

# Evaluation of watching speeches by famous people with or without subtitles on vocabulary acquisition in intermediate-level students

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## ABSTRACT

Subtitles as a powerful teaching tool can help the process of learning the vocabulary of a second language. The present study aimed to examine the potential effect of the use of English and Persian subtitled videos on the development of the acquisition of the vocabulary on EFL (English as a Foreign Language), intermediate students at Rama Institute. 30 Iranian intermediate students were divided into three groups such as English subtitle group (experimental group), Persian subtitle group (experimental group) and no subtitle group (control group). The material included an English one motivational speech of eight minutes and forty eight seconds (Denzel Washington's speech). After a session of watching the video, all participants were requested to answer the multiple choice vocabulary test and then comprehension question, as post-test to assess their improvement in the acquisition of the vocabulary and to clarify that they paid attention to the videos. The results revealed that most of the participants understood the general topic of the video, however, Persian subtitle group performed better in the acquisition of vocabulary.

**Keywords:** Subtitle, Caption, Acquisition of vocabulary, EFL learners

## Introduction

As new teaching methods have been created, tools like audio-visual media, TV, videos, and computers are becoming most significant for teaching (a second language at all levels. These tools can help make learning more effective and thorough. [1-6] Subtitles are an effective way to enhance foreign language learning. Among the many benefits of subtitling movies offer a new way of understanding language. A study conducted by Halger Miter at the Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics and James McQueen confirms that when subtitles are used regularly for learning, they help learners learn a new language faster.

This study looks at videos with subtitles, and it's important to know that seeing the videos with subtitles can really help when learning new words. This includes body language, gestures, and facial expressions that show the meaning, tone, and emphasis of the words, along with the culture and real language of the

speakers. Subtitles are the written words of what people say in the videos, which appear at the bottom of the screen while watching movies [6, 7].

(EFL) teachers have used movies in their classes, without subtitles [8-11]. The important question is whether it's better to show videos with or without subtitles when learning new vocabulary and Which type of subtitle is more effective for learning vocabulary in a second language: Persian subtitles (the learner's first language) or English subtitles?

### *Literature review*

The Importance and History of Watching Lectures in Language Learning :

Watching lectures, particularly those delivered by famous speakers or experts, has become an integral part of language learning. This method not only enhances linguistic skills but also fosters critical thinking and cultural understanding. The practice

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has evolved over time, adapting to technological advancements and the changing needs of learners.

## *Historical lectures*

The tradition of using lectures as a means of education dates back to ancient civilizations. In ancient Greece, philosophers like Socrates and Plato engaged students through spoken discourse. The formal lecture format gained prominence in medieval universities, where scholars would deliver lectures to convey knowledge. However, it was not until the advent of modern technology that the concept of "watching" lectures became widely accessible.

With the introduction of audio-visual media in the 20th century, educational institutions began to incorporate films and recordings into their curricula. The rise of the internet in the late 20th and early 21st centuries revolutionized this practice. Online platforms such as YouTube and educational websites made it possible for learners worldwide to access lectures from esteemed educators and speakers, breaking geographical barriers.

## *The role of lectures in language learning*

1. **Exposure to Authentic Language:** Watching lectures allows learners to hear native speakers using language in context. This exposure helps improve listening skills, pronunciation, and vocabulary acquisition. Learners can observe how language is used in real-life situations, enhancing their understanding of idiomatic expressions and colloquial phrases.
2. **Cultural Insights:** Lectures often reflect the culture and values of the speaker's background. By watching diverse speakers, learners gain insights into different cultures, perspectives, and ways of thinking. This cultural context enriches language learning and fosters empathy and global awareness.
3. **Engagement with Complex Ideas:** Lectures often address complex topics that challenge learners to think critically. Engaging with sophisticated content encourages learners to expand their vocabulary and develop their ability to articulate thoughts in a second language.
4. **Motivation and Inspiration:** Renowned speakers can inspire learners through their passion and expertise. Watching lectures by influential figures can motivate students to pursue their language learning goals with greater enthusiasm.
5. **Flexible Learning:** The availability of recorded lectures allows for flexible learning opportunities. Learners can pause, rewind, or rewatch segments to fully grasp challenging concepts, catering to individual learning paces [12-17].

## *Subtitled video as a learning tool*

Conducted a study involving 90 intermediate ESL students who viewed six episodes of "Wild Weather" under three conditions: English subtitles, Persian subtitles, and no subtitles. Their findings indicated that students exposed to English subtitles performed significantly better in listening tasks compared to those in other groups. This is very similar to several studies support these findings. Garza (1991), and Markham (1989) have

all noted that English subtitles can enhance comprehension and retention among ESL learners by providing linguistic support [9].

## *Improvement in pronunciation and intonation*

The role of video as a tool for improving pronunciation and intonation is well-documented. Baker and Westrup (2003) argue that by observing native speakers [18], learners can better imitate the sounds, rhythms, and intonational patterns of English. This observation is crucial for developing phonetic accuracy and fluency. A study by Derakhshan and Karami (2019) supports this claim [19], finding that ELLs who engaged with video content showed marked improvements in their pronunciation skills. The visual cues provided by video—such as mouth movements and facial expressions—enable learners to refine their speech production more effectively than through audio resources alone.

## *The impact of subtitles on language acquisition*

Subtitles act as a link between spoken and written language, offering learners a visual text that enhances their audio experience. A significant study by Koolstra and Beentjes (1999) explored how subtitles affect children's learning of foreign languages [20]. Their results showed that children who watched subtitled videos had better vocabulary acquisition compared to those who viewed the same content without subtitles. The study highlighted the value of repeated exposure to vocabulary in context, indicating that subtitles not only aid comprehension but also reinforce new words through visual connections. Supporting this perspective, Yuksel and Tanriverdi (2009) examined how subtitled video materials influence vocabulary retention among learners [21]. Their findings revealed that participants who interacted with subtitled content retained vocabulary much better than those who watched non-subtitled videos. The authors suggested that combining auditory and visual inputs enhances cognitive processing, leading to improved learning and retention of new vocabulary.

## *The impact of subtitled video in vocabulary acquisition*

The success of subtitles in vocabulary acquisition can be explained by various cognitive processes. According to the Dual Coding Theory [22], information is more effectively remembered when presented in both verbal and visual formats. Subtitles offer a written form of spoken language, enabling learners to engage with information through different channels. This multimodal strategy not only supports understanding but also strengthens memory by creating more robust associations between words and their meanings.

Additionally, research conducted by Duran (2016) underscores the significance of context in vocabulary learning [23]. By watching subtitled videos, learners encounter new vocabulary in meaningful situations, which improves their ability to deduce meanings and use words correctly. This contextual learning is especially advantageous for those who find it challenging to grasp abstract vocabulary when it is presented in isolation.

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- "How does the presence or absence of subtitles in videos affect vocabulary acquisition in EFL learners?"
  - "Which type of subtitles is more effective for vocabulary acquisition in EFL learners: Persian subtitles (L1) or English subtitles (L2)?"

## Materials and Methods

A total of 40 secondary-level students enrolled in Rama English institution, who were studying Touchstone 2, participated in this study. Prior to the experiment, the researcher administered a test to ensure that none of the participants had any prior knowledge of the vocabulary presented in the video. Based on the results, the researcher selected students with no background knowledge of the relevant terms.

The participants were then divided into three groups. The first group (n=10) watched Denzel Washington's motivational speech without subtitles (target group). The second group (n=10) viewed the video with Farsi subtitles (experimental group). The third group (n=10) watched the video with English subtitles (experimental group).

The researchers selected a short 8-minute and 48 seconds video, available on Google, of Denzel Washington's motivational speech about God and the secret to success given to graduate students at Dillard University.

The video was chosen for its effective and impactful elements, including Washington's eloquent and engaging language, his fluent delivery, and the relatable narrative.

In addition, the creators of the video added Persian subtitles (the first language), which was suitable for the experimental group A, and also the video with English subtitles (suitable for the experimental group B) was available on Google by the same creators, which can be changed in the settings and the researcher turned off the subtitles (suitable for the target group), so this video was noticed.

## Results and Discussion

The present study investigated the influence of L1 (Persian) and L2 (English) subtitles on vocabulary acquisition among 30 Iranian intermediate EFL students at Rama English institution. Participants were divided into three groups: English subtitle, Persian subtitle, and no subtitle. After watching English motivational speech video, participants completed multiple-choice vocabulary tests and comprehension questions to assess their vocabulary acquisition. The key findings are as follows:

**General Comprehension:** All participants demonstrated a good understanding of the overall topic in Denzel Washington's motivational speeches. This suggests that the videos were engaging and accessible to learners, irrespective of subtitle language.

**Vocabulary Acquisition:** The Persian subtitle group showed significantly higher improvement in vocabulary acquisition compared to both the English subtitle and no subtitle groups.

This finding indicates that providing subtitles in learners' native language may enhance their understanding and retention of new vocabulary.

**Group Performance Comparison:** Although the English subtitle group exhibited some improvement in vocabulary acquisition compared to the no subtitle group, their performance was not as strong as the Persian subtitle group. This highlights the potential benefits of utilizing native language subtitles for EFL learners at the intermediate level.

**Attention and Engagement:** The comprehension questions revealed that participants were attentive to the videos, suggesting that engagement contributed to their understanding and retention of vocabulary. This supports the idea that multimedia resources can enrich language learning experiences.

In summary, the findings emphasize the importance of incorporating subtitles particularly in learners' first language as a powerful tool for improving vocabulary acquisition among EFL students. Future studies could examine long-term vocabulary retention from subtitled videos and assess the impact on various proficiency levels.

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As demonstrated by the results, incorporating L1 subtitles can lead to enhanced vocabulary acquisition among EFL learners, underscoring the value of this approach in language learning contexts.

The results align with previous research confirming that subtitles greatly assist language acquisition by supplying contextual information through visual and textual means. Persian subtitles prove effective due to their ability to link existing learner knowledge with the new language being learned. Moreover, non-verbal communication aspects like body language further improve comprehension, making it simpler for learners to connect new words with their definitions.

This research highlights critical questions concerning the language used in subtitles and their influence on learning results. While English subtitles may foster more engagement with the target language, Persian subtitles provide instant cognitive assistance, potentially leading to better vocabulary retention.

## Conclusion

The findings of this study underscore the significant role that subtitles can play in enhancing vocabulary acquisition among EFL learners. By comparing the effects of English and Persian subtitled videos on Iranian intermediate students, it became evident that subtitles in the learners' native language (Persian) provided a more effective means of facilitating vocabulary understanding and retention than English subtitles or no subtitles at all.

The superior performance of the Persian subtitle group suggests that when learners can connect new vocabulary to their first language, they are better equipped to comprehend and remember it. This highlights the importance of considering

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learners' linguistic backgrounds when designing instructional materials. The engaging nature of motivational speeches, such as those delivered by Denzel Washington, further supports the idea that multimedia resources can enhance learning experiences and promote active engagement with the content.

In conclusion, incorporating subtitles particularly in the learners' native language can be a powerful pedagogical strategy for improving vocabulary acquisition among EFL students. Future research could explore additional variables, such as different proficiency levels, types of video content, and long-term retention of vocabulary, to further elucidate the benefits of using subtitled materials in language education. The implications of this study advocate for educators to leverage subtitles as a valuable tool in their teaching practices, ultimately fostering a more effective learning environment for EFL learners.

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