

MOVIES VS. DIGITAL MEDIA: EFFECTIVENESS IN ENGLISH VOCABULARY AND GRAMMAR ACQUISITION AMONG EFL LEARNERS IN CENTRAL ASIA

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ABSTRACT

Digital media platforms have fundamentally transformed the landscape of informal language learning, presenting both unprecedented opportunities and complex pedagogical challenges for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction. While prior investigations have examined the discrete effects of specific media types on language acquisition, relatively few studies have undertaken a rigorous comparative analysis of the differential effectiveness of full-length motion pictures versus short-form digital media — specifically YouTube videos and television series — in facilitating vocabulary enrichment and grammatical competence among undergraduate EFL learners. The present study addresses this research gap by conducting a systematic comparative investigation among fifty undergraduate English-major students enrolled at a higher education institution in Kazakhstan. Employing a mixed-methods research design that integrates quantitative survey instruments with qualitative semi-structured interview protocols, the study explores the extent to which each media category contributes to measurable gains in lexical breadth

and grammatical accuracy, and examines the mediating roles of learner motivation, media preference, and frequency of engagement. The findings of this investigation are anticipated to yield substantive theoretical insights and practical pedagogical recommendations for EFL educators seeking to leverage digital media resources as effective supplementary instructional tools in Central Asian educational contexts.

Keywords: EFL media learning, vocabulary acquisition, grammar development, YouTube, television series, Kazakhstan, digital language learning.

INTRODUCTION

The accelerating pace of technological advancement in the twenty-first century has fundamentally altered the manner in which individuals engage with the English language beyond formal educational settings. The emergence and exponential growth of digital media platforms — encompassing streaming services, video-sharing repositories such as YouTube, and episodic television productions accessible via online subscriptions — have generated a richly diverse ecosystem of authentic English-language content. Learners may access this content at will, transcending the temporal and spatial constraints traditionally associated with classroom-based instruction. In Central Asia, and in Kazakhstan in particular, the widespread adoption of smartphone technology and high-speed internet connectivity has rendered such digital resources increasingly accessible to university-aged populations, making informal consumption of English-language media an inescapable dimension of contemporary student life.

Despite this conspicuous shift in media consumption habits, a substantial lacuna persists in the empirical literature regarding the comparative pedagogical efficacy of distinct media formats for English language acquisition. Prior scholarship has tended to investigate discrete media types in isolation, yielding valuable but inherently limited insights into the relative contributions of films, YouTube content, or serialized television to vocabulary and grammar development. The absence of comparative frameworks illuminating the differential effects of these media modalities represents a significant

obstacle to developing evidence-based recommendations for EFL pedagogy in digitally saturated learning environments.

The present study is motivated by the recognition that undergraduate EFL learners in Kazakhstan inhabit a media landscape characterized by an unprecedented diversity of English-language content sources, and that their language acquisition trajectories are shaped not merely by formal instruction but by the cumulative effects of informal media exposure. Vocabulary and grammar are well-established pillars of communicative competence: Zhang (2012) demonstrated that lexical and grammatical knowledge function as indispensable cognitive prerequisites for successful engagement across all four language skill domains; Nation (2001) affirmed vocabulary breadth as one of the most robust predictors of overall second language proficiency; and Ellis (2006) highlighted the central role of implicit grammatical learning through exposure to authentic language input. The present investigation situates itself within this theoretical tradition, operationalizing media exposure as a form of comprehensible authentic input through which incidental lexical and grammatical acquisition may occur.

1.1 Research Objectives

The study pursues the following objectives:

1. Determine which media format is perceived as most conducive to vocabulary acquisition.
2. Assess the differential impact of each medium on self-reported grammatical accuracy.
3. Investigate the relationship between media preference, engagement frequency, and proficiency gains.
4. Elicit qualitative insights into media-based informal learning among Central Asian undergraduates.

1.2 Research Questions

RQ1: To what extent do EFL learners in Kazakhstan perceive movies, YouTube, and TV series as effective for vocabulary acquisition?

RQ2: Which format is associated with the greatest self-reported grammatical improvement?

RQ3: What motivational and contextual factors mediate learners' engagement with English-language media?

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Media as a Vehicle for Language Acquisition

The theoretical foundation for media-assisted language learning is robustly grounded in Krashen's (1982) Input Hypothesis, which posits that second language acquisition is most effectively facilitated through exposure to comprehensible input that marginally exceeds the learner's current proficiency level. Authentic audio-visual media, by virtue of its multimodal character and the naturalistic register of language it presents, constitutes a particularly potent source of such comprehensible input. Vandergrift and Goh (2012) further affirmed that the simultaneous engagement of auditory and visual processing channels during media consumption creates optimal conditions for the incidental acquisition of both lexical items and grammatical structures, as contextual visual cues provide semantic scaffolding that reduces cognitive load and facilitates inferential meaning-making.

Woore (2010) demonstrated that exposure to authentic spoken language through audio-visual media significantly enhances phonological awareness and aids learners in developing sensitivity to the prosodic features of the target language, thereby indirectly supporting grammatical processing. Winke, Gass, and Sydorenko (2010) similarly established that the strategic use of subtitles during media viewing exerts a measurable positive effect on vocabulary retention and lexical incidental acquisition, particularly when subtitles are presented in the target language rather than the learner's native tongue.

2.2 Full-Length Movies in EFL Contexts

The pedagogical deployment of full-length motion pictures in EFL instructional settings has attracted considerable scholarly attention over the past three decades. Ismaili (2013) conducted a landmark comparative study at South East European University,

demonstrating that students who received film-assisted English instruction exhibited significantly higher motivational engagement and superior language skill development relative to peers instructed through conventional textbook-centered methods. The author attributed these outcomes to the affectively engaging character of cinematic narratives, which sustain learner attention over extended viewing periods and embed target language vocabulary within emotionally resonant storylines that enhance memorability.

Sari and Sugandi (2015) elaborated on the specific mechanisms through which Hollywood productions facilitate vocabulary and grammar acquisition, highlighting the role of nonverbal communicative cues — including gestural expression, facial affect, and paralinguistic features — in providing contextual support for the inferential processing of unfamiliar lexical items. The researchers further noted that the relatively slow narrative pacing and extended character development characteristic of feature-length films afford learners repeated exposure to target structures within varied pragmatic contexts, thereby promoting both breadth and depth of vocabulary knowledge.

2.3 YouTube and Short-Form Digital Video

The emergence of YouTube as a ubiquitous platform for informal English language learning has generated a rapidly expanding body of research examining its pedagogical implications. Watkins and Wilkins (2011) conducted one of the earliest systematic investigations of YouTube's utility in EFL classroom contexts, concluding that the platform's capacity to deliver diverse, topically varied, and contextually authentic video content renders it a highly flexible and motivationally engaging supplementary resource. The authors observed that YouTube's interactive features — including user commentary, content rating systems, and algorithmic recommendation mechanisms — create a participatory learning environment that encourages active rather than passive engagement with English-language content.

Alhamami (2013) further demonstrated that learners who regularly engaged with YouTube videos produced by native English speakers reported significant gains in listening comprehension and colloquial vocabulary knowledge. These improvements were

attributed to the informal and conversational register characteristic of much YouTube content, which more closely approximates naturalistic spoken English than the scripted dialogue of feature films. The brevity of YouTube videos, moreover, accommodates the attentional constraints and time pressures characteristic of undergraduate student populations, enabling flexible and episodic engagement with English-language content throughout the academic day.

2.4 Television Series as Language Learning Tools

Serialized television productions represent a third and increasingly prominent media modality within the informal English language learning ecosystem. Vasquez and Harvey (2010) argued that the episodic structure of television series offers distinctive affordances for language acquisition — most notably, recurrent exposure to consistent character voices, idiolects, and interpersonal dynamics across multiple episodes, which supports the progressive deepening of learners' pragmatic and sociolinguistic awareness. The longitudinal familiarity with recurring characters and narrative contexts cultivated by serial viewing facilitates acquisition of collocational knowledge and formulaic language sequences that resist explicit instruction.

Webb (2010) conducted a quantitative investigation of incidental vocabulary acquisition through viewing a single episode of an English-language television series, demonstrating that even a single encounter with unfamiliar words in engaging narrative contexts yielded measurable form-meaning mapping gains. Rodgers and Webb (2011) extended this inquiry by examining cumulative vocabulary gains through sustained series viewing, concluding that advanced learners could acquire substantial new lexical items through this modality alone.

2.5 Research Gap

Notwithstanding the substantial body of scholarship devoted to the individual examination of movies, YouTube, and television series as language learning resources, the extant literature offers remarkably few empirically grounded comparative analyses of the differential effectiveness of these three media modalities within a single learner population.

This gap is particularly conspicuous in Central Asian EFL contexts, where the intersection of expanding digital media access, distinctive cultural attitudes toward English learning, and the particular proficiency trajectories of university-aged learners creates a research environment of considerable theoretical and applied significance. The present study directly addresses this lacuna by situating a rigorous comparative investigation within the Kazakhstani undergraduate EFL context.

METHOD

3.1 Research Design

The present investigation adopts a convergent mixed-methods research design, integrating quantitative survey-based data collection with qualitative semi-structured interview protocols in order to generate a comprehensive and multi-perspectival account of the phenomena under investigation. This methodological triangulation, consistent with the framework articulated by Creswell and Plano Clark (2018), enables the researchers to achieve both the breadth of coverage characteristic of quantitative approaches and the contextual depth and nuance afforded by qualitative inquiry. The simultaneous collection and parallel analysis of quantitative and qualitative data facilitates the mutual corroboration, elaboration, and — where necessary — productive interrogation of findings across methodological strands.

3.2 Participants

The research sample consists of fifty (50) undergraduate students enrolled in the Department of English Language and Literature in Kazakhstan. Participants were purposively selected on the basis of the following eligibility criteria: (a) enrollment in an English-medium undergraduate program, (b) age range of eighteen to twenty-five years, (c) self-reported proficiency level at or below upper-intermediate (B2) on the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) scale, and (d) regular consumption of English-language digital media in informal learning contexts. The sample comprises both male and female students, distributed across first, second, and third years of undergraduate study, thereby ensuring variation in both proficiency level and duration of prior media exposure.

3.3 Instruments

Data collection is operationalized through two principal instruments. The primary quantitative instrument consists of a researcher-developed, closed-ended questionnaire comprising forty items organized across five thematic dimensions: (1) media consumption frequency and preferences, (2) perceived vocabulary gains attributable to each media type, (3) perceived grammatical improvements associated with each format, (4) motivational engagement and affective responses to media-based learning, and (5) overall self-assessed English proficiency development. All questionnaire items are rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The instrument was subjected to expert content validation by three applied linguists and pilot-tested with ten students from the target population, yielding a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.87, indicative of strong internal consistency reliability.

The secondary qualitative instrument comprises a semi-structured interview protocol consisting of eight open-ended questions designed to elicit rich, contextually nuanced accounts of participants' media-based learning experiences. Interview questions probe the specific circumstances and affective dimensions of media engagement, the strategies learners employ to maximize linguistic benefit from media consumption, and the perceived differential advantages and limitations of each media format for vocabulary and grammar development. Interviews are conducted individually, audio-recorded with participant consent, and subsequently transcribed verbatim for thematic analysis.

3.4 Data Collection & Analysis

Questionnaire administration is conducted during scheduled class sessions, following receipt of informed consent from all participants. Completion requires approximately twenty to twenty-five minutes. Semi-structured interviews are conducted individually in a private setting over a two-week period following questionnaire administration. Each interview lasts between twenty and thirty minutes. All interview data are recorded using a digital audio recorder and subsequently transcribed. Participants are assigned pseudonymous identifiers to protect anonymity throughout the research process.

Quantitative data are analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical procedures, including frequency distributions, percentage calculations, mean scores, standard deviations, and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) to assess statistically significant differences in perceived effectiveness across the three media modalities. Statistical analyses are performed using SPSS Version 26. Qualitative interview data are subjected to thematic analysis following the six-phase framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), encompassing familiarization with data, generation of initial codes, development and review of themes, and production of the final thematic account.

ANTICIPATED RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The following section presents the anticipated empirical findings of the study, organized in alignment with the principal research questions and supplemented by tabular representations of expected data patterns. These projections are grounded in the theoretical framework and prior empirical literature reviewed in the previous section and are intended to provide a comprehensive template for the actual results that will be generated upon full implementation of the study.

4.1 Media Consumption Frequency

Table 1 presents the projected frequency of media consumption among participants.

Media Type	Daily	3–5x/Week	Once/Week	Rarely/Never
Full-length Movies	12 (24%)	18 (36%)	14 (28%)	6 (12%)
YouTube Videos	31 (62%)	13 (26%)	5 (10%)	1 (2%)
TV Series / Netflix	22 (44%)	17 (34%)	9 (18%)	2 (4%)

YouTube is the most frequently consumed format (62% daily), reflecting its episodic, algorithm-curated nature. TV series rank second in daily use, while movies require a greater time investment and are accessed less often.

4.2 Perceived Vocabulary Acquisition

Table 2 presents mean ratings (out of 5) for vocabulary-related items.

Statement	Movies	YouTube	TV Series
Learns new words in context	4.3	3.9	4.1
Exposes to natural vocabulary	4.5	3.7	4.2
Aids long-term retention	4.4	3.5	4.3
Makes learning enjoyable	4.6	4.1	4.4
Overall mean	4.45	3.80	4.25

Movies score highest for vocabulary acquisition ($M = 4.45$), followed by TV series ($M = 4.25$) and YouTube ($M = 3.80$). The projected advantage of movies in contextual vocabulary learning and long-term retention aligns with the theoretical proposition that the extended narrative arcs and emotionally resonant storylines characteristic of feature films create superior conditions for the deep processing of lexical items. The relatively lower ratings projected for YouTube content with respect to long-term vocabulary retention may reflect the episodic and topically fragmented nature of short-form video, which affords less repeated contextual exposure to target vocabulary items. These projections are consistent with the findings of Ismaili (2013) and Sari and Sugandi (2015), who similarly attributed the lexical learning advantage of films to their sustained narrative immersion and the multimodal contextual scaffolding they provide.

4.3 Perceived Grammar Improvement

Table 3 presents mean ratings for grammar-related items.

Statement	Movies	YouTube	TV Series
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Improves sentence structure awareness	4.2	3.4	4.0
Helps understand tense use naturally	4.1	3.6	4.2
Exposes to varied grammatical patterns	4.3	3.3	4.1
Increases grammar confidence	4.0	3.5	3.9
Overall mean	4.15	3.45	4.05

Movies again lead ($M = 4.15$), followed closely by TV series ($M = 4.05$). YouTube receives the lowest grammar ratings ($M = 3.45$), attributable to its informal, often unscripted register featuring colloquial and non-standard constructions. This finding is consonant with the broader theoretical literature, which consistently associates grammatical development with exposure to the more carefully crafted and structurally varied dialogue characteristic of professionally produced cinematic and televisual content. The slight advantage of movies over TV series for grammatical pattern exposure may reflect the greater structural complexity and linguistic diversity of feature film scripts relative to episodic serial formats, which tend to rely more heavily on formulaic dialogue and recurring pragmatic routines.

4.4 Student Motivational Engagement

Table 4 presents motivational endorsement across media types.

Question	Agree / Yes	Neutral	Disagree / No
Movies motivate English learning	46 (92%)	3 (6%)	1 (2%)
YouTube motivates English practice	38 (76%)	9 (18%)	3 (6%)
TV series motivate English improvement	44 (88%)	5 (10%)	1 (2%)

Would use more if teacher-recommended	47 (94%)	2 (4%)	1 (2%)
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Movies (92%) and TV series (88%) generate the highest motivational endorsement. YouTube is slightly lower (76%), possibly reflecting perceived superficiality or informational fragmentation of short-form content relative to the sustained narrative engagement offered by movies and series. Notably, 94% of students would increase media-based learning if formally recommended by educators — underscoring significant potential for teacher-directed media integration within formal EFL instructional frameworks. This finding carries important implications for pedagogical practice: EFL instructors in Kazakhstan and comparable Central Asian contexts may meaningfully enhance learner engagement and language development outcomes by explicitly endorsing and structuring media-based learning activities as legitimate supplements to formal instruction.

4.5 Qualitative Insights

Thematic analysis is projected to yield four principal themes: (1) Emotional Investment and Narrative Immersion — emotionally engaging content aids language absorption; (2) Accessibility and Convenience — YouTube's flexibility supports on-demand practice; (3) Authenticity of Language Input — learners perceive varied naturalness across formats; and (4) Subtitle Dependence and Comprehension Strategies — target-language subtitles improve reading speed and grammar pattern recognition. Representative participant voices: Participant 7 noted stronger word retention when emotionally invested in characters; Participant 23 felt TV series offered more authentic English due to situational variety; Participant 41 reported improved recognition of grammar patterns after switching to English subtitles.

CONCLUSION

The present investigation constitutes a theoretically motivated and methodologically rigorous contribution to the growing body of scholarship examining the role of digital media in informal English language acquisition among undergraduate EFL learners in

Central Asian educational contexts. By adopting a comparative analytical framework that simultaneously examines the differential pedagogical efficacy of full-length motion pictures, YouTube short-form video content, and serialized television productions, the study generates findings of both theoretical significance and immediate practical relevance for EFL educators, curriculum designers, and institutional policymakers in Kazakhstan and the broader Central Asian region.

The projected findings suggest that full-length motion pictures and television series afford learners superior conditions for vocabulary acquisition and grammatical competence development relative to YouTube short-form content, primarily by virtue of their extended narrative structures, emotionally engaging storylines, and sustained and contextually diverse language exposure. YouTube, by contrast, demonstrates particular strengths with respect to accessibility, motivational engagement among digitally native learner populations, and facilitation of informal, opportunistic language practice. These nuanced findings collectively suggest that the most pedagogically effective approach to media-integrated EFL instruction is likely to involve the principled and contextually sensitive combination of multiple media formats, each strategically deployed to leverage its distinctive affordances for language acquisition.

The study is subject to several inherent limitations that constrain the generalizability of its findings. These include the geographically and institutionally bounded nature of the sample, the reliance on self-reported perceptual data rather than direct objective measurement of vocabulary and grammar gains, and the cross-sectional research design, which precludes causal inference regarding the longitudinal effects of media exposure on language development. Future research is accordingly encouraged to address these limitations through the implementation of longitudinal designs, the incorporation of standardized pre- and post-test measures of lexical and grammatical knowledge, and the extension of comparative media analyses to diverse Central Asian educational settings encompassing a broader range of proficiency levels, institutional contexts, and sociolinguistic backgrounds.

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