

Exposure to English Movies: Learners' Vocabulary Comprehension and Content Knowledge

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Abstract. This quasi-experimental pre-test-post-test study, conducted within an action research framework and entitled “*Exposure to English Movies: Learners' Content Knowledge and Vocabulary Comprehension*,” aimed to determine learners' content knowledge and level of vocabulary comprehension. The respondents were thirty BSED 2 English students enrolled during AY 2021–2022 at West Visayas State University–Calinog Campus, selected through convenience sampling. A researcher-made instrument was utilized, consisting of two parts: Part I described the respondents' profile, while Part II included the pre-test and post-test measuring content knowledge and vocabulary comprehension. The pre-test comprised a 15-item vocabulary test and a 15-item content knowledge test. The intervention involved exposure to three English movies: *Little Women*, *Forrest Gump*, and *The Hunger Games: Mockingjay*. Mean was used for descriptive analysis, while the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test and Spearman's rho were employed for inferential analysis at a 0.05 level of significance. Findings revealed that respondents demonstrated an average level of vocabulary comprehension during the pre-test ($M = 9.00$), which improved to a high level in the post-test ($M = 10.80$). In contrast, content knowledge remained at an average level, with pre-test results ($M = 9.67$) slightly decreasing in the post-test ($M = 8.13$). The Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test indicated significant differences between pre-test and post-test scores in both vocabulary comprehension ($z = -3.48$, $p = 0.001$) and content knowledge ($z = 4.04$, $p = 0.000$). However, Spearman's rho revealed no significant relationship between the two variables. These findings suggest that exposure to English movies enhances vocabulary comprehension but requires structured instructional support to improve content knowledge.

Introduction

Vocabulary knowledge is widely recognized as a core component of second language learning because it directly supports learners' ability to understand and use language meaningfully. In English language learning, vocabulary competence influences performance across listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Recent studies emphasize that learners with limited vocabulary knowledge experience difficulty comprehending texts, expressing ideas, and engaging in academic tasks that require precise language use (Schmitt, 2019; Webb, 2021).

Research has shown that insufficient exposure to English vocabulary remains a persistent issue among learners of English as a foreign language. Without access to a broad range of vocabulary, children may struggle to follow lessons, understand texts, and express their ideas clearly. Over time, these difficulties may negatively affect not only their academic progress but also their confidence and sense of participation in the classroom.

In the Philippine educational context, English is used as a second language and as a medium of instruction in many subjects. Despite this exposure, many learners from elementary to tertiary levels continue to demonstrate limited productive vocabulary, which negatively affects academic writing, content comprehension, and oral communication skills (Bernardo,

2019; Dayagbil et al., 2021). This challenge has led educators and researchers to examine different teaching approaches that can enrich learners' language exposure beyond conventional classroom practices. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction, both traditional and modern methods have been widely used. Traditional approaches, such as the grammar-translation and audiolingual methods, provide structured instruction that focuses on grammar and vocabulary development; however, they often offer limited opportunities for learners to practice communicative skills. In contrast, more contemporary approaches, including Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and technology-supported instruction, emphasize student participation, creativity, and the practical use of language. Combining these approaches may therefore provide a more comprehensive learning experience, as it integrates the systematic structure of traditional methods with the interactive and learner-centered nature of modern techniques (Nazarova, 2024). In line with this perspective, one instructional strategy that has gained attention is the use of English films as learning materials in language classrooms. Movies expose learners to authentic and contextualized spoken English, allowing them to encounter vocabulary as it naturally appears in real communication. Through repeated exposure to words and expressions within meaningful contexts, learners may gradually develop stronger vocabulary knowledge and improved comprehension.

The growing availability of streaming platforms such as Netflix and YouTube have made English movies more accessible to learners than ever before. As a result, learners are frequently exposed to English audio-visual content outside the classroom. According to Mayer's (2020, as cited in Mayer, 2024) multimedia learning theory, learning is enhanced when verbal information is combined with visual elements, as this supports deeper cognitive processing. However, despite the increasing use of English movies as instructional tools in language learning, several gaps remain in the literature. Previous studies have primarily focused on vocabulary acquisition and general comprehension outcomes, with limited attention given to the simultaneous examination of vocabulary comprehension and content knowledge. Moreover, many studies rely on descriptive analyses and do not employ rigorous inferential methods to determine significant changes in learners' performance. There is also limited research conducted within the Philippine higher education context, particularly among pre-service English teachers. These gaps highlight the need for a more comprehensive and theory-driven investigation that examines not only whether English movies improve vocabulary comprehension but also whether such improvements translate to content understanding.

This study was grounded in Krashen's Theory of Second Language Acquisition (SLA), particularly his Monitor Model, which posits that exposure to media such as English movies can facilitate the acquisition of essential grammatical morphemes, thereby supporting language learning. The central principle of SLA emphasizes that input in the target language forms the basis for acquisition. Krashen's Monitor Model is explained through five key hypotheses. The acquisition learning hypothesis may occur through learners' exposure to the movie. The natural order hypothesis relates to how language is acquired in a predictable sequence, influenced by the dialogue and accompanying gestures observed in the film. The monitor hypothesis refers to the learner's ability to retain and comprehend language while watching. The input hypothesis highlights the different language components such as grammar, word order, sounds, structure, styles, and registers presented in the movie, which are absorbed as input. Lastly, the affective filter hypothesis emphasizes the learner's emotional response; enjoyment and interest low affective filter enhance understanding and acquisition, whereas disinterest high affective filter may hinder them (Lightbown & Spada, 2013).

Another theory relevant to this study is behaviorism, which focuses on observable behavioral changes and the role of the environment in shaping them. Behaviorists consider language as a learned skill similar to other behaviors, governed by stimulus response relationships. They assert that responses can be predicted based on stimuli, and vice versa (Watson, 1924, as cited in Dastpak, 2017). From this perspective, effective language use is viewed as an appropriate response to a given stimulus. When such responses are reinforced, they become habitual, leading learners particularly children to repeat them. Therefore, exposure to English movies can provide learners with comprehensible input and reinforcement necessary for language understanding and development.

With the aforementioned ideas, the researchers aimed to determine the effect of exposure to English movies on the respondents' English vocabulary comprehension and content knowledge by assessing their performance before exposure through a pre-test and after exposure through a post-test, identifying whether there is a significant difference in their levels of vocabulary comprehension and content knowledge before and after the intervention, and examining whether a significant relationship exists between their vocabulary comprehension and content knowledge across the pre-test and post-test results.

Methodology

Research Design

This quasi-experimental pre-test-post-test design within an action research framework study was conducted during the school year 2021-2022: It aimed to determine the effect of the learners' content and vocabulary comprehension when exposed to English Movies.

This study employed a quasi-experimental pre-test and post-test design within the framework of action research. Action research is a methodological approach that emphasizes practical intervention while also aiming to generate, inform, and develop theoretical understanding (Burns, 2015). In a pre-test-post-test design, the same assessment instrument is administered to participants before and after the implementation of a treatment or exposure to a specific condition. This approach allows researchers to determine whether any observed changes in the participants' performance can be attributed to the intervention or condition applied (Dimitrov & Rumrill, 2003).

A researcher-made questionnaire, which is divided into two parts were validated by a panel of experts was used as a tool for gathering the data and given to the respondents as pre-test and post-test. The pre-test is composed of a general vocabulary comprehension test and learner's general content knowledge. For the post test, a vocabulary comprehension test and content knowledge test were prepared based on the intervention. The intervention is composed of three movies where were assigned to be watched within the span of 1 week.

Participants and Sampling Technique

The respondents for this research were 30 second year Bachelor of Secondary Education major in English students in West Visayas State University Calinog Campus duly enrolled during the school year 2021-2022. They were selected through convenience sampling.

The profile of the respondents is shown in Table 1.

Table 1 shows that there were 30 (100%) respondents both in the pre-test and post-test

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Entire Group	30	100.00
Pre-Test	30	100.00
Post- Test	30	100.00

Table 1. Profile of the Respondents

Intervention

The intervention used in this action research study was the three movies entitled, "The Hunger Games: the Mockingjay, Forrest Gump and Little women". The movies were chosen with the aim of improving the respondents' content knowledge and vocabulary comprehension. Each movies lasted more than 2 hours of screen time. They were specifically chosen for their kind of vocabulary and content.

Instruments of the Study

To ensure validity, the instruments underwent content validation by a panel of experts in English language teaching and educational research. The items were revised based on their feedback to improve clarity, relevance, and alignment with the study objectives. Although the instruments were not standardized, efforts were made to ensure their reliability and appropriateness for the target population.

For pre-test, the researchers' prepared; a set of 15 item general vocabulary researcher-made test; and a set of 15 item general content knowledge researcher -made test.

Similarly, for the post-test, the researchers prepared a set of 15 item vocabulary researcher- made instrument and set of 15 item content knowledge researcher- made instrument, both of which were based on the movies seen.

The researcher-made questionnaire was divided into two parts: part 1) the profile of the respondents; and part 2) the test proper - vocabulary test and content knowledge test for the pre-test and for the post-test.

The intervention was composed of three movies entitled: (1) Little Women; (2) Forrest Gump; and (3) The Hunger Games: Mockingjay. The electronic copies of the three movies were sent to students' Gmail account.

All test procedures commenced within the schedule of three weeks. The pre-test was conducted prior to the intervention and hence thereafter, in the following week, the post-test.

Procedure

The researchers secured permissions to conduct the study from the campus administrator, from the dean of instruction, and from the dean of the college of education of WVSU - CC. A similar permission was secured from the subject teacher on which the study was integrated.

After the approval, the researchers secured permission from the parents and the students as to their willingness to take part in the study. All instructions were carefully explained to ensure that the respondents do not miss any of the directions given to them. Due to the pandemic, the researchers used GC /FB Messenger in informing and instructing the respondents.

The movies were sent to respondents' personal Gmail account. All three movies were integrated the study to a one particular subject of BSED II English where it was deemed relevant. During the conduct of the study, the pre- test was conducted, gathered, checked, and encoded in the first week; the intervention (movies) was conducted in the second week: the movies assigned were Little Women, Forrest Gump, and Hunger Games, the Mocking Jay. The third week was assigned for the conduct of the post-test; it was gathered, checked, and encoded.

Data collected from the pre-test and post-test were encoded, tabulated, and analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

Data Analysis

Prior to statistical analysis, assumption testing was conducted. The normality of the data distribution was assessed using the Shapiro-Wilk test. Results indicated that the data were not normally distributed ($p < 0.05$), justifying the use of non-parametric statistical tests. Additionally, the data were examined for outliers, and no extreme values were found that could significantly affect the results.

The data obtained were subjected to the following descriptive and inferential statistical treatments using the Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS).

Due to the small sample size and the non-normal distribution of the data, non-parametric statistical tests were employed. The Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test was used to determine differences between pre-test and post-test scores, while Spearman's rho was used to examine the relationship between variables.

Mean was used to measure performance level in vocabulary performance and content knowledge in the pre-test and post-test.

Wilcoxon Signed Rank test was used to test for the differences of the pre-test and post-test performance in vocabulary comprehension and content knowledge of the respondents.

Spearman- rho Test was used to test for the relationship between the levels of performances in vocabulary comprehension and the content knowledge of the respondents before pre- test and after post- test.

Ethical Considerations

The study was conducted in accordance with ethical standards for research involving human participants and was reviewed and approved by the appropriate academic authorities of West Visayas State University–Calinog Campus. Since the participants included minors, informed consent was obtained from their parents or guardians, and assent was secured from the students. Participation was voluntary, and no coercion was involved. Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained throughout the study.

Results and Discussion

Descriptive Data Analysis

Pre-Test and Post-Test Performance in Vocabulary Comprehension

Category	N	Mean	Description
Pre-Test	30	9.00	Average
Post-Test	30	10.80	High

Scale

<i>Mean</i>	<i>Description</i>
10.01 – 15.00	High
5.01 – 10.00	Average
0.00 – 5.00	Low

Table 2. Pre-Test and Post-Test Performance in Vocabulary Comprehension

Table 2 shows that the pre-test performance in vocabulary comprehension of the respondents is “Average” (M=9.00), while their post-test performance is “High” (M=10.80).

These findings indicate that learners already possessed a basic level of vocabulary prior to the intervention, but their vocabulary comprehension significantly improved after exposure to English movies. This suggests that movies provide rich and meaningful linguistic input, allowing learners to encounter vocabulary in context, which supports better retention and understanding. This finding aligns with Webb and Rodgers (2009), as cited by Gloria and Galvez (2025), who identified movies as an effective resource for second language learning, particularly in enhancing vocabulary through repeated exposure to authentic language. Similarly, Neuman and Koskinen (1992), as cited in Kaman-Ertürk and Gokgoz-Kurt (2023), emphasized that learners with existing vocabulary knowledge are more likely to acquire new words through contextualized input such as films.

From a pedagogical standpoint, teachers may utilize English movies as a supplementary material to enhance vocabulary learning. To ensure effectiveness, structured activities such as vocabulary tracking, guided questions, and post-viewing discussions should be incorporated to promote active engagement with the language.

Pre-Test and Post-Test Performances in Content Knowledge

Category	N	Mean	Description
Pre-Test	30	9.67	Average
Post-Test	30	8.13	Average

Scale

<i>Description</i>
High
Average
Low

Table 3. Pre-Test and Post-Test Performances in Content Knowledge

Table 3 shows that the pre-test and post-test performance of the learner’s content knowledge are both “Average” with means of 9.67 and 8.13 respectively.

This result suggests that while students maintained a moderate level of content understanding, exposure to English movies did not significantly improve their comprehension of the material. The slight decrease in mean score may indicate that learners experienced difficulty fully understanding the content, possibly due to limitations in vocabulary or the complexity of the movie. This is supported by Van Zeeland and Schmitt (2012), as cited in Webb (2021), who noted that comprehension of spoken language requires a high level of lexical coverage, and insufficient vocabulary may hinder full understanding of content.

Given this outcome, it becomes important for teachers to provide instructional support when using movies for content learning. Pre-viewing activities, guided comprehension tasks, and reflective discussions can help learners process information more effectively and improve their understanding of the material.

Inferential Data Analysis

The Wilcoxon-Signed Rank Test Result for the Difference in the Pre-test and Post-Test Performance in Vocabulary Comprehension of the Respondents

Compared Groups		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	z	p-value
Pre-Test	Negative Ranks	4	13.88	290.00	4.04	.000
Post-Test	Positive Ranks	22	4.00	10.00		
	Ties	4				
Total		30				

Table 4. Wilcoxon-Signed Rank Test Result for the Differences of the Pre-test and Post-Test Performance in Vocabulary Comprehension of the Respondents

The Wilcoxon-Signed Rank Tests results in Table 4 shows a significant difference in the pretest and posttest performance in vocabulary comprehension of learners when exposed to English movies ($z=-3.48$, $p=0.001$). This means that the performances in vocabulary comprehension of learners have increased after being exposed to English movies; therefore, the null hypothesis in this regard is rejected.

This improvement supports the idea that audiovisual materials enhance vocabulary acquisition by providing contextual and multimodal input. This is consistent with the findings of Vasquez et al. (2025), who stated that movies are effective tools for vocabulary development because they expose learners to authentic language, pronunciation, and contextual meaning. Subtitled films, in particular, help learners recognize unfamiliar words and improve comprehension.

For classroom application, teachers are encouraged to integrate movies into instruction as a means of vocabulary enrichment. However, this should be paired with active learning strategies such as identifying unfamiliar words, using subtitles strategically, and applying new vocabulary in speaking or writing tasks.

Wilcoxon-Signed Rank Tests for the Differences of the Pre-test and Post-Test Performance of Learner's Content Knowledge

Compared Groups		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	z	p-value
Pre-Test	Negative Ranks	4	13.88	290.00	4.04	.000
Post-Test	Positive Ranks	22	4.00	10.00		
	Ties	4				
Total		30				

Table 5. Wilcoxon-Signed Rank Tests for the Differences of the Pre-test and Post-Test Performance of Learner's Content Knowledge

Wilcoxon-Signed Rank Test results in Table 5 show a significant difference in the pre-test and post-test performance in learners' content knowledge when exposed to English movies ($z = 4.04$; $p = 0.000$). Although the difference was statistically significant, the mean score decreased from pre-test to post-test, indicating that the intervention did not positively enhance content knowledge. This suggests that exposure to English movies alone may not be sufficient to improve learners' understanding of content. Learners may require additional instructional support, such as pre-viewing activities, guided comprehension tasks, and post-viewing discussions, to process and retain the material effectively.

These findings emphasize the need for scaffolding strategies in instruction. Teachers should provide clear explanations, simplify complex content when necessary, and encourage interaction through analytical discussions and reflective activities to strengthen learners' comprehension.

The Relationship between Vocabulary Performance and Learner's Content Knowledge (Pretest)

Spearman-rho Test of the Relationship between Vocabulary Performance and Learner's Content Knowledge (Pretest)

Compared Group	N	r	p-value
Vocabulary Performance Learner's Content Knowledge	30	.114	.549

*Correlation is significant at .01 level (2-tailed)

Table 6. Spearman-rho Test of the Relationship between Vocabulary Performance and Respondents' Content Knowledge (Pretest)

Spearman-rho test in Table 6 revealed a non-significant relationship between the vocabulary performance and the learner's content knowledge ($r=-.114$, $p=.549$) in the pre- test. This implies that the vocabulary performance of the respondents is independent from their content knowledge before intervention. The null hypothesis in this regard is accepted.

This suggests that having a certain level of vocabulary does not necessarily ensure better understanding of content, as comprehension also depends on factors such as prior knowledge and cognitive processing skills. In light of this, instructional practices should address both vocabulary development and comprehension skills separately. Activities that build background knowledge and critical thinking should complement vocabulary instruction.

The Relationship between Vocabulary Performance and Learner's Content Knowledge (Post- test)

Spearman-rho Test of the Relationship between Vocabulary Performance and Learner's Content Knowledge (Post- test)

Compared Group	N	r	p-value
Vocabulary Performance Learner's Content Knowledge	30	.099	.603

Table 7. Spearman-rho Test of the Relationship between Vocabulary Performance and Respondents' Content Knowledge (Post- test)

Spearman-rho test in Table 7 revealed a non-significant relationship between the vocabulary performance and the learner's content knowledge ($r=-.099$, $p=.603$) in the post- test. This implies that the vocabulary performance of the respondents is independent from their content knowledge after intervention. The null hypothesis in this regard is accepted.

This reinforces the idea that improvement in vocabulary does not automatically lead to better content understanding. While movies can enhance vocabulary, additional instructional strategies are necessary to develop deeper comprehension.

Consequently, educators should combine movie-based learning with structured comprehension activities such as guided analysis, collaborative discussions, and critical thinking exercises to bridge the gap between vocabulary acquisition and content understanding.

Potential Limitations

This study has several limitations. The use of convenience sampling and a relatively small sample size limits the generalizability of the findings. In addition, the short duration of the intervention may not have been sufficient to produce significant improvements in content knowledge

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study shows that exposing learners to English movies can be an effective way to improve their vocabulary comprehension. The results revealed that students moved from an average level in the pre-test to a higher level in the post-test, indicating that movies provide meaningful and engaging language input that supports vocabulary development.

However, the findings also suggest that the same approach was not as effective in enhancing content knowledge, as students' performance in this area remained average and even declined in terms of mean scores after the intervention. Moreover, the lack of a significant relationship between vocabulary comprehension and content knowledge implies that improvement in one does not necessarily lead to improvement in the other.

These results suggest several practical applications in the teaching and learning process. Teachers may use English movies as a supplementary tool to strengthen students' vocabulary, but they should also incorporate additional activities or strategies to better support content understanding. Providing a comfortable and stress-free viewing environment may further help learners engage with the material and improve comprehension. Schools and administrators are also encouraged to support this approach by ensuring access to appropriate technological resources. In addition, both teachers and parents should guide learners in selecting movies that are suitable and beneficial for language and content development.

Future studies may focus on exploring other factors that could influence both vocabulary and content learning, as well as testing different methods or structured interventions that could improve the effectiveness of using movies in education. Expanding the scope of research and improving the research design may also provide more reliable and comprehensive results.

In general, this study adds to existing knowledge by showing that while English movies are useful in enhancing vocabulary comprehension, their impact on content knowledge may be limited, highlighting the need for more balanced and well-supported instructional strategies.

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Data Availability Statement

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analyzed in this study; all data used were obtained from previously published sources as cited in the reference list.

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Appendices

No appendices are attached to this study.