

Using movies and tv shows to improve English skills

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Abstract. The integration of audiovisual media — specifically movies and television series — into English language learning has gained considerable scholarly attention over the past two decades. This article examines the theoretical foundations and practical implications of using screen-based media as a supplementary tool for developing listening comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, pronunciation accuracy, and cultural competence among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. Drawing on research from applied linguistics, second language acquisition theory, and educational psychology, the article argues that structured engagement with authentic media content can substantially accelerate language development when combined with deliberate learning strategies. Recommendations for classroom integration and independent study are also discussed.

Keywords : Netflix, Amazon Prime, YouTube, listening comprehension, speaking skills, pronunciation, shadowing technique, phonetic imitation, prosodic accuracy, accent exposure, vocabulary acquisition, contextual learning, pragmatic competence, communicative language teaching, authentic English input, cultural awareness.

Introduction. Language learning has never been a purely academic endeavor confined to textbooks and grammar exercises. Human beings acquire language most naturally through immersive, contextual exposure — hearing words used in meaningful situations, observing non-verbal cues, and engaging with the emotional and cultural dimensions of communication. In this sense, movies and television programs represent one of the most accessible and richly layered resources available to modern language learners. The widespread availability of streaming platforms such as Netflix, Amazon Prime, and YouTube has dramatically lowered the

barriers to accessing authentic English-language content. Learners in countries where English is not the native language can now consume hours of real, unscripted or professionally scripted speech daily. This shift has prompted educators and researchers to investigate more rigorously how such exposure can be deliberately harnessed to accelerate acquisition, rather than treating screen time as mere entertainment. The purpose of this article is threefold: first, to examine the theoretical basis for the effectiveness of media-based language learning; second, to identify the specific linguistic skills that can be developed through structured engagement with English-language films and series; and third, to offer evidence-based recommendations for both individual learners and classroom instructors seeking to incorporate screen media into their pedagogical practice. Studies show that when films and TV programs are integrated into English learning, students' listening comprehension and willingness to speak improve noticeably. By listening to spoken dialogues on screen and then repeating them, learners become more aware of how words are pronounced, how ideas are connected, and how idioms are used naturally. In addition, visual elements such as facial expressions, gestures, and the situation help viewers guess the meaning of unknown words, making it possible to understand them without immediately turning to a dictionary.

Pronunciation and Speaking Skills. Beyond receptive skills, screen media also supports the development of pronunciation and speaking through a technique known as 'shadowing,' whereby learners repeat the speech of characters in real time, attempting to mirror their intonation, rhythm, and pronunciation. Research by Murphey (2001) found that shadowing exercises derived from film dialogue significantly improved learners' prosodic accuracy and reduced their perceived foreign accent over a period of six months. The technique exploits the brain's mirror neuron system and its natural tendency toward phonetic imitation. Additionally, exposure to a variety of accents — American, British, Australian, and regional dialects — through different films and series builds phonological flexibility, which is increasingly important in a globalized world where English is used as a lingua franca among non-native speakers of diverse linguistic backgrounds.

Language proficiency extends beyond syntactic correctness to encompass pragmatic competence — knowing how to use language appropriately in social contexts. Films are particularly well-suited to developing this dimension of communicative ability, as they portray the social rituals, humor, indirect speech acts, and cultural references that characterize authentic English communication. Learners are exposed to how native speakers open conversations, express disagreement politely, use sarcasm, tell jokes, and navigate power dynamics — nuances that formal instruction rarely addresses in adequate depth.

Practical Recommendations. For media-based learning to realize its full potential, it should be approached with deliberate strategies rather than passive consumption. Researchers and educators have proposed several evidence-based practices. First, learners should begin with English subtitles rather than native-language subtitles, gradually transitioning to subtitle-free

viewing as comprehension improves. Second, focused re-watching of short clips — pausing to analyze unfamiliar words or phrases — is more productive than continuous passive viewing. Third, keeping a vocabulary journal of new expressions encountered during viewing, along with their contextual examples, reinforces retention through active processing. For classroom instructors, short film clips can serve as springboards for discussion, role-play, and debate activities that develop productive language skills. Pre-teaching key vocabulary before viewing and conducting post-viewing comprehension and analysis tasks ensures that viewing is embedded within a broader pedagogical sequence rather than functioning as an isolated activity. Teachers should also be mindful of genre diversity: documentary films expose learners to formal register and academic vocabulary, while comedy series build familiarity with informal speech and humor.

Conclusion. The evidence reviewed in this article strongly supports the conclusion that movies and television programs, when engaged with deliberately and strategically, constitute a highly valuable resource for English language development. Grounded in established theories of second language acquisition and supported by empirical studies across diverse learning contexts, media-based learning enhances listening comprehension, broadens vocabulary range, refines pronunciation, and builds cultural and pragmatic awareness in ways that complement formal instruction.

As digital media continues to proliferate and streaming platforms make vast libraries of authentic English content available worldwide, language educators and learners alike have an unprecedented opportunity to leverage this resource. The key lies not in the quantity of viewing, but in the quality of engagement. A learner who watches thirty minutes of English film with focused attention, active vocabulary logging, and reflective practice will derive considerably more linguistic benefit than one who passively consumes hours of content without strategic intent. The future of language learning is, in no small part, visible on the screen.

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