

Perceptions of audiovisual media in vocabulary acquisition among English learners: benefits and challenges

Xuan Hong Nguyen Thi, Thanh Thai Nguyen

Institute for Foreign Language Training and Education, Thu Dau Mot University, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

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ABSTRACT

Learning vocabulary through English audiovisual materials has long been a popular method among students. With the advancement of digital technology, this approach has gained even more attraction, leading to a growing number of studies that have investigated its effectiveness. However, there is a notable scarcity of research addressing the challenges that students face; therefore, the current study aims to explore students' perspectives on the challenges along with the benefits of using audiovisual media as tools for learning vocabulary. This study was done through a quantitative approach using a questionnaire that included both open-ended and closed-ended questions. With the participation of 132 senior English-major students at Thu Dau Mot University in Vietnam, the study collected 117 valid questionnaires that provided valid data for analysis. Through descriptive statistics, the results reveal the improvements in pronunciation and listening skills, enhanced understanding of slang and idiomatic expressions, and increased exposure to the natural use of the target language. However, the findings also reveal that this method poses challenges for students, including misunderstandings stemming from the use of formal or informal language and an over-reliance on audiovisual media. Therefore, the study emphasizes the need for structured guidance to foster language learning outcomes.

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Corresponding Author:

Xuan Hong Nguyen Thi

Institute for Foreign Language Training and Education, Thu Dau Mot University

No. 6 Tran Van on Street, Phu Loi Ward, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

Email: hongntx@tdmu.edu.vn

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the integration of audiovisual media into language learning and teaching has gained significant attention, prompting educators and researchers to explore its effects. In terms of learning motivation, many researchers have identified that compared to traditional learning methods, listening to or watching native speakers using language in context significantly enhances students' engagement, which fosters their language comprehension and retention. For instance, Sun *et al.* [1], who acknowledged that student interest or motivation is a key factor in achieving language learning goals, identified that movies or short videos, as a form of media, significantly boost students' motivation to learn English. Anah *et al.* [2] also discovered that incorporating multiple senses (e.g., sight and hearing) in the classroom enhances student motivation more effectively than using just one. Furthermore, Kaboocha [3], who examined the attitudes of Saudi English as a foreign language (EFL) students and teachers toward integrating English movies as a tool for language skill development, uncovered that both students and teachers have positive attitudes toward using movies in language learning. Thus, learning and teaching language through audiovisual media has its place in enhancing student motivation. However, how does audiovisual media facilitate vocabulary learning?

To address this question, numerous studies have explored different aspects of vocabulary learning through audiovisual media. In terms of learning motivation and attitude, audiovisual tools significantly motivate students, which makes learning more engaging and stimulates their interest in acquiring new vocabulary [4]. Fauzi and Muljanto [5] further support this, stating that students who watch audiovisual media tend to be more engaged and active, which increases their motivation to acquire vocabulary and achieve their learning objectives. Nurfauziah *et al.* [6], who explored students' perspectives on using English films to improve vocabulary, discovered that students show strong agreement on the benefits of English movies in vocabulary learning.

In terms of effectiveness, many recent studies revealed that audiovisual aids are generally effective for vocabulary learning. For instance, several studies [7]–[11] found that audiovisual input significantly enhances vocabulary acquisition, with experimental groups outperforming controls. Notably, a study by Ashcroft *et al.* [12] revealed that there was a significant increase in students' vocabulary recall ability after watching movies. Moreover, a study by Song and Xiong [13] compared the effects of two social media apps (QQ and WeChat) and one language-learning app (Baicizhan) on vocabulary learning. While all groups demonstrated improvements in vocabulary acquisition, Baicizhan proved to be the most effective and was the most preferred by students. The findings underscore the superior impact of dedicated language-learning apps compared to general social media platforms for enhancing vocabulary learning. However, Piskadlo *et al.* [14] reported that still pictures were more effective than audiovisual aids for EFL beginners. Captions were beneficial for form learning [15], while animated movies [16] and multimedia [17] improved both receptive and productive vocabulary. Moreover, Muñoz *et al.* [18] found that audiovisual input supports L2 learning, with captions aiding grammar acquisition but showing no clear advantage for vocabulary.

Overall, these studies have revealed that in terms of learning outcomes, audiovisual media are effective for vocabulary learning. Additionally, student motivation and engagement are also enhanced by making the learning process more interactive and enjoyable. However, what other benefits does it offer students? We believe that vocabulary learning through audiovisual media may also contribute to better pronunciation, listening comprehension, and contextual understanding, as students are exposed to authentic language use in real-life situations. Despite these benefits, the use of audiovisual media for vocabulary learning may also pose challenges. For example, students might struggle with fast-paced dialogue due to language proficiency levels or may misunderstand slang or cultural references. Previous studies [19], [20] stated students' cognitive overload when watching videos with condensed and fast-paced content. Study by Xodabande *et al.* [21] found the inequality in absorbing language via videos since it much depends on students' linguistic proficiency. Although these potential challenges have been explored in some aspects, like videos from YouTube and the benefits of subtitles on screens, audiovisuals have not been thoroughly examined in general. Therefore, the current study aims to explore what students gain and face in using audiovisual media as tools for vocabulary acquisition under their own perspectives. To achieve this objective, this paper focuses on addressing the following two research questions:

- What specific cognitive and contextual factors contribute to the effectiveness of audiovisual media in enhancing students' vocabulary acquisition?
- How do different types of challenges—such as cognitive load, media content complexity, and learner variability—impact students' ability to learn vocabulary through audiovisual media?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. The role of vocabulary

Richards and Schmidt [22] defined vocabulary as the collection of words that individuals, communities, or speakers of a language know and use, encompassing both receptive (understanding) and productive (speaking or writing) vocabulary. It is essential for communication and understanding, making it a fundamental component of language learning. Salawazo *et al.* [23] emphasized prioritizing vocabulary acquisition within language education. In the digital era, audiovisual media has proven to be a powerful tool for enhancing vocabulary development. Studies showed that exposure to English films and videos improves vocabulary, with Regina and Rajasekaran [20] reporting that 94% of participants found audiovisual input effective for retention and usage. Effective strategies include using dual subtitles to enhance comprehension and repeated viewings to reinforce long-term retention [24], [25]. Different types of on-screen texts, such as enhanced captions, also support deeper processing and vocabulary acquisition, even during initial exposure [10]. However, successful implementation requires tailoring content to learners' proficiency levels and ensuring equitable access, with strategies like repetition, interactive lessons, and student projects maximizing the benefits of audiovisual media for vocabulary learning [20].

2.2. Audiovisual media

Media, derived from the Latin term for “intermediary”, functions as a channel for exchanging information and translating abstract ideas into concrete understanding, thus supporting educational objectives [26]. Media in education are typically categorized into printed, audiovisual, and computer-based forms, with audiovisual media gaining prominence for their ability to combine sound and visuals, creating immersive and engaging learning experiences. In the digital age, audiovisual media—such as videos and multimedia presentations—have become essential educational tools, enriching content delivery, fostering creativity, and enhancing student engagement [27]. Recent advancements, including virtual and augmented reality, further expand the educational potential of audiovisual media by enabling interactive exploration of complex concepts and supporting deeper comprehension and motivation [28]. Research demonstrates that audiovisual media improves learning outcomes, critical thinking, and retention by presenting information in interactive, visually appealing formats [29], [30]. These tools also boost learner motivation by creating stimulating environments and have been shown to outperform conventional methods in various subjects. Despite these benefits, challenges such as technological barriers and diverse learner preferences remain. Effective implementation requires careful content design and equitable access. Generally, the evolution of audiovisual media has transformed education, making it vital for fostering creativity, motivation, and comprehension in modern learning contexts.

2.3. The benefits and downsides of learning vocabulary through audiovisual media

Previous studies [20], [31] highlight the benefits of using audio-visuals as tools in teaching and learning vocabulary in four key functions: attentive, affective, cognitive, and compensatory. In turn, they capture students’ attention, foster enjoyment, improve comprehension, and support students’ acquisitions. Within the process, learners are offered images, sounds, and context to understand messages, which carves and lengthens students’ perception of vocabulary learned. Lo [31] and Alhazmi [32] prompt the striking advantages of using audiovisual media in teaching and learning vocabulary in its conveniences. Audiovisual media, like movies, are ideal for illustrating a process, especially in slow motion. It also has a wide range of choices for students to learn. Each student can learn something from the movie, from the clever or less intelligent ones. Overcoming times and places, movies can give people experiences of visiting new areas, new countries, and various historical times not in their ages. Finally, audiovisual aids can be rewatched to clarify the needed information.

However, audiovisual media in lessons have certain downsides to be considered. According to Azhari and Rahayu [33], the disadvantages of using movies in the teaching and learning process are the cost, time consumption, students’ attention, and appropriate movies for the teaching purposes. It is uneasy to find a suitable clip for the learning and teaching target. Besides, each student has their own way to perceive information from the audiovisual aids, so it will undoubtedly distract the learners from the lessons. Meanwhile, learners with higher proficiency language levels are engaged with a video; the ones with lower levels might struggle with its complicated words [21], [19]. Moreover, short clips or movies take learners much time and patience to watch and rewatch for mastering groups of related vocabulary. It also requires plans to reuse the vocabulary in new contexts for practice so that these new words (to the learners) can become active ones, which are helpful for them to expose their language competence. Regina and Rajasekaran [20] stated about the cognitive overload and distraction potential, in which visual and auditory information might overwhelm some learners, and the entertaining nature of audiovisual content might distract the learners from learning purposes.

3. METHOD

To answer the research questions, this study was conducted at Thu Dau Mot University in Vietnam through a quantitative approach, with the participation of senior English-major students. As reported, the total number of senior English-major students is approximately 350. These students were selected because they were assumed to be familiar with various vocabulary-learning methods, with audiovisual media gaining popularity among them due to advancements in digital technology and the trend-driven nature of young learners. Furthermore, they were believed to have experience in vocabulary learning through audiovisual media, as their lessons incorporated video-based instruction. Therefore, the data collected from these participants are considered valid and reliable for this study.

The primary data collection tool was a questionnaire consisting of both open-ended and closed-ended questions, designed based on the theory of information [34]—mixed questions improving the qualitative nuance and reliability of collected data. This method was chosen since an open- and close-ended survey can exploit the participants’ profound opinions in written form, and noting the answers helps to decrease students’ shyness in answering the questions orally and pressure to be recorded. The questionnaire aimed to gather students’ perceptions regarding the benefits of using videos as a tool for improving

vocabulary mastery, as well as the challenges they may encounter in the process. Specifically, it was divided into two parts, comprising a total of 21 questions. The first part focused on students' general background information, while the second part, consisting of 10 multiple-choice and 7 open-ended questions, explored students' perceptions of the benefits and challenges of learning vocabulary through audiovisual media. Among the multiple-choice questions, some were designed using 5-level Likert scales, while others provided suggested options depending on the specific purposes. The open-ended questions aimed to allow students to clarify, elaborate on, and confirm their experiences regarding the benefits and challenges they encountered when using audiovisual media for vocabulary learning.

After being designed, the questionnaire was presented on Google Forms and sent to all targeted participants through emails and Zalo groups (a popular social media platform in Vietnam), which were established by researchers during the time of teaching at the university. The whole process of data collection took place during the first semester of the 2024-2025 academic year. After a week of data collection, a total of 132 completed questionnaires were received. However, 15 of them were excluded because the respondents reported that they did not actively use English movies to improve their vocabulary. In this regard, only 117 questionnaires were considered valid.

Although the number of collected questionnaires did not cover the entire target population, the sample size of 117, calculated using Yamane [35] formula, is sufficient to ensure a high level of representation. Specifically, 117 respondents account for approximately 92% of the population, with an estimated sampling error of around 8%, as in (1). This statistic indicates that the survey results reliably reflect the opinions of the senior English-major students at Thu Dau Mot University.

$$e = \sqrt{\frac{\frac{N}{n}-1}{N}} = \sqrt{\frac{\frac{350}{117}-1}{350}} = 0.075 (\approx 8\%) \quad (1)$$

The survey responses from Google Forms were then exported and imported into SPSS statistics 22 for analysis. Statistical procedures were employed to assess the distribution of participants' responses, offering valuable insights into students' perceptions of both the benefits of using videos for vocabulary learning and the challenges they may encounter. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the collected data. These analyses enhanced the clarity and quantifiability of the survey results, facilitating a comprehensive discussion, interpretation, and presentation of the findings.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Students' commonly used types of audiovisual media and their perceived helpfulness

Figure 1 shows that the majority of students watch short English clips on TikTok and YouTube, with approximately 80% reporting a frequency of always or often. Notably, TikTok has a higher percentage in the always category (42%), while YouTube leads in the often category (47%). Meanwhile, other types of movies and videos, such as documentary films and films in English with subtitles, have an always and often viewing frequency ranging from 25% to approximately 70%. These findings suggest that students frequently engage with audiovisual media, which plays a significant role in supporting vocabulary acquisition.

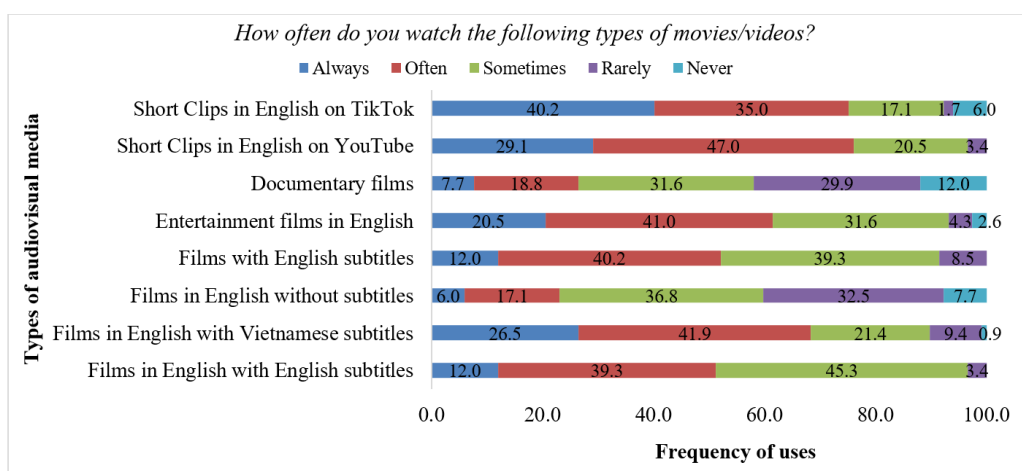


Figure 1. Students' commonly used types of audiovisual media

However, the extent to which these media types support English vocabulary acquisition appears to vary in contrasting ways. For instance, films in English with English subtitles—though not watched as frequently as the 2 most commonly viewed media types, with around 50% of students reporting an always or often viewing frequency, as in Figure 1—appear to provide the greatest support for vocabulary learning, as over 80% of students perceive them as either strongly supportive or somewhat supportive, as seen in Figure 2. More notably, English films without subtitles receive less attention in terms of viewing frequency, with only 23.1% of students reporting an always or often viewing frequency, as in Figure 1. However, they are still recognized for significantly aiding vocabulary improvement, with 57.3% of students acknowledging their supportive role, as in Figure 2.

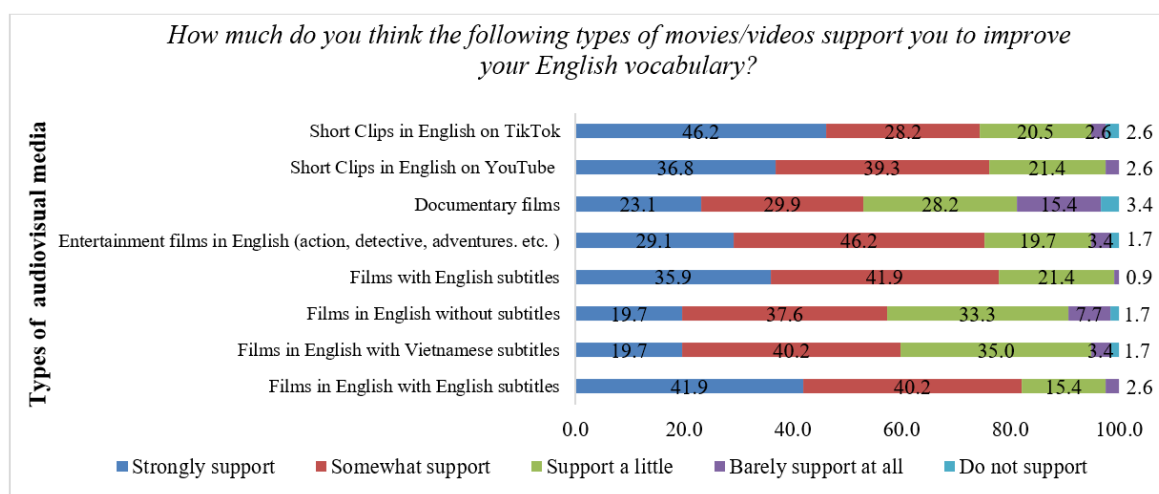


Figure 2. Students' perceptions of the helpfulness of commonly used audiovisual media

4.2. Students' perceptions of the benefits of learning vocabulary through audiovisual media

Figure 3 shows that 83.8% of participants recognize the value of watching movies in improving pronunciation and listening skills. Additionally, 76.9% believe that movies help them learn slang and idiomatic expressions. Exposure to the natural use of the language being learned is noted by 63.2% of participants, further supported by a high level of agreement regarding the role of video context in enhancing meaning comprehension, as in Table 1.

The two other notable benefits include improved vocabulary retention due to audiovisual effects (59%) and increased motivation to learn English (56.4%), as in Figure 3. Notably, none of the participants denied the examined benefits. Moreover, a significant majority—95.7%, as in Table 1—expressed willingness to recommend these learning methods to others, reinforcing the positive impact they may have on learners.

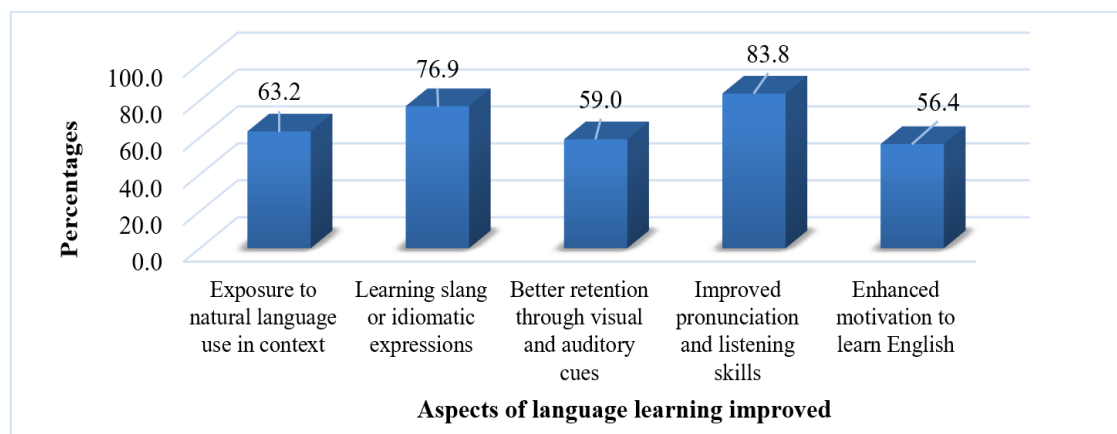


Figure 3. Benefits of using audiovisual media to improve vocabulary

Table 1. Participants' confirmation

Questions	Distributions
Do you believe the context provided in movies (such as storyline, character interactions, and visuals) enhances your understanding of new vocabulary?	Strongly agree (29%), agree (55.6%), neutral (15.4%), disagree (0%), strongly disagree (0%), mean (4.14), standard deviation (0.655)
Would you recommend learning vocabulary through English movies to other students?	Yes, definitely (95.7%), perhaps (0.9%), no (3.4%), mean (2.93), standard deviation (0.367)

Data from open-ended questions, as in Table 2, restate the benefits of learning vocabulary through audiovisual media. Approximately half of the students confirmed the positive impact of the learning method—45.3% of the participants confirmed the superiority of movies in learning vocabulary to traditional textbooks. Most of the respondents appreciated the effectiveness of contextual learning, engagement and motivation, and pronunciation and listening skills. There were 65.8% of the students noted the gains, 15.4% preferred the mixed method in learning vocabulary, while 10.3% discussed the limitations. They highlighted that movies expose viewers to natural dialogue, idiomatic expressions, and cultural nuances, making vocabulary more relatable and memorable. Respondent 96 stated that “*movies provide context and real-life usage of words, making it easier to understand and remember new words.*” The participants' engagement in movies was superior to textbooks. Respondent 55 reported that “*watching films improves listening comprehension and exposes learners to various accents.*” Many respondents mentioned that movies enhance listening skills and help with understanding diverse accents and speech patterns. Respondent 16 admitted that “*movies help learners understand natural conversations and improve listening and pronunciation skills.*”

Table 2. Respondents' notes for the effects of learning vocabulary through audiovisual media

Question	Aspects of effectiveness	N	%
Do you find English movies more effective than textbooks or classroom instruction for learning vocabulary? Why or why not?	Yes	53	45.3
	Contextual learning	28	23.9
	Engagement and motivation	20	17.1
	Pronunciation and listening skills	15	12.8
	Visual and emotional memory	4	3.4
	Individual learning styles	3	2.6
	Cultural insights	7	6
	Preference for mixed methods	18	15.4
	Limitations of movies	12	10.3
	No ideas	10	8.5

4.3. Challenges in learning vocabulary through audiovisual media

Figure 4 highlights several significant challenges that students encounter when using this method to enhance their vocabulary. Particularly, approximately 70% of participants identified misunderstanding slang or cultural references as a major challenge. Additionally, 60.7% reported difficulties in distinguishing useful vocabulary from informal or less relevant language. Furthermore, nearly half of the participants expressed concerns about the lack of structure or consistency in their learning process.

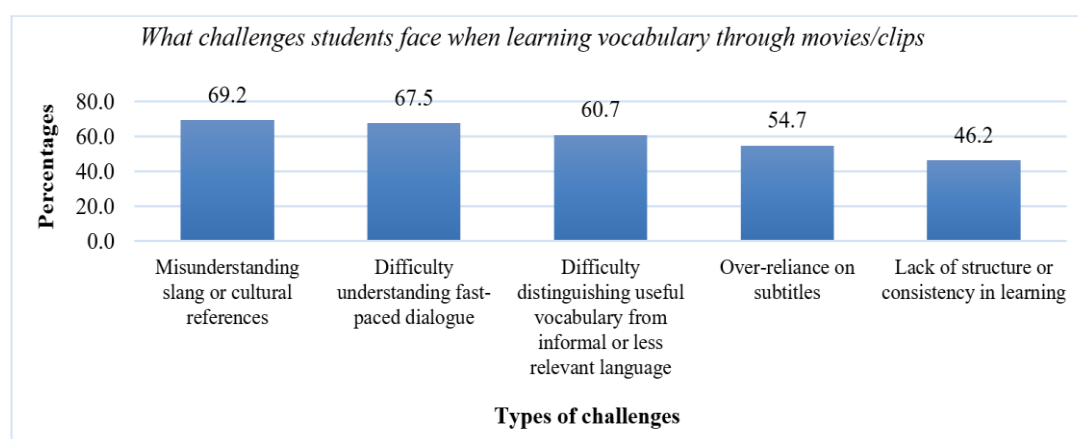


Figure 4. Challenges from learning vocabulary through audiovisual media

Students' notes, as in Table 3, confirm notable challenges related to mispronunciation, inappropriate usage, and context misunderstanding. A prevalent concern among respondents was the risk of picking up incorrect pronunciations, particularly influenced by actors' accents, exaggerated speech, or unclear articulation in films, which accounted for 23.9% of the responses. For instance, respondent 87 noted, "*movies often feature characters with various accents, leading to learners adopting incorrect pronunciation.*" Several participants also highlighted that movies frequently include informal or slang terms that may not be appropriate for professional or academic settings, with this concern representing 16.2% of the responses. As respondent 75 stated, "*I used slang from movies in formal situations, which was out of place.*" Additionally, respondents reported instances where the context of a phrase or its cultural nuances were misunderstood, resulting in misapplication during conversations, accounting for 10.3% of the feedback. For example, respondent 103 remarked, "*idiomatic expressions might be misunderstood or misused without grasping cultural references.*"

Table 3. Participants' notes for negative side effects

Question	Negative side effects	N	%
Have you encountered any negative side effects (e.g., picking up incorrect pronunciation, using inappropriate vocabulary) from learning vocabulary through movies? Please explain.	Incorrect pronunciation	28	23.9
	Use of inappropriate vocabulary	19	16.2
	Misunderstanding context or meaning	12	10.3
	Influence of regional accents and dialects	10	8.5
	Casual and informal language overuse	8	6.8
	Limited vocabulary scope	5	4.3
	Impact on formal English learning	7	6
	No negative impact experienced	8	6.8
	No ideas	20	17.1

5. DISCUSSION

5.1. Benefits

In terms of benefits, the study found some striking information. First of all, the paper found that students' vocabulary acquisition is enhanced via audiovisual media, which aligns with the previous findings [3], [16]. The abundance of information from short video clips and movies contextualizes vocabulary that enhances the validity of measurements that are evidenced by the high scores of agreement in the support of movies/short clips towards vocabulary acquisition, like storyline, character interaction, and visuals, or the high rate of the benefits from "exposure to natural language use in context." This also reaffirms the claims of Ashcroft *et al.* [12] about the vocabulary incidental learning process. Moreover, in this study, the improvement of listening and pronunciation skills through audiovisual media was noted, which supports the assertion of Fauzi and Muljanto [5]—students' language proficiency can be upgraded through familiarizing themselves with natural speech and various accents. In addition, "slang or idiom expressions" and "motivation improvement" through audiovisual media were highly appreciated in this paper, aligning with the observations of previous studies [6], [17], in which the richness in contexts provided by films enhanced language learning.

Significantly, the paper uniquely found that although the platforms like YouTube or TikTok occupied a large proportion of students' interest in watching, the best one for improving vocabulary acquisition is English films with subtitles in English. This finding clarifies Maulida and Warni [36], in which they debated the positive impacts of English-language movies, but they did not differentiate the two formats. The current paper findings signify that English movies with subtitles show its superior functions in understanding and memorizing new vocabulary than the short ones. Expanding Anah *et al.* [2] concern about categorization of media types, the study also found the most preferable type of media was short clips compared to the more comprehensive support from the full-length subtitled films. Besides, this paper also exploited the participants' written responses to clarify the closed questions results. Almost half of them directly agree with the superiority of audiovisual media over textbooks, although some agree with other items like contextual learning and motivation. This result aligns with most of the papers about this topic, particularly Minalla [37], who stated the benefits of movies in fostering learning enjoyment and contextualizing vocabulary acquisition. Generally, the positive and consistent results prove that screens support vocabulary acquisition well among learners.

5.2. Challenges

Despite these benefits, this study identified challenges that echo drawbacks mentioned in previous research. Findings the possible misunderstanding between formal and informal language and context used in audiovisual media in this study align with the ones from Azhari and Rahayu [33], who signified the

distractions from audiovisual media. The misapplication of slang and colloquial language, used to discuss in Ahmed *et al.* [9], was also noted in the study. Over half of the participants voted to face the issues of distinguishing the lexical formality from videos, though only 6.8% of them clarified this problem in writing. This paper briefly found that there is a high rate of misunderstanding in using slang or cultural references, at almost 70%, which sounds like some previous ones, which confirmed context from movies boosting vocabulary meaning acquisition. Another challenge, consistent with previous research [38], is that a proportion of students in this study reported the lack of structures in studying while using audiovisual media. They also showed the concern about the adoption of mispronunciation due to the regional differences, supporting the conclusions of Younas and Dong [16]. In particular, unlike other previous studies, the participants of this paper worried the overreliance on videos with subtitles. Although they admitted the superiority of these types of media in boosting vocabulary budget, over half of the participants self-recognized the issues of dependence on screen captions.

5.3. Implications

The findings of this paper point out that the benefits from audiovisual should be considered in language acquisition. Although students could recognize by themselves the defect of over-reliance on videos, educators should join to warn about the distractions and help to design their structured activities, which is consistent with the suggestions of Nurfauziah *et al.* [6]. Additionally, instructors should notify their students about the superior gains from long movies with subtitles compared to short, unscripted videos so that they can use up the benefits of vocabulary retention.

6. CONCLUSION

The research supports previous studies about gains when utilizing audiovisual media in vocabulary acquisition. Their benefits involve improved listening skills, contextual learning, advanced pronunciation skills, and enhanced motivation. However, it noted challenges like misunderstanding from formal or informal language and over-reliance. Strikingly, the research signifies the necessity of structured guidance for boosting language learning outcomes. The findings orient the application of audiovisual media into the programs of language acquisition, enhancing the benefits and identifying the limitations. In further research, innovative ways for learning vocabulary from videos should be exploited and examined to ensure these media are effective and accessible tools for worldwide learners.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

This journal uses the Contributor Roles Taxonomy (CRediT) to recognize individual author contributions, reduce authorship disputes, and facilitate collaboration.

Name of Author	C	M	So	Va	Fo	I	R	D	O	E	Vi	Su	P	Fu
Xuan Hong Nguyen Thi	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Thanh Thai Nguyen		✓	✓				✓	✓		✓	✓			

C : Conceptualization

M : Methodology

So : Software

Va : Validation

Fo : Formal analysis

I : Investigation

R : Resources

D : Data Curation

O : Writing - Original Draft

E : Writing - Review & Editing

Vi : Visualization

Su : Supervision

P : Project administration

Fu : Funding acquisition

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

INFORMED CONSENT

We have obtained informed consent from all individuals included in this study.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki. All participants were informed about the purpose, procedures, and their rights to withdraw at any time without consequences. Informed consent was obtained prior to participation. Confidentiality and anonymity of participants were ensured throughout the research process.

DATA AVAILABILITY

The data that support the findings of this study are openly available in [Perceptions of audiovisual media in vocabulary acquisition among English learners: Benefits and challenges] at <https://osf.io/3wa5h>.

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BIOGRAPHIES OF AUTHORS



Xuan Hong Nguyen Thi    has been a lecturer at Thu Dau Mot University since 2006. She graduated from University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University, Ho Chi Minh City (VNU-HCM) in 2004. She used to be the leader of the English Language Program, Faculty of Foreign Languages at Thu Dau Mot University for 5 years. She has been interested in English teaching and intercultural communication and she has written several papers in these fields. She can be contacted at email: hongntx@tdmu.edu.vn.



Thanh Thai Nguyen    is a lecturer at Thu Dau Mot University. He received his master degree in English and his bachelor degree from Thu Dau Mot University, Vietnam. He is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in contrastive linguistics at the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University, Ho Chi Minh City (VNU-HCM). In 2021, he joined the Institute for Foreign Language Training and Education of Thu Dau Mot University as lecturer. He has written several papers in the areas of English teaching. His research interests also include TESOL and linguistics. He can be contacted at email: thaint@tdmu.edu.vn.