a movie, I learn new words which I can use later. I believe that movies are a gold mine that has so many new words which we can use in everyday life. I also think that movies should be used in all English classes. They are real and full of new words.

Surprisingly, some participants believed that watching movies helps them improve not only their oral but also their written skills through reading subtitles as explained by one of the participants, "watching movies not only improves my speaking and listening in English, but also my writing has been developed as I was looking at the subtitles that were on movies." The following dialogue between one participant and the interviewer explain how watching movies help in improving the writing skills:

[Participant 1] *I believe that my writing has improved as a result of watching movies.*

[Researcher] *How?*

[Participant 1] *When I watch movies, I rely on subtitle to read and understand what is happening. Reading these subtitles allowed me to know the spelling of many words. Also, reading the subtitles allowed me to know the structure of the sentence.*

All in all, almost all the participant shared the beliefs that watching movies led to their language development. The participants reported that various language skills, such as speaking, listening, vocabulary acquisition, and writing, were improved thanks to watching English movies.

B. Authentic Learning

Almost all the adult language learners shared the belief that watching English movies to learn English is beneficial because these movies represent real-life language used by native speakers of the language. The participants tended to agree that the language used in movies is life, real, and current, and that makes movies authentic sources of language. According to the language learners, listening to real language represented in the movies makes language learning more enjoyable and interesting. As stated by one participant, "Movies represents real life situations and events. That's why I have learned many words, idioms, and phrases by watching movies." Another participant mentioned: "I watch movies in my spare time to develop my English. That is because the language used is natural and real. I can see how normal people talk and used the word and their expressions." Another student stated:

Movies provide learners of English with real situations and the language used in those situations. Learning English through movies not only provide opportunities to learn from native speakers but also exposes learners to language, which thus contribute to the acquisition of language.

Moreover, learning authenticity was expressed by the participants as an advantage of using movies to learn English. The participants believed that exposure to real language increased their motivation to listen carefully and develop their language. For instance, one participant mentioned:

I like watching English movies because they represent real language spoken by real people. It is interesting that you hear language is usually different from what you learn in classes. Real language makes me want to learn more and listen more to new words and expressions.

These findings resonate with Tafani's (2009) research which emphasizes the ideas of using movies to bring more authentic, reality and flexible way of teaching a foreign language. Tafani noted that "While using a film in the classroom to help our English we have paid attention to the accent, voice, body language, choosing of the words, training ear and the eye, lifestyle, plot idea, summary..." (p.88).

Ultimately, the participating adult language learners seemed to agree that authenticity of language learning is one of the most significant advantages to be gained from using movies as English learning tools.

C. Self-learning/Autonomy

Another emerging theme that explains why adult language learners believe that watching movies helps in learning English is the idea of self-learning. In other words, watching movies helps a student to individualize the language learning and making the learning process more appealing and entertaining. The participants mentioned that by watching movies, they rely on themselves in understanding and making connections, and that is an important aspect of language learning. As one participant stated, "I watch movies every other day, so I can learn English outside my English classes. I can depend on myself to develop my English."

Moreover, some participants saw a connection between watching movies and their abilities to recall or understand new words. As one participant stated:

Sometimes, when my teacher gives us a new vocabulary to study. I found myself knowing the word because of a movie that I watched, especially, if the word is related to Science because I like to watch Si-Fi movies a lot.

Interestingly, one participant described learning English through movies as "watching without psychological pressure". These movies, according to the participant, allowed for a more convenient and motivating way of learning. This was clear through some of the participant responses. For instance, one learner mentioned:

One thing that I like about watching movies is that I can depend on myself while learning new words or improving my language skills. I do not need someone to explain to me or teach me these skills. I think that movies are great sources of English learning. I am responsible for my own learning.

Ultimately, the participants thought that movies increased their autonomy and allowed learning English to be a more self-oriented process.

D. Cultural Awareness

One of the most surprising findings that emerged from the data was cultural awareness. The participants shared the beliefs that watching movies increased their cultural awareness and gave them insights on American culture. The participants agreed that culture is an important aspect of English Learning. According to the participating language learners, movies serve as a gateway that helps them understand and appreciate the American culture. As one participant stated:

when I came to the United States, I had some knowledge about America and the lifestyle here because of the movies. Watching movies was a good way for me to know and understand how people talk, how people interact with each other,

how people live, and what people usually eat. This, in my opinion, was one of the reasons why I did not have any problem adapting to the American culture.

Other participants mentioned that by watching Westerns, they were able to get an idea of the Western culture of America, which is an important part of American history. For example, one student indicated, "I love watching movies about the Cowboys. They gave me some historical lessons about America." Noticeably, one of the participants gave an example of how being a fan of a Hollywood actress helped her increase her cultural knowledge of the role of women as productive citizens in the United States. The participants stated:

I am a fan of Julia Roberts, my favorite movie of her was the one when she played the character as a lawyer. I learned a lot of law terms as well as the role of law here in the US. Also, I had the chance to have clear ideas about the role of women in the American society. This movie was an eye-opening for me in terms of Western culture.

All in all, there was an agreement among the participants that learning about American culture is what motivated them to watch movies. These movies provide insight into different aspects of culture such as food, traditions, and lifestyle. As one student indicated, "I can say that I learned about American food, clothes, and lifestyle through watching movies."

V. DISCUSSION

According to the interview results, the participants showed positive opinions toward watching movies to learn English. The results revealed that there seemed to be an agreement on the effectiveness among the participating language learners regarding watching movies. Significantly, several benefits related to language learning were identified by the participants.

First, data from this study suggest that movies can be used effectively to develop different language skills such as speaking, listening, vocabulary acquisition, and writing. The participating language learners were extremely positive regarding connections between watching movies and their language development. In fact, speaking and listening were mentioned by almost all the participants who believed that movies are beneficial sources of developing oral skills. This resonates with previous research concerning the importance of using native-like sources to develop oral skills. Horwitz (2008), for instance, argues that listening to English native speakers is one way to develop oral fluency.

Another skill that was developed as a result of watching movies is pronunciation, and that is an important aspect of the language. In the present study, participants tended to believe that movies helped the learner improve their pronunciation skills. Gilakjani (2012) points out that pronunciation is one of the most significant aspects of language to be taught and learned. Learners with good English pronunciation are likely to be understood even if they make errors in other areas, whereas learners with bad pronunciation will not be understood, even if their grammar is perfect. Hence, the participants reported that movies are beneficial in terms of developing their language proficiency.

Furthermore, the participating language learners seemed to share the idea that movies offer a more realistic representation of the world than traditional language-learning materials, such as textbooks. Hence, watching movies increases the authenticity of the learning process. The participants mentioned that learning through authentic situations increases their motivation and made watching movies more effective and beneficial with regard to learning English. The research concerning authentic learning revealed several advantages of using authentic sources to learn language. For instance, Huang, Tindall and Nisbet (2011) assert that the use of authentic learning materials such as media and movies has become essential as these materials provide real-life exposure to language for learners. The researchers add that these materials enhance the learning environment and make EFL classes engaging and appealing to all students. Likewise, Gilmore (2007) points out that authentic learning helps in decreasing the gap between real language used in real world and classroom language, and that will ensure more effective language learning.

Additionally, besides language development, the study revealed that watching movies increases the cultural awareness of the learners. Culture and language are interrelated skills. Brown (2007) points out that language and culture are parallel and should not be separated when learning English. Brown continues to say: "Language is a part of a culture, and culture is a part of the language; the two are intricately interwoven so that one cannot separate the two without losing the significance of either language or culture." (pp. 189-190). In terms of using movies or films in English leaning, King (200) indicated that the use of films as tools to teach or learn English allow increase students motivation and cultural awareness. King adds that "as far as student motivation and interest are concerned, entertaining films are sometimes enjoyable and relevant to learners' appreciation of popular culture." (p. 515).

Surprisingly, the participants seemed to be aware of the fact that movies cannot be always reliable and effective tools to learn English. That is because these movies are not designed for learning purposes. The intended audiences of these movies are not language learners. This is the main challenge reported by the participants. This lack of pedagogical intentions also led to some difficulties in understanding some of the vocabulary used in the movies.

The participants suggest that in English classes, there should be more time and flexibility to allow movies to be part of the learning and teaching process. When used during language classes, movies increase the authenticity of the classes and make the learning process more enjoyable and motivating.

VI. CONCLUSION

This research explored the perceptions of adult language learners toward the use of movies to learn English. Qualitative research methods were used to explore these perceptions. The interviews allowed the researchers to understand these beliefs and opinions from a deeper perspective. The study found that language learners perceive movies to be an effective and beneficial way of learning English. Furthermore, the interviews revealed that movies can be used to develop not only language skills but also learners' autonomy and cultural awareness. Movies are fun, authentic, and enjoyable, and that makes the learning process more appealing to the language learners.

Significantly, the use of English movies to learn and teach English is always welcomed as they might have a positive effect on students' language learning. Movies are authentic and engaging, and these are likewise some of the important characteristics of effective language learning. Also, because language learners showed positive attitude towards movies, language teachers are encouraged to provide more time to integrate media and movies into their teaching practices. English movies should be used as teaching and learning tools rather than for entertainment. Used appropriately, English movies will help language learners develop their language in enjoyable and appealing ways (King 2002).

The study is important because it shed light on some creative and innovative teaching strategies that can be used to teach and learn English. With respect to future research, the results of this study provided only insight into adult English language learners' opinions toward using movies to develop their language skills. The research did not answer questions that are related to types of movies that can be used effectively for educational purposes. Therefore, additional research is needed--research that explores types of movies that adults language learners can rely on to develop their language. Moreover, additional research is also needed to understand how movies can be implemented as educational tools in FL classrooms.

Ultimately, there were some limitations associated with the study. The most prominent limitation lies on the small sample size: 20 adult language learners who were studying English in two intensive English programs in the US. Hence, the findings of the study may not be generalizable. Also, the researchers had a limited time frame to conduct the study due to the participants' limited schedules. Regarding future research, the present study did not examine the relationship learners' positive perceptions toward using movies and actual learning outcomes. Much research remains to be done that investigates the correlation between the learners' perceptions and positive learning outcomes.

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