

Exploring the Motivational Potential of Intralingual Subtitled Videos as ‘Frugal’ Digital Tool for English Vocabulary Learning

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ABSTRACT

Recent developments in multimedia-assisted language learning have encouraged educators to use more digital tools in the classroom. However, many feel pressured and struggle to adopt them especially when they require training, regular practice, or costly subscriptions. In English vocabulary learning, ESL educators must design effective pedagogy strategies incorporating technology use that are practical and accessible for both teachers and students. In this regard, intralingual subtitled videos (ISVs) offer a ‘frugal’, simple and familiar digital solution. Involving 30 ESL students of a Form 2 class from a secondary school in Melaka, this mixed-method research investigated the extent to which intralingual subtitled videos (ISVs) influence their motivation towards English vocabulary learning. The findings demonstrate that 90% of participants experienced moderate to high motivation when learning English vocabulary through the ISV, with qualitative data showing three themes that further supports its motivational impact: (1) the ability to learn new vocabulary, (2) the ability to understand the form, meaning, and use of the targeted vocabulary, and (3) the entertainment qualities which make learning vocabulary a fun, interesting, and encouraging experience.

1. INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary acquisition is the central component of language learning, as it equips learners with the lexical knowledge necessary for the development of communication and literacy skills (Gorjian, 2014). However, mastering English vocabulary knowledge remains a continuous challenge for language learners, especially in the English as a Second Language (ESL) context, due to limited contextual skills to guess the meaning of unfamiliar words (Sener, 2015) and also a lack of motivation to learn. Without enough vocabulary in the mind or what Read (2000) described as ‘below the threshold’, ESL learners neither understand the messages that others are trying to convey nor are they capable of expressing their own intention. Additionally, traditional vocabulary-teaching approaches like rote learning, dictionary look-up

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practices, and reading exercises, which have been used in many language classrooms, may fail to address diverse learning needs or sustain learners' motivation over time (Webb & Nation, 2017).

Advancements in multimedia-assisted language learning have prompted educators to explore and incorporate digital tools in language classrooms. Still, many educators face pressure to do so and experience struggles especially with complex platforms, which may require some practices and training or even periodical subscriptions that could be costly. In fact, external barriers such as insufficient technical and pedagogical training present a more frequent challenge to educators than internal issues like student's lack of interest in technology (Liang, 2021). Consequently, the additional workload, technostress, and constant demands for technological integration affects the educators' well-being and resilience negatively (Fernández-Batanero et al., 2021).

In the context of English vocabulary learning, ESL educators must not only develop pedagogical strategies that facilitate vocabulary comprehension but also ensure practical and accessible technological use for both educators and learners. To achieve this, intralingual subtitled videos (ISVs) represent a compelling example of what can be called a 'frugal', simple and familiar digital tool. ISVs refer to videos with on-screen subtitles that are in the same language as the audio narration (Raine, 2012). In the current research, this term refers to English videos that are accompanied by English subtitles. ISVs are ever-present in everyday digital platforms like YouTube, Netflix, and even standard media players. Thus, such ubiquitous presence of ISVs creates a pedagogical tool that provides engaging and effective vocabulary learning experiences without requiring expensive platforms or extensive technical expertise.

Over the years, ISVs have demonstrated considerable promise in enhancing vocabulary acquisition by simultaneously engaging learners' visual, auditory, and textual processing channels through their multimodal approach. Research indicates that ISVs strengthen form-meaning-use connections by allowing learners to see words while hearing their pronunciation and observing their contextual usage within authentic digital media, thereby reinforcing memory retention of vocabulary knowledge (Winke et al., 2010). This dual-channel presentation aligns with Mayer's Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning (Mayer, 2024), which posits that information processed through both verbal and visual systems creates richer memory retention and facilitates more meaningful language learning.

Despite many interests in the use of captioned materials like ISVs, a notable gap can be recognised regarding the motivational aspects of ISVs' use in English vocabulary learning. While studies by Chen et al. (2024) and Kurokawa (2025) have documented benefits of using ISVs for vocabulary gain and learner engagement, fewer investigations have systematically examined how ISVs influence learners' intrinsic motivation, which is their interest, engagement, and willingness to be involved in vocabulary learning tasks. Motivation represents a crucial factor for language learning, particularly for vocabulary acquisition, which requires prolonged effort and repeated exposure (Ushioda & Dörnyei, 2021).

To address the empirical gap mentioned, this study thus seeks to answer the following research question: to what extent intralingual subtitled videos (ISVs) influence learners' motivation toward English vocabulary learning? Specifically, it examines the participants' self-reported motivation scales and perceptions of ISVs when learning the targeted English vocabulary in language classrooms. Through understanding how ISVs enhance the motivational aspect of vocabulary learning, this research benefits ESL educators looking to integrate 'frugal', simple and familiar digital practices in their language curricula.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Conceptual Framework

Mayer's Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning postulates that the brain processes auditory and visual information through independent channels (Mayer, 2024). The synchronisation of audio with written text facilitates the mapping of pronounced sounds of words to their spelling forms. This alignment minimizes unnecessary cognitive load, allowing the mind to be redirected from basic decoding to the retention and

acquisition of new vocabulary (Chen, 2024). This reduction in cognitive load is directly tied to motivation. Under Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2020), when learners experience a positive level of comprehension competence, their language anxiety decreases and their self-efficacy rises, leading to higher intrinsic motivation (Teng, 2024). Hence, through ISVs, the reduced cognitive processing barriers (due to audio, images and subtitle presence) directly secures better comprehension, enhances motivational willingness to interact with English input, and enhances learners' vocabulary acquisition.

Self-Determination Theory also emphasises fostering autonomous regulation, which can lead to better performance and enhanced persistence. ISVs enable learners a greater control, such as the ability to adjust playback speed and the repeat content, which thus support both better word recognition and autonomy in learning. Allowing self-regulated learning through ISVs thus could foster learners' intrinsic motivation that is necessary for long-term vocabulary retention (McEown et al., 2019; Mendoza, 2023).

This research is also underpinned by Krashen's Input Hypothesis which suggests that language learning would progress when the input given is comprehensive, that is, slightly above a learner's current level (1992). The ISV used in the current research is the comprehensible input material that contains targeted English vocabulary presented in verbal form (subtitle and audio) and non-verbal form (images) which are slightly beyond the current knowledge of the language learners – with knowledge defined as understanding of meaning, form and use (Nation, 2011).

2.2 Empirical Evidence

Previous studies support the benefits of using ISVs for vocabulary gain and learner engagement. A meta-analysis by Chen et al. (2024) indicates that ISVs significantly improve vocabulary outcomes in both recognition and recall tasks, with subtitled groups consistently outperforming those in non-subtitled conditions regardless of proficiency level. This performance gap is attributed to the subtitles' ability to clarify the auditory stream, allowing learners to link sounds directly to their written forms. This connection is essential for incidental learning for low-frequency words that might be overlooked during natural speech (Teng, 2022; Kurokawa, 2025).

In terms of the motivational aspect, ISVs produce a term that has been identified by Vanderplank (2016) as 'effects with' subtitles. In these effects, learners report increased confidence and reduced anxiety when subtitles support the comprehension of authentic media. This encourages them to be repeatedly engaged with complex content (Teng, 2024). ISVs also assist diverse populations of learners by strengthening word recognition and pronunciation awareness through repeated exposure in self-directed digital environments (Gernsbacher, 2015; Venturini, 2022).

A few other findings further establish ISVs as a validated instrument for motivating vocabulary learning through accessible, self-directed interaction with authentic linguistic input (Hsu, 2015; Hwang et al., 2019; Qiao & Chen, 2023). They reported that learners using adaptive captioning within mobile applications demonstrate remarkable situational interest and higher rates of task completion compared to those without captions. This suggests that ISVs function on dual purpose; providing both cognitive clarity and emotional support within modern digital platforms. To simply put, the independent use of ISVs by learners increased both their enjoyment and motivation level to acquire new words (Nurfauziah et al., 2023).

Despite these supportive findings, several researchers point to potential limitations and conflicting outcomes regarding the use of captions. For instance, Taylor (2005) observed a 'split-attention effect' among lower-proficiency language learners. When presented with simultaneous visual, auditory, and textual input, these learners may struggle to split their attention effectively, leading to cognitive overload and decreased enjoyment. Additionally, without explicit pedagogical guidance or post-viewing tasks, the cognitive gains of captions can remain fleeting, failing to transition from temporary recognition to long-term vocabulary retention (Teng, 2022). Thus, the motivational benefits of ISVs may not be uniform across all learner proficiency levels.

3. METHOD

3.1 Research Design and Scope

The current research employed a classroom-based study in which participants received an English lesson over two days; each day consisted of a two-period class, totalling 80 minutes. This research implemented a descriptive mixed-methods approach, involving both qualitative and quantitative approaches, with more weight given to the qualitative approach in investigating the extent to which intralingual subtitled videos motivate students to engage with and persist in English vocabulary learning. This research involved 30 students of a Form 2 class from a secondary school in Melaka. All students were intermediate-level English language learners who were native speakers of Malay language, with English language being their second language.

To secure approval in conducting this research, institutional ethical approval was obtained from the Educational Planning and Research Division of Ministry of Education Malaysia as well as the school administration. Participation was entirely voluntary, and student data were kept confidential and anonymised.

3.2 Data Collection and Analysis

This research used a vocabulary quiz, which was adapted from Raine's vocabulary quiz (2012), which itself was modified from Wesche and Paribakht's 1993 Vocabulary Knowledge Scale. The quiz tested participants on 6 targeted vocabularies (2 nouns, 2 verbs and 2 adjectives) taken from the ISV titled 'The Lego Story'. These words were chosen as the targeted vocabulary to be learned because they provided patent contextual clues such as pictorial, textual and verbal cues which could help participants to guess the meanings when accompanied by a visual display.

An open-ended questionnaire was then distributed to the participants at the very end of the classroom lesson. The questionnaire contains a 4-level Likert scale as the provided choices for participants' responses to the question 'Do you find learning English vocabulary through viewing intralingual subtitled video motivational?' Also, the questionnaire required the participants to justify their selected responses. Data from the open-ended questionnaire were analysed using frequency (percentage) and also categorised following the coding and theming method.

4. FINDING & DISCUSSION

4.1 ISVs Influence on Learners' Motivation: Quantitative Findings

The quantitative analysis revealed notably positive perceptions regarding ISV being motivational in learning English vocabulary. Table 1 shows 27 out of 30 participants affirmed that learning English vocabulary through viewing the ISV was either 'very' (n = 14, 47%) or 'somewhat' (n = 13, 43%) motivational. Only three participants (10%) found viewing ISV as 'not very' motivational, and no participant selected 'not at all' motivational.

Table 1. Participants' responses to "Do you find learning English vocabulary through viewing intralingual subtitled video motivational?" (N = 30)

Scale	Frequency	Percentage
Very	14	47%
Somewhat	13	43%
Not Very	3	10%
Not at All	0	0%

The positive outcomes observed can be grounded in Mayer's (2024) Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning, which illustrates that words and images are more conducive to learning rather than either just text or image alone. The presence of both English audio with English subtitles enabled participants to become

cognitively active by being engaged in the process of attending to the video presented, making connections between subtitles and pictures, and relating them to their background knowledge in order to establish understanding of an unfamiliar word. Crucially, such cognitive processes could serve as a catalyst for learner motivation. Baranowska (2021) found that ISVs provide optimal instructional scaffolding for language learners, generating favourable attitudes and enhancing receptive vocabulary retention. Teng (2025) highlighted that captioned video (including ISVs) significantly enhances learners' engagement and willingness to learn vocabulary incidentally by mitigating cognitive load and creating stronger form-meaning mappings. Dizon and Gayed (2021) and Altun and Hussein (2022) similarly reported that integrating intralingual subtitles in digital video tasks increases learner satisfaction, builds word recognition confidence, and sustains intrinsic motivation in English learning contexts.

4.2 ISVs Influence on Learners' Motivation: Qualitative Findings

4.2.1 Theme 1: New Vocabulary

The most prevalent theme raised from the data is that the ability to learn new vocabulary itself is considered motivational. The participants revealed that they felt motivated to learn English vocabulary through the ISV as they managed to learn new vocabulary which they previously did not know. The following are some responses that illustrate this point:

- (i) *"The video makes me learn many new vocabulary."* – S1KAA1
- (ii) *"I encounter words that I have not seen before."* – S2KAA1
- (iii) *"I get to learn new words which I did not know previously."* – S8A1
- (iv) *"The video helps enrich my vocabulary."* – S9A1

This finding suggests that the ISV creates the conditions of noticing (Schmidt, 1990), which is an important cognitive process in vocabulary learning, where language learners become aware of new words. Such a situation makes them realise their own positive progress, which then leads to learning motivation. When students realized they were actually learning new words, they felt more capable. According to Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2020), feeling competent or successful in an activity is a key driver of intrinsic motivation. Therefore, the cognitive act of noticing new words triggered an emotional feeling of progress, which then made the students feel motivated to continue.

4.2.2 Theme 2: Vocabulary Knowledge Aspects

Another common theme raised by the participants is that the ISV was considered motivational because it allowed the learning of the three significant aspects of vocabulary knowledge: form, meaning and use (Nation, 2011). Not only were the participants able to learn the pronunciation and spelling of the targeted vocabulary, but they also managed to learn the meaning of those words and became aware of how they were used in sentences. The following responses are examples that demonstrate this point:

Table 2. Participants' responses illustrating vocabulary knowledge aspects enhanced by the ISV

Aspect of Vocabulary Knowledge		Response	Participant
Form	Spelling	<i>"I can know how words are spelt."</i>	S6A1
	Spelling	<i>"I get to spell and pronounce a word more easily."</i>	S9A1
	Pronunciation	<i>"I get to pronounce words correctly."</i>	S1A1
	Pronunciation	<i>"I get to catch the pronunciation of English words more quickly and clearly."</i>	S9KAA1
Meaning		<i>"The video makes me learn the meaning of words that I rarely encounter."</i>	S3KAA1
		<i>"I get to learn the meaning of words that I was not aware of previously."</i>	S7KAA1
Use		<i>"I now know how to use the words in sentences since I am not so good at building sentences."</i>	S1KAA1

This result may be explained by the fact that audio cues were present in the video as it is confirmed by Heddy (2025) that audiovisual media like subtitled video could enhance learners' oral skills by imitating the intonation and pronunciation heard from audio. The finding also identified that a participant knew how to use the words in sentence form and this corroborates with Chia's research (2008) which reported that some of her Chinese participants who watched movies in English subtitles managed to understand the usage of words from the context displayed in the subtitle. Beyond cognitive skill development, this multimodal exposure significantly reduces language anxiety and cognitive load, leading to higher learner enjoyment and positive attitudes toward vocabulary acquisition (Zhou & Wu, 2024). Captioned video environments reduce listening anxiety and lower the affective filter, making structural input (form) less intimidating and more accessible to processing. Simultaneously, the rich contextual and visual scaffolding enhances perceived self-efficacy in deriving word meaning, which stimulates learner engagement and intrinsic interest (Teng, 2024). As learners observe authentic communicative interactions, this heightened motivation translates into greater confidence and willingness to experiment with active vocabulary use in productive contexts (Ardianti & Chabibah, 2025).

4.2.3 Theme 3: Entertainment Qualities

Some participants commented on the entertainment qualities of the ISV such as being fun, interesting and encouraging as the reasons to become motivated to learn English vocabulary. Some examples of participants' responses that address this point are listed in the following table:

Table 3. Participants' responses illustrating entertainment qualities of the ISV

Entertainment Quality	Response	Participant
Fun	"The video makes me have fun with learning English vocabulary."	S2KAA1
	The video is fun."	S8KAA1
Interesting	"The video makes me feel interested to learn English vocabulary."	S9KAA1
	"I take interest in viewing videos, especially cartoon videos."	S3KAA1
	"The video grabs my attention. It is interesting and not boring."	S11A1
Encouraging	"I like watching cartoon videos, so the video encourages me to learn English vocabulary."	S6KAA1

Due to the nature of the intralingual subtitled video being fun, interesting and encouraging, it provided more reasons as to why the participants became motivated to learn English vocabulary. This finding corroborates the statement of Wan Azlina and Leong (2015) that video may encourage more effective, entertaining, exciting and supportive processes of language learning which may result in rapid and satisfying learning progress of learners. Neuman and Koskinen (1992) also state that the entertainment qualities of videos is a reason that makes subtitled videos preferable for language learning and can be taken as an advantage over texts. Marielo, D'Fly and Barretta, (2015) also support this by emphasising that subtitle video can be motivational as viewers' interest are typically driven towards the story on the screen, thus taking advantage of its meaningful context for the purpose of language learning. The enjoyment of the video helped create a comfortable and positive learning environment. This supports Wan Azlina and Leong (2015), who found that video media makes the classroom process more supportive and exciting. It also agrees with Neuman and Koskinen (1992), who stated that the entertaining nature of videos is a major advantage over traditional text. By keeping the students relaxed and interested, the video reduced their language anxiety. This emotional support helped them focus on the learning task and made them want to participate actively.

4.2.4 Contrasting Perception

Despite the positive responses reported by a majority number of participants, few others however had a contrasting perception regarding the ISV. One participant (S10A1) did not perceive the ISV as motivating, citing difficulties in comprehension. The remaining ones did not provide explanations to why they had a

contrasting perception since they chose not to respond. This underscores an important boundary of ISV utility.

The most possible explanation for this result is that even with the addition of subtitles, the ISV used was not at a level where it constituted comprehensible input for those particular participants. This may be because the participants' level of English proficiency did not allow them to benefit from the ISV and thus, resulted in low level of motivation to learn English vocabulary. According to Krashen's (1992) 'i+1' Input Hypothesis, input must align closely with the learner's current competence. If the vocabulary and textual complexity of the ISV exceed this threshold, the input is no longer comprehensible, resulting in cognitive overload and a subsequent drop in motivation.

The reality is, even though all participants in this research were those of intermediate level of English proficiency, there are many sub levels that go under it. These particular participants who had contrasting perceptions might possess a lower level of English compared to their peers which caused them not to acquire better learning experience. Neuman and Koskinen (1992) noted a 'rich get richer' tendency in the results of their research, whereby students who had a higher English language competency in the study made more significant vocabulary gains than their lower-level counterparts.

5. CONCLUSION

This study investigates to what extent intralingual subtitled videos (ISVs) influence learners' motivation toward English vocabulary learning. Specifically, it examines the participants' self-reported motivation scales and perceptions of ISVs when learning English vocabulary in language classrooms. The findings demonstrate that 90% of participants experienced moderate to high motivation when learning English vocabulary through the ISV shown, with qualitative data showing three themes that further prove its motivational impact: (1) ability to learn new vocabulary, (2) ability to understand the form, meaning and use of the targeted vocabulary, and (3) the entertainment qualities which make learning vocabulary a fun, interesting and encouraging experience. Thus, it can be concluded that, to some extent, the ISV did motivate students to learn English vocabulary.

Through this research, the perceived motivational value of ISVs are uncovered in many aspects. Other than being a motivational tool to drive language learners' interest in learning vocabulary, teachers ought to exploit ISVs as a pedagogical tool that provides aids in curbing many emerging learning problems due to the lack of vocabulary knowledge among language learners. Going into the language curricula, language educators can utilise 'frugal', simple and familiar digital tools like ISVs in meaningful and engaging pedagogy because they are practical, accessible and motivating options that deserve more systematic use in English language classrooms compared to more sophisticated platforms that require expertise and costly periodical subscriptions. In fact, ISVs can serve as potential materials for autonomous learning, granting English learners greater control over their pace and study habits.

While the present study shows the motivational potential of ISVs for English vocabulary learning, several limitations must be acknowledged when interpreting the results. First, the small sample size (N = 30) from a single school in Melaka limits generalisation of the results. Besides, the short intervention duration (two days) only captures immediate situational interest rather than sustained, long-term motivation. Additionally, motivation was measured via a single self-reported Likert item, which has lower measurement reliability than multi-item validated constructs. Future studies should use a longitudinal design with a randomized control trial to evaluate long-term vocabulary retention. Furthermore, multi-item scales based on Self-Determination Theory should be employed to capture diverse motivational dimensions, and standardized pre-/post-tests should be implemented to track objective vocabulary gains.

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7. CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors agree that this research was conducted in the absence of any self-benefits, commercial or financial conflicts and declares the absence of conflicting interests with the funders.

8. AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Farahiya Zalikha Zakaria: developed the research concept and theoretical framework as well as conducted and analysed the data collection; **Mohd Azri Abd Jalil:** performed literature search and contributed to the reviewing, editing and formatting of the paper. **Farahiya Zalikha Zakaria and Mohd Azri Abd Jalil:** wrote, revised the article, and approved the last version of the manuscript.

9. DECLARATION OF GENERATIVE AI AND AI-ASSISTED TECHNOLOGIES

This manuscript was developed with the assistance of Gemini Notebook and Gemini Pro for the purpose of writing comprehensive literature reviews and discussions of results. The tool/service supported the author(s) in reviewing and refining the content, and the authors assume full responsibility for the final version submitted for publication.

10. DATA AVAILABILITY/SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS

The datasets used and/or analysed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

11. ETHICS STATEMENT

This study was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Ethics Committee under Educational Planning and Research Division of Ministry of Education Malaysia (Approval No: KPMSP.600-3/2/3 Jld 2 (49)/2016). All procedures involving human participant subjects were in fulfilment of the ethical standards of the 1964 Helsinki Declaration. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and data anonymity was strictly maintained throughout the study.

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