

University Students' Perceptions on Netflix and Subtitles for English as a Second Language Learning

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ABSTRACT

Known to be one of the most popular online video streaming services, Netflix has gained a large number of users for its extensive authentic videos and how it greatly benefits language learning. Despite its popularity, its purpose to serve as the source of language learning is often overlooked, particularly for English as a second language (ESL). Thus, this study is aimed to determine university students' perceptions towards Netflix as a tool for English as a second language learning and to examine university students' opinions of subtitles as a tool to assist in learning English as a Second Language (ESL). The theoretical framework adopted in this study is Computer-assisted Language Learning (CALL). Next, a semi-structured interview (SSI) consisting of six (6) questions was administered to 12 Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) students. Then, the data gathered from the SSI was analysed using thematic analysis. The findings highlighted all five (5) themes which were authenticity, recreation, convenience, comprehension and recall for Research Objective 1, while only two (2) themes were identified for Research Objective 2 which were comprehension and recall. It is concluded that university students positively perceived Netflix and subtitles for English as a second language learning. It is hoped that this study contributes more insights for future researchers, students, and instructors on the advantages of utilising tools such as Netflix and subtitles in learning English as a Second Language (ESL).

Keywords: Netflix; subtitles; language learning; Computer-assisted Language Learning

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, technology is continuously evolving and this growth has benefited the method of language learning as numerous ways can be used for those who want to learn English as a second language (ESL). Due to such reasons, computer-assisted language learning (CALL) has been favoured to adapt to the increasing numbers of language learners as it is a much broader method compared to the traditional notion of language learning, whereby utilising technology in language learning is more dynamic, socially-centred and entertaining (Dizon, 2021). One of the countless advancements made would be the online video streaming services which are created to provide users not only the benefit of possessing a source of entertainment, but also a platform to help its users to learn more about the English language such as Netflix. Known to be one of the most popular online video streaming services, it has gained a large number of users for its extensive authentic videos (Dizon, 2016). Besides that, Netflix-featured subtitles for the videos help the users to gain a better understanding of the language used and the context of the video independently. According to Rao (2019), ESL learners get to learn English in an authentic environment, and watching English movies is a popular and powerful tool for them as they get to develop self-learning and become independent learners. Additionally, movies sparked students' interest in subtitled videos, helped them become more confident in their capacity to use these videos as a learning tool, and placed them in a position to keep improving their English language proficiency (Athirah, 2019).

Due to the nature of Netflix as a video streaming platform, users often associate it with leisure viewing instead of utilising it for second language learning. Dizon and Gayed (2021) opined that while video streaming services have significantly changed how people watch television shows and movies, relatively little is known about how they might be used to encourage second language (henceforth, L2) development. Therefore, this may also contribute to how Netflix is often overlooked as the platform for authentic and meaningful language learning. Next, when it comes to subtitle preference, the problem arises as Malaysian university students tend to choose the assistance of first language (henceforth, L1) subtitles instead of L2 subtitles. This is because, according to Abdulrahman (2018), low proficiency learners are attracted to L1 subtitles more since L1 subtitles are more helpful for students who have had trouble with their reading or listening comprehension of the target language. Moreover, low-proficiency students found L2 subtitles distracting and difficult to pay attention to (Wang, 2014). However, the assistance of English subtitles in authentic videos shown on Netflix could also give positive effects on L2 learners that can significantly improve their proficiency and comprehensible input. Not only that, Netflix videos and subtitles can greatly benefit language learning in general such as in diction, pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar, as well as an individual's cultural background awareness whilst assimilating them with useful phrases, slang, and idiomatic expressions (Dizon, 2016).

Internationally, several studies have been made to find out the correlation between Netflix and subtitles and how they can improve learning the L2, but plenty more was done in the English for Foreign Language (EFL) context (Alm, 2019, 2021; Damanik & Katemba, 2021; Dizon, 2016, 2018; Maharani, 2021). The focus on ESL in recent studies is still relatively scarce specifically looking at Netflix and subtitles its usefulness in language learning (Perez, 2022; Türkmen, 2020). To date, while the study involving the use of multimedia or CALL in second language learning is abundant, the role of Netflix and its subtitles as tools for ESL learning is still underdeveloped in Malaysia. Therefore, the objective of this study is to investigate university students' perception of using a video streaming service such as Netflix and the assistance of subtitles for English as a

second language learning based on these research questions:

1. What are university students' perceptions towards Netflix as a tool for English as a Second Language (ESL) learning?
2. What are university students' opinions of subtitles as a tool to assist English as a Second Language (ESL) learning?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Background

Many have described CALL as a complicated and dynamic field due to its rapid progress over the past 25 years (Chen, Zou, Xie & Su, 2021; Deutschmann & Vu, 2015; Hubbard, 2009;). According to Hubbard (2009), it is the constant changes in technology that necessitate the frequent updating of CALL knowledge and skills. In light of the remarkable changes in the ways that technology has been incorporated into language learning and teaching, CALL has also expanded its definition. The early definition of CALL involved "the search for and study of the computer applications in language teaching and learning" (Levy, 1997, p. 1). As technology advanced and the use of various digital devices or resources inside and outside of language classrooms increased, the definition of CALL has changed to "the development and use of technology applications in language teaching and learning" (Levy & Hubbard, 2005, p. 143). In more recent years, more attempts have been made to depict the nature of the field better. Beatty (2003, p.7) defined CALL as "any process in which a learner uses a computer and, as a result, improves his or her language". However, following this notion, Hubbard (2009, p. 1) raised two questions about the meaning of "computer" and "improve". He contends that the term "computer" should encompass not only desktop and laptop gadgets but also the network that connects them, as well as other gadgets like PDAs, mobile phones, and other digital gear. In response to "improve," Hubbard asserts that CALL today enhances not only learners learning but also teacher productivity, teacher growth, material development, and language assessment systems. Therefore, in this sense, CALL emphasises "any computer technology" used in a "language learning context" (Hubbard, 2009, p. 2). His view on how the assistance of any technology may improve language learning followed these six criteria:

- Learning efficiency: learners are able to pick up language knowledge or skills faster or with less effort;
- Learning effectiveness: learners retain language knowledge or skills longer, make deeper associations, and/or learn more of what they need;
- Access: learners can get materials or experience interactions that would otherwise be difficult or impossible to get or do;
- Convenience: learners can study and practice with equal effectiveness across a wider range of times and places;
- Motivation: learners enjoy the language learning process more and thus engage more fully;
- Institutional efficiency: learners require less teacher time or fewer or less expensive resources.

The transformations of CALL are now felt not only in the classroom but also in almost every aspect of our everyday lives. Accessible, portable, and exponentially more powerful technologies have

all emerged, and the educational environment itself has also undergone major change at the same time, with a change in emphasis from teacher-centered to learner-centered learning, from centralised to distributed (Stockwell, 2014). Echoing this, Deutschmann and Vu (2015) stated that now, the values that are prioritised alongside language learning are the content of social interaction and cultural discourse. Therefore, it is thus crucial to stress that CALL does not simply involve the use of technologies in language learning per se, but supports and transforms language education in a variety of ways. This modern direction of CALL proves that although Hubbard's (2009) argument about "computer" and "improve" was made before the sophisticated 21st-century technology, it is nonetheless still a valid argument today.

Dizon (2021) Five Themes of Netflix and Subtitles as a Language Learning Tool

Gilbert Dizon has been extensively studying computer-assisted language learning (CALL) and has particularly developed an interest in the influence of Netflix on second language (L2) learning over the years. Based on Hubbard's (2009) approach to CALL, Dizon (2021) adapted and identified, five themes when it comes to how the multimedia platform nowadays, particularly the video streaming platform Netflix and subtitles help language learning which is described as follows:

1. Authenticity means that through consuming content from Netflix, viewers are exposed to cultural knowledge gain and are more likely to understand how the English language is used in a much more "authentic" way as most series or movies always lean towards the use of informal and casual English. This can be supported by the findings agreed with Koyfman (2021), whereby watching shows on Netflix also provides the students learning English with real cultural education that simultaneously improves their language skills.
2. Recreation emphasises how language learning through naturalistic CALL focuses on the pursuit of leisure interest in learning a second or foreign language in digital environments in an informal context compared to the traditional learning experience. Young (2021) opined that watching videos that are not specifically intended for educational purposes can contribute to a student's growth and progress concerning their language skills.
3. Convenience concerns the flexibility of accessing the content at any time and any place for language learning. Kumar (2021) stated that the flexibility of a certain platform offers convenience for students and impacts them positively as this allows them to enhance their learning performance and increase their perception to learn and improve according to their timing and pace.
4. Comprehension focuses on understanding the visual and aural input from the contents. This needs to be considered because when it comes to learning a language like English or simply just improving them, using a method of just watching can be difficult for some as they need to take into measure the rate of speech, accents, slang, and other contributing modalities (Alghamdi, 2022).
5. Recall refers to the ability to remember new or unfamiliar words or phrases which also depends on repetition and comprehension. According to Alm (2021), occurring repetition through regular and narrow viewing supported comprehension.

Netflix and Subtitles in Language Learning

The use of online video streaming services such as Netflix has gained an astonishing amount of popularity not only due to the variety of entertaining content but also because it can also be used as a learning platform for those who seek to learn more conveniently and casually. According to Türkmen (2020), Due to the interesting range of content, Netflix has managed to gain the interest

of everyone, especially young and adult audiences. Moreover, Smith (2021) stated that the existence of Netflix is something that presents a high potential when it comes to learning about language as the contents go beyond the traditional film and visual media. In other words, Netflix enables an authentic learning experience as learners can learn through authentic videos which are known to be beneficial as it allows learners to have a contextualised view of a language that can help learners to visualise the words and meanings (Dizon, 2018). The use of subtitles has also been studied by researchers to investigate the effect of subtitles on language learning through video platforms. According to Black (2021), second language development can be gained through consuming audiovisual content as there is sufficient evidence that subtitles significantly improve reading, listening, and retention of words or phrases and increases phonological information. Moreover, Aksu-Ataç and Köprülü-Günay (2018) agreed that the role of movie subtitles in foreign language teaching and learning can increase motivation as subtitles possess positive effects that promote language learning through informal contexts. Other than that, Vicencio and Vicencio (2020) posited that the subtitles on videos and films allow learners to obtain and facilitate their second language learning. Hence, the use of Netflix and subtitles can offer learners ample benefits when it comes to language learning.

Previous Studies on Netflix and Subtitles for L2 Learning among University Students

In terms of the studies on Netflix and subtitles for English language learning, the trend is more popular for English as Foreign Language learning (EFL). To name a few, Dizon (2018) analysed the connection between using Netflix and its correlation and impact on L2 learners. The findings revealed that Netflix offers several benefits not only for entertainment purposes but also for learning purposes as it increases the Japanese students' L2 vocabulary and learning motivation. Next, Dizon (2021, 2016) also analysed Japanese students' perception towards the use of subscription video streaming services (SVSSs) for informal language learning and the usefulness of Netflix and subtitles in the EFL classroom. The finding unfolded the learners have favourable views of Netflix to improve vocabulary, but highly positive attitudes towards the use of the site to improve L2 listening comprehension. Next, Alm (2021) looked into the notion of intra-formal learning in EFL learning through Netflix. Building on methods to extended learning (in reading, listening, and viewing), she proposed that learners should be encouraged to draw on informal learning opportunities to expand learning chances in formal settings. The findings from her study proved that the availability of language tools, such as subtitles, encouraged learners' learning focus to explore learning features that suited their language level, personal interests, and leading to the development of routines that resulted in frequent viewings. Lastly, Damanik and Katemba (2021) investigated the perception of college students on Netflix as a digital learning aid for vocabulary improvement and found that watching English movies/series on Netflix can help students improve their vocabulary. Therefore, based on the trend, it is a popular field in EFL instead of ESL.

The novelty of research on the use of Netflix and subtitles in ESL learning known by the researcher is still present, particularly in Malaysia. In the international context, Türkmen (2020) performed a case study to investigate utilising Netflix and subtitles as second language (English) support for English-Turkish learners. The findings revealed while engaging in leisure activities, watching Netflix movies is said to be good for learning new terms, vocabulary, and language usages as well as for writing, grammar, vocabulary, and vocabulary skills. This topic, however, is still understudied in Malaysia, particularly among young adult learners or university students. Therefore, this study intends to fill the gap by analysing the perception of using Netflix and subtitles among university students in Malaysia in learning English as a second language.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted the qualitative method to determine the perception of university students on Netflix and subtitles as a tool to learn English as a second language. The research sample for this study was 12 students from Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) coming from different fields of study. The sample of this study was decided through a random sampling technique to ensure equal probability and chances for the respondents to be chosen to participate in the online interview. Next, the type of instrument that was used to retrieve the required data is a semi-structured interview (SSI) which was conducted online on the Google Meet platform. It consisted of six (6) specified questions adapted from Dizon (2021) to answer the present study's research questions. A thematic analysis was used as it is the best approach to analyzing qualitative data. This is because, according to Braun and Clarke (2006), using thematic analysis to collect data can contribute to a more accessible form of analysis as it does not require thorough theoretical and technological information on other types of qualitative approaches.

The data analysis procedure of this study was conducted by applying the themes found in Dizon (2021). To accurately analyse the interview data, five themes were used which are authenticity, recreation, convenience, comprehension, and lastly recall. Once all themes have been reviewed and defined, it was concluded with a write-up of the information gained throughout the analysis. Finally, the existing data were analysed again to ensure the accurate interpretation of the interview data. To ensure reliability and validity, the transcripts were analysed thoroughly and the codes were cross-checked by constantly comparing the data. In terms of validity, several strategies were used which include the triangulation of different data as the sources of information, using rich, thick descriptions to convey the findings, presenting negative or discrepant information and also spending prolonged time in the field.

FINDINGS & DISCUSSIONS

Netflix as a tool for English as a Second Language (ESL) Learning (RQ1)

The findings from Research Question 1 on students' perception of Netflix as a tool for English as a second language (ESL) learning identified five (5) themes adapted from Dizon (2021). The themes of authenticity, recreation, convenience, comprehension, and recall were found in the responses given by the respondents. Throughout a thematic analysis, the themes of authenticity, recreation, and convenience were found repetitively in each of the respondent's answers to the interview questions (Table 1). The answers concerning these themes were mainly positive as students believe that Netflix provides flexibility, an authentic learning experience, and an interesting informal medium for ESL learning. This can be supported because according to Turner (2022), learning a language through an interesting medium will also improve focus and retention. Alm (2021) also revealed in his study that the variety of L2 movies or series enabled the learner-viewers to choose shows that matched their unique preferences, generating interest and encouraging the creation of routines that led to regular viewings.

Table 1

Respondents' answers highlighting the themes of Authenticity, Recreation & Convenience (RQ1)

Respondent 1	<i>The casual sentence structures or slang or like accents allow me to dive deeper into their culture.</i>
Respondent 11	<i>It can also expose you to the cultural aspects where you can learn more detail about how English is used in real-life situations.</i>
Respondent 7	<i>I think students would enjoy using this platform to learn English because they are not restricted and you kind of have a sense of freedom. With learning in the classroom, it can be very strict and too formal. However, this type of learning is fun and less restrictive.</i>
Respondent 5	<i>I use this service mainly because it is super convenient. I can stream shows on the go or whenever and wherever I want as long as I have the app and a working internet connection.</i>

However, the other two themes, comprehension and recall received a mixed reaction (Table 2) because some consider that solely depending on Netflix to understand complex words or sentence structures and memorise them can be quite difficult. This finding agreed with Dizon (2021) that as video streaming content was not specifically made for language learning purposes, consequently, this has led to comprehension difficulties for some students which were contributed by the rate of speech, the vocabulary level used, and the genre of the contents. Moreover, the mixed reactions from this study also agreed with the findings by Napikul, Cedar and Roongrattanakool (2018) as watching English movies and reading English subtitles at the same time could improve the learners' vocabulary learning, listening, and reading skills, but low proficient students may be faced with the problem that they cannot grasp a word at the first time they hear it and require more time in doing so. Therefore, the findings for Research Question 1 suggested that university students perceive Netflix as a tool for English as a second language learning positively, yet, some highlighted that its downside is that it is not suitable as an independent language learning platform. The table below highlights the themes given by the respondents:

Table 2

Respondents' answers highlighting the themes of Comprehension & Recall (RQ1)

Respondent 5	<i>The use of informal speeches and a great deal of slang has helped me to pronounce words better and it really drives my curiosity for the better to search for and understand the words.</i>
Respondent 2	<i>I think it's hard to pinpoint the accent used unless I watch it a lot of times so it definitely helps me understand. They also sometimes talk way too fast</i>
Respondent 6	<i>It might be hard to totally understand everything by just watching one show or movie so with Netflix and subtitles it is not a platform you can fully depend on to learn English.</i>

Subtitles as a tool to assist English as a Second Language (ESL) Learning (RQ2)

Research Question 2 is focused on the students' opinions of subtitles as a tool to assist English as a Second Language (ESL) learning. For this research question, only comprehension and recall were identified (Table 3). As the questions were focused only on subtitles, the themes of comprehension and recall were found in the answers given by the respondents. Their opinions on the use of subtitles to assist language learning were mainly positive and conclusive as all collectively agree that with subtitles their comprehension of what is being read and heard is improved. These findings also agreed with the findings from Ebrahimi and Bazaei (2016) as participants performed better in vocabulary and comprehension when the movie was played with subtitles since the written forms of the dialogues were presented to learners. Thus, the students opined that without the assistance of subtitles, it might be harder to fully capture all the nuanced features of the English language. Moreover, with the help of subtitles when watching a video, students believe that it is easier to recall certain words and phrases. When they read the subtitles and listen to the shows simultaneously, their memorization skills will be increased (Gass, Winke, Isbell & Ahn, 2019). The table below highlights the themes given by the respondents:

Table 3

Respondents' answers highlighting the themes of Comprehension & Recall (RQ2)

Respondent 4	<i>Of course! Yes (having the subtitles on). Because it's easier to understand what they say and it is a bonus because you get to know the spelling of certain words. Some words in English are complicated in the sense that the pronunciation is different from the spelling.</i>
Rebraunspndent 7	<i>Yes, I do prefer having my subs on. I find it easier to concentrate on the show when there are subtitles because I can thoroughly comprehend what is being said. I think listening alone is not enough for me.</i>
Respondent 2	<i>Of course! Because I think it's hard to pinpoint the accent used unless I watch it a lot of times so it definitely helps me understand. They also sometimes talk way too fast so I love having subtitles.</i>
Respondent 10	<i>I do. Because I think it's hard to focus just by hearing, without subtitles I need to listen to the words being said repetitively so with subtitles I can fully know, understand and remember.</i>

Discussions

Based on the data analysis of this study, several themes were identified: authenticity, recreation, convenience, comprehension and recall. In general, the findings in this study were used to highlight the university students' perception of Netflix and subtitles for English as a second language (ESL) learning. The findings from this study agree with the study by Dizon (2018, 2021), as the university students gave a favourable perception of the topic. This could be seen in his findings as they gave positive reviews on learning EFL through video streaming services such as Netflix. Through

authenticity and recreation, both studies depicted that these university students' viewed Netflix and subtitles as means to learn and improve their English language proficiency in an authentic, fun, and engaging way. Comparatively, the findings of this study also supported those by Türkmen (2020), that Netflix and subtitles help the development of second language skills and cultural competence of the students they learn the casual language usages such as slang, cultural differences, vocabulary and grammar. Through the convenience of time and place, learning could take place outside the classroom, in a more flexible manner. The findings from this study support those of Alm (2019) as it was stated that exposure to learning through Netflix positively impacted the students' engagement as the quality of their learning experiences varied according to the chosen time and place of their viewings. However, the findings from this study also revealed that there are minor disadvantages in terms of comprehension, and recall such as slang, accents, and speech rate. It is aligned with those from Dizon (2021) that as video streaming content was not specifically made for language learning purposes, consequently, this has led to comprehension difficulties for some students which were contributed by the rate of speech, the vocabulary level used and the genre of the contents.

Besides that, the assistance of subtitles was deemed to be extremely helpful as it allows better comprehension and recall among the students. From the findings, it is evident that subtitles in movies facilitate listening, reading comprehension, and vocabulary acquisition. Movies and show with English subtitles contain audio-visual information, so it stands to reason that they could help students develop their listening abilities, and since the textual information in the subtitles shows the narration, dialogue, sound effects, and music, students consume the textual information to understand the spoken words by reading them on screen (Hashim & Aziz, 2022). Therefore, this behaviour may lead them to improve their vocabulary and reading comprehension. The study is also in line with Alm (2021) where it was demonstrated that the participants agreed their comprehension is enhanced through the naturally occurring repetition through replay and subtitle options which allowed participants to view their movies or series with a focus on the language. Moreover, it also supported the findings by Ebrahimi and Bazaee (2016) that subtitles had a positive impact on university students' content comprehension of English movies since the participants comprehend the subtitled movie better than the one without subtitles. Hence it is proven that, despite learning EFL or ESL, university students admitted that learning English on Netflix can boost their comprehension and recall, especially with the assistance of subtitles.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study was conducted to accentuate how language learning for ESL students can be facilitated greatly by the convenience of CALL which in this case is Netflix and subtitles. Based on the findings that were elaborated above, the utilization of a video streaming service such as Netflix and the assistance of subtitles is perceived mainly on the positive side through the five themes identified: authenticity, recreation, convenience, comprehension, and recall. It provides a certain realization that the method of language learning is not restricted only to the traditional and professional classroom setting, but can also be achieved by watching authentic videos on a streaming service like Netflix and with the help of subtitles. Even though there are other types of methods of English language learning, obtaining high-quality input is not easy outside the classroom. Through the informal learning route via Netflix, students can be more comfortable in the learning process. Moreover, the findings and discussions also agree with the benefits Netflix

and subtitles can offer to young-adult learners in both ESL and EFL contexts. All past studies and this current one indicated that Netflix and subtitles are viewed positively as tools to learn English as a Second Language and despite having certain downsides, the pros of this video streaming service outweigh the cons.



Several recommendations can be made to further improve the quality of the research. Firstly, the main limitations of this study can be seen in the aspect of the methodology. As the topic is made with the limitation to only involve university students, future researchers could broaden their research subjects. The topic can be directed towards the differences in perception between genders, ages, or the general public to gain different and more of their perceptions by utilizing Netflix and subtitles as a tool for language learning. Besides that, another recommendation that can be given to enhance the quality of this study is through employing a different methodology. Future researchers may approach this study differently by using a quantitative method or mixed method to obtain varied data and a better understanding of the research topic. Lastly, it is recommended for future researchers to perform this study on non-English major students or across different proficiency levels in the language. It will determine whether this is a contributing factor towards identifying the effectiveness of Netflix and subtitles for ESL learning and directly contribute more to the presently underdeveloped area in the ESL context. Lastly, it is hoped that this paper can be used as a complementary reference for educators or students, who are intrigued to understand more about the correlation between watching Netflix videos and the help of subtitles with the improvement of students' English as a Second Language (ESL) proficiency, to gain more insight and a deeper understanding of language learning and the benefits they could gain from Netflix and subtitles.

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