

“THE MIRACLE WORKER”: A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO LANGUAGE ACQUISITION PEDAGOGY

Nanik Retnowati, Indah Sri Rejeki, Najwatus Salimah, Kiasati

*nanik.retnowati@uika-bogor.ac.id

Universitas Ibn Khladun Bogor, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the pedagogical potential of *The Miracle Worker* (1962) as a teaching medium in Language Acquisition courses, with a dual focus on linguistic development and character education. Employing a qualitative descriptive method with film content analysis, the research systematically examines key scenes and character interactions to identify how theoretical principles of language acquisition—such as behaviorist, nativist, interactionist, and affective approaches—are reflected in Helen Keller’s learning journey. Data were collected through close scene analysis, thematic coding, and interpretation aligned with major theories of language development. The findings reveal that the film presents a rich, multidimensional representation of the language acquisition process, highlighting the importance of tactile-based instruction, emotional support, and socially mediated interaction. Helen Keller’s journey illustrates that effective language learning is deeply influenced by both cognitive and affective factors. Traits such as perseverance, empathy, self-discipline, and emotional resilience are shown to facilitate communication and comprehension, suggesting a strong interdependence between character growth and linguistic development. The study concludes that *The Miracle Worker* is a powerful educational tool that can enhance students’ understanding of language acquisition concepts while also promoting reflective discussion on inclusive, empathetic teaching practices. By integrating academic content with character values, the film exemplifies a holistic approach to language education that addresses both intellectual and personal dimensions of learning.

Keywords: *The Miracle Worker*, language acquisition, character education, content analysis, holistic education

INTRODUCTION

Film, as a powerful form of literature, provides both entertainment and educational value. In today’s globalized world, where multimodality and cultural diversity shape society, a broader understanding of literacy is essential in education (Rintaningrum, 2009). As an educational tool, film offers a unique opportunity to teach not only linguistic skills but also critical life lessons. Several studies have shown that films can enhance language learning (Fidelia & Rohmah, 2023; Laoli et al., 2025; Lv, 2023; Pervan, 2024; Sánchez-Auñón et al., 2023), content knowledge (Karimaliana et al., 2024; Rudy et al., 2020; Sakkir & Usman, 2018), and character development (Ramadhan et al., 2023; Rifa, 2022; Rudy, 2022).

*Corresponding Author

Nanik Retnowati

Email: nanik.retnowati@uika-bogor.ac.id

In the Language Education Program, Language Acquisition is a key subject that introduces prospective educators to the complexities of language development. One film that stands out in illustrating these complexities is *The Miracle Worker* (1962). This powerful film offers valuable insights into the challenges faced by Helen Keller, a blind, deaf, and mute girl, as she learns to communicate. Through the dedicated efforts of her teacher, Anne Sullivan, the film not only showcases the process of language acquisition but also highlights the transformative role of education in shaping character. Numerous researchers have examined this film from diverse perspectives, shedding light on various aspects of language learning and educational interaction. One of the perspectives is the moral value and character building found in the film (Khasanah, 2020; Rifa, 2022; Sulayani et al., 2021). Rahayu et al. (2021) investigated the application of B.F. Skinner's behaviorist principles, such as reinforcement and conditioning, in Anne Sullivan's teaching approach. Meanwhile, Putri & Fitri (2020) focused on the educational values embedded in the characters' development, particularly perseverance, discipline, and respect, emphasizing their relevance in modern pedagogy.

This study departs from previous research by shifting the focus toward a holistic interpretation of language acquisition theories and character education as interrelated constructs. It argues that the process of language acquisition cannot be fully explained by a single theory. Instead, behaviorist, nativist, interactionist, and input-based theories each contribute complementary insights, together forming a more comprehensive framework for understanding how language is acquired and how it simultaneously supports character formation. Helen Keller's journey from isolation to linguistic understanding provides a profound reflection on the nature of language and its acquisition. The film serves as a case study for various language acquisition theories, including behaviorists, nativists, and functionalist approaches (Brown, 2007). These theories explore how language acquisition unfolds: from the impact of environmental stimuli and reinforcement (behaviorist), to innate cognitive abilities (nativist), and the role of social interaction and communication functions (functionalists). The *Miracle Worker* vividly demonstrates the intersection of these theories, offering a concrete example of how language learning occurs within both a social and cognitive context.

This study draws on key perspectives from language acquisition theories as well as character education. These frameworks are essential for understanding how *The Miracle Worker* can be utilized as an educational tool to teach both language acquisition and character development. Language acquisition and character development are closely interconnected; successful language learning is often supported by strong character traits such as perseverance, empathy, curiosity, and responsibility. According to Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, language development is mediated through social interaction and shaped by one's environment, including emotional and moral dimensions. Krashen's (1992) Affective Filter Hypothesis also highlights those emotional factors—like motivation and self-confidence—significantly influence language acquisition, where positive character traits help lower the affective filter and promote effective learning. Recent studies further support this connection. Afnita et al. (2021) found that character education significantly enhances second language development in gifted children by fostering moral values and social competencies. Similarly, Novalina et al. (2024) showed that role-playing activities not only support early childhood language development but also cultivate character by encouraging empathy and moral understanding through interaction. These findings emphasize that character and language learning reinforce each other: good character supports effective communication, while language use enhances personal and moral growth.

Recent research underscores the multifaceted nature of language acquisition, demonstrating that no single theory can fully explain the process. Instead, a combination of behaviorist, nativist, interactionist, and input-based perspectives offers a more comprehensive understanding. Behaviorist Theory (Skinner, 1957) emphasizes the role of conditioning and reinforcement in language learning. Recent studies have shown that consistent positive reinforcement can enhance motivation and improve language outcomes in learners (Sari et al., 2024; Naeem, 2022; Wang et al., 2021). Nativist Theory (Chomsky, 1959) asserts that

humans have an innate ability to acquire language. Research comparing the language development of children and artificial intelligence models suggests that both follow similar learning trajectories, supporting the idea of an inherent capacity for language acquisition. A study published in 2023 found that deep language models like GPT-2 exhibit stages of language learning comparable to those observed in children aged 18 months to 6 years (Evanson et al., 2023). Interactionist Theory (Vygotsky, 1978) emphasizes the role of social interaction in language development. Recent research highlights the importance of social interaction in language learning, suggesting that language acquisition is deeply influenced by interactions with caregivers and peers. A study published in 2023 found that children's language development is significantly influenced by their interactions with caregivers, supporting the interactionist perspective (Alharbi, 2023). Input Hypothesis (Krashen, 1992) stresses the necessity of comprehensible input for language learners. Recent studies have shown that providing learners with comprehensible and meaningful input can enhance language acquisition. For example, a study conducted in 2021 found that learners who received input that was both understandable and contextually relevant demonstrated improved language skills (Loschky, 1994; Peras & Turano, 2024). These findings suggest that language acquisition is a complex process shaped by innate abilities, environmental input, and social interaction. An integrated approach offers a fuller understanding than any single theory alone.

The Miracle Worker illustrates these principles vividly. Helen Keller's breakthrough in connecting the sign for "water" with its meaning shows the power of comprehensible input and meaningful interaction, echoing Krashen's and Vygotsky's theories. Anne Sullivan's patient, structured guidance exemplifies scaffolding and the zone of proximal development, demonstrating how language emerges through responsive, context-rich teaching. By analyzing key scenes, students can see abstract language acquisition theories brought to life, making them more accessible and relatable. The Miracle Worker also serves as a case study in character education, demonstrating key values such as perseverance, creativity, independence, and respect for achievement. Helen Keller's growth throughout the film embodies these qualities as she learns to communicate, demonstrating how education can cultivate moral and emotional resilience.

Thus, The Miracle Worker, with its emotionally rich narrative and character-driven lessons, offers an ideal platform for simultaneously fostering both language acquisition and character formation. Previous studies on the film have primarily focused on its educational dimensions, particularly in relation to character building, teacher-student relationships, and the behaviorist theory of language acquisition. However, this research aims to approach the film more holistically by incorporating a range of language acquisition theories—including behaviorist, nativist, interactionist, and sociocultural perspectives—while also highlighting the moral and emotional values that support language development.

This integrated perspective is especially valuable for students studying the Language Acquisition course, as it provides a concrete, narrative-based example through which they can observe and reflect on theoretical concepts within a single, cohesive framework. By analyzing The Miracle Worker, students can gain deeper insights into how various language acquisition theories manifest in real-life contexts, enriched by emotional depth and social dynamics. Therefore, this study proposes the film as a meaningful and effective case study to be included in the curriculum of Language Acquisition, helping bridge the gap between theory and practice in a compelling and pedagogically relevant way. The purpose of this study is to answer the following research questions:

1. How does The Miracle Worker illustrate key theories of first language acquisition—including behaviorist, nativist, interactionist, and sociocultural approaches—through the case of Helen Keller?
2. In what ways can The Miracle Worker serve as an effective pedagogical tool in a Language Acquisition course, by providing an integrated example of language development and character formation within a unified narrative framework?

METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive method using narrative content analysis, with *The Miracle Worker* (1962) as the primary data source. The analysis focuses on how the film illustrates the process of language acquisition and character development, integrating multiple theoretical perspectives—behaviorist, nativist, interactionist, and sociocultural—within a single, cohesive narrative. In doing so, the research also aims to explore the film's potential as an instructional medium for students enrolled in Language Acquisition courses.

The primary data consists of selected scenes from the middle and ending sections of the film, particularly those that depict Helen Keller's evolving ability to understand and use language, as well as her growth in emotional regulation, discipline, and social interaction. This selection aligns with classical narrative structure theory, particularly the three-act structure (Field, 2005; McKee, 1997), where the middle (climax) represents the most intensive character and plot development, and the end reflects resolution and transformation.

Scenes were selected based on two primary criteria:

1. Key moments of language acquisition, such as Helen's recognition of the word "water" and its association with the physical experience, illustrating foundational concepts like comprehensible input, sensory-based learning, and language-symbol mapping.
2. Character-building events, where personal growth, values like persistence, empathy, independence, and mutual respect are visibly developed through the relationship between Helen and Anne Sullivan.

These scenes were transcribed and annotated, focusing on both verbal (dialogue, sign language) and non-verbal elements (gestures, physical interactions, emotional expressions) to capture the multimodal nature of communication.

Meanwhile, the analysis follows a three-step model based on Halliday's (1985) Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) framework: description, interpretation, and explanation.

Description involves the transcription and detailed examination of selected scenes, identifying linguistic and semiotic features such as tactile signing, gesture-based instruction, and contextual cues provided by Anne Sullivan.

Interpretation focuses on how these elements function within the context of language acquisition. For instance, Helen's tactile learning of "water" is analyzed through the lens of Krashen's comprehensible input, Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development, and Chomsky's notion of innate language structures. The interactions are interpreted as dynamic moments of learning shaped by emotional bonding, environmental input, and individualized scaffolding.

Explanation connects the findings to broader theories of language acquisition and character formation. It highlights how the film's portrayal of language learning reflects theoretical constructs—such as behaviorist reinforcement, innate linguistic capacity, social interactionism, and the critical role of emotional and moral support in language development. Moreover, it explains how the development of language and character are intertwined, making the learning process both cognitive and affective in nature.

By using this methodological approach, the study not only investigates how *The Miracle Worker* represents the language acquisition process but also demonstrates how such a film can be employed as a pedagogical tool. For students studying Language Acquisition, this film provides a concrete, emotionally resonant example that brings together multiple theories and values into one unified learning experience, enriching both academic understanding and reflective practice.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section explores how *The Miracle Worker* (1962) illustrates the intertwined processes of first language acquisition and character development, particularly in the case of Helen Keller. The film serves as a valuable multimodal narrative that showcases how language acquisition theories—such as those of Krashen, Chomsky, and Vygotsky—manifest in real-

life scenarios, especially for learners with severe sensory impairments. Through detailed scene analysis, this section also demonstrates how the film can function as an effective pedagogical tool for students in Language Acquisition courses, offering both theoretical and practical insights into how communication and emotional growth evolve together.

The Process of First Language Acquisition in Helen Keller

Sensory Deprivation and the Foundations of Learning

In *The Miracle Worker*, Helen Keller's initial lack of formal language, due to her sensory impairments, is poignantly depicted. Her early non-verbal behaviors—such as grabbing faces, mimicking lip movements, and rocking in frustration—reflect a deep-seated drive to communicate, aligning with Chomsky's concept of an innate language faculty awaiting activation through appropriate input.

Recent studies reinforce the idea that sensory deprivation does not preclude language development. Research indicates that individuals with sensory impairments can form semantic representations of concepts typically acquired through visual input, such as colors or spatial awareness, by relying on other modalities like touch and hearing. These abstract concepts activate the same brain regions involved in conceptual knowledge in both blind and sighted individuals. Furthermore, studies on early gesture use demonstrate its predictive role in language development. For instance, the diversity of meanings conveyed through gesture at 18 months can predict vocabulary size at 42 months (Rowe et al., 2008; Rowe & Goldin-Meadow, 2009). Additionally, combining gestures with speech at an early age is associated with the onset of two-word utterances, highlighting the integral role of non-verbal communication in language acquisition (Dill, 1984).

In this context, Helen's instinctive actions and emotional expressions are not mere signs of frustration but represent meaningful attempts to connect with her environment. These behaviors underscore the potential for language development, even in the absence of conventional sensory input, awaiting the right pedagogical intervention.

Behaviorist Conditioning and Structured Environment

In *The Miracle Worker*, Anne Sullivan's initial pedagogical approach emphasizes discipline as a foundation for learning. Her insistence that Helen "fold the napkin" during the "breakfast battle" scene exemplifies B.F. Skinner's behaviorist model, where language acquisition follows the establishment of controlled behavior through reinforcement. Anne asserts, "Obedience is the gateway through which knowledge enters," highlighting discipline as a precursor to communication.

Recent studies affirm the efficacy of operant conditioning in language learning. Basnet (2022) found that positive reinforcement significantly enhances student motivation in English language learning, underscoring the role of structured environments in fostering language acquisition. Furthermore, a 2024 study in the *Prima Journal* analyzed language acquisition in children aged 0–5 years under the care of working mothers (Napitupulu & Bako, 2024). The research indicated that continuous practice and reinforcement are crucial for language development, supporting Skinner's view that language acquisition is a stimulus-response process influenced by environmental interactions. These findings align with Skinner's theory, suggesting that structured, disciplined environments are instrumental in facilitating language acquisition, particularly for learners with disabilities.

Comprehensible Input and the Linguistic Breakthrough

In *The Miracle Worker*, the pivotal "pump scene" illustrates Helen Keller's first linguistic breakthrough. As Anne Sullivan spells "W-A-T-E-R" into Helen's hand while water flows over them, Helen pauses and begins to spell it back, connecting the tactile experience with the symbolic word. This moment exemplifies Stephen Krashen's Input Hypothesis, where language acquisition occurs when learners are exposed to

comprehensible input that is slightly beyond their current proficiency level ($i+1$), allowing language to emerge naturally (Pauzan, 2024).

Recent studies affirm the efficacy of this approach. A 2023 literature review highlighted that polytechnic student in China improved their English writing proficiency when exposed to comprehensible input, supporting the application of Krashen's theory in language education (Li, 2023). Additionally, a study emphasized the importance of providing comprehensible input in college English education to enhance students' language acquisition and communicative competence (Jeonbuk, 2023).

Furthermore, Helen's subsequent ability to label other items—"mama," "pump," "ground"—demonstrates her innate capacity for creative construction, aligning with Noam Chomsky's theory that language acquisition involves generating novel combinations of known elements. This progression underscores the role of comprehensible input in facilitating both linguistic development and cognitive growth.

Social Interaction and the Role of the More Knowledgeable Other

In *The Miracle Worker*, Anne Sullivan embodies Vygotsky's concept of the "More Knowledgeable Other" (MKO), guiding Helen Keller through the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Anne's methods—modeling, waiting, correcting, and emotionally supporting—serve as scaffolding, a temporary support system that enables learners to perform tasks they cannot accomplish independently. This approach facilitates the transition from external assistance to internalized knowledge (Cruz et al., 2024).

Vygotsky emphasized that cognitive development is inherently social, occurring through interactions with more capable individuals. Anne's role exemplifies this, as she mediates between Helen and the world, fostering learning through guided interaction. Her assertion, "Language is to the mind more than light is to the eye," underscores the transformative power of language in cognitive development.

Recent studies reinforce the significance of scaffolding in learning. A 2023 study highlighted the effectiveness of scaffolding-based instruction in enhancing intermediate English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners' reading comprehension, motivation, and reducing anxiety. The research underscores the importance of teacher-student interactions within the ZPD in promoting cognitive growth (Ahmed Abdel-Al Ibrahim et al., 2023).

Additionally, a 2022 study explored the impact of scaffolding on EFL learners' speaking achievement. The findings suggest that scaffolding, through expert guidance, significantly improves learners' speaking abilities by providing support within their ZPD (Ahmed Abdel-Al Ibrahim et al., 2023; Cruz et al., 2024). These studies align with Vygotsky's theory, illustrating that structured social interaction and scaffolding are crucial for cognitive development and language acquisition.

Character Development as a Parallel to Language Growth

As Helen acquires language, her behavior and identity begin to transform. Emotional growth parallels linguistic progress, reinforcing the idea that character and communication are co-dependent.

From Frustration to Empathy

In *The Miracle Worker*, Helen Keller's emotional journey—from initial frustration to profound empathy—parallels her linguistic development, underscoring the integral relationship between language acquisition and emotional growth. Early in the film, Helen exhibits behaviors such as screaming, throwing objects, and hitting others, signaling her unmet needs for expression and understanding. These actions reflect her struggle to communicate and navigate her emotions in a world that is largely inaccessible to her.

The pivotal moment occurs during the "pump scene," where Anne Sullivan spells "W-A-T-E-R" into Helen's hand while water flows over them. This multisensory experience

catalyzes Helen's realization that the tactile sensation corresponds to a symbolic representation, marking her first linguistic breakthrough. Following this, Helen begins to label other items—such as "mama," "pump," and "ground" - demonstrating her capacity for creative construction and the emergence of symbolic thought.

As Helen's language skills develop, so do her emotional intelligence. She transitions from expressions of frustration to demonstrations of empathy and gratitude, such as when she signs "teacher" and embracing Anne. This shift illustrates how language acquisition can facilitate emotional development, enabling individuals to articulate and regulate their emotions more effectively.

Recent research supports the notion that language acquisition and emotional development are closely intertwined. A study published in the *British Journal of Educational Psychology* found reciprocal relationships between language and socio-emotional competencies in preschool dual language learners. The research indicated that early vocabulary skills can enhance self-regulation and emotional competence, while strong self-regulation skills can facilitate language development through better engagement in social interactions (Ertanir et al., 2021).

Furthermore, a 2023 study in *Heliyon* explored the role of emotional intelligence in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners' academic literacy development. The findings suggested that emotionally intelligent learners exhibit greater happiness, self-esteem, and social support, which positively influence their language acquisition and academic performance (Yang & Duan, 2023).

These studies underscore the bidirectional relationship between language acquisition and emotional development, highlighting the importance of fostering both to support holistic growth in learners.

Anne's Role in Modeling Values

In *The Miracle Worker*, Anne Sullivan serves not only as Helen Keller's linguistic guide but also as a moral educator, profoundly influencing Helen's character development. Anne's personal experiences with disability and trauma, particularly her time at the Perkins School and her relationship with her ill brother Jimmy, shaped her resilience and compassion. These traits she imparts to Helen through both teaching and example, demonstrating the integral role of educators in shaping students' character alongside their academic growth.

Anne's refusal to accept pity or defeat exemplifies perseverance—a core value she instills in Helen. Her assertion, "I treat her like a seeing child because I expect her to see," underscores her belief in high expectations and dignity for all learners, regardless of their challenges. This approach aligns with the Pygmalion effect, where expectations from educators can lead to improved student performance.

Recent studies reinforce the significance of teacher modeling in character development. A 2023 study published in the *Journal of Language and Cultural Education* found that foreign language teachers' moral settings and behaviors significantly influence students' moral adjustment and academic integrity (Ferková & Zacharová, 2023). Additionally, a 2024 study in the *International Journal of Education and Curriculum Application* highlighted that children's language development can be an effective means of implementing character education, as language skills facilitate communication and understanding of moral values (Mustoip et al., 2023). These findings underscore the bidirectional relationship between language acquisition and character development, emphasizing the importance of a supportive and value-driven educational environment in fostering holistic growth in learners.

Family Transformation: The Interplay Between Language Acquisition and Character Development

In *The Miracle Worker*, the Keller family's evolution mirrors Helen's linguistic and emotional growth, underscoring the profound influence of a supportive home environment on character development.

Captain Keller's Shift in Perspective

Initially, Captain Keller's authoritarian stance and desire for order, as evidenced by his remark, "I want some peace here," reflect a limited understanding of Helen's needs. However, as Helen's language skills develop, he witnesses her transformation and begins to appreciate the depth of her potential. This shift aligns with findings that a nurturing environment can positively impact children's development. The home environment significantly influence young children's language development, emphasizing the role of supportive interactions in fostering cognitive and emotional growth (Brito, 2017).

Katie Keller's Unwavering Hope

Katie Keller's steadfast hope, encapsulated in her statement, "Any number of times... if there's a chance," provides emotional stability for Helen. This unwavering support is crucial, as research indicates that a warm and responsive parenting style contributes to children's social competence and emotional well-being. The quality and quantity of language experienced during early childhood are predictors of brain development, long-term language achievement, and later cognitive and academic ability, underscoring the importance of a supportive home environment (Lawton et al., 2023).

James Keller's Journey from Cynicism to Support

James Keller's progression from skepticism to supportiveness mirrors the family's collective growth. His eventual embrace of Anne's methods and belief in Helen's potential reflects the transformative power of witnessing language acquisition and its impact on character development. This transformation is consistent with findings that the family environment plays a significant role in shaping children's personalities. A harmonious home environment supports children's personality development and ensures the effective implementation of character education (Aminova et al., 2021).

The Keller family's transformation illustrates the interconnectedness of language acquisition and character development. As Helen's ability to communicate expands, so does her family's understanding and support, highlighting the reciprocal relationship between a child's linguistic growth and the nurturing environment provided by those around them. These dynamics underscore the critical role of a supportive family in fostering both cognitive and emotional development.

Implications for Language Education

The Miracle Worker stands as a rich, multimodal educational resource for students in Language Acquisition courses, especially within teacher preparation programs. The film uniquely brings to life core theories of language development through concrete, emotionally charged scenes that capture the complex interplay between language learning and character growth.

Firstly, the film offers vivid, scene-based illustrations of major language acquisition theories in action—such as Krashen's Input Hypothesis, Vygotsky's social interactionist model, and Chomsky's creative construction theory. For example, Helen's breakthrough moment at the water pump provides a tangible example of comprehensible input (Krashen, 1985), while Anne's scaffolded guidance exemplifies Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). This aligns with findings from recent educational research indicating that multimedia materials like film can enhance understanding by providing contextualized,

embodied examples of abstract concepts (Coëgnarts & Kravanja, 2015; Gambino & Share, 2023).

Secondly, *The Miracle Worker* powerfully illustrates how emotional growth and language acquisition are deeply intertwined. The film's portrayal of Helen's frustration transforming into empathy, and Anne's unwavering perseverance, emphasizes the emotional dimensions of learning that textbooks often overlook. Recent studies in applied linguistics stress the importance of emotional resilience and social-emotional support in language learning success, especially for learners facing additional challenges (Castro & Shelton-Strong, 2024; Hiver & Solarte, 2021).

Moreover, the film's use of multimodal communication—combining tactile, visual, and verbal modes—helps students grasp the embodied nature of language learning. This multimodal approach resonates with contemporary research that advocates for inclusive, sensory-rich language education environments to support diverse learners (Embarek & Hacene, 2024; Korkmaz & Karatepe, 2018; Tamblyn et al., 2023).

Incorporating *The Miracle Worker* into Language Acquisition syllabi enables students to move beyond theoretical definitions and observe real human struggles and breakthroughs. It encourages future educators to view learners as complex individuals shaped by emotion, environment, and resilience, rather than as passive recipients of knowledge. This perspective aligns with current pedagogical frameworks emphasizing learner-centered, holistic approaches to language teaching (Badjadi, 2020; Embarek & Hacene, 2024; Nadeem, 2012).

Finally, the film underscores the critical role of character-building values such as discipline, empathy, and perseverance alongside cognitive skill development. These qualities are essential for second language learners who must navigate cultural, emotional, and linguistic barriers simultaneously. Recent educational psychology research highlights that fostering such non-cognitive skills significantly boosts learners' motivation and long-term success (Cheng & Zhou, 2023; Rankin et al., 2022; Thao et al., 2023).

In sum, *The Miracle Worker* serves not only as a narrative about overcoming disability but as an invaluable tool for language educators to deepen their understanding of language acquisition's multifaceted nature, bridging theory, practice, and human experience.

CONCLUSION

This study has revealed that *The Miracle Worker* is a rich, authentic depiction of first language acquisition, especially in complex contexts involving sensory impairments. Helen Keller's transformative journey—from a pre-linguistic state of frustration to meaningful communication—reflects key language acquisition theories including Skinner's behaviorism, Chomsky's nativism, Krashen's comprehensible input, and Vygotsky's social interactionism. Each theory comes to life through specific scenes that make abstract principles tangible.

Moreover, the film powerfully demonstrates how language acquisition is deeply intertwined with character development. Helen's emerging empathy, self-regulation, and independence unfold alongside her linguistic breakthroughs, affirming that language learning is both a cognitive and emotional process. Anne Sullivan's role as a persistent, empathetic guide further underscores the importance of a socially and emotionally supportive environment.

Crucially, this research argues that *The Miracle Worker* is a highly effective pedagogical tool for use in Language Acquisition courses, especially in teacher education programs. By presenting real human struggles, it enables future language teachers to understand learners not merely as subjects of theory, but as whole individuals shaped by environment, emotion, and resilience. The film enriches theoretical learning by offering concrete examples of how language is acquired and how character is shaped in tandem. Thus, integrating this film into language education curricula can foster deeper insight, empathy, and pedagogical sensitivity—qualities essential for cultivating skilled and compassionate language educators.

REFERENCES

- Afnita, A., Saputra, D., Ulya, R. H., & Efrianto, E. (2021). Character education as a means of second language development in talented children: A study of sociolinguistic. *AL-ISHLAH: Jurnal Pendidikan*, 13(3), 1696–1704. <https://doi.org/10.35445/alishlah.v13i3.996>
- Ahmed Abdel-Al Ibrahim, K., Cuba Carbajal, N., Zuta, M. E. C., & Bayat, S. (2023). Collaborative learning, scaffolding-based instruction, and self-assessment: impacts on intermediate EFL learners' reading comprehension, motivation, and anxiety. *Language Testing in Asia*, 13(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40468-023-00229-1>
- Alharbi, J. M. (2023). Insight into the role of interaction in language acquisition: Vygotsky's interactionist theory of language. *Arab World English Journal*, 14(2).
- Aminova, D. K., Bondarenko, N. G., Popov, K. I., Shebzukhova, T. A., & Vartumyan, A. A. (2021). Harmonious development of the personality of schoolchildren in modern education system. *Revista on Line de Política e Gestão Educacional*, 4040–4054. <https://doi.org/10.22633/rpge.v25iesp.7.16162>
- Badjadi, N. E. I. (2020). Learner-centered english language teaching: Premises, practices, and prospects. *IAFOR Journal of Education*, 8(1), 7–27. <https://doi.org/10.22492/ije.8.1.01>
- Basnet, B. (2022). Application of the positive reinforcement to enhance the learnability of EFL Learners. *Journal of Durgaxmi*, 125–130. <https://doi.org/10.3126/jdl.v1i1.57109>
- Brito, N. H. (2017). Influence of the home linguistic environment on early language development. *Policy Insights from the Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 4(2), 155–162. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2372732217720699>
- Brown, H. D. (2007). *Principles of language learning and teaching* (5th ed.). Pearson Longman.
- Campbell, E. E., & Bergelson, E. (2022). Making sense of sensory language: Acquisition of sensory knowledge by individuals with congenital sensory impairments. *Neuropsychologia*, 174, 108320. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.neuropsychologia.2022.108320>
- Castro, E., & Shelton-Strong, S. J. (2024). Exploring emotions in language learning: Learners' self-awareness, personal growth, and transformation on a CLIL course. *Language Teaching Research*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13621688241267366>
- Cheng, X., & Zhou, S. (2023). The influence mechanism of parental emotional companionship on children's second language acquisition. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.1034867>
- Chomsky, N. (1959). A Review of B.F. Skinner's Verbal behavior. In *Language* (Vol. 35, Issue 1). <https://doi.org/10.2307/411334>

- Coëgnarts, Maarten., & Kravanja, Peter. (2015). *Embodied cognition and cinema*. Leuven University Press.
- Cruz, J. B. Dela, Escarlos, G., Mechelle, M., Remorosa, R., Capili, S. R., Grace, E., Decir, B., Delacruz, J. B., Mae, M., Balase, H., & Escarlos, G. S. (2024). Vygotsky's social development theory: The role of social interaction and language in cognitive development. *International Journal of All Research Writings*, 6. www.ijarw.com
- Dil, N. (1984). Nonverbal communication in young children. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*, 4(2), 82–99. <https://doi.org/10.1177/027112148400400207>
- Embarek, R., & Hacene, B. (2024). The Role of Experiential Learning in Teaching Language Skills. *Journal for Educators, Teachers and Trainers JETT*, 15(3), 312–320. <https://doi.org/10.47750/jett.2024.15.03.026>
- Ertanir, B., Kaiser-Kratzmann, J., & Sachse, S. (2021). Long-term interrelations between socio-emotional and language competencies among preschool dual language learners in Germany. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 91(2), 735–754. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjep.12391>
- Evanson, L., Lakretz, Y., & King, J.-R. (2023). *Language acquisition: do children and language models follow similar learning stages?* <http://arxiv.org/abs/2306.03586>
- Ferková, Š., & Zacharová, Z. (2023). Implementation of moral education by teachers of foreign languages. *Journal of Language and Cultural Education*, 11(3), 67–75. <https://doi.org/10.2478/jolace-2023-0028>
- Fidelia, V. D., & Rohmah, Z. (2023). Using English Movies to improve students' listening skills. *NOBEL: Journal of Literature and Language Teaching*, 14(2), 206–225. <https://doi.org/10.15642/nobel.2023.14.2.206-225>
- Field, Syd. (2005). *Screenplay: the foundations of screenwriting*. Delta Trade Paperbacks.
- Gambino, A., & Share, J. (2023). Critical media literacy and second language acquisition. In *International Encyclopedia of Education (Fourth Edition)* (pp. 76–85). Elsevier. <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-818630-5.07072-X>
- Halliday, M. A. K. (1985). *Dimensions of discourse analysis: grammar*. van Dijk (ed). *Handbook of Discourse Analysis*, 2, 29–56.
- Hiver, P., & Solarte, A. C. S. (2021). Resilience in language learning and use. In *The Routledge Handbook of the Psychology of Language Learning and Teaching* (pp. 205–217). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429321498-19>
- Jeonbuk, Z. (2023). *Enhancing English Writing Proficiency in China's Polytechnic Students: An In-Depth Literature Review on the Application of the Input Hypothesis*.
- Karimaliana, K., Ramadhan, S., & Mukhaiyar, M. (2024). Transformative Literacy Training for English Students: The Impact of Movie-Based Learning Methods. *VELES (Voices of English Language Education Society)*, 7(3), 829–838. <https://doi.org/10.29408/veles.v7i3.24296>

- Khasanah, U. (2020). *Character education values in the miracle worker movie*. Unpublished Thesis. State Institute of Islamic Studies of Jember. Indonesia.
- Korkmaz, Ş. Ç., & Karatepe, Ç. (2018). *The Impact of Multi-sensory Language Teaching on Young English Learners' Achievement in Reading Skills* (Vol. 12, Issue 2).
- Krashen, S. (1992). The input hypothesis: An update. *Linguistics and language pedagogy: The state of the art*, 409-431.
- Laoli, A., Bago, E., Lase, D. A., Vita, H., & Gulo, S. (2025). Influence of Watching English Movies on English Language Speaking Skills. *International Journal of Multilingual Education and Applied Linguistics*, 2. <https://doi.org/10.61132/ijmeal.v2i1.187>
- Lawton, W., Araujo, O., & Kufaishi, Y. (2023). Language Environment and Infants' Brain Structure. *The Journal of Neuroscience*, 43(28), 5129–5131. <https://doi.org/10.1523/JNEUROSCI.0787-23.2023>
- Li, Y. (2023). Study on the Significance of the Input Hypothesis to English Teaching. In *Journal of Education and Educational Research* (Vol. 3, Issue 2).
- Loschky, L. (1994). Comprehensible input and second language acquisition. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 16(3), 303–323. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0272263100013103>
- Lv, Z. (2023). The Significance of English Movies on Learning English in EFL Classrooms. *The Educational Review, USA*, 7(8), 1111–1115. <https://doi.org/10.26855/er.2023.08.013>
- McKee, R. (1997). *Robert McKee - Story*. ReganBooks.
- Mustoip, S., Al Ghozali, M. I., As, U. S., & Sanhaji, S. Y. (2023). Implementation of Character Education through Children's Language Development in Elementary Schools. *IJECA (International Journal of Education and Curriculum Application)*, 6(2), 91. <https://doi.org/10.31764/ijeca.v6i2.14192>
- Nadeem, M. (2012). Learner-Centered English Language Teaching (An Observation: Public & Private Teachers' Training Systems At Primary Level). In *The International Journal of Engineering And Science*. www.theijes.com
- Naeem, F. (2022). *Behaviorism and the Study of Language Acquisition and Language Learning Background*. <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.35525.12003>
- Napitupulu, L. H., & Bako, E. N. (2024). Analysis of Language Acquisition in Children Aged 0-5 Years in the Care of Career Mother: Behaviorism Theory-B.F Skinner. *ELT (English Language Teaching Prima Journal)*, 6(1), 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.34012/elt.v6i1.5042>
- Novalina, S., Anwar, K., Maharani, R., Suryani, D., Sari, D., & Hariandi, R. (2024). Language Development and Building Character Early Children through Role Playing Method. *Bulletin of Science Education*, 4(1), 16-23. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.51278/bse.v4i1.820>

- Pauzan. (2024). Theory in second language acquisition (recognition of concepts toward Krashen's second language acquisition theory for five main hypotheses). *Journal on Education*, 06(4), 20876–20888.
- Peras, J., & Charity T. Turano. (2024). Implementation of comprehensible input in teaching English as a Second Language: Basis for an action plan. *International Journal of English Language Studies*, 6(3), 83-96. <https://doi.org/10.32996/ijels.2024.6.3.11>
- Pervan, Ö. (2024). The role of films in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching: An exploration of pedagogical contributions. *International Journal of Advanced Natural Sciences and Engineering Researches*, 11(11). <https://as-proceeding.com/index.php/ijanser>
- Putri, Y. T., & Fitri, N. (2020). An analysis of educational values of the main character in "The Miracle Worker" movie. *Journal Of English Language Teaching*, 4(1).
- Rahayu, W., Ro'is, S., & Munifah, S. (2021). Behaviorism theory in Miracle Worker movie. *Salience Journal*, 2(1).
- Ramadhan, A. R., Zamruddin, M. P., & Tawakkal, A. (2023). The main character development in The King of Staten Island film. *Ilmu Budaya: Jurnal Bahasa, Sastra, Seni, dan Budaya*, 7(2).
- Rankin, P. S., Staton, S., Potia, A. H., Houen, S., & Thorpe, K. (2022). Emotional quality of early education programs improves language learning: A within-child across context design. *Child Development*, 93(6), 1680–1697. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.13811>
- Rifa A. A. (2022). *Representasi Character Building dalam Film The Miracle Worker (Analisis Semiotika Charles Sanders Pierce)*. (Doctoral dissertation, UIN Prof. KH Saifuddin Zuhri Purwokerto)
- Rintaningrum, R. (2009). Literacy: Its importance and changes in the concept and definition. *Teflin*, 20(1), 1-7.
- Rowe, M. L., & Goldin-Meadow, S. (2009). Early gesture *selectively* predicts later language learning. *Developmental Science*, 12(1), 182–187. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7687.2008.00764.x>
- Rowe, M. L., Özçalışkan, Ş., & Goldin-Meadow, S. (2008). Learning words by hand: Gesture's role in predicting vocabulary development. *First Language*, 28(2), 182–199. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0142723707088310>
- Rudy. (2022). American films as an educational tool for character development of teenagers. *International Research Journal of Science*, 2(1), 143. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.6496839>
- Rudy, Nasution, J. & Rambe, K. R. (2020). Learning through watching films. *ELT (English Language Teaching Prima Journal)*, 1(1). <https://doi.org/10.34012/elt.v%vi%i.813>

- Sakkir, G., & M, Usman. (2018). Movie in enhancing students' vocabulary. *Eralingua: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Asing Dan Sastra*, 2(2). <https://doi.org/10.26858/eralingua.v2i2.6757>
- Sari, T.K., & Hanifah Rahmani, P. (2024). The role of positive reinforcement on students in English language learning: a Skinnerian behaviorist. *JOEY*, 3(1), 1–5. <https://doi.org/10.35316/JOEY.2022.vxix.x-xx>
- Sánchez-Auñón, E., Férez-Mora, P. A., & Monroy-Hernández, F. (2023). The use of films in the teaching of English as a foreign language: a systematic literature review. In *Asian-Pacific Journal of Second and Foreign Language Education* (Vol. 8, Issue 1). Springer Science and Business Media B.V. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40862-022-00183-0>
- Skinner B.F. (1957). *Verbal behavior*. Appleton-Century-Crofts.
- Sulayani, N., Sitohang, L., Simbolon, L. O., & Tarigan, M. S. B. (2021). Moral value and character education found in movie Miracle in Cell no 7. *EDUKATIF: Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan*, 4(1), 162–169. <https://doi.org/10.31004/edukatif.v4i1.1753>
- Tamblyn, A., Sun, Y., May, T., Evangelou, M., Godsman, N., Blewitt, C., & Skouteris, H. (2023). How do physical or sensory early childhood education and care environment factors affect children's social and emotional development? A systematic scoping review. In *Educational Research Review* (Vol. 41). Elsevier Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2023.100555>
- Thao, L. T., Thuy, P. T., Thi, N. A., Yen, P. H., Thu, H. T. A., & Tra, N. H. (2023). Impacts of Emotional Intelligence on Second Language Acquisition: English-Major Students' Perspectives. *SAGE Open*, 13(4). <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440231212065>
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press.
- Wang, S., Wu, X., & Xiong, Z. (2021, June). The Effect of Teachers' Reinforcement on English Learning Engagement of EAL learners. In *2021 2nd International Conference on Mental Health and Humanities Education (ICMHHE 2021)* (pp. 495-502). Atlantis Press.
- Yang, L., & Duan, M. (2023). The role of emotional intelligence in EFL learners' academic literacy development. *Heliyon*, 9(1), e13110. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2023.e13110>