

## THE EFFECTS OF WATCHING ENGLISH-SUBTITLED VIDEOS ONEFL STUDENTS' VOCABULARY LEARNING

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### Abstract

This paper studies how watching English-subtitled videos affect EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students' vocabulary learning. 20 English major students watched an English video about a classic ghost tale twice. The control group ( $n = 10$ ) watched the unsubtitled video, while the experimental group ( $n = 10$ ) watched the subtitled video. After watching it, they did the test of vocabulary and the test of understanding. A descriptive-qualitative method was utilized in this paper. It reveals that watching a video with its English subtitle affects the vocabulary learning; the experimental group achieved a higher score in both tests than the control group. However, the experimental group's mean score was only slightly, not significantly, high. Pedagogical implications are found to utilize English-subtitled videos for better vocabulary learning.

**Keywords:** EFL, listening, subtitled video, vocabulary learning

### Introduction

In EFL, videos or audio-visual media with English subtitles (Vanderplank, 2016) have been one of the subject matters conducted by its researchers. Specifically, a sake of English-subtitled videos is to gain more attention from the students (Teng, 2019). Numbers of researchers have conducted papers on such subtitled audio-visual media or videos. A paper indicates that students' factors have an influence on their language learning by watching English-subtitled videos (Pattimore & Muñoz, 2020). Another one discusses the proposition, plan, and practical occurrence between language learning and subtitles (Anelli, 2015). A review discovers that watching audio-visual media with English subtitles for learning EFL is related to the advancement of listening skills (Trenkic, 2017).

An interpretation of the discovery above is that the speech in English videos comes continuously in which there is no pause among the spoken words. Thus, the listeners, whose English is not their first language, may encounter any troubles at ascertaining where a word is finished and the following one starts. English on-screen texts or subtitles in its videos are supposed as a handy tool for those listeners for their English words – vocabulary. Theoretically, these subtitles may be useful to extract vocabularies from the videos' speech in English which is a foreign language for them. Henceforth, considering this background, a paper discussing the effects of watching English-subtitled videos on EFL students' vocabulary learning is substantial.

Learning English vocabularies by watching its subtitled videos has been expanding nowadays. The expansion of subtitled-video utilizations is somewhat due to mediocre knowledge (Laufer & Rozovski-Roitblat, 2015) gained either from reading (Teng, 2020) or from watching unsubtitled videos (Perez, 2020). Vocabulary is one of the decisive factors of students' understanding in both listening and reading (Webb & Nation, 2017). In this paper, EFL students are asked to watch a brief video of an English classic tale. Then, the researchers study the effects of an English-subtitled video on the students' vocabulary learning. What is found in this paper may later contribute to the current knowledge in English Language Teaching.

### ***Vocabulary Learning***

Vocabulary learning happens in class activities which involve students' understanding (Hulstijn, 2013). Listening, reading, and or conducting both of them simultaneously are some of the activities included. It is revealed that students, at understanding meaning, learn the vocabularies incidentally – not intentional. EFL students may learn vocabularies by listening (van Zeeland & Schmitt, 2013a), reading (Day, Omura, & Hiramatsu, 1991), watching unsubtitled audio-visual media (Peters & Webb, 2018), and with subtitled videos moreover. On the other hand, few papers suggest that the knowledge from students' vocabulary learning by listening (Vidal, 2011), reading (Reynolds, 2015), even listening and reading simultaneously (Webb & Chang, 2015) is considered limited. By on-screen texts, it is more possible for students to expand their English vocabularies. Yet, there is hardly any study on how watching English-subtitled videos influences the vocabulary learning with EFL students as its participants.

### ***Subtitled-Video Utilization***

Vocabulary learning in EFL with subtitled video is related to sorting out the details – coding. There is a link between orals and visuals (Paivio, 1986). From those ones, collecting details can be achieved easier. The subtitle on a video's screen can actively encourage the words in a language; it is English in this case, and an understanding of the continuous speech. What is meant by this is that the operation of both orals (the speech) and visuals (the subtitle) may improve the value of vocabulary learning. Then, if spoken words are accompanied by their on-screen representations, students possibly bring about a more excellent knowledge of the target English words (Mayer, 2014). It is aimed at none other than easing students at collecting the details contained in a video by linking what they hear and what they see. Another related literature posits that students have a certain amount in their mind storage for collecting learning details (Sweller, 2011). Along with it, students may not be able to collect the details at their best when their mind storage runs out of its amount. Subtitled-video utilization involves the video screen, spoken words, and subtitles in one media. In consequence, it more eases students to learn, especially vocabulary, without much burdening them.

### ***Vocabulary Learning with Subtitled-Video Utilization***

Students may understand the meaning of vocabularies or words spoken in the video along with presenting its subtitle on the screen. Nevertheless, this vocabulary learning with a subtitled-video utilization might also be influenced by certain

factors of the video itself. These factors include what the video is about, how it looks like, how the spoken words sound like, how the subtitle is presented, etc. The on-screen text could be presented in students' first language or their second/foreign language. Since this paper focuses on English as the students' foreign language, the video is going to be presented with an English subtitle. In this paper, English-subtitled videos are supposed to have beneficial effects for students in their vocabulary learning. Likely, the subtitle aids students to recognize what words are spoken in the video's speech. By the presence of the written form of the audio, students will focus more because they have an "additional" thing to pay attention to on the screen. While watching the subtitled video, students probably visualize the meaning of unfamiliar words they hear in which this is substantial for their vocabulary learning. Therefore, the effects of watching an English-subtitled video need to be studied in order to encourage this handy tool for EFL students' vocabulary learning.

However, in this case of subtitled videos, certain factors from students are considered as well. For example, the students' prior knowledge of English vocabularies may contribute to their understanding of English as a foreign language. 2,000 to 3,000 are the approximate words which are required to be known in English (van Zeeland & Schmitt, 2013b) for a good proficiency. Regularly, a good English-vocabulary knowledge must be achieved by the students to collect the video details. Moreover, this kind of proficiency can influence their writing skill (Laufer & Levitzky, 2017) even the speaking one. In a reading-focused paper, different proficiencies of English vocabularies mean different results of vocabulary learning (Ender, 2016). Comparing students who have a higher vocabulary proficiency with ones who have a lower vocabulary proficiency, those who have the higher proficiency do better than those who have the lower one in a listening activity (Matthews, 2018).

Besides, another literature argues that such "natural" English competences also influence vocabulary learning (Saito, 2017). It is said that students with these natural competences already have the proficiencies from their inners, such as in mind storage (Wen, Biedroń, & Skehan, 2017). There is a link between how the students collect learning details to their minds and their inner competences (Li, 2016). Yet, it somehow might not matter as the students would improve in class activities either (Winke, 2013). Through all those literature, the researchers conduct this paper for a closer study on the effects of watching English-subtitled videos on EFL students' vocabulary learning.

### ***Research Questions***

Two research questions guide this paper as the followings:

1. Does watching an English-subtitled video have any effects on EFL students' vocabulary learning?
2. Does watching the video with its English subtitle have any effects for EFL students to understand what the video is about?

### **Method**

#### ***Participants***

The participants, selected at will, were 20 English major students which consisted of 2 males and 18 females. They were third-year students at Tidar

University aged 21 to 23 years old per 2022. Indonesian was their first language, while English was their foreign language. All the students were organized into two groups – control and experimental groups. Those ones, who were assigned to the control group ( $n = 10$ ), watched an unsubtitled video; the others, who were assigned to the experimental group ( $n = 10$ ), watched a subtitled video.

### ***Video Selection***

The researchers selected a brief video, 7-minute-45-second, which told about a classic ghost tale entitled *The Phantom Coach*. It was available on YouTube and had two British narrators. This video was presented by a sort of puppeteering which was unique that it contributed to why the researchers selected this media. Other contributing factors were its interesting story, understandable plot, and suitable standard. Besides, the video’s creators also added its official English subtitle in which it could be modified in the settings. Hence, this video was considered convenient for all the participants. Participants of the control group were required to turn off the subtitle; ones of the experimental group were required to turn on the subtitle.

### ***Test of Vocabulary***

Google Form was selected as the platform for participants to do the test. Types of questions were utilized here. Type 1 asked whether participants could recognize spoken words in the video or not. Choice “yes” would be clicked if they thought the word was in the video; choice “no” would be clicked if they did not think so. Type 2 asked whether participants knew the meaning of English words spoken in the video or not. Four choices were added in Indonesian in which three of them were distractors and only one was the correct meaning. Type 3 asked whether participants knew the correct meaning of Indonesian words in English based on the video. Among four choices added in English, there was only one correct choice. The actual test included 10 questions for participants. To visualize what it is like, Table 1 below shows examples of these question types’ details.

Table 1. Examples of Question Types in the Test of Vocabulary

Type	Question	Choice
1	Is there the word "pace" in the video?	a. <b>Yes</b> b. <b>No</b>
2	What is the meaning of "journey"?	a. <b>Lembah</b> b. <b>Bebatuan</b> c. <b>Perjalanan</b> d. <b>Cerobong asap</b>
3	What is "kelap-kelip" in English?	a. <b>Squattering</b> b. <b>Backfiring</b> c. <b>Tendering</b> d. <b>Flickering</b>

### ***Test of Understanding***

To study participants’ understanding, this test only focused on substantial details of the video. It was still done on Google Form. All questions utilized types of multiple-choice and true-or-false. The actual test included 10 questions for participants. To visualize what it is like, Table 2 below shows examples of the question types’ details.

Table 2. Examples of Question Types in the Test of Understanding

Question	Choice
What month was it in the story?	a. <b>June</b> b. <b>September</b> c. <b>December</b>
The main character approached a crossroad.	a. <b>True</b> b. <b>False</b>
When did the terrible accident happen according to the elderly man?	a. <b>5 years ago</b> b. <b>7 years ago</b> c. <b>9 years ago</b>

### ***Mechanism***

This paper utilized a descriptive-qualitative method. Firstly, participants were asked to watch the video, The Phantom Coach, through its YouTube link shared by the researchers. Here, the subtitle requirements were that the subtitle was turned off for the control group and it was turned on for the experimental group; both of them were allowed to watch it twice. Secondly, the researchers shared the Google Form links to them in which they must do all tests right after they finished watching the video. Thirdly, the test results were accumulated from Google Form. For scoring, 1 correct answer got 1 point and 1 incorrect answer got 0 point. Lastly, the results were discussed.

### **Findings and Discussion**

In Test of Vocabulary, the control group, who watched the video without the subtitle, scored a mean of 8.2. Meanwhile, the experimental group, who watched the video with the subtitle, scored a mean of 8.5. The control group scored a mean of 7.6 in Test of Understanding. On the other hand, the experimental group scored a mean of 8.3. Table 3 below displays the results of Test of Vocabulary for each group.

Table 3. Results of Test of Vocabulary

Participant	Total Point	
	Control Group (Unsubtitled Video)	Experimental Group (Subtitled Video)
Participant 1	9	9
Participant 2	9	8
Participant 3	9	10
Participant 4	7	10
Participant 5	8	8
Participant 6	8	6
Participant 7	7	9
Participant 8	8	9
Participant 9	9	8
Participant 10	8	8
MEAN	8.2	8.5

Table 4 below displays the results of Test of Understanding for each group.

Table 4. Results of Test of Understanding

Participant	Total Point	
	Control Group (Unsubtitled Video)	Experimental Group (Subtitled Video)
Participant 1	10	7
Participant 2	8	9
Participant 3	9	10
Participant 4	6	10
Participant 5	8	7
Participant 6	3	10
Participant 7	7	5
Participant 8	9	9
Participant 9	10	8
Participant 10	6	8
MEAN	7.6	8.3

From the finding, the vocabulary-test results between the two groups do not differ much. However, the mean scores resulted confirm that the experimental group still gets a higher score than the control one does as what has been hypothesized. A mean score of 8.5 is obtained by the experimental group, while the control group obtains 8.2. It reveals that the English subtitle is useful to extract vocabularies from the video. Living in this context, a subtitle positively aids students at recognizing the written form of an audio or speech which affects their vocabulary learning as a result. In addition, during watching the video with its subtitle, participants of the experimental group may pay attention to the words presented on the screen. Notwithstanding, both in the control and experimental groups, there can be unfamiliarity with certain words for some participants, especially such extreme ones. Consequently, they can notice gaps in their English vocabulary proficiency.

Although the researchers hypothesized that participants who watched the subtitled video would score significantly high, they scored only slightly higher than ones who watched the unsubtitled video. It can be related to the “context” shown in the video itself in which it provides a way for the control group to interpret a certain word’s meaning. Thus, both group’s performances have a slight difference. Also, some participants of the experimental group might not be able to recall every single vocabulary even though they had seen written forms by the on-screen text. The researchers allow all participants to watch the video twice, yet, difficult vocabularies may still be difficult for some of them that they end up inferring the meanings instead.

The results of Test of Understanding reveal that the experimental group’s mean score is higher than the control group’s in which this reflects the researchers’ hypothesis. A mean score of 8.3 is obtained by the experimental group, while the control one obtains 7.6. Hence, the results found provide boundless supports for the utilization of a subtitle. Participants who watched the subtitled video possibly understood the video better than ones who watched the unsubtitled video did. Yet, it did not necessarily mean that those ones, who were assigned to watch the video

without its English subtitle, did not understand the video details well. It can be seen from the results that many of their total points are high.

As regards the subtitled video, the researchers find that the subtitle's prominence for the experimental group does not prevent some participants of the control group to perform well in Test of Understanding. One of the contributing factors is that they may be intermediate to advanced students already. Likely, the video is considered easy for them to understand. Nevertheless, the rest find it difficult that the video details are also challenging for them to understand. Therefore, subtitles are considered useful for understanding a video on the other hand. If only participants of the control group were allowed to turn on the subtitle, they probably would turn it on. Further research needs to be conducted for studying the effects of video details on students' vocabulary learning.

These findings shed light on the effects where vocabulary learning is accomplished by watching English-subtitled videos. Perez, Peters, and Desmet (2018) show that watching videos is effective for vocabulary learning; so does this paper. The findings signal the usefulness of watching videos, especially the subtitled ones, for EFL students' vocabulary learning as the experimental group (subtitled video) denotes a higher score than the control group (unsubtitled video). Nevertheless, this paper is far from the thoughts of watching unsubtitled videos is not useful. Watching unsubtitled videos is still effective that some studies have proven it in other methods (Peters & Webb, 2018; Perez, 2020). It is just that watching an English video with its subtitle is more effective than without. In multimedia learning, such a visual, in the form of subtitles, helps lowering students' workload, so that they can focus more on the details (Mayer, 2014).

### ***Pedagogical Implication***

The utilization of an English subtitle shall be more encouraged when videos are aimed for EFL students' vocabulary learning since it is a handy tool for recognizing the spoken words in order to visualize the meanings. By this paper, the researchers suggest adopting a method in which the on-screen text density is reduced bit by bit. To describe it, the subtitle can be displayed fully at the first stage. At the second one, it is only the keywords which are displayed. Finally, there is no subtitle displayed at all. This kind of method progressively trains students to not always be dependent on a subtitle as well as optimizes the recognition of spoken words during the vocabulary learning through a video. From this, their vocabulary proficiency can be improved, so that it eases them to learn more vocabularies and understand related things better.

### **Conclusion**

As a conclusion to this paper, the researchers provide some ways for future research. Firstly, future researchers can study how to advance subtitles focusing on the words' meaning, either in students' first language or their foreign one. The research questions may be directed to students' understanding and vocabulary learning. Next, since this paper has valued a brief video, a future researcher shall look up to what a longer video takes, such as full-length TV programs. Further studies about the effects of subtitled-video utilization, in a long term, on the willingness level of subtitled-video utilization need to be conducted. In other words, they are related to students' enhancement in their listening skill. Lastly, there is eye

tracking to monitor how students spend more time on paying attention to the on-screen subtitle in which it gives a potential to study their attention part in their vocabulary learning. These ways stated definitely enable other researchers to dig more awareness of the subtitle assistance in English Language Learning.

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