

An Analysis of Finding Nemo Movie to Explore Student Perception and Vocabulary Acquisition

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates students' perceptions of the animated film *Finding Nemo* as a medium for learning English vocabulary and explores how it facilitates vocabulary acquisition in authentic and engaging contexts. Employing a descriptive qualitative approach, the study involved 35 second-semester students of the English Education Study Program at Hamzanwadi University. Data were gathered through open-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, and were analysed thematically to identify patterns emerging from participants' responses. The findings suggest that students generally have a positive perception of using *Finding Nemo* in vocabulary learning. They reported acquiring both concrete and abstract vocabulary through contextual exposure in the film's dialogues and visual storytelling—the combination of audio, visual, and emotional elements enhanced comprehension and long-term retention. Moreover, students reported that learning through the film was more enjoyable and motivating than traditional methods, as it created a relaxed and interactive learning environment. These results suggest that animated films such as *Finding Nemo* not only enrich students' vocabulary but also promote positive attitudes and motivation toward learning English.

Keywords: Vocabulary Acquisition; Student Perception; Animated Film; Finding Nemo

INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary mastery is a vital component of English language proficiency. Vocabulary is the main foundation that enables a person to understand and use language effectively in various contexts. Without adequate vocabulary mastery, language skills such as speaking, writing, reading and listening will experience

significant obstacles. Therefore, improving vocabulary is a top priority in English language learning, particularly for learners developing their communication skills. Vocabulary mastery not only affects language fluency but also broadens horizons and enriches understanding of learning materials.

In an increasingly dynamic learning era, creative learning media play a crucial role in supporting the English learning process. The use of innovative and interesting media can increase students' learning motivation and make the learning process more enjoyable and effective. One of the popular and potentially lucrative media is the animated movie. Animated films combine visual and audio elements harmoniously, making it easier for students to naturally understand vocabulary and language contexts. Through interesting stories and vivid character portrayals, animated films can attract students' attention and make English learning more contextual and authentic.

The Finding Nemo animated movie is one of the most popular media that students love. The movie tells the adventure of a little fish trying to find his father, with various characters and situations that are easy to understand. Finding Nemo's strength lies in the use of simple yet communicative English, as well as interesting visuals that support the understanding of the story. With sufficient duration and easy-to-follow dialogue, this film can serve as an effective medium for introducing and reinforcing English vocabulary, particularly that related to daily life and the marine environment. The potential of Finding Nemo as a learning medium is huge, but its use needs to be researched more deeply to determine its effectiveness and students' perceptions of this medium.

Several previous studies have investigated the role of animated films in English vocabulary learning, yielding encouraging results. For example, research conducted by Saputri (2025) found that the use of Learning English for Kids interactive animation is effective in introducing vocabulary to kindergarten children aged 5-6 years, with a high effect size value of 1.98. Johnson and Lee's (2020) research also revealed that students have a positive perception of movie media because movies can reduce boredom and increase interest in learning. However, most of these studies still separate the aspects of students' perceptions from those of vocabulary acquisition without combining the two in a comprehensive study. Additionally, studies focusing on the use of Finding Nemo in the local context are still limited.

The existence of this research gap is a compelling reason to conduct further studies that integrate the analysis of students' perceptions and vocabulary acquisition through the Finding Nemo animated film, particularly in the context of English language learning in Indonesia. Students' perceptions of learning media significantly impact the effectiveness of the media in the teaching and learning process. By understanding students' perceptions and how Finding Nemo aids them in mastering vocabulary, educators can design more effective and enjoyable

learning strategies. This research seeks to fill the gap and make a real contribution to the development of animated movie-based English learning media.

Based on the above description, this study aims to analyse second-semester students' perceptions of using the Finding Nemo animated film as a medium for learning English vocabulary, as well as explore how the film helps students acquire new vocabulary authentically and engagingly. This study will answer two main questions: (1) How do students perceive the use of the Finding Nemo movie in English vocabulary learning? (2) How does the Finding Nemo movie help students acquire English vocabulary authentically and effectively? With the results of this study, it is expected to provide practical recommendations for teachers and learning media developers to maximise the potential of animated films in improving students' English language skills.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous Related Studies

Several studies have explored the use of movies or animations in English vocabulary learning. For example, a study by Agustin et al. (2022) demonstrated that the use of short animated videos significantly improved students' vocabulary acquisition, with an average score increase from 44.12 to 68.85, as indicated by a t-test result of 4.564 ($p < 0.05$), suggesting clear effectiveness over conventional methods. Johnson and Lee's (2020) research also shows that students have a positive perception of using movies as a learning medium, as they increase interest and foster a deeper understanding of the language. However, most of these studies have focused on the effect of media on vocabulary or perception separately, without comprehensively combining the two aspects, let alone using the Finding Nemo movie specifically.

Student Perception in Language Learning

Students' perceptions of language learning refer to the subjective images or assessments that students have of the learning processes, media, and methods they undergo. Perdana et al. (2023) found that the use of Kahoot as a learning tool resulted in excellent student perceptions, with 48% stating "Very Good" and 44% "Good", as well as encouraging increased motivation, engagement, and learning success. Zamzami (2023) stated that students responded positively to online English learning due to flexibility and accessibility, although they also experienced technical and communication barriers. Positive perceptions of learning media can increase students' engagement and earnestness in learning, while negative perceptions can lead to boredom and decreased motivation.

Vocabulary Acquisition

Vocabulary acquisition is the process of learning and mastering new words in a language, which includes recognising, understanding, storing, and using those words in appropriate contexts. Recent research indicates that the use of animated media or videos with intralingual subtitles significantly enhances vocabulary acquisition, as they provide visual and auditory contexts that reinforce recall (Teng, 2022; Jia et al., 2024; Systems, 2024). In addition, student production-based approaches—such as digital storytelling and student-made videos in flipped classroom learning—have been shown to provide better vocabulary acquisition results because they offer a personalised, collaborative, and motivating context (Zhou & Wu, 2024; Nami & Asadnia, 2024; Argudo-Serrano et al., 2024). These findings confirm that engaging and contextualised learning media, such as the *Finding Nemo* animated movie, have the potential to be an effective means to improve students' vocabulary acquisition in a meaningful and enjoyable way.

Animated Films as Learning Media

Animated films as learning media have the advantage of presenting content in an engaging visual and auditory manner, thereby increasing student engagement and motivation to learn. Subtiara (2025) found that the use of cartoon films in English language learning results in a significant increase in students' vocabulary mastery, due to the support of visual and audio contexts that facilitate understanding and retention of words. Similar findings were reported by Pratiwi et al. (2023), who demonstrated that animated films with English subtitles facilitated students' understanding of vocabulary meaning and spelling more effectively. However, the limitations of animated films also need to be considered, such as the relatively short duration, too fast or complex dialog, as well as the potential for cognitive distraction when the visuals displayed are too decorative or irrelevant to the material (seductive details effect). Nonetheless, Kirana and Iswati's (2023) study corroborates that animated media, such as TED-Ed videos, can significantly improve vocabulary acquisition while providing a fun and authentic learning experience for students.

This study occupies a unique position because it combines two important aspects of language learning: students' perceptions and vocabulary acquisition through the use of the *Finding Nemo* animated movie. Unlike previous studies that have only highlighted one aspect, this research aims to understand how students perceive learning media and to examine the extent to which the movie is effective in improving English vocabulary acquisition. In addition, this study was conducted in the local context of Indonesia, which is still rarely researched, so the results are expected to provide relevant practical and theoretical contributions to the development of animated film-based English language learning media in the Indonesian educational environment.

METHOD

Design and Sample

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach, aiming to describe students' perceptions of using the Finding Nemo animated film as a medium for learning English vocabulary and to explore how the film aids in vocabulary acquisition. The qualitative approach was chosen to enable the researcher to gain a deep understanding of the students' views and experiences. The participants in this study were second-semester students of the English Language Education Study Program at Hamzanwadi University. The questionnaire was distributed online to all second-semester students; however, only 35 people completed it. These 35 respondents then became the research sample.

Instruments and Procedures

The research instruments consisted of questionnaires and interviews. The questionnaire consisted of open-ended questions designed to measure students' perceptions of using the Finding Nemo movie as a medium for learning English vocabulary. The questionnaire was distributed online to all second-semester students, and data were collected from 35 respondents who were willing to complete it.

In addition to the questionnaire, semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected students to delve deeper into their experiences watching Finding Nemo and how the movie helped them learn vocabulary. The researcher did not conduct a live screening of the movie, but asked the students to respond based on their personal experience of watching Finding Nemo.

Data Analysis

Data from questionnaires and interviews were analysed using thematic coding analysis. The analysis process began with organising the data, then coding to find the main themes related to students' perceptions and vocabulary acquisition through animated films. The results of the analysis were used to provide an in-depth picture of students' views and the effectiveness of Finding Nemo as an English language learning medium.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Findings from the Open-Ended Questionnaire

Data from the open-ended questionnaire provide an initial overview of students' perceptions of using Finding Nemo Animation for English vocabulary learning and acquisition.

Analysis Questionnaire Results

The majority of students showed interest and had previous experience using the Finding Nemo animation, as indicated by the 35 respondents who completed the questionnaire. All respondents (100%) had modelled Finding Nemo and even used the animation to learn English vocabulary. Moreover, 85(%) of respondents were interested in the Finding Nemo movie because of the funny characters, exciting and colourful storyline. In addition, (95%) of respondents stated that it was helpful to learn using the Finding Nemo animated movie because it was not monotonous, not boring and could learn anytime during free time.

Table 1.

Coding Thematic Questionnaire

Category	Sub-Category	Topic	Code
A. Watching & Student Involvement	1. Exposure to Movies	a. Knowing the movie from social media	A-1-a
		b. Watching because of friends/family recommendations	A-1-b
	2. Emotional engagement	a. Feeling entertained and happy while watching	A-2-a
		b. Feeling sad and moved by a certain scene	A-2-b
B. Vocabulary Learning Through Story Context	1. Vocabulary acquisition	a. Learn vocabulary of marine animal names	B-1-a
		b. Learning vocabulary for activities at sea	B-1-b
	2. Scenes that help	a. Scenes at Nemo school help understand vocabulary	B-2-a
		b. The scene where Marlin and Dory talk to the whale	B-2-b
C. Media effectiveness and visual support	1. Effective learning media	a. Attract interest in learning English	C-1-a
		b. Provide examples of vocabulary usage in context	C-1-b
	2. Visual Support	a. Pictures make it easier to understand new words	C-2-a

		b. Integration of images and dialog makes learning easier	C-2-b
D. Learning Motivation	1. Triggering Factors Motivation	a. Curiosity to understand English	D-1-a
		b. Encouragement from teachers or friends	D-1-b
	2. The impact of motivation on learning	. More confident using new vocabulary	D-2-a
		b. Want to watch other movies to increase vocabulary	D-2-b

The results of the thematic coding analysis of this questionnaire indicate that respondents are familiar with Finding Nemo through social media (A-1-a) and also from friends/family recommendations (A-1-b). In the emotional involvement section, respondents report feeling happy and entertained when watching (A-2-a), and they also feel moved in certain scenes (A-1-a). In the vocabulary acquisition section, respondents reported that they had acquired new vocabulary for the names of sea animals (B-1-a) and vocabulary related to activities at sea (B-1-b). The scenes that helped respondents were the scene at school (B-2-a) and the scene when Marlin and Dory talked to the whale (B-2-b). The use of effective learning media can attract students' interest in learning English (C-1-a) and also provide examples of vocabulary in context (C-1-b). With visual support, images make it easier to understand new words (C-2-a).

Additionally, the two images and dialogue help make learning easier (C-2-b). The triggering factors of motivation are curiosity to understand English (D-1-a) and Encouragement from teachers/friends (D-1-b). The motivation has an impact on learners, as they can become more confident in using new vocabulary (D-2-a) and are more inclined to watch other movies to expand their vocabulary (D-2-b).

Interview Analysis Result

Based on the results of the Question analysis above, five respondents were selected for the interview. The five selected respondents stated that using Finding Nemo animation for learning and vocabulary acquisition is very helpful and effective, especially for beginners who want to learn English but do not want to use monotonous and boring methods. In addition, respondents also stated that learning using the Finding Nemo animation can be done at any time during free time and can even serve as entertainment. Respondents also said that, unlike formal learning.

Table 2
Coding Thematic Interview

Category	Sub-Category	Topic	Code
A. Experiences & Feelings while learning with Movies	1. Feelings while learning	a. Learning feels like entertainment and is not boring	A-1-a
		b. Feeling bored and struggling in some parts	A-1-b
	2. Enthusiasm and motivation to learn	a. Increased enthusiasm for learning after watching the movie	A-2-a
		b. Learning motivation triggered by movie experience	A-2-b
B. Vocabulary comprehension and acquisition	1. Improved vocabulary comprehension	a. Recall vocabulary of animal names and activities at sea	B-1-a
		b. understand the meaning of vocabulary through story context	B-1-b
	2. Vocabulary comprehension strategies	a. Relying on visuals and movie scenes to guess the meaning	B-2-a
		b. use subtitles or text support to understand	B-2-b
C. Media effectiveness and the role of visuals	1. Effectiveness of movies as learning media	a. Movies make learning vocabulary more interesting than books	C-1-a
		b. Movies help maintain attention and concentration	C-1-b
	2. The Role of Visuals and Audio	a. Images and animations make it easier to remember vocabulary	C-2-a
		b. The character's voice and intonation support the understanding of new words	C-2-b

D. Learning Motivation	1. Strengths in the Language aspect	a. vocabulary is learned naturally and contextually	D-1-a
		b. listening skills improved through movies	D-1-b
	2. Strengths in the Language aspect	a. Increased interest in learning English	D-2-a
		b. Increased confidence in using English	D-2-b

Combined Thematic Coding Analysis of Questionnaires & Interviews

From the combined analysis of questionnaires and interviews, it was found that. Respondents were familiar with the Finding Nemo movie through social media and the surrounding environment. This movie makes them feel happy and motivated to learn English. Finding Nemo helps increase vocabulary with a clear and fun context, making it more effective than the usual memorisation method.

Table 3.
Table of thematic coding analysis results of questionnaires and interviews

Category	Sub-category	Topic	Code
A. exposure to movies	1. Source of information about the film	a. Learning about the movie Finding Nemo through social media that shows movie clips or recommendations	A-1-a
		b. Learning about the movie Finding Nemo from friends or teachers at school who recommended watching it.	A-1-b
	2. Frequency of viewing	a. Watching the movie Finding Nemo only once, either at home or at school	A-2-a
		b. Watching Finding Nemo more than once, both for entertainment and to learn English	A-2-b
		a. Feel happy, entertained, relaxed, and more	B-1-a

B. Emotional response & engagement	1. Emotional response	motivated to learn English while watching movies.	
		b. Feeling sad, tense, or moved by certain scenes, such as when Nemo gets trapped or when Marlin searches for his son.	B-1-b
	2. Attachment to characters	a. Feeling connected to the character Dory because of her funny, cheerful, and optimistic nature	B-2-a
		b. Feeling connected to Nemo or Marlin because of their struggles in facing challenges	B-2-b
C. Vocabulary acquisition and comprehension	1. New vocabulary	a. Considering concrete words such as escape, swim, and help that are used directly in the scene	C-1-a
		b. Remembering abstract words such as rescue and forget, which are understood through the course of the story.	C-1-b
	2. Contextual learning	a. Understanding the meaning of words through specific scenes, such as escaping from an aquarium	C-2-a
		b. Understanding the meaning of words through the situations described, such as the tense atmosphere when Nemo goes missing.	C-2-b
D. Effectiveness of media &	1. Effectiveness compared to other methods	a. Evaluating films is more effective than books or memorisation methods because it provides a real context.	D-1-a
		b. Consider the film suitable for beginners because the language used is simple and supported by visuals.	D-1-b

learning motivation	2. Motivation to learn	a. Feeling motivated to learn because the process is enjoyable and does not feel like formal learning	D-2-a
		b. Feeling that learning with movies makes the atmosphere less boring, so I want to learn more.	D-2-b

Respondents learned about Finding Nemo through social media featuring movie trailers or recommendations (A-1-a) or from friends or teachers at school (A-1-b). In terms of frequency of viewing, some individuals only watched the movie once at home or school (A-2-a), while others watched it more than once, either for entertainment or to improve their English skills (A-2-b). While watching, respondents experienced positive emotions, such as happiness, entertainment, relaxation, and motivation to learn English (B-1-a). However, some respondents also felt sad, tense, or moved at certain scenes, including when Nemo was trapped or when Marlin was searching for his son (B-1-b). Some respondents felt connected to the character of Dory because of her funny, cheerful and optimistic nature (B-2-a).

In contrast, others felt close to Nemo or Marlin because of their struggles in facing challenges (B-2-b). The movie helped enrich respondents' vocabulary, both in the form of concrete words such as escape, swim and help (C-1-a) and abstract words such as rescue and forget (C-1-b). The vocabulary was understood through specific scenes, such as escaping from the aquarium (C-2-a), or through the situations depicted, such as the tense atmosphere when Nemo went missing (C-2-b). Respondents rated the movie as more effective than books or memorisation methods because it provided a real context (D-1-a) and was considered suitable for beginners because the language used was simple and supported by visuals (D-1-b). In addition, learning through movies keeps them motivated because the process is fun (D-2-a) and not boring, thus fostering the desire to learn again (D-2-b).

The results of this study align with the findings of previous research, as stated by Smith (2018) and Johnson & Lee (2020), which show that animated films can significantly increase students' motivation and vocabulary acquisition. Students' positive perception of Finding Nemo as a learning medium reinforces the role of audiovisual media in making English learning more interesting and contextualised. Factors that influence students' perceptions include previous viewing experience, basic language skills, and interest in visual media. Students who have positive experiences tend to be more open and motivated to learn through movies. Conversely, differences in language comprehension levels affect how they receive and understand the movie's content.

The vocabulary acquisition results reported by students support language acquisition theories that emphasise the importance of context and authentic

experiences (Nation, 2013; Schmitt, 2008). The Finding Nemo animated film provides visual context and relevant dialog that facilitates the retention and recall of new vocabulary. However, the limitations of the film, such as the speed of dialog, need to be anticipated in the learning process so that students do not lose the meaning. Overall, the findings suggest that animated films can be an effective medium for learning English vocabulary, especially when combined with supportive teaching strategies such as discussion or repetition.

CONCLUSION

Based on the study's results, students have a positive perception of using the Finding Nemo animated film as a medium for learning English vocabulary. The movie is considered interesting, fun, and effective in helping students understand and remember new vocabulary. Additionally, the use of animated films can enhance students' learning motivation and confidence in using vocabulary, thanks to the presentation of authentic visual and audio contexts. Nevertheless, some obstacles, such as difficulty in understanding fast dialogue and challenging vocabulary, are still experienced by students, so assistance from teachers and additional learning strategies are needed to maximise the learning process. Therefore, integrating the Finding Nemo animated movie as a vocabulary learning medium is effective and can serve as an alternative, especially when combined with interactive methods and group discussions, to overcome comprehension barriers and improve students' English learning outcomes.

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