



**USING ENGLISH SUBTITLED MOVIES
TO LEARN MODAL VERBS: A STUDY
ON EFL STUDENTS'**



HAZAHRA NURSABILA PUTRI

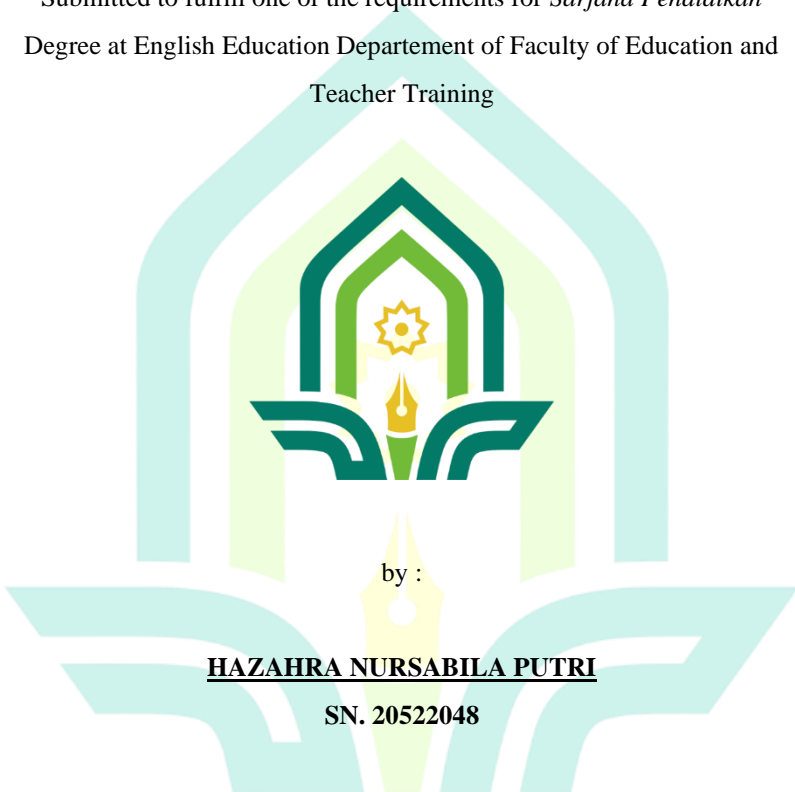
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A THESIS

Submitted to fulfill one of the requirements for *Sarjana Pendidikan*
Degree at English Education Departement of Faculty of Education and
Teacher Training



by :

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**ENGLISH EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
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K.H. ABDURRAHMAN WAHID PEKALONGAN**

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2026**

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Dengan ini mohon agar skripsi tersebut segera dimunaqosahkan.

Demikian nota pembimbing ini dibuat untuk digunakan sebagaimana mestinya. Atas perhatian bapak/Ibu, saya sampaikan terima kasih.

Wassalamu'alaikum Wr.Wb.

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MOTTO

Keinginan untuk membuktikan bahwa kemampuan seseorang tidak ditentukan oleh apa yang orang lain katakan, melainkan oleh apa yang ia lakukan, menjadi landasan dalam melangkah. Oleh karena itu, komentar yang tidak membangun tidak dijadikan sebagai acuan dalam menentukan arah.

Setiap orang memiliki pandangannya masing-masing, namun keyakinan bahwa diri sendirilah yang paling memahami kemampuan dan proses yang dijalani tetap dipegang. Dengan demikian, fokus diarahkan pada usaha dan tujuan yang ingin dicapai, karena hasil nyata diyakini lebih bermakna daripada sekadar penilaian.

Komitmen untuk terus berusaha, belajar, dan berkembang akan selalu dijaga. Hal ini merupakan bentuk pembuktian bahwa saya mampu mencapai tujuan yang diharapkan, sekaligus menunjukkan kepada mereka yang pernah meremehkan dan menyepelkan saya bahwa setiap usaha akan menghasilkan pencapaian yang nyata.

-Hazahra Nursabila Putri

ABSTRACT:

This research is motivated by the challenges experienced by EFL students in understanding and using modal verbs accurately in various communicative contexts. English subtitled movies offer authentic audiovisual input that enables learners to observe modal verbs as they naturally occur in real life interactions. This study aims to investigate the use of English subtitled movies in supporting EFL students' learning of modal verbs. A qualitative research design was employed using content analysis of selected English subtitled movies and supported by interviews with EFL students. The findings show that modal verbs presented in movie dialogues help students understand several key aspects of modal verb usage, namely: (1) expressing obligation and rules, (2) giving advice and interpersonal support, (3) encouraging self discipline and commitment, (4) developing sensitivity to expectations and opinions in communication, and (5) promoting awareness of responsibility and fairness in outcomes. These aspects are conveyed through contextualized dialogues that allow students to connect grammatical forms with situational meaning. In addition, the study indicates that English subtitled movies assist EFL students in developing a more flexible and contextual understanding of modal verbs, making them more confident in using modal verbs appropriately in real communication.

Keywords: *English subtitled movies, modal verbs, EFL students, audiovisual learning, grammatical understanding*

ABSTRAK:

Penelitian ini dilatarbelakangi oleh tantangan yang dialami oleh mahasiswa EFL dalam memahami dan menggunakan modal verbs secara tepat dalam berbagai konteks komunikasi. Film berbahasa Inggris dengan subtitle bahasa Inggris memberikan input audiovisual autentik yang memungkinkan pembelajar mengamati penggunaan modal verbs sebagaimana muncul secara alami dalam interaksi nyata. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji penggunaan film berbahasa Inggris dengan subtitle bahasa Inggris dalam mendukung pembelajaran modal verbs pada mahasiswa EFL. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah kualitatif dengan pendekatan analisis isi terhadap film-film berbahasa Inggris yang disertai subtitle, serta didukung oleh wawancara dengan mahasiswa EFL. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa modal verbs yang muncul dalam dialog film membantu mahasiswa memahami beberapa aspek utama penggunaan modal verbs, yaitu: (1) mengungkapkan kewajiban dan aturan, (2) memberikan nasihat dan dukungan interpersonal, (3) mendorong disiplin diri dan komitmen, (4) mengembangkan kepekaan terhadap harapan dan pendapat dalam komunikasi, serta (5) meningkatkan kesadaran terhadap tanggung jawab dan keadilan dalam hasil atau konsekuensi. Aspek-aspek tersebut disampaikan melalui dialog yang kontekstual sehingga mahasiswa dapat mengaitkan bentuk gramatikal dengan makna situasional. Selain itu, penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa film berbahasa Inggris dengan subtitle bahasa Inggris membantu mahasiswa EFL mengembangkan pemahaman modal verbs yang lebih fleksibel dan kontekstual, sehingga mereka menjadi lebih percaya diri dalam menggunakan modal verbs secara tepat dalam komunikasi nyata.

Kata Kunci: *Film berbahasa Inggris dengan subtitle, modal verbs, mahasiswa EFL, pembelajaran audiovisual, pemahaman gramatikal*



PREFACE

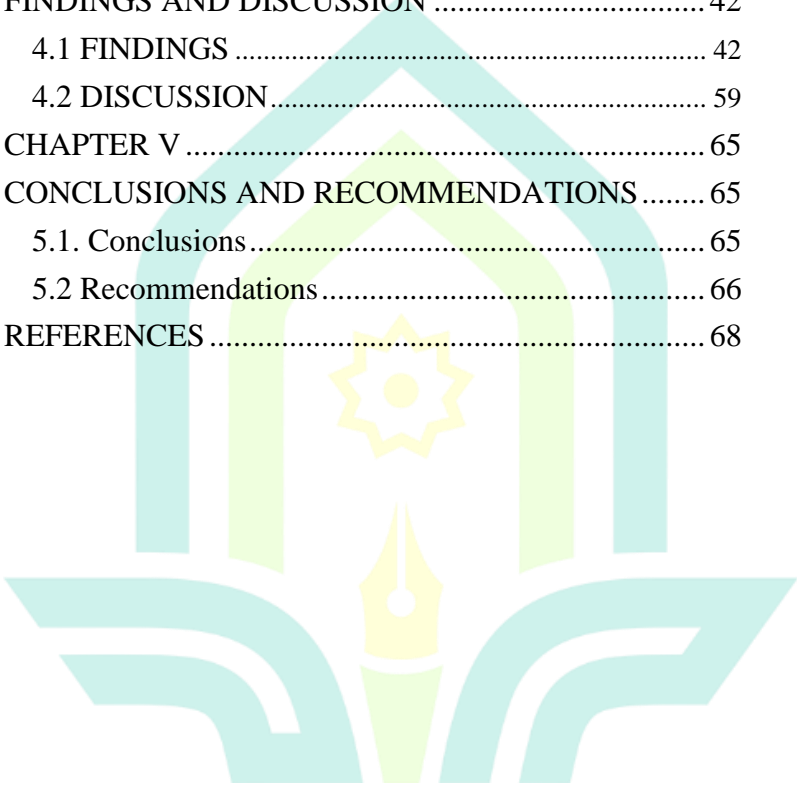
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background

Literary Grammar is the crucial aspect of second language learning because it provides the foundation for meaningful and accurate communication (Celce Murcia, 1991). Without grammatical competence, learners may know vocabulary but still struggle to construct coherent and contextually appropriate sentences. Among various grammatical features, modal verbs are particularly challenging for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners due to their complex meanings and context dependent use. Modal verbs such as can, must, may, might, should, express notions of ability, obligation, permission, and possibility. However, these meanings often shift depending on the speakers' intention, tone and situational context (Palmer, 1990). For example must can express strong necessity ("You must finish this") or logical deduction ("He must be tired"). Because of the semantic nuances, many learners misuse modal verbs, often translating them literally from their first language, which leads to misunderstanding and unnatural expressions in both spoken and writing communication.

In many EFL learners classrooms, especially in Indonesia, grammar instruction is still dominated by traditional approaches that emphasizes rote memorization, drills, and written exercise. While these methods help students recognize grammatical forms, they often fail to promote communicative competence or pragmatic

understanding. As a result, students may perform well on grammar tests but find it difficult to apply these structures in real life communication. According to (Sherman, 2003) authentic learning materials such as films, news clips, and songs can help bridge this gap by providing meaningful exposure to the language as it is naturally used by native speakers. (Gilmore, 2007) further supports the use of authentic materials, emphasizing that they allow learners to encounter genuine language use, natural pronunciation, and cultural context that cannot be replicated through textbook alone.

Films, in particular are among the most effective authentic resources because they integrate linguistic, visual, and emotional input that mirrors real life communication. (Bahrani & Sim, 2012) explains that movies expose learners to authentic dialogue supported by paralinguistic elements such as gestures, facial expressions, and tone of voice, which enrich comprehension and make meaning more accessible. (King, 2022) also highlights that films provide opportunities for learners to acquire idiomatic and colloquial expressions while observing how grammar functions pragmatically within social interaction. Through watching films, learners can observe how modal verbs are used to express request, advice, obligation, or possibility in genuine, emotionally charged contexts (Ismaili, 2013). These elements make films not only entertaining but also pedagogically valuable for teaching abstract grammatical concepts like modality.

The integration of English subtitles in films further enhances this learning experience. Subtitles bridge the gap between auditory and visual processing, allowing learners to connect spoken language with its written form. The integration of English subtitles in films further enhances this learning experience. Subtitles bridge the gap between auditory and visual processing, allowing learners to connect spoken language with its written form. support this, suggesting that conscious attention to linguistic features in the input leads to more effective leaning. When learners watch English subtitled films, they can identify modal verbs within natural dialogues, compare spoken and written forms, and reflect on how meaning changes according to context, tone, and intention. This combination of auditory and textual input promotes deeper processing, especially for complex grammar like modal verbs.

To explore this approach, the present study utilizes three English subtitled films *La La Land* (2016), *Dead Poets Society* (1989), and *Pride and Prejudice* (2005) as learning materials. These films were selected because they contain rich, authentic, emotionally engaging dialogues that represent various real life social settings such as romantic relationship, professional interactions, and personal decision making contexts in which modal verbs naturally occur.

In *La La Land*, modal verbs such as *should*, *might*, and *could* are often used to express encouragement, uncertainty, and possibility, for example “You can’t

always get what you want” and “Maybe you should take a chance”. Illustrate how modal verbs convey motivation, suggestion, and doubt in authentic conversation. This exposure helps students understand how modality shapes meaning beyond literal grammar.

Meanwhile, Dead Poets Society offers emotionally charged classroom and personal interactions in which modal verbs such as must, should, and can appear naturally in motivational, disciplinary, and reflective speech. example, lines like “You must seize the day” or “You can make your life extraordinary illustrate how modal verbs express obligation, encouragement, and personal agency. These examples help learners understand how modals operate not only as grammatical markers but also as tools for conveying determination, persuasion, and emotional emphasis within authentic conversations. Such contextual use allows students to observe how modal verb gain meaning through tone, gestures, and situational dynamics elements that are often absent from traditional grammar instruction.

Similarly, *Pride and Prejudice* provides abundant examples of modal verbs used within polite, formal, and socially complex interactions. Expressions such as “I must confess...” or “You should not be so quick to judge” demonstrate how modal verbs function to soften statements, express social expectations, and convey subtle emotional nuances. Through these dialogues, learners can observe how modal verbs contribute to politeness strategies, maintain social hierarchy, and reflect

interpersonal attitudes. The films' formal register and nuanced character interactions offer learners a deeper understanding of how modality operates within different levels of politeness and cultural norms, enabling them to connect grammar to social meaning.

By observing and reflecting on these films, learners are encouraged to connect grammatical knowledge with communicative meaning. This reflective learning process promotes not only a stronger understanding of modal verbs but also the development of pragmatics competence the ability to use language appropriately across social, emotional, and situational contexts.

When students analyze authentic examples of obligation, permission, possibility, and advice in film dialogues, they gain insight into how modal verbs function beyond prescriptive rules. Integrating English subtitled films therefore aligns with communicative and learner centered principles by providing meaningful, contextualized input that supports more natural and effective internalization of modal verbs in real life communication.

1.2 Limitation of Problem

Based on the background of the study, this research has identified a problem, namely the difficulty face by EFL students in understanding and using modal verbs appropriately in authentic communicative contexts. Modal verbs such as can, must, should, and might are complex grammatical features because their meanings vary depending on contexts, speaker intention, and social

situation, which often leads students to misuse them or rely on literal translations from their first language. In many EFL classrooms, grammar, instruction still emphasizes rule memorization and written exercises, resulting in students' limited ability to apply modal verbs naturally in real life communication. Although previous studies have examined the use of films and subtitles for language learning, there is a lack of focused research that specifically investigates how English subtitled movies help EFL students understand modal verbs contextually and what benefits students gain from this learning approach. Therefore, this study is necessary to address this gap by exploring the role of English subtitled movies in supporting students' comprehension of modal verbs through authentic dialogue. The findings are expected to contribute to grammar learning pedagogy by providing insights into the effectiveness of subtitled films as meaningful and engaging media for developing grammatical and communicative competence among EFL students.

1.3 Formulation of the Problems

Based on background above, this research is conducted with the formulation of the problem related to:

1. How do English subtitled movies help EFL students understand modal verbs in authentic context?
2. What are the benefits of using subtitled movies to learn modal verbs to EFL students?

1.4 Operational Definition

1. **Modal verbs:** Modal verbs are auxiliary verbs in English used to express meanings such as ability, obligation, permission, advice, and possibility. Common modal verbs include can, must, may, might, must, and should, whose meanings vary depending on context and speaker intention (Palmer, 1990).
2. **English subtitled movies:** English subtitled movies refer to films presented with English written subtitles that appear simultaneously with spoken dialogue. In this study, English subtitles are used as a learning aid to help EFL students notice, understand, and interpret the contextual use of modal verbs through combined visual and auditory input (Vanderplank, 1998).
3. **English movies for learning:** English movies for learning refer to the use of English language films as authentic instructional media in language learning. Through movies, learners are exposed to real life conversations, natural grammar usage, emotional expressions, and social interactions, which support the contextual understanding of modal verbs in meaningful communication (Sherman, 2003).

1.5 Aims of the Study

The main objective of this study is to identify and analyze how English subtitled movies help EFL students understand the use of modal verbs in authentic communicative contexts. This study aims to explore how modal verbs such as can, must, should, and might are presented through natural dialogues in English subtitled

films and how these grammatical forms convey meanings related to ability, obligation, advice, permission, and possibility. In addition, this research seeks to examine the benefits of using English subtitled movies as learning media in supporting students' grammatical awareness and contextual understanding of modal verbs. Through this analysis, the study expects to provide insights into the use of English subtitled films as effective and meaningful teaching materials for learning modal verbs in EFL contexts.

1.6 Significance of the Research

1. **Theoretical Significance:** This research provides theoretical contributions to the field of language learning by examining how authentic audiovisual materials specifically the films *La La Land*, *Dead Poets Society*, and *Pride and Prejudice* facilitate learners' understanding of modal verbs in real communicative contexts. Through the natural dialogues in these films, learners encounter modal verbs that express encouragement, obligation, suggestion, permission, and possibility across different social settings. This supports theories of contextualized grammar learning by showing how modal verbs function not only grammatically but also pragmatically in varied emotional and interpersonal interactions.
2. **Empirical Significance:** Empirically, this study offers evidence based on students' reflections and experiences in learning modal verbs through English subtitled films from different genres: musical romantic

(La La Land), inspirational educational (Dead Poets Society), and classical romantic (Pride and Prejudice). Their perceptions provide empirical supports for the effectiveness of films as multimedia resources that enhance grammar learning. The findings are expected to demonstrate how exposure to modal verbs through authentic dialogue improves comprehension, noticing, and contextual interpretation more effectively than traditional rule based instruction.

3. **Practical Significance:** Practically, the result of this research can guide English teachers in designing more engaging grammar instruction using film based learning. Since the films La La Land, Dead Poets Society, and Pride and Prejudice naturally embed modal verbs in meaningful situations such as offering advice (“You should try...”), giving encouragement (“You can do this”), showing obligation (“You must believe in yourself”), or expressing social expectations (“You must behave properly”) teachers can use film subtitles as a practical tool help students understand how modals are applied in real interaction. These films can serve as enjoyable, accessible, and motivating alternatives for teaching modal verbs in classroom or self learning contexts.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Conclusions

This study explores the role of English subtitled movies in supporting EFL students' learning of modal verbs and their meaningful use in communication. The findings indicate that English subtitled movies expose learners to natural and contextualized uses of modal verbs in varied communicative situations. Through authentic audiovisual input, students develop an understanding of how modal verbs such as must, should, could, might, and may function to convey obligation, possibility, advice, belief, and fairness. Rather than seeing these forms as isolated grammatical rules, learners understand them as tools for expressing social meaning, adjusting language according to context, and interpreting speaker intentions. This demonstrates that subtitled movies help integrate grammatical knowledge with pragmatic awareness in real life interactions.

In addition, sustained engagement with English subtitled movies strengthens students' ability to apply modal verbs in new communicative contexts. Learners show greater flexibility in discussing shared responsibilities, evaluating situations, considering alternative perspectives, and expressing personal beliefs in a considerate manner. Modal verbs serve as resources for ethical and responsible communication, enabling students to express ideas objectively while maintaining

politeness, fairness, and openness. Overall, English subtitled movies function as an effective medium for both grammatical development and value-oriented language use, offering EFL learners opportunities to internalize modal verb functions and apply them productively in authentic communication.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions above, this study provides several recommendations for various parties.

First, for educators, it is recommended to utilize English subtitled movies as creative and contextual teaching media to support students' understanding of modal verbs. Teachers can design learning activities such as guided discussions, dialogue analysis, or reflective tasks that encourage students to identify how modal verbs are used in different communicative situations. Through these activities, students can better understand how modal verbs express obligation, advice, possibility, and responsibility in real life contexts.

Second, for EFL students, it is recommended to engage actively with English subtitled movies by paying closer attention to how modal verbs are used in movie dialogues. By observing how characters express opinions, expectations, and decisions, students can improve their comprehension of modal verb functions and develop greater confidence in using modal verbs appropriately in communication.

Finally, for future researchers, it is recommended to explore further the use of English subtitled movies in learning modal verbs by focusing on aspects that differentiate future studies from the present research. Future studies may investigate different categories of modal verbs, compare various movie genres, or examine the effectiveness of English subtitled movies across different educational levels or learning contexts. In addition, future researchers can develop structured learning models or guided instructional frameworks to examine how audiovisual input can support students' grammatical understanding and communicative competence more effectively. With deeper exploration, future research is expected to provide broader insights into the role of English subtitled movies as an innovative medium in language learning.



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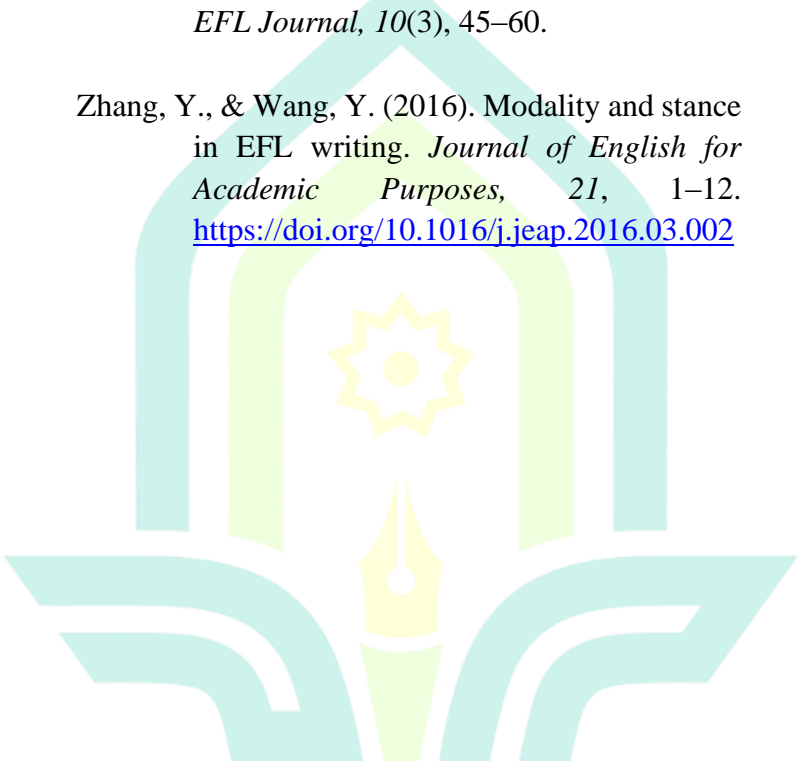
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