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Fostering EFL students' language skills in upper secondary school through the use of films in the classroom

Utvecklandet av språkliga kunskaper hos gymnasieelever i ämnet engelska genom användandet av film i klassrummet.

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Examiner:
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Abstract

This study investigates the incorporation of films in upper secondary English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms and how it contributes to the development of students' language skills. Intending to identify effective pedagogical practices and educational outcomes related to film-based teaching, this study seeks out to synthesize current studies in this field. It addresses the following research question: What does existing research reveal about the ways films are used in upper secondary EFL classrooms to promote students' language skills?

Ten peer-reviewed articles which were published from 2020 and 2025 were chosen using an organized search process in Libsearch (EBSCO) based on specific inclusion and exclusion criteria. Three main themes emerged from the thematic analysis of the data using Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework: applying film in the classroom, effects on language proficiency, as well as intercultural understanding and social awareness.

The findings show that using films in task-based, interactive, and scaffolded education greatly improves verbal confidence, vocabulary acquisition, listening comprehension, and, to a smaller degree, writing, reading, and grammar development. Additionally, films encourage student enthusiasm and offer beneficial opportunities for interaction with difficult social issues and intercultural learning. The research does, however, also draw attention to didactic issues, such as technical limitations, variations in skill levels, and common misconceptions about the teaching value of films.

The study comes to an understanding that using films is an effective multimodal tool for EFL instruction when they are appropriately selected and didactically implemented. These results highlight the significant implications for classroom practice and are also closely aligned with the objectives of the Swedish upper secondary English curriculum as well as previous research in this field.

Key words: EFL, Film, Upper Secondary School, Linguistic Development, Interculturality, Multimodality

Declaration of Contribution

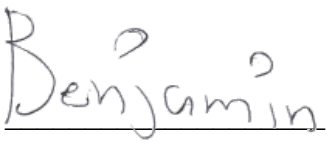
This paper was written by Benjamin Huseinbegovic and Milo Johansson. We would like to extend a thank you to our supervisor Malin Reljanovic Glimäng for much appreciated and valued input throughout our writing process. Throughout the process, this paper has largely been a collaborative effort, with exceptions of individual writing later being compiled and reviewed by the writing partner.

The search process was carried out together, sifting through studies and creating the used boolean strings. Data and notes were retrieved individually from each of our articles, which later was compared and compiled. Parts written in real-time collaboratively include: Table of Contents; 1. Introduction; 2. Aim and Research Question; 3. Method (with the exception of 3.4 Thematic Analysis); and 7. References.

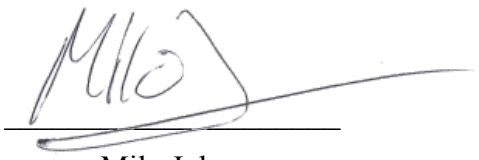
Though the parts described followingly were largely written individually, both partners assisted in rewriting much of each other's texts for cohesion and correction.

Benjamin Huseinbegovic focused their efforts on Abstract, 3.4. Thematic Analysis, 4.3. Intercultural Understanding and Social Awareness, 5.2. Language Proficiency (speaking, writing, grammar, and reading), 5.3. Intercultural and Social Awareness, and the first paragraph of 6. Conclusion.

Milo Johansson focused their efforts on Declaration of Contribution, 4.1. Applying Film in the Classroom, 4.2. Effects on Language Proficiency, 5.1. Using Film in the Classroom, 5.2. Language Proficiency (listening comprehension and vocabulary), 5.4. Critiques and their Implications, and the latter paragraph of 6. Conclusion.



Benjamin Huseinbegovic



Milo Johansson

Table of contents

1. Introduction

The research area of this paper surrounds the use of film in upper secondary EFL classrooms. The literature overview focuses partly on why films and how films are used in the EFL classroom; despite negative views, the didactic positives of using films are largely present throughout our literature. This proves interesting when looking at the development of students' English language proficiency, developing skills such as listening comprehension, speaking proficiency, vocabulary, grammar, reading, and writing. Which, as described in this essay, has shown to be substantially beneficial. The language skills of intercultural understanding and social awareness were noted to also gain effective learning potentials through the use of film. This becomes relevant in an ever changing globalized and digitalized world, where the need to understand other cultures becomes increasingly important. The need for research in this field then becomes ever more significant, stressing the importance of

looking at current research. There appears to be limited recent research specifically focusing on upper secondary EFL and film. Looking at the past five years of articles in this field, we intend to reveal the findings of recent research..

For ease of understanding, key terms regarding this field need to be explained for further context. Throughout this paper the term EFL is used to describe English as a Foreign Language, used to imply the education of English to non-native speakers. Our literature contains the use of films, an authentic text provided in either shorter clips or full length films from theatrically released feature films. The inherent nature of films lends itself to multimodality, the combination of audio and visual stimuli – which has largely been argued in previous research as an effective didactic tool. The focus of this study is on upper secondary school, which in a Swedish context contains grades 10 to 12 or ages 15 to 19. The linguistic development of students include the development of vocabulary, speaking, listening comprehension, grammar, writing, and reading. We also use the terms interculturality, the interplay and understanding between and of different cultures, and social awareness, the awareness of social issues pertaining to race, gender, and the environment.

In the context of Swedish upper secondary schools, this becomes relevant when analyzing policy documents for the subject of English, adapting the education to students' interests, as well as looking at previous research on the topic. According to the Swedish upper secondary school policy document for English (Skolverket, 2025), their broad definition of the subject details that the English language is relevant in assisting the individual’s participation in social and cultural contexts. The document is largely focused on facilitating the development of students’ English linguistic proficiency. The policy document also states that students should experience different authentic texts. Students view film both in and outside of the classroom, it is a relevant area of study as it pertains to the interests of students and it is a modern medium to understand other cultures. Previous research such as a literature review conducted by Sánchez Auñón et al. (2023) becomes relevant in these aspects. They found that film requires distinct didactic applications depending on students and education settings. Their findings reveal that the use of film in the classroom had linguistic (vocabulary, grammar, understanding of authentic language), intercultural, and critical thinking benefits.

2. Aim and Research Question

The purpose of this paper is to explore how the use of films in EFL classrooms at the upper secondary level is discussed in research. Important due to an ever more digitalized classroom and an increase in English-language media in Sweden due to an increasingly globalized culture. As well as the limited recent research on upper secondary school , and is relevant for us writers as future upper secondary school teachers. The question this paper intends to answer then becomes: What does existing research reveal about the ways films are used in upper secondary EFL classrooms to promote students' language skills?

3. Method

In this section we will outline the methodological approach in this paper. First off, we will describe our search process in selecting our ten articles. Secondly, we will explain our inclusion and exclusion criteria in our search. This is summarized in the inclusion of our search overview (Table 1). Lastly we will describe how we conducted our thematic analysis.

3.1 Search Process

In the research process of this paper we have chosen to conduct searches in Libsearch (EBSCO) by using Boolean search strings. We chose this search engine due to its availability, and its filters regarding publishing dates and if articles were peer-reviewed. From there on we received results from its connected databases. In using this we got results, not only from Eric which is an education focused database, but also from other databases which could have relevant articles. From our research question we derived three main criteria that the papers must meet: film, English as a foreign language education, as well as research related to our specific age span. Deriving sources from this requires specific search terms, as certain Boolean strings provide differing levels of relevant and useful research. The string which we ended up using in Libsearch (EBSCO) yielded 37 papers, of which ten articles proved relevant to our research question and followed our inclusion and exclusion criteria. Keywords included in this string relate to: film, efl education, and upper secondary school. The further developed Boolean string shown in Table 1, includes synonyms to these keywords. The keywords and their synonyms were grouped together by using parentheses to make it clear for the search engine that we were looking for this specific group of information. Within the groups, each keyword was then connected by using the "OR" operator to signify that they were exchangeable to each other. The groups were then linked together with the "AND"

operator to ensure that each of the three criteria were met in the search engine to yield relevant results.

This process was not without challenges. Due to the limited research area of this paper, a substantially large part has been formulating relevant search terms related to our topic area. Learning how to apply these operators and going back and forth between search terms. We landed on the string which yielded our relevant results, but in doing so we also broadened our topic, which originally included only intercultural learning outcomes, to include all potential English language learning outcomes. We then sifted through each article ensuring that those we chose had significant parts related to our research question, which resulted in a selection of our ten articles.

3.2 Inclusion Criteria

In this paper, we have used only peer-reviewed research papers to ensure validity and academic prowess. We chose to include studies from other cultures than our own since the available Swedish research is limited and the use of film in EFL classrooms could be applied cross-culturally due to similar didactic applications. Kaatari et al. (2023) did not use a classroom-based study, however, their results were deemed relevant for the overall effect of watching films on students' language skills. The study by Goldberg (2021) was conducted in the United States regarding native speakers, but was found relevant due to its findings regarding attitudes towards the use of film in the classroom. The ages of students in our articles' studies were important in the articles' inclusion. The age span surrounds 15 to 19 years olds in grades 10 to 12, as it is relevant to the ages and grades in the Swedish education system for upper secondary school. The genre of film in the studies were not deemed important, as long as the main focus was films.

3.3 Exclusion Criteria

Since our research area pertains to upper secondary school, as this is relevant to our ongoing education, we chose to exclude studies focusing on university classrooms and grades lower than grade 10. The publication date range of our selected studies were chosen to be from 2020 to 2025, to ensure relevancy in a rapidly changing culture where digitalization and globalization gradually takes a prominent role. All of our selected articles needed to either originally be in English or have an official English version. For example, Llano et al. (2022) is an article originally conducted in Spanish but has an official English article.

Table 1 - Search overview

database date	Boolean search string	hits/ results	exclusion/ inclusion	selection
Libsearch (EBSCO)	(film OR movie) AND (EFL OR “English as a foreign language” OR ESL OR “English as a second language” OR "English teaching" OR “English language education”) AND (“upper secondary” OR “high school” OR gymnasium OR “grade 10” OR“grade 11” OR “grade 12”)	37	Peer-reviewed sources between 2020 and 2025, relevant to students’ learning outcomes in upper secondary EFL classrooms.	(Cárdenas-Claros & Ramírez-Orellana, 2024) (Goldberg, 2021) (Hongsa et al., 2024) (Kaatari et al., 2023) (Llano et al., 2022) (Pu'adah et al., 2025) (Sánchez Auñón & Férez Mora, 2024) (Sert & Amri, 2021) (Taka, 2021) (Younas & Dong, 2024)

3.4 Thematic analysis

The findings of the included studies were synthesised using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke’s (2023) six-phase framework. This approach is accessible, flexible in its application, and it is also an established framework which is suitable for the purpose of synthesizing research. Thematic analysis entails systematically identifying and organising patterns of meanings across a dataset, which will offer insight into it. In this literature review a total of 10 articles were analyzed between us, the authors, carefully reading the articles and

later comparing our notes with each other. By using Braun and Clarke's (2023) framework we noticed similar patterns throughout the articles, although the results varied, all authors described film as a positive factor in the EFL classroom.

This framework operates through five phases. Following phase one, we individually actively worked with understanding the data while also reading the content closely several times, taking brief notes on first impressions or interesting aspects of the data. With the goal to increase the familiarity and knowledge of the data. Following phase two, we created codes for each relevant information which was associated with our research question and aims in order to prevent overlooking potentially important data. This data was recorded and coded individually through notes and then gathered in a collective document, here codes were compared and rewritten under the same code-names. This process was conducted without much disagreement, since we had retrieved and coded similar information. Data from our articles pertaining to for example vocabulary development were coded as such. Following phase three, we analysed and compared these codes in a document, and from that analysis we created themes that correspond with the research question and are relevant to the codes. For example the codes pertaining to vocabulary development were grouped under a sub-theme of vocabulary development in the larger theme of linguistic development. Then through phase four, we examined possible themes that entail determining whether they are related to the research question and are being supported by the data we gathered. The theme of vocabulary development was then deemed relevant and sufficient in data for our research question, resulting in its inclusion in this paper. In Phase five, we named our themes for the results section of the paper.

The themes were chosen to chronologically structure an answer to our research question: What does existing research reveal about the ways films are used in upper secondary EFL classrooms to promote students' language skills?. The first theme deals with applying film in the classroom, from which we derived the subheading of didactic positives and negatives with the didactic use of film, and using film as a didactic tool. The second theme concerns the effects on language proficiency: the development of language skills such as vocabulary, speaking, listening comprehension, reading, writing, and grammar. The last theme was constructed as intercultural understanding and social awareness. In our paper, we structured the themes to logically lead into one another and included subheadings to promote understanding, which is phase 6 of Braun and Clarke's (2023) framework.

4. Results

In this section of this paper we will provide an overview of our findings for each article in our literature, describing their results following three themes found throughout them connected to our research question: What does existing research reveal about the ways films are used in upper secondary EFL classrooms to promote students' language skills? Firstly, we will describe our findings for applying films in the classroom. This section is divided into two separate subheadings: arguments for the didactic positives and negatives of using film in the classroom; and the use of film as a didactic tool. Secondly, we will review the recorded effects on English language proficiency from our literature - effects on listening comprehension, vocabulary development, speaking proficiency, as well as reading and writing proficiency. Lastly, we will go over how the didactic use of film influences students' intercultural understanding and societal awareness.

4.1 Applying Film in the Classroom

4.1.1 Didactic Positives and Negatives for the Use of Film

The overall effects of English film on language development should play an important part in film's didactic viability. The article by Kaatari et al. (2023) found, through their analysis of a Swedish corpus on extramural activities and writing tasks, that students who spent greater time with extramural activities had overall greater English proficiency. Specifically, students who partook in watching films outside of the classroom showed increased vocabulary development. However, extramural English could also negatively impact students' writing and grammar due to what content they were interacting with. With this in mind, the authors recommend that extramural English should be guided by teachers in the classroom for learning potentials outside of it.

Previous research has proven the didactic viability of film use in the classroom. Its potential role as an interactive task, content, or object of learning in the classroom provides opportunities for learning potential. The findings of Pu'adah et al. (2025) support this through their four-week multi-method study integrating film in their lesson plan with a class of 25 students The authors highlight that through the use of film students use the interplay between cognitive, affective, and contextual factors which strengthen linguistic development, contextual scaffolding, and the construction of meaning through observing gestures, facial expressions, and intonation. Hongsa et al. (2024) corroborates this in their findings, where

they propose that language skills such as the development of vocabulary, listening comprehension, and practical language use were assisted by the use of film in the classroom. These findings align with teachers' opinions from Goldberg (2021), that film is an invaluable tool for learning potentials through its multimodality.

Our findings also point towards positive student attitudes. Sánchez Auñón & Férez Mora (2024) conducted a series of classes focused on environmentalism with the use of film over a month of extracurricular classes. Understanding the meaning of authentic materials seemed to boost students' self-confidence as well as being much more motivated to learn both grammar and vocabulary due to contextualization within the film's plot. The article by Taka (2021) confirmed students' live, active, and enjoyable attitudes through the researcher's observation of their classroom. This is also shown in interviews and student questionnaires conducted by Hongs et al. (2024), where students were recorded as saying that films alleviated boredom, stress, as well as making class more enjoyable, but also that it required less effort.

Even with the established positive effects of film, there exists stigmas and criticism against its didactic use. From an interview study in the article by Goldberg (2021), they found several notable experiences shared by 11 upper secondary school teachers. Mainly the stigma of using film as a passive time killer. School administrators and other faculty also regarded its use as lazy and often strongly advised against it. This meant that some teachers had to hide the use of film, disguising it as literature in their courses. For other teachers it meant self-restricting their use of it. Another challenge faced by these teachers were students who followed this line of thinking, resulting in students not paying active attention or skipping class. The study by Pu'adah (2025) additionally found that teachers faced multiple challenges with films' didactic nature such as a lack of student motivation, lack of exposure to authentic materials, issues regarding malfunctioning equipment hindering classes, and the diversity of students' listening proficiencies proving difficult to account for.

4.1.2 Using Film as a Didactic Tool

Films are not shown just to view films, the inherent properties of the medium make films didactically viable. According to teachers interviewed in Goldberg (2021), the use of films as a didactic tool requires effort from both students and teachers in order to function. To facilitate active film-viewing there are numerous methods. Pausing the film can be a strategy for: making sure students are paying attention, engagement, discussion, clarification, thinking

skills, and reflection. Same could be said for the ability to rewind as it can offer closer inspection and opportunities for engagement. Sharing the videos with students can assist them in assisting deeper understanding by themselves.

Much of our literature argues that films should be used together with task-based education. Such as the findings in Hongsa et al. (2024), where the primary step towards attaining proficiency requires engagement in the foreign language and constructing meaning from multimodality. Film-based tasks, such as the student-led discussions in Sert & Armi (2021), provide learners with the opportunity to collaboratively negotiate alternative meanings and assist each other in their practical English use. Co-constructing objects of learning in their use and adaptation of linguistic and semiotic resources from the observed film.

Film can be incorporated with other mediums to further learning potentials. Goldberg (2021) describes how teachers can incorporate the use of film with literature in favor of critical thinking of authors' choices and overall deeper understanding – assisting visualization of settings, characters, mannerisms. This can be applied to students' writing or combined with students' own film productions, facilitating learning potentials as they apply their newfound knowledge practically.

To combat challenges included with film's usage, teachers should be aware of them. Llano et al. (2022) warns that teachers should be aware of clear instructions in their task-based multimodality for effective learning potentials. Films should be carefully selected to appropriately suit the students and its didactic viability for relevant learning objectives. Due to the time limitation of classes potential technical problems should be resolved and fragments of films should be viewed instead of whole films. Sánchez Auñón & Férez Mora (2024) also emphasizes shorter clips from films, as.this is a favored method for time allocation purposes and the didactic relevancy of the film for each lesson's learning objective.

Using English captioning together with films can be employed didactically to enhance learning potentials. This is supported by Taka's (2021) findings, which shows that captioned films aid language learning in assisting with listening, language comprehension, processing, pronunciation, reading, vocabulary, and constructing meaning from context-bound expressions. Cárdenas-Claros & Ramírez-Orellana's (2024) study expands upon this by showing the effects of gradually reducing captions. Going from verbatim transcripted captioning to partially transcripted captioning to no captioning over time ultimately made

students focus on their audiovisual input, increased their understanding, and developed linguistic skills.

4.2 Effects on Language Proficiency

A noticeable effect of the didactic use of film throughout our literature was on the proficiency of students' listening comprehension. Pu'adah's (2025) results, through pre- and post-test data as well as interviews after conducting lesson plans with films, concluded that the use of films enhanced students' listening comprehension. In Hongsa et al. (2024) a statistical analysis also confirmed this effect through data from a similar method design. Students themselves perceived an enhancement of their listening comprehension compared to other didactic listening tools. When using captioning, Taka (2021) found that comprehension was further assisted. Notably, the students interviewed in Cárdenas-Claros & Ramírez-Orellana (2024) were listening without the fear of not understanding the content of the films following their reduction in captioning.

Significant effects of using film were recorded when it came to vocabulary development. Kaatari et al. (2023) found that when teachers encouraged extramural English film, vocabulary was specifically supported.. In Cárdenas-Claros & Ramírez-Orellana's (2024) interviews with students, captioning films helped the acquisition and recognition of new words. In the student-led discussions observed by Sert & Amri (2021) word searching provided opportunities for collaborative vocabulary development, notably recycling words that were relevant to the discussed film. Goldberg (2021) found that through film students gained another dimension of vocabulary from the stylistic elements for film as a text. Younas & å (2024) found through their study on animated films in the classroom, that film was effective as a multimodal tool for varied levels of learners on vocabulary development through training on vocabulary in the context of the film.

Another noticeable effect was the development of students' proficiency with speaking. Hongsa et al. (2024) found that class discussions were more engaging when film was viewed as well as films having made students feel that their speaking proficiency had improved and made English relevant for their everyday life. From the study by Sert & Amri (2021) where they recorded student discussions after viewing film, they found that students' multimodal orientation following the narrative material generated learning potentials. Most importantly in the creation of meaning, vocabulary, and interactional competence through their co-narration

of the film, in order to complete discussion questions. Similar traits were observed in both Sánchez Auñón & Férez Mora (2024) and Take (2021) where discussions flowed much easier with time and students were more engaged after having viewed films in their classes. In Cárdenas-Claros & Ramírez-Orellana (2024) they additionally found that captioning also had a positive effect on students' speaking proficiency, as the film's multimodality assisted their awareness of pronunciation cues.

Minor, but still significant, effects were noticed on writing, grammar, and reading. Sánchez Auñón & Férez Mora (2024) found that using English films had developed students' reading and grammar. However, there was a disconnect between film usage and grammar learning ,as it was hard to incorporate and difficult with students with lower language proficiency. Both Taka (2021) and Cárdenas-Claros & Ramírez-Orellana's (2024) noticed that after using captioned video, students had developed further reading comprehension skills such as skimming, scanning, and intensive reading. Supporting all of these claims, Pu'dah et al. (2025) found that English education incorporated with film supported overall receptive and productive language skills.

4.3 Intercultural Understanding and Social Awareness

Another recurring theme in our literature is the use of films as an effective way of promoting intercultural understanding. Llano et al. (2022) describe that language serves as a fundamental tool for the expression of values, beliefs, actions, and identities that firmly support the notion that language development is fundamentally linked to cultural learning. In this way, films are viewed as educational tools that facilitate students' access to authentic cultural knowledge. By offering visual and contextualized depictions of often hard to come by authentic social interactions, celebrations, and daily lives, films enable students to witness numerous cultural elements. Their article describes how students were taught about Halloween traditions in the United States by using brief clips from the television series Friends; showing cultural norms by studying the characters' behaviors, traditions, reactions, and responses. However, the research also emphasizes how crucial didactic mediation is, according to Pu'adah et al (2025), students' comprehension can be hindered by cultural unfamiliarity. In their study 92% of students stated they understood films more effectively when the teachers gave context and background information.

Students' views of authenticity and exposure to linguistic diversity is another common theme among the research. According to Hongsa et al. (2024), students appreciated films because they gave them access to natural speech patterns, native accents, proper pronunciation, and depictions of cultural diversity.. This is consistent with Pu'adah et al. (2025), who stress that exposing students to more authentic English through films helps them appreciate other cultures. Hongsa et al. (2024) demonstrated that English films gave students prolonged exposure to culture-specific language use, which subsequently enhances intercultural comprehension through listening-based instruction. Students' involvement with film narratives allowed them to interpret meaning by using both verbal and visual clues, including international patterns, the tone of voice, and visual context. Learners were more prepared to comprehend culturally embedded communication patterns attributed to this multimodal input, especially in casual and everyday situations.

Our articles indicate that films can be successfully utilized for involving students in difficult social topics that facilitates both cognitive and behavioural growth. A common theme in the studies is that films give students an approachable way to learn about abstract or foreign social issues, enabling them to do so in a way that is both contextualized and emotionally engaging. Films can serve as a coherent thematic framework for addressing global social problems, especially environmental deterioration, as shown by Sanchez Aunon and Ferez Mora (2024) use of Avatar which reinforced an ongoing theme thread and assisted students in gradually processing complex information. They described that in their study, students were able to articulate more complex ideas, participate effectively in discussions, and create arguments based on ideas covered during the lesson. According to Sert and Amri (2021), students' cultural understanding and awareness of systematic racism in the US were enhanced by the usage of an American film problemizing the topic. Students were introduced to social realities that went beyond their own cultural experiences through narrative and character-driven storytelling.

5. Discussion

In this section we will discuss the implications of our findings from the ten articles related to our research question "What does existing research reveal about the ways films are used in upper secondary EFL classrooms to promote student's language skills?". From this research question we have extracted three themes present in our articles: why and how film is used;

their effects on language proficiency regarding students' grammar, vocabulary, listening skills, reading, writing, and speaking ability; and their effects on intercultural understanding as well as social awareness. These will be discussed in relation to previous research in this field as well as the Swedish upper secondary school curriculum for the subject English.

5.1 Using Film in the Classroom

Relevant to students in cultures where English-language media is popular and widespread, such as Sweden. The effects of watching film extramurally has shown to benefit the development of English language skills according to Kaatari et al. (2025). Film has however shown to influence students' linguistic development negatively, as authentic spoken English may not be in line with the goals of their classroom language development. This then stresses the need for guiding students through this medium. The use of film in the classroom then enables discussions and critical thinking skills can facilitate students' language development outside of the classroom. The need for this is mentioned in the Swedish curriculum for upper secondary school EFL, where students should interact with varied forms of English content, such as film. Students, according to this policy document, should know how to use these different sources outside of the classroom to develop their language skills.

Positive views from students and teachers have been established through our results, as well as negative ones. Regarding relevancy for students, the results gathered from Sánchez Auñón & Férez Mora (2024), Taka (2021), and Hongs et al. (2024) point towards positive attitudes and increased motivation from students when watching films. The literature overview of previous research by Sánchez Auñón et al. (2023) describes this great acceptance and perceived improvement of language skills. Here, teachers also give their mainly positive perspectives, underlining film as a didactic tool. However, our findings also reveal stigmas and drawbacks to the use of film. Goldberg (2021) found that teachers experienced pressure not to include film in the classroom from both their colleagues and their own perceived less didactic role in the education system. Adding to this, teachers face challenges such as students not taking class seriously, linguistic barriers between students hindering discussion and understanding, as well as not enough technical support from their administration due to film's didactic stigma. We can conclude that the possible learning potentials of film should be further understood as well as known by educators, and ultimately should its inclusion should be encouraged in language education.

The positive effects on students' language skills and increased motivation through the didactic classroom use of film have been thoroughly established throughout our finding. In the context of the classroom, film should be used as a didactic tool for EFL learners. Working with this multimodality, film can assist students with linguistic development as well as contextual scaffolding through its cognitive, affective, and contextual factors. The authentic nature of film is perhaps the main contributor to this. The Swedish curriculum for upper secondary school EFL stresses the need for students to engage with authentic materials to better understand other cultures in combination with linguistic development. This highlights the usefulness of film in education.

From the conclusion that film is an invaluable tool for assisting in the development of language skills, our findings further delve into different ways to conduct film-based language education to increase learning potentials. Teachers need to facilitate the active viewing and effort from students, otherwise film use will live up to the negative stigmas perpetuated by many in education. This is relevant in Sweden, where the curriculum stresses the need for students to engage with the English language in their education, as well as their education largely being in it, in order to develop language skills in functional and meaningful contexts. Sánchez Auñón and collaborators' (2023) findings suggest students should look out for information during the viewing, and afterwards complete related activities honing language skills - to further student engagement. They propose five steps which should be followed: vocabulary explanation, plot prediction, description of cultural background, discussion of thematic issues, and listening and speaking practice.

As much of our literature agrees, this should be combined with task-based education. The primary step towards gaining proficiency in language is to engage and understand. Film tasks such as film-based discussions can help students form collaborative knowledge, speaking skills, and critical thinking. Producing their own films or writing about these films can help the students apply their newfound knowledge practically. The Swedish curriculum describes that education should allow students to evaluate and use varying content in their production and interaction, as well as formulate and develop their understanding by themselves and others. Such tasks align with these goals set out to enhance learning outcomes.

Furthermore, our literature suggests that applying captioning with film can further all of the previously mentioned learning potentials, as another level of reading comprehension is added to this multimodality. This is mainly interpreted from the results of Taka (2021) and Cárdenas-Claros & Ramírez-Orellana (2024), who both insist on captions as an opportunity for language development. Students attribute further developed language skills to this addition, most notably an increase with pronunciation and processing text.

To not further add to the stigma of using film, teachers should be aware of certain aspects of its use. Teachers should use clear instructions with task-based teaching to increase learning potential. Films should be carefully chosen to suit the students, both in motivation and its inherent linguistic properties. Technology should be accounted for, both in what is used with film-based tasks and making sure the viewing goes smoothly when accounting for the limited time of class - a majority of our studies favour splicing films into shorter clips from films to allow for each lesson's relevant learning objective. This is agreed upon in previous research as described in Sánchez Auñón et al. (2023). Fragmented film clips can help with film-based tasks as well as provide background knowledge and relevant vocabulary for each lesson.

5.2 Language Proficiency

The use of film in the classroom has been shown throughout our articles to significantly improve the proficiency of students' listening comprehension. This is established in: Pu'adah et al. (2025), Hongsa et al. (2024), Taka (2021), and Cárdenas-Claros & Ramírez-Orellana (2024); where the effect was shown through both quantitative date in test results, and qualitative data from interviews with students. This proves important in the Swedish curriculum where it is explicitly said that students should develop their ability to understand spoken English. The multimodal nature of film proved efficient when forming meaning and understanding through the audiovisual information, especially when combined with captioning. This effect on listening comprehension has been identified in a plentitude of previous studies as described in Sánchez Auñón et al. (2023), especially the benefits of captioning.

In our articles, the use of film proved to be a highly efficient tool for students' vocabulary development. The more that students seemed to watch films in their everyday life, the more developed their vocabulary was. Within the classroom setting, students themselves reported that the use of films helped develop their vocabulary acquisition through its multimodality. It

proved useful as a tool for students of different levels of English, even outperforming traditional techniques of vocabulary learning. This effect of didactic film usage can be further found in previous research, as the literature overview by Sánchez Auñón et al. (2023) found that film effectively facilitated this skill, both in students' receptive and productive acquisition.

The improvement of students' speaking proficiency, especially through increased interaction and communicative confidence, is another important result of film-based learning. This aligns with Hongsa et al. (2024) and Sert and Amri (2021), where students noted gains in spoken production that carried over into their daily interactions, and classroom discussions became noticeably more engaging when the usage of films was included in lessons and discussions. This also aligns with the context of the Swedish curriculum, where the students' ability to express themselves and interact with other students using speech is emphasized. This aligns with the findings of the previous literature review by Sánchez Auñón et al. (2023), who explain that film was found to have a positive impact on students' speaking abilities, fluency, and accuracy.

The results from the studies show minor but didactically meaningful effects on writing, grammar, and reading. Our findings reveal that by incorporating English films, not only was student involvement facilitated, but it also contributed to the improvement of students' reading abilities and grammatical awareness. Films have been a useful tool to develop learners' way of using different strategies such as scanning, intensive reading, and skimming. This effect of using films in classrooms can be found in previous research from Sánchez Auñón et al. (2023), who described that film aided students' writing development positively and further understanding of grammar, with increased student involvement in the classroom.

5.3 Intercultural and Social Awareness

The discoveries of this study demonstrate the educational relevance of films as instruments for facilitating social awareness and intercultural understanding in upper secondary EFL education. The idea that language acquisition and cultural acquisition are linked is supported by these findings that have been presented. Our literature points out and demonstrates that when students interact with cultural meanings, social norms, and communicative conventions, it is consistent with the concepts of intercultural communicative competence. Our research also stresses the importance of teachers providing contextual scaffolding;

students can internalize new cultural knowledge through didactic support from teachers, such as conversations, reflections, and explanations.

The results show a strong alignment with the Swedish National Curriculum for Upper Secondary English. The curriculum places a clear emphasis on helping students improve their capacity to comprehend social and cultural situations in various contexts, to reflect on societal issues, living conditions, and cultural expressions, and to use the English language for meaningful communication. These goals are supported by using film in the EFL classroom. This is shown in studies by Sánchez Auñón & Férez Mora (2024) and Sert & Amri (2021), which explain how students learn language while also facilitating global awareness and critical thought. The Swedish curriculum emphasizes this focus on topics such as social justice, racism, and environmental responsibility. Furthermore, the results are relevant to the modern Swedish EFL students, who need preparation for engagement in a globalized society. Students gain intercultural sensitivity from being exposed to a variety of cultural viewpoints, which is necessary for both future studies and real-life applications.

5.4 Critiques and their Implications

In this section of our paper we will discuss possible critiques of our literature. Most of our articles have conducted studies on a small limited sample size using one group of students, perhaps weakening the generalizability of the authors findings. Although, since most of their results seem to align with one another, one could argue that the relevancy and generalizability of findings and conclusions are not unfounded. The students' ages in the studies have not been the same as the ages in the Swedish school system for upper secondary school. This is due to differing international standards for grades ten to eleven, different definitions of upper secondary school, and different knowledge levels of the grades presented in each article. This limits to generalizability towards Swedish students in EFL classrooms, but also the overall generalizability of these findings. Some of these studies contain weak causal evidence for language-based learning outcomes, such as Sánchez Auñón & Férez Mora (2024), which focuses on the engagement of students, but does not measure their language development except for observations from teachers. Causal claims barely exist in many of the studies, as they mainly provide correlational evidence. Due to the nature of studies in the articles taking place during 2020-2025, some of them conducted studies through online classrooms due to

pandemic limiting classroom activity. As such, this may not effectively translate to traditional classroom environments.

6. Conclusion

The review of the research shows that, when used with carefully planned instructional design, films are a didactically viable tool in upper secondary EFL classrooms that can promote language development as well as intercultural understanding and social awareness. This broadly answers our research question: What does existing research reveal about the ways films are used in upper secondary EFL classrooms to promote students' language skills? Our findings show that; when accompanied by teacher scaffolding, straightforward didactic goals, active viewing, and task-based activities; film serves as an effective multimodal tool for learning, despite the negative views being perpetrated about its educational use. Linking viewing to tasks connected to linguistic development is necessary for effective learning potentials. The use of film significantly improved students' speaking skills, vocabulary, listening comprehension, and, to a lesser degree, reading, writing, and grammar. By exposing students to authentic language use, social issues, and cultural norms, films facilitated the development of intercultural competence and social awareness. Particularly when educators contextualized the material and promoted thoughtful debate. So to answer our research question: existing research reveals that when films are didactically incorporated into teaching, they promote both students' language proficiency as well as intercultural understanding and social awareness.

Through introspectively looking at this paper combined with our conclusions and the knowledge gaps in our literature, we can suggest possible future improvements in this field's research. Future studies should include a larger number of participants and perhaps also experiment with other sampling methods than convenience sampling, even if difficult in school environments. This would strengthen the causal evidence for the positive didactic effects of film use in the classroom. Conducting a study over a larger period of time could also show this causality. One could continuously look at the effects of subtitled films' multimodal effects over the course of a greater period of time, incorporating film with other didactic tools and issuing pre-/post-test experimental designs throughout the research period. Comparing a sizable number of participants to a control group could further reveal the didactic role of film. For a future generalizable literature overview, conditions should largely align between articles' research; ages for the research groups, the countries' definition of

English levels, and similar in-classroom education methods. Such a literature review would be possible if including research before 2020 as well as including a greater number of articles than 10 – which would yield further validity to the claims presented in this overview. More studies need to be conducted in Sweden to make a holistic national literature overview possible, increasing the relevancy for not only Sweden's education system but also similar systems globally.

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Table 2 - Overview of studies

author **year** **title** **journal** **database**	**aim** **RQs**	**method** **data collection** **selection** **participants** **material** **country**	**main results**
Cárdenas-Claros, M. S., & Ramírez-Orellana, D. (2024, January). PROGRESSIVE REDUCTION OF CAPTIONS IN LANGUAGE	Examine perspectives of high.school EFL learners regarding progressive reduction of captions on enhancing	Qualitative case study. Entry survey, individual reflections, and focus group observations from/with students.	Learners not only appreciate the varied captioning approaches but the varied captioning facilitated the integration of new linguistic knowledge.

LEARNING. *Journal of Information Technology Education: Innovations in Practice*, *23*(2), 1-19. Complementary Index.	language learning. What are the perceptions of high-school learners of English regarding a pedagogical innovation that includes three types of captions (full, partial, and keyword) in video-based materials? What are the perceptions of high-school EFL learners regarding the absence of captions after progressive caption reduction?	Students who were able to commit to a five-week study plan outside of school. 11 high-school EFL learners. Varying levels of captioned combined with clips from films as well as student surveys, reflections, and interactions in focus groups. Chile.	
Hongsa, N., Wathawat hana, P., Arlakun, L., & Buarapa, O. (2024).	Investigate impact of integrating English films on listening	Mixed methods research design. Post- and pre-tests,	Findings indicate that through integrating film in the classroom students improved in listening

Unlocking Listening Proficiency: Integrating English Movies in Thai EFL Secondary Education. *Journal of Education and Learning*, *Vol. 13*(Issue 1), 10p. ERiC. 10.5539/jel.v13n6p274	comprehension and attitudes of tenth grade EFL students. To what extent does the use of English movies impact the enhancement of listening comprehension among grade 10 EFL students? What are the attitudes of students toward integrating English movies as a medium to enhance listening comprehension?	questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews. Convenience sampling of a single EFL class. 33 tenth grade EFL students. Test, questionnaires, interview analysis, and appropriate English films. Thailand	comprehension as well as displayed a positive attitude towards film as a learning tool.
Joseph, G. (2021). The English Language Arts Hundred Years' War: Subverting the Stigma of Film in America's English Classroom. *Film Education Journal*,	Films should have an equal status to other texts in English classrooms. How do American high-school	Qualitative interview study. Semi-structured teacher interviews. Volunteer English teachers.	Teachers use structured approaches to film instruction which facilitates learning potentials, but they are pressured into not using it in the classroom by their

Vol. 4(Issue 2), 13p. https://doi.org/10.14324/FEJ.04.2.04	English teachers make sense of and instruct with film?	12 High-school English teachers Film and film clips. United States	peers and administrators.
Kaatari, H., Larsson, T., Wang, Y., Acikara-Eickhoff, S., & Sundqvist, P. (2023, October). Exploring the effects of target-language extramural activities on students' written production. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, *62*(2), 1-12. Academic Search Index. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jslw.2023.101062	Investigate the relationship among a number of English extramural activities and two aspects of writing development: lexical diversity and noun phrase complexity What is the relative effect of EE activities vis-`a-vis classroom factors when it comes to lexical diversity and/or NP complexity? To what extent are there differences between	Quantitative correlational study. Writing tasks and self-reported questionnaires from Swedish Learner English Corpus. Convenience sampling. 200 Upper secondary school Swedish EFL students. Data from writing tasks and data about students' extramural English activities.	The results show that reading in English leads to higher frequency of adjectival modification, whereas conversing in English and watching TV programs positively impact vocabulary development.

	receptive EE activities and other types of EE activities in terms of the effect of lexical diversity and NP complexity, and what are the differences?	Sweden.	
Llano, Y., Alexander, R., & Anangano, C. (2022). LA ENSEÑANZA DE LA CULTURA A TRAVÉS DE LAS PELÍCULAS EN EL AULA DE INGLÉS COMO LENGUA EXTRANJERA. *MLS Educational Research*, *6*(Issue 2), p.253-268, 16p. Complementary Index. 10.29314/mlser.v6i2.769	Explore the use of film in teaching culture in EFL classrooms. What are some useful tips derived from an action research experience in teaching culture with films in an online high school class?	Qualitative case study. Student questionnaire and teacher reflection. Convenience sampling. Eighteen Secondary school online EFL students with A1 level of English. Film and teacher designed tasks. Equador	Films facilitated engagement and cultural awareness.

Sert, O., & Amri, M. (2021, January). Learning Potentials Afforded by a Film in Task-Based Language Classroom Interactions. *Modern Language Journal*, *vol. 105 issue 1*(issue 1), 16. ERIC. 10.1111/modl.12684	Investigate how film.based tasks support learning potentials in the EFL classroom. How do students talk the movies into being within a discussion task? In what ways does collaborative attention work create learning potentials?	Qualitative observational research. Ten hours of classroom recordings and following discussion analysis. Convenience sampled EFL classrooms. 25 EFL learners. Film used together with task-based learning. Sweden.	Films supported task-based interactions in class discussions, facilitating language development.
Sánchez Auñón, E., & Férez Mora, P. A. (2024, 02 08). Environmentalism in the English classroom: An autoethnographic analysis of a cinema-based	Exploring how a film-based EFL lesson plan can integrate environmentalis m and language learning.	Qualitative autoethnography. Teacher reflections and observations. Convenience sampling.	Instruction combined with film facilitated engagement and language development.

didactic proposal. *Didáctica. Lengua y Literatura*, *36*(1), 153-172. Complementary Index. https://dx.doi.org/10.5209/dill.87742	How can film-based pedagogy support environmental and language learning in EFL?	Two classes of upper secondary EFL students. Film. Spain.	
Soleman Dapa, T. (2021). The Efficacy of Using Subtitled Video in Teaching Reading to Indonesian English as Foreign Language (EFL) Students. *IDEAS: Journal on English Language Teaching & Learning, Linguistics & Literature*, *Vol. 9*(Issue 2), 9p.	Finding out the efficacy of using Subtitled Video in teaching reading to EFL students. Is the use of Subtitled Video effective in teaching reading stories to Indonesian EFL students?	Pre-experimental design. Pre- and post-test data. Convenience sampling. Tenth grade EFL students. Film and film-based tests/tasks. Indonesia	Using subtitled video as media is effective in teaching reading to EFL students.
Younas, M., & Dong, Y. (2024). The Impact of Using Animated Movies in Learning English Language Vocabulary: An Empirical Study of	Examines the effectiveness of animated films in increasing students' vocabulary.	Pre-experimental design. Pre- and post-test data. Convenience sampling.	The findings revealed a statistically significant difference in receptive vocabulary and productive vocabulary in favor of the experimental group

Lahore, Pakistan. *SAGE Open*, *Vol. 14*(Issue 2), 12p. ERIC. 10.1177/2158244024 1258398	How do animated movies support students in learning vocabulary at the college level? Is there any difference in vocabulary learning if taught with the help of animated movies?	64 twelfth grade students. Animated film and film-based tests/tasks. Pakistan	which used animated film.
Zahra, P., Nur, R., Puji, R., & Sri, W. (2025). The Use of English Movie for Enhancing Students' Listening Skills: Teacher's and Students' Challenges at Junior High School. *DEAS: Journal on English Language Teaching & Learning, Linguistics & Literature*, *Vol. 13*(Issue 1), 14p. Complementary	Examine the process of teaching and learning English listening using English films, identify the challenges encountered by both teachers and students, and determine whether films can enhance students' listening skills.	Mixed-methods design. Pre- and post-test data, questionnaires, classroom observation, and interviews. Convenience sampling. 25 ninth graders and one English teacher. Film, Film-based tests/tasks,	Results demonstrated the effectiveness of English films in enhancing listening comprehension in EFL classrooms, as well as finding challenges in its implementation from both students and teachers.

Index. 10.24256/ideas.v13i 1.6207		questionnaires, and interviews Indonesia	