



Exploring EFL Learners' Experiences of Using English Movies to Enhance Listening Skills

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ABSTRACT

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This study aimed to explore EFL learners' experiences of using English movies to enhance their listening skills, identify the benefits they gained, and examine the challenges they encountered during the learning process. A qualitative descriptive approach was employed to provide an in-depth understanding of learners' experiences. The participants consisted of three undergraduate EFL students purposively selected from a private university in Indonesia. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed that watching English movies significantly contributed to the improvement of learners' listening skills by enhancing their comprehension of authentic spoken English, pronunciation, vocabulary acquisition, and awareness of various English accents. Furthermore, the participants reported increased motivation, confidence, and enjoyment in learning English through authentic audiovisual materials. Despite these benefits, they experienced several obstacles, including rapid speech, unfamiliar accents, connected speech, and limited vocabulary. To address these challenges, they adopted various learning strategies such as using subtitles, replaying difficult scenes, and inferring meaning from context. The study implies that integrating English movies into EFL instruction can provide an engaging and authentic learning environment that effectively supports listening development while fostering learners' motivation and autonomous learning skills.

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INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of digital media has transformed the way people access information, communicate, and acquire new knowledge, including foreign language learning. Among the wide range of digital resources, English-language movies have become one of the most frequently used authentic learning materials by learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Unlike traditional classroom materials, movies provide natural conversations, authentic

pronunciation, cultural expressions, and contextualized communication that reflect real-life language use (Fitriani, 2025; Hikmah, 2026; Mohlas, 2025). Such authentic exposure enables learners to experience English in meaningful situations while simultaneously developing linguistic competence and intercultural awareness. In particular, listening, which is considered one of the most challenging language skills, can benefit significantly from repeated exposure to authentic audiovisual input. Previous studies have shown that learners who frequently engage with English movies demonstrate better listening comprehension and increased motivation to learn English (Hermansyah & Hasan, 2020; Fidelia & Rohmah, 2023). Therefore, investigating learners' experiences with English movies is important because it provides insights into effective approaches that can support listening development in contemporary language education.

Despite technological advancements and the increasing availability of English audiovisual materials, many EFL learners continue to struggle with listening comprehension. Listening requires learners to process pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, intonation, and meaning simultaneously while interpreting spoken language in real time. Unlike reading, listening provides no opportunity to revisit information unless learners intentionally replay the audio, making comprehension particularly demanding (Kunta, 2025; Kusumawati, 2026; Najiburohman, 2025). Rahman et al. (2022) argue that unfamiliar accents, rapid speech, connected speech, and limited vocabulary remain major barriers to successful listening comprehension among EFL learners. Similarly, Jyoti (2020) identifies concentration difficulties, contextual misunderstanding, and insufficient lexical knowledge as common factors that hinder listening performance. These persistent challenges suggest that exposure to authentic language alone is insufficient without appropriate learning strategies. Consequently, understanding how learners navigate these difficulties while engaging with authentic audiovisual materials has become increasingly important for improving listening instruction and supporting more effective language learning practices.

The increasing popularity of online streaming platforms such as Netflix, Disney+, YouTube, and other digital media has encouraged many university students to incorporate English movies into their independent learning routines. Rather than relying solely on classroom instruction, students frequently watch English movies for entertainment while simultaneously attempting to improve their listening abilities. Informal observations and previous empirical studies indicate that learners commonly activate subtitles, replay difficult scenes, pause videos to identify unfamiliar vocabulary, and infer meaning from contextual information during movie viewing. Nevertheless, many students continue to experience difficulties understanding native-speaker conversations because of rapid speech, reduced pronunciation, idiomatic expressions, and diverse English

accents. Although these challenges are widely experienced, learners often develop individualized strategies that enable them to gradually improve their listening comprehension (Adzimah, 2024; Holidi, 2026; Nadhifah, 2026). This phenomenon demonstrates that English movies function not merely as entertainment but also as authentic learning resources whose educational value depends on how learners interact with them throughout their listening development process.

Previous studies have consistently demonstrated the educational value of English movies in foreign language learning. Hermansyah and Hasan (2020) reported that regular exposure to English movies significantly improved university students' listening comprehension by providing authentic pronunciation and contextual language input. Likewise, Putri et al. (2023) emphasized that authentic audiovisual materials facilitate listening development through exposure to natural conversations and native-speaker accents. Other studies have highlighted additional benefits beyond listening. Sari and Aminatun (2021) found that English movies enrich learners' vocabulary acquisition and understanding of idiomatic expressions, whereas Fidelia and Rohmah (2023) reported increased motivation and confidence among learners who frequently watched English movies. Furthermore, Pratiwi et al. (2021) demonstrated that learning strategies such as using subtitles, replaying scenes, and predicting meanings from context effectively support listening comprehension. Collectively, these studies indicate that English movies contribute positively to language learning by integrating authentic language exposure with engaging audiovisual experiences.

Although previous studies have confirmed the positive contribution of English movies to language learning, several important limitations remain. Most existing research has primarily examined measurable learning outcomes, such as vocabulary acquisition, speaking performance, or overall listening achievement, while giving limited attention to learners' personal experiences during the listening process (Albustomi, 2025; Ni'am, 2025; Rahman, 2025). Furthermore, previous studies generally emphasize the effectiveness of audiovisual media without exploring how learners interpret authentic spoken language, respond to listening difficulties, and develop strategies to overcome these challenges. Issues such as understanding fast speech, recognizing connected speech, coping with unfamiliar accents, and interpreting idiomatic expressions remain insufficiently investigated from the learners' perspective. In addition, studies focusing on Indonesian higher education, particularly students enrolled in private universities, are still relatively limited. Consequently, there is a need for research that explores not only whether English movies improve listening skills but also how learners experience the learning process, negotiate listening challenges, and construct effective strategies while engaging with authentic audiovisual materials.

Addressing these limitations represents an important contribution to both language education research and classroom practice. Rather than measuring learning outcomes quantitatively, the present study adopts a qualitative perspective to examine the lived experiences of EFL learners when using English movies as a medium for improving listening skills. This study positions learners as active participants who continuously interpret authentic language input, adapt their learning strategies, and construct meaning from real-life communication presented in movies. By focusing on learners' experiences, listening difficulties, and coping strategies simultaneously, this research provides a more comprehensive understanding of movie-based listening development than previous outcome-oriented studies. Moreover, investigating learners from an Indonesian private university expands the contextual diversity of existing literature and contributes empirical evidence from an educational setting that has received relatively limited scholarly attention. The findings are expected to enrich current discussions regarding authentic audiovisual learning, learner autonomy, and listening pedagogy in EFL contexts.

Based on the identified research gap, this study seeks to explore how EFL learners experience the use of English movies in developing their listening skills, the challenges they encounter during authentic listening activities, and the strategies they employ to facilitate comprehension. It is argued that English movies provide authentic linguistic exposure that promotes listening development when learners actively employ appropriate cognitive and metacognitive strategies to overcome comprehension barriers. Rather than functioning solely as entertainment media, English movies serve as meaningful learning resources that encourage learners to become more autonomous, motivated, and confident while interacting with authentic spoken English. By generating an in-depth understanding of learners' experiences, this study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on authentic language learning and offers practical implications for English teachers, curriculum developers, and educational institutions in integrating movie-based learning into listening instruction. Ultimately, the findings are expected to support the design of more engaging, learner-centered, and contextually relevant approaches for developing listening competence in EFL classrooms.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to explore EFL learners' experiences of using English movies to enhance their listening skills. A qualitative descriptive design was selected because it enables researchers to obtain rich and straightforward descriptions of participants' experiences, perceptions, and learning practices in their natural contexts without imposing theoretical interpretations (Sandelowski, 2000). The study was guided by Webb and Rodgers' (2009) framework, which emphasizes that repeated exposure to

authentic audiovisual input facilitates incidental language acquisition by providing contextualized language use, natural pronunciation, and diverse speech patterns. Through this approach, the study sought to understand how learners perceived the contribution of English movies to their listening development, the challenges they encountered, and the strategies they employed to overcome those challenges.

The research was conducted at a private university in Cirebon, Indonesia, where English is learned as a foreign language and students have increasing access to digital learning resources, including English-language movies through online streaming platforms. This setting was purposively selected because it represents an EFL learning environment in which students frequently engage in autonomous language learning beyond formal classroom instruction. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure they possessed relevant experiences related to the research objectives. The study involved three undergraduate students who regularly watched English movies as part of their independent English learning activities and reported that this practice had contributed to the improvement of their listening skills. Although the number of participants was limited, qualitative research prioritizes the depth and richness of information rather than statistical generalization. To capture diverse perspectives, participants differed in their movie-watching frequency, preferred genres, and subtitle preferences. Ethical considerations were carefully observed by obtaining informed consent from all participants, ensuring voluntary participation, and protecting their identities through the use of pseudonyms.

Data were collected through an open-ended questionnaire that allowed participants to describe their learning experiences, listening challenges, and learning strategies in their own words without being restricted by predetermined response options. This instrument was chosen because it encouraged participants to provide detailed reflections while enabling the researchers to identify recurring patterns across individual experiences. The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis following the procedures proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), including familiarization with the data, initial coding, theme generation, theme review, theme definition, and report development. Through this analytical process, several major themes emerged, including the perceived improvement of listening comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, pronunciation development, authentic language exposure, learning motivation, confidence enhancement, listening difficulties, and the strategies employed to overcome those challenges. These themes formed the basis for interpreting learners' experiences and addressing the research objectives.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Developing Listening Skills Through English Movies

The findings indicate that English movies played a significant role in improving the participants' listening skills by providing continuous exposure to authentic spoken English. All participants acknowledged that frequent movie watching gradually enhanced their ability to comprehend conversations delivered by native speakers. Initially, they experienced considerable difficulty understanding spoken English because they relied heavily on subtitles and were unfamiliar with natural pronunciation and speech patterns. However, repeated exposure enabled them to recognize commonly used words, understand sentence structures, and follow conversations more effectively. Participant 1 stated, "I slowly understand what English people say other than by reading the subtitles," suggesting that dependence on subtitles gradually decreased as listening ability improved. Similarly, Participant 2 explained that English movies "really help my listening skills and my ability to recognize some accents," while Participant 3 reported becoming more capable of following conversations and identifying familiar words without understanding every individual expression. These findings demonstrate that listening development occurred progressively through repeated interaction with authentic audiovisual materials rather than through isolated listening exercises. The participants gradually became accustomed to the rhythm, pronunciation, stress, and intonation of natural English, allowing them to process spoken language more efficiently and confidently over time.

Another important finding concerns the participants' increasing ability to comprehend spoken English within meaningful communicative contexts. Rather than translating every unfamiliar word into their first language, participants reported that they increasingly relied on contextual information, visual cues, facial expressions, and situational settings to infer meaning. This suggests that English movies supported the development of top-down listening processes, in which learners interpret messages by integrating linguistic knowledge with contextual understanding. Such an ability is particularly important because authentic communication rarely requires listeners to recognize every individual word. Instead, successful listening depends on constructing meaning from multiple sources of information simultaneously. The audiovisual characteristics of movies facilitated this process by combining spoken language with visual context, allowing participants to predict speakers' intentions and understand conversations despite occasional vocabulary limitations. Consequently, English

movies provided a more realistic listening environment than conventional classroom recordings because learners were exposed to natural conversations embedded within meaningful social interactions. This finding indicates that contextualized audiovisual input plays a crucial role in strengthening learners' overall listening comprehension while promoting more effective processing of authentic spoken English.

The findings of this study support previous research highlighting the effectiveness of authentic audiovisual materials in developing EFL listening competence. Hermansyah and Hasan (2020) argue that English movies expose learners to authentic pronunciation, contextualized conversations, and naturally occurring language that cannot easily be replicated through textbook-based instruction. Likewise, Putri et al. (2023) found that continuous exposure to English movies improves learners' listening comprehension by familiarizing them with native-speaker pronunciation and diverse English accents. The present study extends these findings by demonstrating that listening improvement is not merely reflected in better comprehension outcomes but also in learners' gradual adaptation to authentic spoken English. The participants described listening development as a cumulative process in which repeated exposure reduced their dependence on subtitles, increased their sensitivity to pronunciation and intonation, and enabled them to construct meaning more efficiently during real-life conversations. These findings reinforce Webb and Rodgers' (2009) proposition that repeated exposure to authentic audiovisual input promotes incidental language acquisition by allowing learners to internalize linguistic patterns naturally. Therefore, integrating English movies into listening instruction can provide meaningful opportunities for learners to experience authentic communication while simultaneously strengthening listening comprehension through continuous and contextualized exposure.

Challenges and Learning Strategies in Movie-Based Listening

Although English movies contributed substantially to the participants' listening development, the findings reveal that learners continued to encounter several challenges when processing authentic spoken English. The most frequently reported difficulties involved rapid speech, unfamiliar accents, connected speech, slang expressions, and limited vocabulary knowledge. Participant 1 admitted, "English people do talking so fast and I still need the subtitles," indicating that speech rate remained a major obstacle to comprehension. Likewise, Participant 2 simply identified "speed of speech and

accent” as the most challenging aspects of understanding movie dialogues, while Participant 3 emphasized that different accents and speaking speed frequently prevented complete comprehension. These findings suggest that authentic audiovisual materials present linguistic complexity that differs considerably from the carefully articulated listening materials commonly used in EFL classrooms. Native speakers often reduce sounds, connect words, employ contractions, and use informal expressions that require learners to process spoken language rapidly without sufficient time for conscious translation. Consequently, listening difficulties should not necessarily be interpreted as learning failure but rather as a natural stage in developing listening competence through authentic language exposure. As learners become increasingly familiar with these characteristics, they gradually improve their ability to process natural spoken English more efficiently and confidently.

To overcome these listening barriers, participants employed a variety of cognitive and metacognitive learning strategies that enabled them to regulate their own learning process. Rather than passively watching movies for entertainment, they actively interacted with the audiovisual content by replaying difficult scenes, activating English subtitles, pausing conversations, and inferring unfamiliar vocabulary from contextual information. Participant 1 explained that “I do playback the dialogue until I get the meaning,” demonstrating repeated listening as a strategy for reinforcing comprehension. Similarly, Participant 2 repeatedly listened to difficult scenes until the conversations became understandable, whereas Participant 3 combined English subtitles, scene repetition, and contextual guessing to interpret unfamiliar expressions without immediately relying on translation. These strategies illustrate learners’ increasing autonomy in managing listening difficulties independently. Instead of expecting immediate understanding, participants gradually developed adaptive learning behaviors that allowed them to monitor comprehension, identify linguistic problems, evaluate their understanding, and select appropriate strategies according to the complexity of each listening situation. Such strategic behavior reflects the development of self-regulated learning, in which learners actively construct meaning through continuous interaction with authentic language rather than depending exclusively on teacher guidance.

The present findings are consistent with previous research highlighting both the challenges and pedagogical benefits of authentic audiovisual materials in EFL listening instruction. Rahman et al. (2022) argue that fast speech, unfamiliar pronunciation, and diverse accents constitute the primary obstacles experienced by EFL learners when listening to authentic English conversations.

Likewise, Manurung et al. (2022) reported that learners frequently struggle with native-speaker speech because of rapid delivery, reduced pronunciation, and insufficient vocabulary knowledge. Nevertheless, the present study extends these findings by demonstrating that learners are capable of developing effective strategies to compensate for such difficulties through repeated exposure to English movies. Consistent with Pratiwi et al. (2021), the participants found that replaying scenes, utilizing subtitles, and interpreting meaning through contextual clues substantially improved comprehension while simultaneously expanding vocabulary recognition and listening confidence. These findings indicate that authentic listening challenges should not discourage the integration of English movies into EFL classrooms. Instead, they emphasize the importance of equipping learners with appropriate listening strategies that enable them to transform linguistic difficulties into valuable learning opportunities. Consequently, English movies function not only as authentic listening materials but also as platforms for cultivating learner autonomy, strategic competence, and resilience in responding to real-world communication.

Authentic Language Exposure, Learner Motivation, and Confidence Through English Movies

One of the most significant findings of this study is that English movies provided participants with authentic language exposure that extended beyond improving listening comprehension alone. The participants consistently reported that movies introduced them to natural conversations, colloquial expressions, slang, idioms, humor, and everyday communication that are rarely encountered in conventional English textbooks. Participant 1 explained that movies helped them understand how native speakers frequently use slang and newly emerging idiomatic expressions in daily interaction. Similarly, Participant 2 stated that English movies exposed them to informal expressions, jokes, and authentic pronunciation that are generally absent from classroom instruction. Participant 3 also emphasized that movies enabled them to observe how English is genuinely spoken in real-life situations through casual conversations rather than carefully structured textbook dialogues. This authentic exposure gradually influenced participants' own language use. Expressions such as "How are you?" were naturally replaced by "What's up?", while phrases like "I'm very tired" evolved into "I'm exhausted," reflecting learners' growing awareness of pragmatic language use. These findings suggest that movie-based learning facilitates not only linguistic knowledge but also sociolinguistic competence, enabling learners to understand how English is appropriately used across different communicative situations and social contexts. Consequently, English movies become valuable

sources of authentic input that bridge the gap between classroom English and naturally occurring communication.

Beyond language development, the participants reported substantial improvements in their confidence and motivation to learn English after regularly watching English movies. Repeated exposure to authentic conversations gradually reduced their anxiety when listening to native speakers and increased their willingness to communicate using English. Participant 1 expressed feeling considerably more confident because frequent movie watching had convinced them that they were capable of understanding and speaking English more effectively. Likewise, Participant 2 explained that continuous exposure to native pronunciation, everyday expressions, and different accents made listening activities less intimidating than before. Rather than perceiving English as a difficult academic subject, participants increasingly viewed it as a practical communication tool encountered in enjoyable learning situations. This shift in perception contributed to stronger intrinsic motivation, encouraging learners to watch more English movies voluntarily and continue improving their listening abilities independently. Such findings indicate that emotional factors play a critical role in successful language learning. Enjoyable audiovisual materials not only improve cognitive outcomes but also create positive learning experiences that strengthen learners' confidence, reduce language anxiety, and encourage autonomous learning behaviors. Therefore, English movies should be viewed as motivational learning resources capable of simultaneously supporting affective and linguistic development in EFL contexts.

The findings of this study corroborate previous research while offering a more comprehensive understanding of learners' experiences with movie-based listening. Sari and Aminatun (2021) argued that English movies facilitate vocabulary acquisition by exposing learners to authentic idioms, slang, and contextual language use that rarely appear in formal instructional materials. Similarly, Hermansyah and Hasan (2020) emphasized that authentic audiovisual input enables learners to experience realistic pronunciation, communicative expressions, and contextualized language beyond textbook examples. Furthermore, Fidelia and Rohmah (2023) reported that English movies enhance learners' motivation by creating enjoyable and meaningful learning experiences while simultaneously strengthening confidence in using English for communication. The present study extends these findings by demonstrating that authentic language exposure, listening development, strategic learning, increased confidence, and learner motivation are closely interconnected rather than independent outcomes. Participants perceived English movies not merely as entertainment but as authentic learning environments where listening skills, vocabulary knowledge, pragmatic competence, and self-confidence developed

simultaneously through continuous interaction with meaningful language input. From a pedagogical perspective, these findings suggest that English teachers should integrate carefully selected English movies into listening instruction while providing appropriate scaffolding, including pre-listening preparation, vocabulary support, guided listening tasks, and reflective post-viewing discussions. Such instructional practices may maximize learners' opportunities to engage with authentic spoken English, promote autonomous learning, and develop communicative competence that is transferable to real-world interactions beyond the classroom.

CONCLUSION

This study explored EFL learners' experiences of using English movies to enhance their listening skills and revealed that authentic audiovisual materials provide substantial benefits for language development beyond listening comprehension alone. The findings demonstrate that regular exposure to English movies enabled learners to improve their listening comprehension, pronunciation awareness, vocabulary acquisition, and understanding of authentic language use, including slang, idiomatic expressions, and everyday conversations. Furthermore, participants developed greater confidence and motivation to use English while adopting effective learning strategies, such as replaying movie scenes, using English subtitles, and inferring meaning from contextual cues to overcome listening difficulties associated with fast speech, unfamiliar accents, and connected speech. These findings highlight that English movies function not only as entertaining media but also as authentic learning resources that foster autonomous learning and meaningful language acquisition. From a theoretical perspective, this study enriches the growing body of literature on movie-based language learning by providing an in-depth qualitative understanding of learners' experiences, challenges, and self-regulated learning strategies, particularly within the context of Indonesian EFL higher education. Nevertheless, this study is limited by its small number of participants and its focus on a single institutional context, which restricts the transferability of the findings to broader populations. Future research is therefore encouraged to involve larger and more diverse participant groups, employ multiple qualitative data collection methods such as interviews and classroom observations, or adopt mixed-methods and longitudinal designs to examine how sustained engagement with English movies influences listening development and other dimensions of English language proficiency over time.

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