USING ENGLISH LANGUAGE MOVIES TO IMPROVE NON-ENGLISH MAJORS’ ORAL ENGLISH PROFICIENCY IN CHINA

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Abstract

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Sisi Xu

Under the Supervision of Dr. David Gillota

In recent years, with the rapid development of science and technology and with the improvement of teaching facilities, numerous teachers tend to teach foreign / second language by using English language movies, because English language movies possess many merits, including providing the authentic contexts, different situations and buzzwords to learners. This paper makes a study on using English language movies to improve Non-English majors’ oral English Proficiency. It begins with the introduction. Then, it focuses on a brief review of the theoretical basis, the advantages of watching English language movies, the requirements of selecting English language movies, the merits of captioned English language movies, the application of English language movies and summary. Last is the conclusion and recommendations. Through analyzing these eighteen published scholarly articles related to foreign language teaching by English language movies, the paper reveals that English language movies are beneficial to improve Non-English majors’ oral English.

Keywords: English language movies, captions, oral English proficiency, application
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>APPROVAL PAGE</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TITLE PAGE</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TABLE OF CONTENTS</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of the Problem</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition of Terms</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of the Study</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of the Study</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delimitation of the Study</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Basis</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Advantages of Watching English Language Movies</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Requirements of Selecting English Language Movies</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Merits of English Language Movies with Captions</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Application of English Language Movies</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
III. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.................................................20
REFERENCES...............................................................................................21
Chapter I Introduction

With the rapid development of the world economy, English, a tool of communication, plays a crucial role in China. Therefore, it is very common to offer English classes from primary schools to universities in China, even some kindergartens have set up English classes. However, English is taught with comparatively more emphasis on the aspects of reading, writing, and grammar in China. Therefore, the communicative ability of non-English majors has always been an embarrassing situation. Undoubtedly, boosting Oral English proficiency is the pursuit of non-English majors. Though numerous instructors and researchers have adopted multiple teaching methods to enhance non-English majors’ oral English proficiency, they still cannot obtain satisfactory results. Actually, language learning greatly relies on language atmosphere, and English is taught as a foreign language in China where all the people speak Chinese. Therefore, it is obvious that the biggest obstacle for non-English majors to improve oral English is the lack of the authentic English-speaking environment. That is to say, it is important to note that language learners should be immersed in the environment of speaking English, which may facilitate them to boost their spoken English proficiency. Meanwhile, English language movies not only bring wonderful pictures in motion and fascinating stories but also provide authentic contexts, different situations, and buzzwords to learners. Therefore, using English language movies to improve non-English majors’ oral English proficiency is the best choice.

English language movies have been used for language teaching for many years.
According to Li and Wang (2015), the British Modern Language Association initially introduced movies into language teaching in 1956 (p. 1097). Later, the relevant literature emerged. To begin, Tuncay (2014) has put forward that feature movies with appropriately designed activities and tasks are not only a valuable resource for an EFL classroom but also can enhance students’ self-motivation and provide an enjoyable, educational experience for students and teachers alike (p. 62). Then, Yaseen and Shakir (2015) have mentioned that movies can be deemed as a unique source of language education in the comprehensive way and are beneficial for EFL learners to learn a new language easily (pp. 34, 31). Moreover, Park and Jung (2016) have pointed out that the value of visual materials in promoting student motivation, which includes the interest in the language, culture and student participation (p. 87). Meanwhile, Kabooha (2016) has pointed out that movies are powerful instructional tools which can develop students’ language skills, and movies teaching can enhance students’ motivation to learn the language (p. 255). Next, Pasban, Forghani, and Nouri (2015) have investigated the impacts of using English captions on Iranian intermediate EFL students learning of phrasal verbs (p. 380). Last but not least, Drood and Asl (2016) have investigated the probability of enhancing the accuracy of Iranian EFL learners’ task-based oral performance through listening tasks. They have provided learners and L2 educators with a clear explanation on using audio-visual listening tasks to affect the L2 learners’ performance in terms of accuracy of their speech (p. 114).

To sum up, it seems that most of the studies focus on enhancing students’ motivation and listening skills by using English language movies. However, there are
few studies on improving learners’ oral English by English language movies, especially for non-English majors. Although some language teachers have attempted to use English language movies to enhance non-English majors’ oral English proficiency, they still have not formed a series of research suggestions. That is to say, the limited researches or unsystematic studies may not facilitate for language instructors to explore. Therefore, there is a need to explore how to enhance non-English majors’ oral English proficiency by English language movies. So the following research questions are raised.

**Statement of the Problem**

According to the above statement, this study aims at exploring the following five questions:

Q1: What is the theoretical basis of this study?

Q2: What are the advantages of watching English movies?

Q3: How do we select the English language movies to teach spoken English?

Q4: What are the merits of captioned English language movies?

Q5: How do we use English language movies to boost non-English majors’ verbal expression proficiency?

**Definition of Terms**

EFL: Abbreviation of the term English as a foreign language.
L2: Abbreviation of the term Second Language.

caption: Vandergrift (2007), “captions may be defined as redundant text that matches spoken audio signals and appears in the same language as the target audio” (p. 79).

**Purpose of the Study**

The purposes of this study are expected to find out the advantages of watching English language movies as the teaching materials, the requirements of selecting the English language movies, the merits of the captioned English language movies, and explore the application of English language movies.

**Significance of the Study**

The results of this study will guide non-English majors to enhance their oral English proficiency through effective immersion in English language movies. Meanwhile, it will be helpful for language teachers in choosing the proper kind of English language movies to teach oral English in their classes. Moreover, the course designers and language teachers will use English language movies as vital teaching materials to enhance oral English teaching after referring to the findings of this study. Eventually, all the research outcomes will lay the foundation for further study.

**Delimitation of the Study**

This study was based on library research. The research was conducted through the Karrmann Library of the University of Wisconsin-Platteville online and through
books borrowed from the library of Hanjiang Normal University. The primary searches were conducted by the internet through EBSCOhost with Eric as the primary sources. The search terms were limited to “English movie/film teaching”, “captioned movie teaching”, “EFL/ESL” and “oral English”. In addition, some articles were selected from some references, and electronic articles were borrowed from the Karrmann Library.

**Methodology**

The research focuses on how to use English language movies to boost non-English majors’ oral English proficiency. Following that, a brief review of the theoretic basis on “input hypothesis” and “Comprehensive Output Hypothesis” was conducted. The advantages of watching English language movies and the requirements of selecting the English language movies were conducted. The merits of the captioned English language movies and the application of English language movies were performed. Eventually, the findings were summarized and synthesized, and recommendations were made.

**Chapter II Review of Literature**

In recent years, with the continuous renewal of teaching facilities, it is very convenient for language teachers to use audio-visual materials in language class. Thus, the huge stock of movies available to exploit in language teaching and movies teaching
has experienced a quick development. Meanwhile, using English language movies to enhance non-English majors’ oral English proficiency has inevitably evoked numerous language teachers’ interests. However, not all language instructors have obtained the satisfactory teaching efficiency. Therefore, using English language movies to enhance non-English majors’ oral English proficiency has inevitably evoked controversy among language teachers.

Some researchers and language instructors argue that English language movie teaching cannot reach their initial targets, because they view English language movie teaching as entertainment, which is not encouraged to use in the English class, let alone to enhance non-English majors’ oral English proficiency. Moreover, some teachers hold that there is no effect to improve the non-English majors’ oral English proficiency by watching English language movies, because during the process of appreciating the movies many students cannot concentrate on the sentence expressions, but focus on the plots of the movies.

Whereas the other researchers and teachers consent to using English language movies to boost oral English proficiency. They argue that watching English language movies not only can boost the competence of listening, but also can enlarge the vocabulary for non-English majors. Moreover, it also provides the authentic language environment and a wide range of expressions which are often used in the daily life to learners. That is, the expressions in English language movies are very connected to the real life and they are very practical to communicate with the foreigners. According to
Wang (2009), English language movies can connect the sounds with pictures, which are useful for the learners to understand the language skills and remember the contexts, the new words and expressions (p. 179). Hence, these teachers hold that all the benefits of watching English language movies facilitate the enhancement of oral English proficiency.

There is no doubt that different teachers have different viewpoints on the English language movies teaching efficiency, because different teachers may adopt different teaching methods. According to Hu and Jiang (2008), English film is an effective medium to teach language skills (p. 239). That is to say, it is feasible to use English language movies to enhance non-English majors’ oral English proficiency according to the previous studies on English language movies teaching. The key point, however, is that language instructors should not ignore some crucial factors which may directly affect the teaching efficiency. Therefore, this literature review will focus on using English language movies to enhance non-English majors’ oral English proficiency from the theoretical basis, the advantages of watching English language movies, the requirements of selecting English language movies, the merits of the captioned English language movies and the application of English language movies.

**Theoretical Basis**

Krashen (1982) has put forward the “input hypothesis” which relates with acquisition, not learning. Moreover, acquisition is based on the understanding of language which can be done with the help of context or extra-linguistic information (p.
21). Meanwhile, Bahrani and Sim (2012) have stated, “From the linguistic point of view, authentic language input refers to the use of authentic materials from the target culture which is presented in the target language such as different programs, for example, news, films, songs, soap opera, and comedy as audiovisual mass media materials provided by carious technologies”(p. 56). Moreover, Li and Wang (2015) as cited in Swain (1995) mentioned, “Swain proposed the Comprehensible Output Hypothesis. He pointed out that in second language acquisition, if the learners only rely on language comprehensible input which couldn’t ensure they can speak accurately and fluently in communication. So, they also need the comprehensible output” (p. 1096). Therefore, according to the theory of modern foreign language teaching, learners should be in contact with a large quantity of understandable language. Then, the learners can absorb them and use them. Therefore, using English language movies to enhance oral English proficiency also emphasize the comprehensible language input, which will benefit the comprehensible language output.

**The Advantages of Watching English Language Movies**

There is a general agreement among language instructors that authentic language input can be used in second language learning (Bahrani & Sim, 2012, p. 56). It goes without saying that English language movies are no exception, because English language movies have many special advantages which have been listed as follows.

Watching English language movies can arouse the students’ interest. King (2002) held that it was a novel way for some students to learn English by watching English
films and their preconceptions about learning English were based on their past learning experience (p. 510). That is to say, learning English by watching English language movies may attract students’ interests than the traditional method. Moreover, using movies in the foreign language classroom can improve learner’s motivation to learn the language (Kabooha, 2016, p. 255), and appeal them to participate in class (Park & Jung, 2016, p. 87). Furthermore, English language movies with authentic context and vivid story not only can attract students’ interest of learning English, but also can enhance the learning effect (Li & Wang, 2015, p. 1097; Wang & Zhang, 2012, p. 1011).

English language movies are inestimable teaching resources. King (2002) has pointed out that English films are the inestimable teaching resources (p. 510), because they provide a rich context for foreign language acquisition (Rokni & Ataee, 2014, p. 203; Wang & Zhang, 2012, p. 1011). Moreover, Wang and Liu (2011) have stated that English language movies can provide a real and vivid context for students (p. 42). Namely, all the words or expressions used in the English films are very concise and connected to our daily life, which are useful in our real life and are not usually seen in the language books, so learners can master them more easily (Yaseen & Shakir, 2015, p. 34). Therefore, English language movies are the appropriate materials for learning language.

Watching English language movies can enlarge English vocabulary as numerous studies showed. Through watching English films, students can enlarge their vocabulary (Kabooha, 2016, p. 255), master the oral English expressions frequently
used in daily life and foster the sense of English language, such as, the stress, rhythm, pitch, pause and speed (Wang & Liu, 2011, p. 42). Moreover, numerous researchers have mentioned that movies have the feature of repeating the language, which is the process of language acquisition (Li & Wang, 2015, p. 1097; Wang & Liu, 2011, p. 42). However, accumulating the vocabulary requires the feature of repeating the word. Therefore, watching English language movies is a good tool to accumulate the vocabulary under the conscious or unconscious conditions (Wang & Zhang, 2012, p. 1011).

Watching English language movies can broaden British and American culture for learners. Language is a carrier of culture and the movie is the medium of the culture. Therefore, if you want to learn a language, you must learn its culture. Wang and Liu (2011) have mentioned that during the process of language learning, if you want to understand and use the language correctly, you must learn both the language and its culture (p. 42). Meanwhile, there are some cultural differences between Chinese and English-speaking countries, so it is difficult for students to understand some sentences. That is, if you are familiar with the English and American culture, you will grasp the English language better. However, Li and Wang (2015) have put forward that English movie can vividly and directly show the English national culture and cultural background knowledge from different angles (p. 1097). Moreover, Wang and Liu (2011) have mentioned that movies always reflect ways of thinking and behavior of western people (p. 42). Hence, seeing English language movies is an effective way to know English and American culture.
Watching English language movies can provide a real language environment. Numerous researchers held that seeing English language movies could compensate the deficiencies of the traditional classroom teaching, because it could bring the language to the real life (King, 2002, p. 510; Li & Wang, 2015, p. 1098). We all know that any movie has story plots which make the dialogues connecting to the real life. In other words, through appreciating English language movies, learners can contact the veritable and flexible expressions of English. Numerous researchers have pointed out that students immerse in the environment with real communication context spoken by natives can acquire language (King, 2002, p. 510; Li & Wang, 2015, p. 1097; Wang & Liu, 2011, p. 41).

All the advantages mentioned above are the prerequisite conditions of enhancing non-English majors’ oral English proficiency, because all the advantages are conductive to transfer what the students hear into the oral expressions naturally through the repeated imitations and practices. Just as Li and Wang (2015) have mentioned, watching English language movies is a direct and effective method to improve the spoken English (p. 1097).

**The Requirements of Selecting English Language Movies**

Although English language movies have many merits to improve learners’ oral English proficiency, the quality of the movie material will influence the teaching effect. That is to say, not any English language movies can be used as the oral English teaching material. Kabooha (2016) has mentioned that language instructors should be careful to
select movies for their lessons (p. 254). Thus, it is vital for teachers and learners to take some factors into account when they select English language movies.

Preferentially, English language movies with a large amount of dialogue about daily life is needed. There are numerous English language movies that contain an enormous variety of topics, but not all English language movies are fit for teaching oral English. The language used in simple real life movies is often used in daily life (Yaseen & Shakir, 2015, p. 34). For instance, some comedies and dramas have a lot of dialogues, which will be useful for learners to relate the expressions with the situation. However, at present, many English language movies have commercial properties, and their pursuit of action and rich background have led to a reduction in dialogue (Li & Wang, 2015, p. 1098). Hence, action movies have more physical activity and less dialogue. Additionally, fictional films do not always use the English we use in our daily lives (Yaseen & Shakir, 2015, p. 34).

Numerous researchers have put forward that it is crucial to choose movies with clear sound and a standard accent (King, 2002, p. 514; Wang & Liu, 2011, p. 44), which can be used in the teaching of oral English (Li & Wang, 2015, p. 1098). In addition, Wang and Liu (2011) have pointed out that the speed of the movie should not be fast (p. 44). That is to say, the movies which have the clear and pure pronunciation and standard intonation are easy for students to understand and are also very suitable for students to imitate. Meanwhile, the pure pronunciation and standard intonation will help students to rectify their incorrect pronunciation and intonation. Thus, as teaching
materials of oral English, English language movies with clear sound and standard intonation are the essential prerequisite.

Numerous researchers have mentioned that the contents of the movies selected by teachers should be matched with the level of the students (King, 2002, p. 514; Kabooha, 2016, p. 254; Wang, 2009, p. 180; Wang & Liu, 2011, p. 44; Wang & Zhang, 2012, p. 1011). Wang (2009) has stated that not all films on different topics with language are suitable for students’ level (p. 180). If the content is too difficult for students to comprehend, they will have no confidence to learn it, let alone to practice oral English. According to Li and Wang (2015), teachers should consider the difficulty gradient in the selection of movies (p. 1098). In other words, at the beginning of teaching English language movies, teachers can choose the movies with simple plots, clear pronunciation and slow speed of speaking. Later, if students have adapted to the movies teaching, teachers can choose the movies with complex plots and fast speed of speaking.

The content of the English language movies should be positive. Many researchers hold that the themes of the English language movies must be the positive attitude towards life and world (Li & Wang, 2015, p. 1098; Wang & Liu, 2011, p. 44). That is, if movies contain scenes of the violence, horror and pornography, it must be ruled out (King, 2002, p. 514; Li & Wang, 2015, p. 1098; Wang & Liu, 2011, p. 44; Wang & Zhang, 2012, p. 1012). Because the positive scenes can exert a guide role to the students and the negative scenes may make students fall into a wrong path.
The contents of English language movies should be kept up with the times. If the contents of movies are novel, interesting, humorous, close to the college life and can reflect the features of the times, they can evoke students’ learning desires which will prompt students to spend time imitating the pronunciation and intonation of the dialogues. Hence, it will reach the goal of boosting learners’ oral English.

The length of movies should be moderate. Li and Wang (2015) found that it was critical that teachers should pay special attention to the length of the movie (p. 1098). It is obvious that there is limited time in class, and only a part of the movie can be taught in class (Wang & Liu, 2011, p. 44). If the film is too long, the course will become an entertaining class (Wang, 2009, p. 180) or students will feel tired. Li and Wang (2015) has mentioned that if students feel exhausted and boring after watching the long movie, the teaching effect will be influenced. Therefore, teachers should control the time of playing movie according to different types of movies (p. 1098).

English language movies must have captions. During the process of selecting the English language movies, one of the significant factors, the captioned English language movies, must be taken into account. According to Alkhatnai (2012), “captions refer to subtitles or translations of a video’s original audio track. Captions were originally designed so that hearing impaired viewers, or speakers of other languages, could follow along with a film’s dialog” (p. 1574). However, during the process of appreciating the English film, students may be stuck by some of the unfamiliar words, phrases or expressions. At this time, captions are beneficial and convenient for students
to comprehend them. Therefore, the popularity of using the captions is increasing and they gradually play a vital role in language learning (Alkhatnai, 2012, p. 1574). All in all, it is vital to select the English language movies with captions, because the captioned English language movies contain several merits, which are beneficial for non-English majors to boost their oral English.

The Merits of English Language Movies with Captions

English language movies selected as teaching materials must have captions. Janfaza, Jelyani, and Soori (2014) have mentioned that numerous foreign language classes around the world are using captioned movies (p. 81). The reason is that the captioned English language movies contain many merits which avail non-English majors to boost their oral English proficiency and are listed as follows.

Captioned English language movies are propitious to enhance students’ listening skills. Wang and Liu (2011) have noted that English language movies with captions have very special advantages, specially in the listening training (p. 42). Then, Alkhatnai (2012) also has argued that captions not only can improve students’ listening and comprehension skills, but also facilitate learners to understand the language’s cultural intricacies (p. 1575). However, the comprehensible listening input is the precondition of oral communication. Therefore, captioned English language movies are beneficial to enhance learners’ oral expression proficiency.

Captioned English language movies are propitious to improve learners’ speaking skills. From the outcome of the empirical study of Rokni and Ataee (2014),
the experimental group watching the movie with captions shows a considerable improvement in their oral English, whereas the control group watching the same movie without captions shows little improvement (p. 211). In addition, Wang and Liu (2011) have pointed out that captioned films will enhance the vocabularies output of the learners (p. 41). However, the quantity of vocabulary is the essential condition to improve the students’ oral English. Therefore, seeing the captioned English language movies are beneficial to boost students’ oral English proficiency.

Captioned English language movies can assist learners to comprehend the movies. According to Rokni and Ataee (2014), the English language movies with captions are beneficial to comprehend the contents of movies, which is taken for granted by many teachers and researchers (p. 203). Numerous research findings have revealed that students need to receive a great quantity of comprehensible input to reach the target language learning during the process of learning a second or foreign language (Janfaza, Jelyani, & Soori, 2014, p. 81). Only on the basis of comprehending the meanings of the expressions from the movies can learners use the language better.

All in all, all the merits of the captioned English language movies pave the way to enhance non-English majors’ oral English proficiency.

The Application of English Language Movies

The application of English language movies to teaching is a complicated process (Wang & Zhang, 2012, p. 1012). Numerous researchers have noted that teachers play the role of designers or leaders during the process of teaching English film, which
is not just the process of teachers playing and students watching (Li & Wang, 2015, p. 1098; Wang & Zhang, 2012, p. 1012). In order to improve the students’ oral English, teachers should design some specific teaching activities (Li & Wang, 2015, p. 1098; Wang & Zhang, 2012, p. 1012). Only by designing teaching process by heart can teachers achieve good teaching results.

Wang (2009) has mentioned that the purpose of film teaching is to help students to get much information of the target language, thus teachers should design different methods to arrange the teaching. For example, to explain some idioms or key words of the film; to predict the plot of the film from the title; to introduce the general idea of the cultural background; to discuss the theme of the film; to role-play the film (p. 180). Actually, all of these activities require students to speak, which is beneficial for practicing learners’ oral expression.

Li and Wang (2015) divided the film teaching into four sections: preparation, before watching, during watching and after watching. Each section designed many activities. During the section of preparation, teacher designed many activities, such as fill in the blank, choose the correct answers and ask students to search for relevant information of the film. Before watching, teachers put forward some questions according to the plots, and asked students to summarize the outline of the story or describe the characters’ image after appreciating the film (p. 1099). Therefore, students may focus on film and find clues of the related problems, which will facilitate students to grasp the theme of the film. During the watching, Li and Wang (2015) also held that
teachers should select some classic clips as the speaking material to play repeatedly, then asked students to imitate or role-play the dialogues (p. 1099). From these activities, students not only can see the essence through the phenomenon, but also can comprehend the intonation culture from the language. After watching, Li and Wang (2015) argued that teachers should also require students to rewrite the story, write their feelings, analyze the main characters, or recite the classic dialogues (p. 1099). All of these activities can prompt their oral English proficiency to arrive a higher level.

What matters most is that Li and Wang (2015) have put forwards some possible problems on film teaching and also have found the solutions to solve these problems, which pave the way for film teaching (p. 1099).

Wang and Zhang (2012) have classified the activities of movie teaching into three parts, pre-watching activities, while-watching activities and post-watching activities. All of the activities Wang and Zhang mentioned are the same with the activities mentioned by the former researchers mentioned above. In addition, they ask students to decide whether the statements are true or false according to the film and state the reasons (p. 1013).

Kabooha (2016) divided the integration of English language movies into five parts. In the section of previewing activities, different warm-up activities were adopted to facilitate learners to understand the movies scenes. In the viewing movie segments, teacher adopted the short sequence approach instead of viewing the whole movie. In the section of viewing worksheets, the distributed worksheets attracted learners’ attention in the particular details of the movie and students were asked to answer the short questions (p. 250). Moreover, vocabulary and pronunciation notebooks were used
to note all the new vocabulary or phrases from the movie and students were required to recall the vocabulary or phrases where they came across (Kabooha, 2016, p. 251). In the section of movie summaries, students were asked to write a short movie review according to the specified requirements (Kabooha, 2016, p. 251). In the last section, students did a group work, a movie role-play, as required (Kabooha, 2016, p. 251).

**Summary**

To sum up, it is feasible to boost non-English majors’ oral expression proficiency using English language movies, but how to select English language movies and how to apply English language movies are the key points of enhancing non-English majors’ oral English proficiency in China.

**Chapter III Conclusions and Recommendations**

From the review of literature, English language movies can be effective pedagogical tools to enhance non-English majors’ oral expression proficiency when used appropriately and selected as required. This study only explored non-English majors. Therefore, if the study is conducted in different proficiency levels, it may be more persuasive to illustrate the effect of using English language movies to boost learners’ oral English proficiency. In addition, it is better to explore to what degree English language movies can be used by different proficiency level learners.
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