

## The Role of Subtitled Movies in Enhancing English Language Skills: Postgraduate Students' Perceptions and Motivation

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### Abstract

Language acquisition has always been a challenging process for language learners, particularly adult learners, and thus educators are always looking for interesting and innovative ways to help them learn language effectively. Movies with subtitles have become popular as a resource for language acquisition because they are entertaining, provide visual-auditory input, and provide authentic context for the learners. The combination of audio-visual elements such as pictures, videos, sounds, and subtitles in movies contributes many inputs, from learning about history and culture to learning and acquiring the English language. Additionally, motivation plays a crucial role in acquiring a second language. Therefore, this study explores the effect of subtitled movies on English language acquisition among postgraduate students and their learning motivation. The research employed a qualitative method where semi-structured interviews were conducted by interviewing 12 participants, postgraduate students from a local university in Malaysia. The findings revealed that subtitled movies are effective in language learning to improve students' English language skills, particularly in vocabulary expansion and reading skills. Besides, the use of subtitled movies also promotes a positive learning experience where students feel motivated to learn when using subtitled movies. This study demonstrates the potential of subtitled movies as valuable learning material in language learning, suggesting their integration into the education curriculum. This study may contribute to the growing research on the use of subtitled movies in language learning, providing insightful understanding for educators and policymakers in the field of language education.

**Keywords:** *Postgraduate students, subtitled movies, language learning, learning motivation, perceptions*

### Introduction

This paper explores the perceptions of using subtitled movies to improve English language acquisition and learning motivation among postgraduate students in one of the local universities in Malaysia. It is proposed that using subtitled movies helps improve English language learning and increase learning motivation.

Roslim et al. (2021) report that many scholars have addressed the increasing importance of using movies to enhance second language teaching and learning. This is because movies allow learners to engage, learn, acquire, experience, and improve their language skills. Additionally, movies can assist students in integrating the development of their speaking, listening, writing, and reading skills, enhancing their communicative competence (Bellalem et al., 2018). Movies enable teachers to introduce variety and reality to the classroom, and the discussions based on the movie content enable students to contribute their own experiences and background knowledge (Kusumawati, 2018). Furthermore, in this era of modern technology, almost everyone has access to watch their favorite movies unlimitedly, be it on television at home, at the

cinema, on the internet, or on the phone. A film, also known as a movie or a motion picture, is a collection of still images on film that are rapidly projected onto a screen using light (Andrew et al., 2023). Besides, the definition of a movie, is a story recorded as a set of moving pictures with sound to be shown at the cinema or on television (Anggraeni et al., 2018). The authors further explain that a movie can be concluded as one of the literary forms that include story, play, history, and culture that is recorded as a video and shown on television, cinema, or other broadcast media where entertainment is the main purpose. Thus, using movies offers a unique language-learning experience by combining audiovisual elements such as pictures, videos, and sounds compared to the traditional language-learning method.

Movies with subtitles refer to those movies that have captions or subtitles in a language that is different from the one used for the original audio track. According to Nurfauziah (2023), the definition of subtitles is the display of translated language in a movie in the form of titles, usually at the bottom of an image or shot on the screen. These subtitles serve as a written translation of the dialogue spoken and enable an accented language to become intelligible to any viewers (Kusumawati, 2018), even if they are not proficient in the language used in the movie. Therefore, it is easier for learners to learn and acquire a language when it is understood in the context of watching subtitled movies that reflect real-life situations. Movies with subtitles are proven to have a strong impact on learning a second language in general (Bellaleme et al., 2018). In fact, Kusumawati (2018) states that the use of subtitled movies is more effective in enhancing overall comprehension compared to non-subtitled movies. Moreover, movies with subtitles provide learners with a visual picture of spoken language, which aids in a deeper understanding of the language and improves language acquisition. However, several studies have also highlighted the disadvantages of using subtitled movies. To illustrate, a study by Shahril and Abdullah (2022) found that low-proficiency learners might face a problem where they cannot understand a word the first time, they hear it, and they require more time to do so. This finding is aligned with the result of the study by Napikul et al. (2018), where a student did not comprehend the subtitle even by observing the gestures and body language from the movie.

In addition, the effectiveness of movies with subtitles may differ based on individual learners' characteristics, such as language proficiency and learning motivation. Motivation is one of the most important keys in acquiring a second language (Nurhidayah, 2020; Seven, 2020). This is because the success of language learning is greatly dependent on learning motivation. It influences the amount of work that learners are willing to put in and the methods that they use to learn. Nonetheless, the relationship between the use of subtitled movies and learning motivation remains underexplored. The cultural and social context of Malaysia exacerbates this problem even more; many people lack the drive to improve their English because it is not ingrained in their everyday lives, even though they have a foundation in the language (Mohamed et al., 2023).

Nevertheless, although there are some flaws, without a doubt past research has demonstrated the benefits of using subtitled movies, where learners are more likely to learn and acquire the English language,

especially for postgraduate students who want to improve their English language acquisition. Postgraduate students can benefit most from using subtitled movies as a learning material to improve English language acquisition because of their various benefits, which include vocabulary development, language skills improvement, cultural awareness, and more (Alhai, 2023; Bostanci, 2022; Morse, 2022). Movies with subtitles offer contextual learning, motivation, and self-paced learning where students can choose movies that align with their interests and language proficiency levels. Subtitled movies provide a dynamic and interesting method of learning languages that is ideally suitable to postgraduate students' advanced academic and professional needs, considering that movies arouse viewers' curiosity (Karray & Debernitz, 2017). As a result, students can become more motivated and can even overcome some of their nervousness about not knowing the language by watching movies to learn the language (Nurfauziah et al., 2023). With the presence of subtitles, it helps students understand the conversation and the story of the movie. Therefore, this study aims to explore postgraduate students' perceptions of the use of subtitled movies in improving English language acquisition.

Additionally, English language acquisition has been a major challenge for many students throughout the years. Not every learner is keen on the traditional language learning methods, especially for adult learners, as they can be boring and lack interesting input in a lesson. The traditional methods that emphasize memorizing and repetition do not address the learning styles and strategies of all students (Bostanci, 2022). Hence, educators should incorporate learning strategies for the learners to diversify their language learning experience. We must acknowledge that students or learners now do not tolerate writing on paper as much, making teaching or learning a language a challenging task (Anas & Zakaria, 2019). Thus, it hinders them from learning and acquiring the language to the fullest. Certainly, this has attracted much interest among researchers, and many researchers have studied studies on the topic of movies and language learning until now (Alluri, 2018; Bjornsson & Andersson, 2019; Uzzaman & Roy, 2019; Roslim et al., 2021). However, the use of subtitled movies in improving English language acquisition remains an area of concern. As stated by Shahril and Abdullah (2022), this topic is still understudied in Malaysia, especially among young adult learners, who are postgraduate students. Anas and Zakaria (2019) reported that there are hundreds of studies conducted outside of Malaysia (Bellalem et al., 2018; Sadiku, 2018; Kusumawati, 2019; Ambele & Abam, 2020; Bostanci, 2022) that explored more on the effectiveness of having subtitles in audio-visual materials, their study has determined that it is best to have this extended, including to the Malaysian context. Ünal and Ekmekçi (2022) suggested that more research should employ qualitative methods to get a deeper understanding of learners' perceptions of the use of subtitles in language learning. In addition, Yaacob et al. (2021) even suggested that an interesting research topic that can be conducted is exploring whether English or Malay subtitles are more effective as learning media. Respectively, more reliable and credible research regarding the topic of subtitles and English language learning is needed in Malaysia. Hence, the two research

objectives of this study are to analyze postgraduate students' perceptions of using subtitled movies to improve their English language acquisition and to examine their learning motivation in improving English language.

## **Literature Review**

For adult learners, Second Language Acquisition (SLA) represents a rewarding yet complex process that requires an effective and comprehensive approach. Their motivations, cognitive abilities, prior language knowledge, and language learning strategies significantly impact the course of their language acquisition. Hiver et al. (2021) identify several contributing factors to successful SLA, including age, motivation, intelligence, attitude, aptitude, personality, and cognitive style. Understanding these complexities is essential for educators, language programs, and institutions to create efficient and effective language learning experiences. While age-related challenges in language learning continue to be discussed, recent research by Noyan and Asik (2024) suggests that adult learners can excel through appropriate instructional approaches and targeted strategies. By implementing specific learning strategies in SLA, such as using subtitled movies, educators can enhance adult learners' potential and provide them with the necessary language learning materials to succeed. Consequently, through the application of these learning strategies, adult learners can acquire their second language to the fullest extent.

Moreover, learning a second language opens numerous doors by improving communication, providing exposure to different cultures, promoting intercultural understanding, and adding personal value. To facilitate second language acquisition, researchers have developed various SLA strategies. Applying these learning strategies is crucial for language learners to maximize their learning opportunities. Teng (2023) notes that second language learners benefit from individualized language learning strategies that address and manage their internal states. According to Teng (2022), strategies involve setting goals, deciding on actions to achieve those goals, and mobilizing resources to execute those actions. Eva et al. (2023) further define language learning strategies as specific actions and processes that language learners deploy to learn and use a language more effectively. Among these effective approaches is the contextual learning strategy. Recent studies by Jasper-Abowei et al. (2023) describe contextual learning (CL) as a system that links brain activity to create meaningful patterns by relating academic material to real-life contexts. In language learning specifically, CL involves understanding and acquiring language within authentic situations and contexts. This approach is vital because it enhances long-term memory storage, enabling learners to apply their acquired language skills in daily life. Additionally, CL allows educators to connect academic content with real-world situations that students regularly encounter, thereby inspiring language learners to use their language skills in authentic contexts. A prime example of contextual learning is the use of subtitled movies.

Over the years, subtitled movies have emerged as one of the most effective tools for language learners to enhance their English language acquisition, particularly for adult learners. Research by Ng (2024) provides compelling evidence, demonstrating significant improvement in the listening comprehension scores of adult English learners after they watched video content with subtitles. When language learners watch subtitled movies, they are exposed to natural language use across various social and cultural contexts. Khadawardi (2022) emphasize that movies can significantly enhance understanding of vocabulary usage in authentic contexts while providing realistic settings for vocabulary acquisition. This multisensory exposure offers learners valuable contextual cues alongside visual and auditory input, thereby facilitating both language acquisition and comprehension.

As previously highlighted, learning motivation plays a crucial role in second language acquisition (L2), and the theoretical frameworks used to understand language learning motivation have evolved substantially over time. Recent research by Al-Hoorie and MacIntyre (2020) has expanded our understanding of motivation in language acquisition by acknowledging its complex and dynamic nature. The concept of motivation in this context has been influenced by various theories and models, notably the socio-educational model developed by Gardner in 1985 (Lamb et al., 2023). These researchers explain that Gardner's model incorporates factors that impact language acquisition and reflect attitudes toward both the L2 cultural group and the learning environment. Csizér (2020) argues that Gardner's concept of goal orientation remains the most significant and controversial aspect of the model. These orientations function as antecedents or drivers of motivation, comprising both integrative and instrumental orientations. An integrative orientation represents a positive attitude toward the target language group and a desire to join or assimilate into that community, whereas an instrumental orientation refers to practical or external motivations for learning the language. Despite extensive research on instrumental and integrative motivation, Mendoza and Phung (2019) identify limitations to this approach, noting that it may not fully account for the diverse range of student motivations. They point out that distinguishing between integrative and instrumental motivation can be challenging because reasons for learning a second language often depend on complex social and psychological factors. Considering all these aspects, learning motivation remains a key factor in SLA, affecting numerous outcomes including goal achievement and skill improvement. Furthermore, teachers and educators play an essential role in enhancing learner motivation for acquiring or improving L2, such as through the strategic incorporation of subtitled movies into language instruction.

The theoretical framework underpinning this study is based on one of Krashen's SLA theories, the Affective Filter Hypothesis. This theory posits that a learner's emotional or affective state can significantly impact the success of language acquisition. The hypothesis explains that the affective filter functions as a psychological barrier that prevents comprehensible language input from reaching the mental Language Acquisition Device (LAD), thereby impeding language acquisition. Recent reexaminations of this theory by

Sajida and Vijaya (2023) continue to validate the notion that three primary factors influence this mental filter: motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety. This filter can either facilitate or impede the process of acquiring a second language. Language learners who possess high motivation and self-confidence coupled with low anxiety can process more language input due to their low affective filter, whereas those with a high affective filter experience reduced language input processing. This hypothesis underscores the critical role of motivation, one of the key variables, in second language acquisition, particularly for postgraduate students who are categorized as adult learners.

In language learning, motivation serves as a crucial component in acquiring a second language. Papi et al. (2019) have developed comprehensive frameworks that build upon Gardner's motivation theory, identifying three key elements: 1) willingness (the desire to reach a goal), 2) eagerness (the resolution to learn), and 3) enjoyment of learning. Their research distinguishes between two primary goal motivations: instrumental and integrative. Individuals who study a language due to external stimulation demonstrate instrumental motivation, while those who learn a second language for personal development exhibit integrative motivation. Contemporary research by Shan (2024) demonstrates that integrative motivation more effectively provides language learners with sustained, long-term motivation and correlates significantly with successful second language acquisition. In the context of this research, postgraduate students' motivation primarily stems from the enjoyment of acquiring language through watching subtitled movies. These subtitled films can foster integrative motivation by providing valuable insights into the social and cultural contexts of L2 speakers. Through this medium, learners become motivated to understand not only linguistic elements but also the cultural nuances portrayed in the films.

Furthermore, recent studies by Rock (2021) emphasize the significant role of attitudes in language acquisition. Building upon Gardner's socio-educational model, current research indicates that students are more likely to persist in their language studies and achieve higher proficiency levels when they maintain positive attitudes toward the target language community and demonstrate a strong desire to integrate with that community. To gain deeper insights into the relationship between motivation and attitudes, it is essential to examine students' perceptions regarding the use of subtitled movies in enhancing language acquisition. Hashim and Aziz (2022) expands the concept of perception or self-perception, defining it as the process through which individuals learn about themselves via their own behavior and observation. This research emphasizes that self-perception significantly impacts how people develop self-knowledge, even when inconsistencies exist between prior beliefs and observed behavior. Understanding how individuals develop self-knowledge is crucial because this self-awareness forms the foundation upon which people build their attitudes, values, and preferences. Consequently, a significant connection exists between motivation and perceptions in this research study. As Seven (2020) observe, a student's motivation plays a pivotal role in shaping their attitudes, behaviors, and overall experience in the language learning process, substantially

influencing how they perceive and engage with language learning materials such as subtitled movies. Wang et al. (2024) explain this phenomenon by noting that motivation and emotion fundamentally determine how we perceive our world, organize our memories, and make important decisions.

## Methodology

### Research Design and Participants

This research employed a qualitative method, which includes conducting semi-structured interviews to find out the students' perceptions towards using subtitled movies in English language acquisition. The participants in this study consisted of 12 postgraduate students from an English language course at a local university in Malaysia, which is Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM). The sampling technique used in this study is purposive sampling. Considering the aim of this study is to identify postgraduate students' perceptions towards using subtitled movies to improve their English language acquisition, the participants chosen met these three criteria to be able to get the data for this research. The three criteria were:

- 1) A postgraduate student
- 2) Majoring in the English language course
- 3) Watch movies with subtitles

### Instrumentation and Materials

The instrument that was utilized to collect the data from the respondents is interview questions with 14 open-ended questions that cannot just be answered with a simple 'yes' or 'no'. The interview demands that the respondents answer in-depth and clarify their answers. The interview questions from Alolaywi (2023), Shahril and Abdullah (2022), and Wong (2011) all developed instruments that served as the basis for the interview questions of this study. However, for this study, there were some changes made to a few questions to fit the specific context and research objectives of the study. Table 1 displays the questions adapted for the interview.

Table 1: Interview Questions

Item	Question
1	Do you watch movies and how often do you watch them?
2	What language(s) do you usually watch the content in?
3	When watching English movies or any movies, do you use subtitles as well and in what language?
4	Do you think that watching movies with subtitles is effective for language acquisition and how?
5	What motivates you to improve your English language skills?
6	Do you think that motivation plays a crucial role in learning a second language? Why?

7	How do you feel about using subtitled movies as learning materials for language learning? Do you feel motivated when you watch subtitled movies?
8	Have you noticed any improvements in your language skills as a result of watching subtitled movies and in what way subtitled movies improve your language acquisition?
9	In your opinion, what are the advantages of using subtitled movies in improving English language acquisition?
10	What are the disadvantages of using subtitled movies in improving English language acquisition?
11	Do you have a preferred movie genre or type that you find most effective for language acquisition through subtitles?
12	What elements-other than language- have you learned from movies (e.g., culture)? And do you feel more connected to the language and culture through subtitled movies?
13	Do you find subtitled movies to be a comfortable and supportive learning materials?
14	Overall, would you suggest other students to watch movies with subtitles to improve their English language acquisition? Why?

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

Once the participants were identified, the interviews were conducted online via the Microsoft Teams platform. The audio and the online interview with each respondent were recorded for documentation and ease of transcription. The audio of the interview was then transcribed manually with the help of Microsoft Team's transcription and put into separate files to be uploaded to the software NVIVO. Then, the data analysis was done using thematic analysis based on Braun and Clarke's (2006) model of thematic analysis method. Their thematic analysis method is a process that consists of six steps: 1) become familiar with the data; 2) generate codes; 3) generate themes; 4) review the themes; 5) define and name the themes; and 6) locate exemplars. Therefore, once the data was collected, it was analyzed using the thematic analysis method with the help of NVIVO software. The interview transcription files were uploaded to NVIVO for coding and categorization purposes to identify and generate the themes for this research. Hence, phrases, words, and paragraphs in the transcripts pertaining to the research objectives were coded and categorized. The analyzed data was then exported to an Excel sheet document in the form of a codebook to review the themes. After that, the data analysis was revised and compared to determine and name the precise themes that would answer the research questions of this study.

### **Reliability and Validity**

To ensure the reliability and validity of the research and its results, this study adapted the interview questions from Alolaywi (2023), Shahril and Abdullah (2022) and Wong (2011). Then, member checking is conducted. Once done with the transcription, the transcriptions of the interview were shared with the respondents for them



to verify whether what they had said during the interview was accurately captured. Besides, to maintain transparency and ensure validity, a detailed audit trail is kept for all the research-related activities, such as the audio recordings, transcriptions, and coding book. Lastly, the interview questions that were used to collect the data for this study were checked by two qualified research supervisors, who are lecturers at UiTM, to validate the reliability and validity of the research.

## Findings

A total of 12 respondents, consisting of postgraduate students, were interviewed in this research to find out their perceptions towards using subtitled movies to improve the English language and their learning motivation. From the data analyzed using NVIVO software, two main themes were found: 1) the effectiveness of subtitled movies; and 2) learning motivation. The themes found will then be discussed in depth to answer the research questions, with support from past research that has been done.

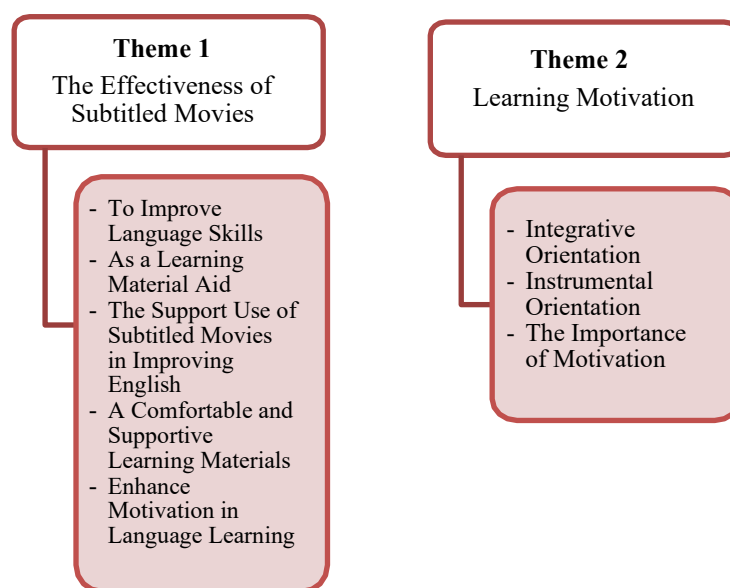


Figure 1: The Themes and Sub-themes Found in the Data Analysis

Based on Figure 1, there are several sub-themes of the effectiveness of subtitled movies and the learning motivation as suggested by the participants. The sub-themes of the effectiveness extracted were; To improve language skills, as a learning material aid, the support use of subtitled movies, a comfortable and supportive learning material, and enhance motivation in language learning. As for learning motivation, the sub-themes were; integrative orientation, instrumental orientation, and the importance of motivation.

## **Discussion**

### **Research Question 1: What are the perceptions of postgraduate students towards the use of subtitled movies in improving their English language?**

The findings reveal that participants unanimously perceive subtitled movies as effective learning materials for language acquisition. This perception aligns with the contextual learning (CL) framework described by Jasper-Abowei et al. (2023), which emphasizes the importance of linking academic material to real-life contexts. Participants identified three primary benefits of subtitled movies: improvement of language skills, provision of comfortable and supportive learning environments, and enhancement of motivation in language learning. This multidimensional perception validates Ng (2024) assertions that the unique blend of auditory and visual language input offered by subtitled movies creates an optimal learning environment for language acquisition.

#### ***Improving Language Skills***

The most significant language skill improvement reported by participants was vocabulary development. As Participant 8 articulated, *"watching movies with subtitles is effective for language acquisition in terms of the exposure to the various vocabulary expressed by the content. So, in a way, it introduces me to the words that I didn't even know."* This finding strongly corresponds with Khadawardi (2022) research, which demonstrates that movies significantly enhance understanding of vocabulary in authentic contexts. The repeated exposure to words in meaningful contexts allows learners to internalize vocabulary more effectively than through decontextualized learning.

The combination of audio and visual stimuli in subtitled movies provides multisensory input that reinforces language acquisition, as described in Sajida and Vijaya 's (2022) reexamination of Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis. Participant 4 noted, *"When you watch a movie, you can hear the pronunciation of the words. So, by looking at the subtitles you can see how the words are spelled."* This integration of pronunciation, spelling, and contextual usage creates a comprehensive learning experience that addresses multiple aspects of language proficiency simultaneously. The process exemplifies how subtitled movies facilitate what Hiver et al. (2021) identify as the interconnected nature of language acquisition factors, including cognitive abilities and learning strategies.

#### ***Comfortable and Supportive Learning Material***

Half of the participants characterized subtitled movies as comfortable and supportive learning materials. This perception aligns with the principle of lowering the affective filter, as conceptualized by Sajida and Vijaya (2023). By creating a relaxed learning environment, subtitled movies reduce anxiety—one of the three factors that can raise the affective filter and impede language acquisition. Participant 7 highlighted this advantage:

*"Especially those who have who do not have the privilege to learn the language... you won't feel overwhelmed watching the movie because I think subtitles provide little support, a bit of support for the viewers."*

The *"comfortable"* nature of learning through subtitled movies directly correlates with the enjoyment factor identified by Papi et al. (2019) as one of the three key elements of motivation. As Participant 11 observed, *"Instead of learning because we don't realize the process happening... it feels natural. It doesn't feel like I'm being forced to watch the movies to learn."* This implicit learning process exemplifies what Wang et al. (2024) describe as the intricate relationship between emotional states and language acquisition, where positive emotional experiences facilitate more effective learning outcomes.

Moreover, the finding that subtitled movies support learners with hearing difficulties reinforces Seven (2020) emphasizes on the need for adaptive approaches to motivation in diverse learning contexts. By accommodating various learning needs, subtitled movies promote inclusive language acquisition opportunities, which can positively influence learners' self-perception—a critical factor in language learning motivation, as articulated by Hashim and Aziz (2022).

### ***Limitations of Subtitled Movies as Learning Materials***

Despite the positive perceptions, participants expressed important caveats regarding the role of subtitled movies in language learning. Several participants, including Participants 1, 5, and 12, emphasized that subtitled movies should function as supplementary rather than primary learning materials. This perspective reflects a nuanced understanding of language acquisition that aligns with Noyan and Asik's (2024) finding that adult learners benefit most from a combination of instructional approaches rather than a single method. The concern that learners might focus on content enjoyment rather than language acquisition highlights the importance of intentionality in the learning process, as emphasized by Eva et al. (2023) in their definition of language learning strategies. Without deliberate attention to language elements, the potential benefits of subtitled movies may not be fully realized. This limitation underscores Teng's (2022) assertion that effective language learning strategies require goal-setting and resource mobilization—processes that may need explicit guidance when using entertainment media for educational purposes.

The participants' emphasis on subtitle quality further demonstrates their sophisticated understanding of effective learning materials. As Participant 7 stated, *"it's also our responsibility to actually check the accuracy of this subtitle because sometimes it's not translated very accurately."* This concern echoes Teng's (2023) finding that second language learners benefit from individualized strategies that help them manage their learning environment—including the critical evaluation of learning resources.

***Enhancement of Motivation in Language Learning***

Eight participants reported that subtitled movies enhance motivation in language learning, a finding that directly connects to Al-Hoorie and MacIntyre's (2020) expanded understanding of motivation in language acquisition. The enjoyment factor of watching movies creates what Csizér (2020) would classify as integrative motivation—learning driven by personal interest rather than external requirements. As one participant noted, subtitled movies are inherently enjoyable, and *"people are usually motivated to do fun things."* This observation perfectly illustrates Busse's (2020) emphasis on positive attitudes as crucial elements in sustained language learning efforts.

Participant 2's comment about feeling *"relief...because I won't miss out on the movies"* demonstrates how subtitled movies can reduce anxiety—one of the three factors in Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis as reexamined by Sajida and Vijaya (2023). By lowering anxiety, subtitled movies create optimal conditions for language acquisition according to this theoretical framework. The combination of reduced anxiety and increased enjoyment exemplifies the ideal emotional state for language learning described by Wang et al. (2024), where positive emotions enhance memory organization and decision-making in the learning process.

**Research Question 2: What factors influence the learning motivation of postgraduate students in improving their English language?**

The findings reveal that postgraduate students' motivation for improving their English language proficiency stems from both integrative (intrinsic) and instrumental (extrinsic) orientations. This dual motivational framework challenges Gardner's (1985) assertion that integrative orientation is more strongly correlated with successful second language acquisition. Instead, the current findings align more closely with Mendoza and Phung's (2019) critique of the traditional integrative-instrumental dichotomy, suggesting that motivation for language learning is more complex and multifaceted than previously theorized.

The intrinsic motivations identified by participants—desire for confidence in English speaking, understanding complex topics, and genuine interest in the language—exemplify what Shan (2024) describe as integrative orientation. These motivations reflect personal development goals rather than external pressures. Conversely, extrinsic motivations—career requirements and peer pressure—represent the instrumental orientation discussed by Lamb et al. (2023) in their contemporary examination of Gardner's socio-educational model.

The finding that participants succeeded in language learning regardless of whether their primary motivation was integrative or instrumental supports Hashim and Aziz (2022) perspective on the importance of self-perception in language acquisition. When learners perceive themselves as capable and motivated—regardless of the source of that motivation—they engage more effectively with learning materials and strategies. This observation also aligns with Seven (2020) concept of adaptive motivation, which emphasizes

the importance of understanding motivational dynamics in specific learning contexts rather than applying rigid categorical frameworks.

As evidenced by statements from Participants 3, 9, and 12, academic and career requirements constitute significant motivational factors for these postgraduate students. Participant 12 explicitly noted, *"I got motivation to speak or to learn English more because because of the needs of education and also the needs of my career."* This motivational pattern reflects what Papi et al. (2019) identify as *"willingness"* and *"eagerness"*—two of the three key elements in their motivational framework. The necessity of English proficiency for academic and professional success creates both a desire to reach language goals (willingness) and a dedication to the learning process (eagerness).

Furthermore, participants' recognition that motivation is *"a force that pushes the learners to improve their English language"* echoes Busse's (2020) emphasis on the role of attitudes in language acquisition. When learners acknowledge the importance of motivation, they develop a meta-awareness of their learning process that can enhance their commitment to improvement. This awareness exemplifies the self-regulated learning approach advocated by Eva et al. (2023), where learners take responsibility for their progress rather than relying solely on external structures or requirements.

The participants' assertion that motivation is *"the key to acquiring a second language"* because *"acquiring a language can be hard"* demonstrates their understanding of the challenges inherent in adult language learning. This perspective aligns with Hiver et al.'s (2021) identification of motivation as a critical factor in successful SLA, particularly for adult learners who must overcome potential age-related challenges as discussed by Noyan and Asik (2024).

Hence, the findings regarding both research questions reveal a sophisticated understanding of language learning processes among postgraduate students. Their perceptions of subtitled movies as valuable but supplementary learning tools, combined with their recognition of diverse motivational factors, demonstrate an awareness of the complex interplay between learning strategies, motivation, and successful language acquisition. These insights offer valuable guidance for designing effective language learning experiences that leverage both technological resources like subtitled movies and the intrinsic and extrinsic motivations that drive adult learners.

## Conclusion

To conclude, the study has demonstrated that movies with subtitles can greatly improve the English language proficiency of postgraduate students and their learning motivation. Using subtitled movies as learning material provides an engaging and interactive medium for language learning, creating a more immersive and contextual learning environment. This study has successfully answered two research questions that were proposed in this study. The findings show that postgraduate students perceive subtitled movies to be effective as they provide

many advantages in improving their language skills, such as vocabulary, pronunciation, reading and writing skills, and overall comprehension of the English language. Additionally, it has been discovered that watching movies with subtitles increases students' motivation to learn a second language, making learning more enjoyable and less boring. This can be seen that using subtitled movies in language learning corresponds to Gardner's theory of motivation and positive attitudes leading to success in second language acquisition. Although subtitled movies can be valuable learning materials, it is important to note that they cannot replace the traditional learning method in the classroom. To become proficient in a language, learners will need to master all four language skills, which are reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Therefore, merely relying on subtitled movies can hinder the improvement of some language skills, especially listening skills which is crucial components of language learning (Lee & Park, 2017; Hasan, 2022).

Moreover, the implications of this study can influence both pedagogical methods and language education policy in the future by incorporating subtitled movies in language learning. Firstly, the positive perceptions of postgraduate students about using subtitled movies to improve English language and learning motivation highlight how important it is for educators to incorporate multimedia materials into their lesson plans. This not only diversifies the language learning materials but also accommodates the varied learning styles and preferences of students. Secondly, this paper emphasizes how using movies with subtitles can motivate students to learn a second language, which in turn promotes a more learner-centered approach. This may result in increased student engagement, higher retentiveness, and ultimately improved language learning inputs. Next, the findings of this study could influence curriculum designers and policymakers to integrate subtitled movies as one of the activities in the language learning curriculum. This will require the development of guidelines for the effective use of movies with subtitles in language classrooms, including the selection of appropriate movies for learning, the incorporation of subtitled movies with other learning activities, and the assessment of learning inputs gained from watching the subtitled movies. Finally, this study may create opportunities for further research. The effectiveness of subtitled movies can be explored in many different settings, such as using subtitled movies for different educational levels or with different or specific genres of subtitled movies. This would contribute to a more thorough understanding of the use of subtitled movies in language learning. All in all, this study underscores the potential of subtitled movies as useful learning material in language learning and promotes wider use of them in teaching practices. Therefore, further research regarding this is necessary to fully understand and optimize the benefits of subtitled movies.

Lastly, some recommendations from the study can be proposed based on the findings. As stated previously, it is strongly recommended that subtitled movies be incorporated into the language curriculum, as they offer vast advantages, from improving language skills to enhancing motivation for learners. In addition, it is suggested that educators be trained in how to use subtitled movies effectively as learning material so that they will be well-equipped and prepared to maximize the benefits of subtitled movies for language learning.

In terms of recommendations for future research, future research may use a different research design, especially a mixed method that includes both surveys and interviews, to obtain an in-depth comprehension of postgraduate students' perceptions of the use of subtitled movies and their learning motivation. Besides, future research may use larger samples for this study to collect sufficient and more precise data. In this way, the findings will be more accurate and adequate to analyze. Next, future research may focus on students who watch the same genres of subtitled movies to get accurate results on how the use of subtitled movies helps to improve language learning. Future research may also be conducted on how subtitled movies help in learning not just in language but also in other subjects like history, culture, or science, so that subtitled movies can also be implemented in other fields of education. Additionally, another recommendation is to use different contexts and settings for this study to add more findings and results as references. This could include studies focusing on different age groups, proficiency levels, and languages. For example, language students from undergraduate studies, language students from other universities, or language students from different courses. Last but not least, future research could also investigate the impact of different genres of subtitled movies on language learning and motivation. This research would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the role of subtitled movies in language areas.

### **Author contributions**

Conceptualization, methodology, formal analysis, and initial draft preparation by Raihannah Khairyn Kamaruddin; supervision, writing, review, and editing by Aini Faridah Azizul Hassan. All authors have reviewed and approved the manuscript for publication.

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### **Data availability statement**

The data supporting this study's findings are available on request from the corresponding author.

### **Conflicts of interest**

All authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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