

VIDEO STREAMING PLATFORMS FOR LEARNING ENGLISH - CASE STUDY: NETFLIX

Monica Ariana SIM¹, Anamaria Mirabela POP¹

¹ Department of International Business, Faculty of Economic Sciences, University of Oradea, Oradea, Romania

ariana_mona@yahoo.com

mipop@uoradea.ro

Abstract We live in an age of technology when people increasingly give up on television and turn to online streaming sources to entertain. These services provide an alternative to cable and satellite on-demand service, sometimes at a lower cost. Due to its intense development over the last few years, video streaming technology has attracted academic attention as a valuable tool for learning or improving English. Thus, this study discusses the practicality of video streaming use in foreign language higher education. It starts with a brief review of the literature on the use of video for language learning, focusing on the main benefits for learners. Then, the study presents the video as a learning tool underlying its advantages over the other previous physical technologies. To highlight the value of video streaming to language education, benefits and problems are explained, and Netflix is outlined as an example of a streaming video platform that may be used within English language teaching. General vocabulary items will be acquired, and listening skills will be improved. However, the interest in studying and approaching new topics focusing on specialized vocabulary will be recognized as an advantage when utilizing video streaming platforms. Next, specific strategies for using video streaming platforms will be outlined. The first was that short documentaries could be watched along with multiple-choice questions to promote general vocabulary building. The second is that Netflix's series or movies can be utilized to find specific themes to help explain particular grammar or vocabulary points while improving the specialized business vocabulary.

Keywords: learning English; video streaming platforms; business vocabulary; skills.

JEL Classification: F12; J11

1. Introduction

According to dictionaries and specialists, video streaming is described as “a continuous transmission of video files from a server to a client. It enables users to view videos online without having to download them.” (Gillis, 2023) or as “sending media content in a continuous stream of compressed data over the Internet, which is displayed to the viewer as soon as it arrives” (AQR); it comes from the term

”streaming” being “the activity of listening to or watching sound or video directly from the internet” (<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/streaming>).

The concept of honing your English skills through Netflix aligns with one of the oldest principles of language acquisition: the most effective way to learn a language is through listening. This method aids in transitioning language from the left side of your brain to the right side, where your native tongue is stored. Netflix has enhanced this approach by offering a variety of new tools that enable you to enrich your existing English language abilities simply by enjoying your preferred films.

2. Literature review

Learning foreign languages for international communication, especially for academic and business purposes, has never seemed so crucial. Foreign language competencies are mainly required for students and graduates who choose to work in multinationals or an international context. However, in higher education, there is not much space to learn foreign languages as part of the primary curriculum – except for a few specializations that allocate more classes to foreign language teaching – thus, students lack sufficient exposure to successful language learning. (Richards, 2015; Trinder, 2017; Tsou et al., 2006).

Video streaming and other out-of-the-class activities have consequently been considered reliable allies in the process. During the past decades, the effect of audio-visual input on second language learning has been studied from different perspectives, even if research on the application of live streaming in foreign language learning is relatively limited, especially in Romania.

Research has focused on questions related to the role of video streaming platforms and TV programs (documentaries or series) for *incidental vocabulary learning*, suggesting that this approach can effectively stimulate different language learning, encompassing areas such as comprehension and vocabulary acquisition (Rodgers, 2018; Peters & Webb, 2018; Pattermore and Muñoz, 2023). Moreover, research suggests that watching television and video platforms may positively impact learners' listening and reading proficiency, as noted by Lindgren and Muñoz in 2013. The alternative audiovisual input immerses learners in *authentic language usage* (Lin, 2014) and thus adds extra value to the leisure activity as studies reveal a “strong correlation among the development of listening, reading, writing and speaking language skills of experimental group students whose English listening skills have improved by using authentic videos.” (Polat and Etisti, 2019). Considering authentic language material “any material in English which has not been produced explicitly for language teaching” Taylor (1994), video streaming exposes the language learners to the most effective types of authentic audiovisual materials and could significantly enhance their language proficiency (Bahrani, Tam, and Zuraidah, 2014). Video streaming creates an interactive learning environment for viewers and conveys cultural content, enriching the educational experience. (Stilborne & MacGibbon, 2001; Hartsell & Yuen, 2006).

Researchers also discussed another facet of learning through watching, namely the effect of watching foreign language programs and films with *captions* showing that

it enhanced learners' phonetic retuning, vocabulary acquisition, and listening comprehension (Mitterer and McQueen, 2009; Vanderplank, 2019).

Another aspect considered by linguists refers to the potential of video as a tool for language learning from a *motivational approach*, and data reveal that watching television and videos in a foreign language as extracurricular activities has increasingly become popular among learners, having a beneficial influence (Kuppens, 2010; Lindgren and Muñoz, 2013, Peters & Webb, 2018; Kanellopoulou and Giannakoulopoulos, 2021).

3. Benefits and shortcomings of using video streaming as a learning tool

With advances in software and networking technology, video streaming has become more accessible, more effective, and beneficial for language learning. Video streaming platforms are often seen as valuable additional tools for language learning, but they may not replace the need for structured language courses and interactive practice. Nevertheless, integrating video streaming into the learning process rallies foreign language learning to the demands of globalization. It soothes its adaptation to the present needs: self-directed learning, self-paced study programs, and authentic language learning experiences. As a result from the literature review, among the numerous advantages of integrating video streaming into the language learning process, we can summarize the following:

- a) *Improved Listening and Pronunciation*: Video content helps learners develop their listening skills and enhance their pronunciation by exposing them to authentic spoken language.
- b) *Visual Context*: Videos provide a visual context that aids comprehension, making it easier for learners to understand the meaning of words and phrases.
- c) *Cultural Awareness*: Video materials often incorporate cultural elements, allowing learners to gain insights into the culture and customs of the target language.
- d) *Engagement and Motivation*: Video content can be more engaging and motivating for learners, as it is visually stimulating and can relate to real-life situations. Watching movies or TV shows in the target language can stimulate interest and keep learners more committed to their language-learning journey.
- e) *Contextual Learning*: Videos offer opportunities for contextual learning, where learners can see language used in everyday situations, which is vital for practical language skills.
- f) *Vocabulary and Idiom Acquisition*: Learners can pick up new vocabulary and idiomatic expressions from watching and listening to videos.
- g) *Convenience*: Platforms can be accessed on various devices, allowing viewers to learn English at their own pace and schedule.

Among the disadvantages of video streaming as an aid for learning languages, we mention that streaming video works only when there is an available Internet connection; streaming videos require sufficient Internet speed to function correctly, as well as the cost of subscription and of devices which become more performant.

Some also refer to the most common mistake people make when learning English by watching: it can be delightful, but it is still a passive language learning activity, and therefore, it cannot and should not replace the active way of learning (Shayna Oliveira, 2023). A Harvard study (Ruder, 2019) analyzing the influence of devices on brain activity shows that the brain can be more active while sleeping than when watching TV; thus, simple exposure to audiovisual input like listening to podcasts or watching movies is unlikely to be sufficient in itself for language learning to occur. Another shortcoming of video streaming platforms as learning tool aids has to do with the proficiency level of the viewer, and it has been argued that an intermediate level is the necessary proficiency prerequisite to start benefiting from audiovisual input to the full extent (Danan, 2004).

Unlike language learning apps or classes with teachers, video platforms may not provide immediate feedback on your language skills. This can make it challenging to identify and correct mistakes, constituting another con for the topic.

4. Video streaming platforms. Netflix

In an era where video streaming platforms have gained significant prominence in our daily lives, it is imperative to consider their potential impact on education as specialists reveal that in the process of acquiring a foreign language, input plays an important part.

Adapting the teaching-learning process to the everchanging learners' interests is crucial and comparable to the importance of content marketing in ensuring customer engagement and commitment to a brand (Nurain & Harwati, 2019) transferred to the educational system.

Video streaming content is conveyed over various platforms, including social media platforms like YouTube Live, Facebook Live, Twitter, Instagram Live, and TikTok, as well as through professional business services, such as Kaltura and Dacast. It was not until the early 1990s that computers evolved into devices powerful enough to display streamed media. Music concerts and baseball games were among the first events to be streamed. The base for the first practical video coding format, the discrete cosine transform (DCT) algorithm, was developed for image and video compression. The first commercial video streaming product, StarWorks, was released in 1990. After several small but sure steps in the industry in 1999, Apple released a streaming media format called QuickTime. The same year, President Bill Clinton participated in a presidential webcast at George Washington University. The early 2000s also offered improved protocol formats for video streaming. According to Britannica, three years later, the streaming service Twitch began hosting livestreams of video games, which became immensely popular. In the following years, platforms such as YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram introduced live streaming availability for users. In 2005, a new level was reached when YouTube was born, together with the latest opportunities offered. In 2008, YouTube hosted its first live event, called YouTube Live. Today, creators who have more than 1,000 subscribers on their channel can livestream on mobile devices. 2020, the Statista database predicted that the number of video-on-demand viewers in the U.S. will grow from 143.3 million in 2020 to 164.9 million by 2025.

There are several video streaming platforms with plenty of content for learning English, offering a wide range of videos, including educational content, language learning materials, and entertainment, all of which can help improve English language skills. Some popular video streaming platforms are Amazon Prime Video, Apple TV+, Disney+, HBO Max, Hulu, Netflix, Peacock, Twitch, YouTube, Skyshowtime, etc.

Netflix is a subscription video-on-demand streaming service that has become extremely popular and has been considered in the media as “a transformative tool for language learning” (Tapper, 2019). The platform offers original and acquired films, documentaries, and shows from various genres, and it is available internationally in 190 countries. Its subtitle options make videos, movies, and TV series accessible to language learners at all levels, providing both entertainment and exposure to foreign languages. In addition, David Wilkinson and Ognjen Apic are the tool’s developers, which began as a hobby project and turned into a Chrome browser extension called “Language Learning with Netflix (LLN).” The ambitious project has become an exciting tool that enables viewers to watch foreign language shows with subtitles both in the original language and English and pauses automatically to allow the learner/viewer to absorb what has just been heard. The significant number of people downloading the tool indicates that viewers are also looking to optimize their entertaining experience, which becomes an entertainment-based language learning activity.

Although there still seems to be a lack of extensive research on Netflix specifically, there are studies on language learning through immersion. Netflix can serve as a passive immersion, potentially contributing to language proficiency growth through its dual language subtitles, a popup dictionary, precise video playback controls, and many more features when watching films and series.

5. Specific strategies for using video streaming platforms in learning. Practice tasks

5.1. Features and Tips

Despite being a passive activity, Netflix holds potential, and this article investigates it for self-directed language learning within a formal educational context; examples and activities that can be used with students are also provided. Learning Languages with Netflix allows viewers to become involved with the language while watching Netflix content. Video content offers visual and auditory input, enhancing language comprehension and retention. It will enable seeing and hearing native speakers, crucial for improving pronunciation and understanding accents. In this respect, Netflix can be a valuable resource for learning English, provided viewers approach it with a language-learning mindset.

Features that help:

a) watch with two subtitles: Watching TV shows or movies with two subtitles - one in the original language and the other in your target language enables you to mirror and compare, and it helps pick up on the meaning of words. While subtitles can be helpful for comprehension, relying too heavily on them can hinder the ability to listen and understand spoken English without written assistance.

b) turn on English subtitles only: to assist with comprehension, turn on English subtitles. This way, you can read along with the dialogue while listening to it, reinforcing your understanding of spoken English. Unlike podcasts, which are also passive learning activities, viewers benefit from video to better understand a lot through context. Reading instead of listening and watching will be tempting but it is a start. The effort is to keep the eyes on the top of the screen, focus on watching, and only look down at the subtitles if something prevents understanding the core message. Reading the subtitles does not force the brain to listen; thus, the progress will be slow. Video streaming is great as viewers can also listen to subtitles one at a time or line by line, even hear it over, which makes it much easier for them to follow conversations and pause when they need more time to understand what is happening.

c) turn off the English subtitles/ all subtitles: provided that the audio is English, viewers who want to improve English language skills and acquire new vocabulary should turn off the subtitles once they feel they understand more than 80% of the action; it might make watching slightly less enjoyable at the beginning, but from a learning perspective, it will be much effective.

d) use the built-in dictionary available on LLN, as it provides easy access when seeing the translation or meaning of a specific word.

e) take benefit of the pro features (paid), which include an option to save phrases, enabling one to focus on them later, choosing auto-translation or human translation.

f) repeat and review: it might be an excellent tip to rewatch challenging episodes or scenes, as repetition can be a powerful learning tool.

g) take notes: while watching, taking notes of new words or phrases can help to improve the vocabulary; it may be successfully followed by looking up their meanings and creating flashcards or a vocabulary list.

5.2. Practice tasks for business purposes

Establishing specific language learning goals for Netflix usage is critical for success; for example, aiming to watch a certain number of episodes per week or understand a particular series without subtitles could help real progress. This progress can, for instance, be measured in improving specialized business vocabulary - a desirable goal when preparing to enter the labor market. Whether the personal goal is learning a certain number of new terms each week or mastering the language related to a particular aspect of an industry, setting goals can help stay focused and motivated. Improvement takes time, consequently, patience and consistency are essential. Integrating strategies into daily routines will contribute to a gradual and lasting enhancement of business vocabulary.

Among the classic strategies that enhance business vocabulary, we mention *reading* industry publications, business books, and reports that will expose the learner to the latest trends, developments, and terminology; *enrolling* in relevant courses or workshops that focus on business communication and vocabulary; *participating* in professional networking events, conferences, and seminars; *keeping* business dictionaries and glossaries handy; *watching* business documentaries and talks; *listening* to business podcasts that focus on the field of interest which help familiarize with business language. There is also Netflix with its business series, films or documentaries.

Teachers as facilitators may indicate different fields of interest and the movies/series that focus on them; diverse assignments and aspects are to be noticed while watching and then discussed in the class:

a) series or movies set in or revolve around a specific industry or business environment. For example, "Suits" for law firms, "Silicon Valley" for the tech industry, or "Mad Men" for the advertising world. Students are advised to pay attention to the terminology used by characters in those settings and to take note of industry-specific jargon, acronyms, and expressions.

b) students focus on professional interactions and are to observe how characters communicate in professional settings; they need to pay attention to how they structure their sentences, hold meetings, negotiate, and discuss business strategies. Analyzing the language used during presentations, interviews, and business meetings can help provide insights into effective communication in a professional context.

c) students have to identify characters who hold leadership or managerial positions, paying attention to leadership styles and the language they use to motivate, delegate, and manage teams; instances of conflict resolution and negotiation are spotted as these situations often showcase persuasive and diplomatic language.

d) exploring series or movies that depict international business scenarios can also be done with Netflix. These can expose students to various accents, communication styles, and cultural nuances in the business world; students note how characters navigate cross-cultural communication challenges and adapt their language to different contexts.

e) if the class aims to improve financial vocabulary, students may be guided to watch content involving finance and economics. At the same time, they document how characters discuss budgets, investments, market trends, and financial strategies.

f) numerous legal dramas or series with a legal focus can be beneficial for improving legal and contractual vocabulary, while attention should be given to how characters articulate legal concepts, negotiate contracts, and handle legal disputes.

g) project management and innovation are among the trendiest facets of business these days, so teachers may consider exploring series or movies that showcase project management or innovation in a business context; this can help understand the language associated with project planning, execution, and problem-solving.

h) customer relations and marketing are also very well represented in movies and series; thus, students may look for content that highlights customer relations, marketing strategies, and advertising and be exposed to the language related to branding, market research, and customer engagement.

Using subtitles or pausing and rewinding scenes to fully grasp the language used in specific contexts are strategies enabled by Netflix for learning. Additionally, teachers as facilitators complement learning with industry-specific readings and discussions to deepen the understanding of specialized business vocabulary.

6. Conclusions

This article aims to offer a tentative explanation of the effectiveness and efficiency of using video streaming platforms as learning aids and to shed some light on how much technology, more precisely video streaming platforms (Netflix in particular),

can assist and support English language acquisition. When teaching a foreign language, instructors as facilitators should focus on diverse means of arising interest and motivation as crucial ingredients of the instruction process. Netflix can be part of a broader language-learning strategy. Complemented with grammar exercises, vocabulary building, and real-life interactions, it is a valuable tool for learners. This paper's discussions and presentations will hopefully encourage further research and exploration in this promising field.

References

1. Alm, A. (2021) *Language Learning with Netflix: from Extensive to Intra-formal Learning*, The EuroCALL Review, 29(1), 81-92, <https://doi.org/10.4995/eurocall.2021.14276>
2. Bahrani T., Tam S.S., Zuraidah M., (2014) *Authentic Language Input Through Audiovisual Technology and Second Language Acquisition*, SAGE Open July-September 2014: 1–8, sgo.sagepub.com, [Online], Available: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/2158244014550611> [14 May 2023]
3. Danan, M. (2004) *Captioning and Subtitling: Undervalued Language Learning Strategies*. Meta, 49, 67-77. <http://dx.doi.org/10.7202/009021ar>
4. Gillis A. S (2023) What is streaming?, [Online], Available: <https://www.techtarget.com/searchunifiedcommunications/definition/streaming-video> [14 May 2023].
5. Hartsell, T., & Yuen, S. (2006). Video streaming in online learning. AACE Journal, 14(1), 31-43.
6. Kanellopoulou, C. and Giannakouloupoulos, A. (2021) *Internet-Assisted Language Teaching: The Internet as a Tool for Personalised Language Exploration* Creative Education, 12, 625-646. doi: 10.4236/ce.2021.123043.
7. Kuppens, A. H. (2010) *Incidental Foreign Language Acquisition from Media Exposure*, Learning, Media and Technology, 35, 65-85. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439880903561876>.
8. Lai, Y., Saab, N., Admiraal, W. (2022) *Learning Strategies in Self-Directed Language Learning Using Mobile Technology in Higher Education: A Systematic Scoping Review*, p7749-7780.
9. Language Learning with Netflix, [Online], Available: <https://languagelearningwithnetflix.com/> [17 May 2023].
10. Lindgren, E. and Muñoz, C. (2012) *The influence of exposure, parents, and linguistic distance on young European learners' foreign language comprehension*, International Journal of Multilingualism 10(1):1-25, DOI: 10.1080/14790718.2012.679275.
11. Mitterer, H and McQueen, J.M. (2009) *Foreign subtitles help, but native-language subtitles harm foreign speech perception*. PLOS ONE 4, no. 1: e7785. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0007785.
12. Netflix [Online], Available: <https://www.netflix.com> [17 May 2023].
13. Nurain, A. A. S., Harwati H., Melor Md. Y. (2019) *Live Streaming: A New Platform for ESL Learning*, Creative Education, Vol.10 No.12, DOI: 10.4236/ce.2019.1012215.

- Pattamore, A. & Muñoz, C. (2023) *The effects of binge-watching and spacing on learning L2 multi-word units from captioned TV series*, *The Language Learning Journal*, 51:4, 401-415, DOI: 10.1080/09571736.2023.2211614.
14. Peters, E., & Webb, S. (2018) *Incidental Vocabulary Acquisition through Viewing L2 Television and Factors That Affect Learning*, *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 40, 551-577. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0272263117000407>.
15. Polat, M. & Erişti, B. (2019). *The effects of authentic video materials on foreign language listening skill development and listening anxiety at different levels of English proficiency*, *International Journal of Contemporary Educational Research*, 6(1), 135-154. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33200/ijcer.567863>.
16. Ruder, D.B. (2019) *Screen Time and the Brain. Digital devices can interfere with everything from sleep to creativity*, [Online], Available: <https://hms.harvard.edu/news/screen-time-brain> [19 May 2023].
17. Shayna Oliveira *Learning English Outside The Classroom – Part 2: How To Learn English With Netflix* [Online], Available: <https://www.espressoenglish.net/learning-english-outside-the-classroom-part-2-how-to-learn-english-with-netflix/> [17 May 2023].
18. Statista Database, [Online], Available: <https://www.statista.com/outlook/dmo/digital-media/video-on-demand/united-states> [18 May 2023].
19. Stilbore, L., & MacGibbon, P. (2001) *Video/video conferencing in support Of distance education*, [Online], Available: http://www.col.org/Knowledge/ks_videoconferencing.htm [4 May 2023].
20. Taylor, D. (1994). *Inauthentic authenticity or authentic inauthenticity?* *Teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language*, 1, 1-10.
21. The Association for Qualitative Research, (2023) *Video Streaming*, [Online], Available: <https://www.aqr.org.uk/glossary/video-streaming> [17 May].
22. Tapper, J. (2019) *No habla español? How Netflix could transform the way we learn languages*. *The Guardian*. [Online], Available: <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2019/mar/02/netflix-languages-education> [17 May 2023].
23. Vanderplank, R. (2019) *Gist watching can only take you so far: attitudes, strategies, and changes in behaviour in watching films with captions*, *The Language Learning Journal*, 47:4, 407-423, DOI: 10.1080/09571736.2019.1610033.