



Students' Opinion of Reading English Subtitle of Korean Drama on Vocabulary Enhancement

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ABSTRACT

Vocabulary acquisition is an important component of language learning, as a larger vocabulary enhances fluency in a foreign language. While traditional reading materials like books matters for vocabulary development, other media sources such as subtitles can also play a significant role. This research aims to analyze students' opinions on the effectiveness of reading English subtitles in Korean dramas for vocabulary enhancement. The study employs a qualitative descriptive design, with data presented in simple tables accompanied by explanations. Data collection was conducted through an online questionnaire and interviews, and instrument validation was performed using expert judgment. The research participants included 101 students from IAIN Kediri, representing students from the 2017, 2018, 2019, and 2020 cohorts, with 6 students selected for interviews. The findings reveal the following: (1) A majority of students (76.2%) expressed high agreement with the experience of using subtitles as a learning tool. (2) A significant percentage (77.2%) agreed on the benefits of subtitles for vocabulary enhancement. (3) The students' opinions on the impact of subtitles on vocabulary implementation and awareness also showed high agreement (72.5%). Overall, the average of the three indicators was 75.3%. These results suggest that English subtitles in Korean dramas can be an effective tool for vocabulary enhancement. The findings highlight the potential of using media such as subtitles to bridge entertainment with language learning.

Keywords: english subtitles, korean dramas, vocabulary enhancement, media in education

Introduction

The role of English as a global language continues to grow in significance, particularly in the context of globalization and digital communication. In Indonesia, English is considered a foreign language and is taught across all levels of education, from primary schools to universities. One of the fundamental aspects of language learning is vocabulary acquisition, which serves as a foundation for developing the four essential skills: reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Without an adequate vocabulary, learners often struggle to communicate effectively or comprehend written and spoken texts.

The traditional approach to vocabulary learning often relies on textbooks and memorization, which may not appeal to all learners, particularly in the digital era. Today, students have access to a wide array of multimedia resources that can support language learning in informal and enjoyable ways. One such medium is Korean drama, also known as K-drama, which has become immensely popular among Indonesian youth. According to Casaus (2020), Korean dramas have become a popular gateway for international audiences to engage with Korean culture and language, often through English subtitles. This growing trend has led to an increased interest in how such media consumption may contribute to second language acquisition, particularly vocabulary development. While some academic outcomes are shaped by uncontrollable variables, Dollinger et al. (2018) stress the importance of leveraging controllable factors. This includes the selection of supplementary learning tools such as English-subtitled Korean dramas, which offer flexible and engaging means for vocabulary enhancement. With the widespread use of English subtitles in these dramas, learners are increasingly exposed to authentic English vocabulary in context, thereby creating a unique opportunity for vocabulary acquisition.

The use of audiovisual materials in foreign language learning is rooted in the principles of comprehensible input (Krashen, 1985) and dual coding theory (Paivio, 1991), which state that language learners benefit more when linguistic input is accompanied by meaningful visual content. Subtitles act as scaffolds for learners by providing textual reinforcement of spoken language, enabling better retention and deeper processing. Furthermore, exposure to English through entertainment media allows learners to encounter language in real-life contexts. Unlike textbook examples that often use simplified and contrived language, Korean dramas present natural dialogues and idiomatic expressions

that reflect contemporary usage. This exposure can help learners build not only vocabulary knowledge but also pragmatic competence.

The relevance of using English subtitles in foreign media as a learning tool has been supported by various studies. Subtitles can bridge the gap between spoken and written language, making it easier for learners to understand and acquire new vocabulary. This research aims to explore students' perceptions of reading English subtitles in Korean dramas, focusing on their experiences, perceived benefits, and the impact on vocabulary development. Vocabulary knowledge is often viewed as a critical component of language proficiency. Schmitt (2000) emphasized the centrality of lexical knowledge to communicative competence, asserting that without sufficient vocabulary, learners cannot effectively engage in communication. Wilkins (1972) also noted that while grammar is essential, it is vocabulary that carries the bulk of meaning in communication.

Reading is a key strategy for vocabulary acquisition, particularly when it involves engaging and authentic content. Ahmadi (2017) emphasizes the crucial role of motivation in enhancing reading comprehension, which is essential in subtitle-based vocabulary acquisition. Since subtitles provide contextualized language input, learners' motivation to engage with the content (e.g., Korean dramas) significantly influences how effectively they can process and retain new vocabulary. The integration of multimedia, such as video content with subtitles, can further enrich this learning experience. Subtitling, as a form of Interlingua translation, involves converting spoken dialogue into written text displayed on the screen. Gerzymisch-Arbogast (2008) described subtitles as a condensed written representation of spoken dialogue, often accompanied by contextual information such as songs, placards, and background sounds. Subtitles can serve both as a comprehension aid and as a tool for vocabulary learning, especially when learners are exposed to repetitive and contextually rich language input. Hyung (2017) demonstrates how output activities using English subtitles in Korean dramas can effectively support language learning. These activities require learners to produce language based on the input they receive, reinforcing vocabulary acquisition and improving overall language competence.

Several studies have investigated the role of subtitles in vocabulary acquisition. Rinekso et al. (2021) revealed that Indonesian EFL students enjoyed learning vocabulary through English subtitles, finding the activity both enjoyable and educational. Ryu (2017)

highlighted the effectiveness of English subtitles in aiding memory retention when watching Korean TV dramas. Hidayat (2016) found that movies with subtitles significantly enhance students' vocabulary mastery, suggesting their pedagogical potential in language classrooms. This finding supports the integration of media like Korean dramas with English subtitles as supplementary tools for vocabulary learning.

A growing body of literature has emphasized the potential of subtitled media to support both incidental and intentional learning. For example, Peters and Webb (2018) investigated the acquisition of academic vocabulary from watching documentaries with subtitles and found significant vocabulary gains.

Despite the growing interest in this learning strategy, few studies have specifically focused on students' perceptions of reading English subtitles in Korean dramas as a tool for vocabulary enhancement in the Indonesian context. This study aims to fill that gap by exploring the subjective experiences of English Department students at the State Islamic Institute of Kediri, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of how entertainment media can play a role in foreign language development. Based on the explanation above, this article strives to find out about the students' opinion of reading English subtitle of Korean Drama on vocabulary enhancement.

Methods

This study adopted a descriptive qualitative design to gather in-depth insights into students' perceptions. Qualitative research allows researchers to explore complex phenomena from the participants' perspectives, making it suitable for this study's goals (Creswell, 2009). The purpose of using this approach was to understand how students interpret and experience the use of English subtitles in Korean dramas as part of their vocabulary learning process. The study aimed not to generalize findings, but to explore trends, patterns, and meanings within a specific group of English language learners. The participants consisted of 101 students enrolled in the English Department at the State Islamic Institute of Kediri. These students were drawn from four academic cohorts: 2017, 2018, 2019, and 2020. All participants had prior exposure to Korean dramas and regularly used English subtitles when watching them. In addition to the questionnaire, six students were purposively selected for follow-up interviews based on their active engagement in

subtitle-based media consumption. This purposive sampling ensured that the data collected was relevant and detailed in relation to the research objectives.

Demographic data indicated a majority of female respondents (around 78%) and male respondents (22%). Most participants reported watching Korean dramas at least once a week, with English subtitles as their primary language choice. Their English proficiency levels ranged from intermediate to advanced, as self-reported and confirmed by their academic standing. Two main instruments, questionnaire and semi-structured interview, were used to collect the data. The questionnaire instrument consisted of 15 Likert-scale items divided into three sections: (a) experience of using the media, (b) perceived benefits of subtitle use, and (c) vocabulary implementation and awareness. The Likert scale ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The questionnaire was piloted and reviewed by three expert lecturers to ensure its validity and clarity. Then, an interview guide was developed to explore more deeply the students' personal experiences, beliefs, and challenges when watching Korean dramas with English subtitles. Interviews were conducted via WhatsApp voice calls and lasted between 20–30 minutes each. All interviews were transcribed and coded for analysis.

Data collection took place over one month. The questionnaire was distributed online via Google Forms, and interviews were arranged after initial analysis of the survey responses. Data triangulation was achieved by comparing quantitative trends from the survey with qualitative insights from interviews.

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the questionnaire results, focusing on the percentage of students who agreed or strongly agreed with each item. The interview data were analyzed thematically, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six steps: familiarization, coding, theme development, theme refinement, defining themes, and final writing. NVivo software was used for organizing the interview codes and supporting the thematic analysis. Ethical considerations included informed consent, the option to withdraw at any time, and anonymity of participants. Pseudonyms were used in reporting interview quotes to maintain confidentiality.

Result and Discussion

The data for this study were collected using a combination of a questionnaire and

interviews. The questionnaire consisted of 15 closed-ended questions and was distributed to 101 students from the English Department at the Islamic State of Kediri (IAIN Kediri), spanning across four academic batches from 2017 to 2020. To further support and deepen the understanding of the data, 6 students were selected for interviews. This section presents the findings derived from the responses to the questionnaire and the interviews, which are grouped into three key areas: students' experiences using the media, the benefits of the media for vocabulary enhancement, and their language implementation and awareness.

1. Students' Personal Information

The first section of the questionnaire aimed to collect basic demographic information about the respondents. The gender distribution is shown in Table 1, which indicates that the majority of the students who participated were female (77.2%), while the male participants accounted for only 22.8%.

Table 1:

Gender Distribution of Respondents

Gender	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Male	23	22.8%
Female	78	77.2%
Total	101	100%

As shown in Table 1, a significant majority of the respondents (77.2%) were female, which reflects the gender imbalance commonly observed in many higher education institutions. This demographic information is essential as it provides context to the data, potentially influencing how different genders engage with the media and learning processes. Further data was collected about the respondents' semester batches. As shown in Table 2, the majority of the respondents were from the 2017 semester batch, making up 38.6% of the participants, followed by the 2020 batch (28.7%). The 2018 and 2019 batches had a lower number of respondents (21.8% and 12.9%, respectively).

Table 2:

Semester Batch Information

Semester Batch	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
2017	38	38.6%

Semester Batch	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
2018	22	21.8%
2019	13	12.9%
2020	29	28.7%
Total	101	100%

The data in Table 2 shows the distribution of students across different academic years. The highest proportion of respondents (38.6%) came from the 2017 batch, followed by the 2020 batch (28.7%). The participation from the 2018 and 2019 batches was comparatively lower. This distribution provides insight into how students from different cohorts may have varying levels of experience with English language learning and engagement with extracurricular media like Korean dramas.

2. Students' Opinion of Reading English Subtitles of Korean Drama in the Experience of Using the Media

The next section of the findings presents the students' experience with watching Korean dramas with English subtitles. A significant majority of students (76.2%) reported that they had prior experience watching Korean dramas, and many had been doing so for an extended period. Among these, 53.4% of students affirmed that they had consistently watched Korean dramas with English subtitles.

Table 3:

Students' Experience Using the Media

Statement	SA (%)	A (%)	N (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Mean (%)	Interpretation
I have ever watched Korean drama.	46.5%	23.7%	20.7%	3.9%	4.9%	80%	Very High
I have already been watching Korean drama with English subtitles.	53.4%	13.8%	12.8%	2%	29.7%	75.8%	High
I think it is easy to find and download Korean dramas with English subtitle.	43.5%	20.7%	13.8%	7.9%	16.8%	75%	High

Statement	SA (%)	A (%)	N (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Mean (%)	Interpretation
I think it is rare to find English subtitles on Korean dramas.	10.9%	6.9%	19.8%	15.8%	46.5%	76.8%	High
Sometimes, reading English subtitles of Korean drama is quite complicated.	9.9%	15.8%	20.7%	46.5%	6.9%	73%	High

Table 3 reflects the high frequency with which students watch Korean dramas with English subtitles. The majority of students (75.8%) confirmed that they regularly watch these dramas with English subtitles. Moreover, 75% of students found it easy to find and download Korean dramas with English subtitles. However, there was a small portion of students (46.5%) who reported that finding English subtitles could sometimes be challenging, though this issue did not seem to be a major barrier. The relatively high agreement on the complexity of reading subtitles suggests that, for some students, the reading process might occasionally be difficult but does not hinder overall engagement with the media.

The interview responses reinforced these findings, with several students mentioning that watching Korean dramas had become an enjoyable and stress-relieving activity for them, further enhancing the experience of learning English through subtitles.

3. Students' Opinion of Reading English Subtitles of Korean Drama on the Benefits for Vocabulary Enhancement

The second major aspect explored in the questionnaire was the perceived benefit of watching Korean dramas with English subtitles, specifically in enhancing vocabulary. A majority of students (77.2%) strongly agreed that reading English subtitles in Korean dramas motivated them to learn English and improve their vocabulary.

Table 4:

Benefits of Using English Subtitles for Vocabulary Enhancement

Statement	SA (%)	A (%)	N (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Mean (%)	Interpretation
I think watching Korean drama with English subtitles motivates me to learn English, especially improving vocabulary.	46.5%	24.7%	15.8%	7.9%	4.9%	80%	Very High
I think English subtitles of Korean drama are not an effective media for vocabulary enhancement.	13.8%	11.8%	18.8%	38.6%	16.8 %	67.2%	High
English subtitles of Korean drama offer me flexibility to increase my vocabulary in terms of time and place.	45.5%	19.8%	19.8%	8.9%	4.9%	78%	High
I have noticed improvements in my vocabulary since watching Korean drama with English subtitles.	43.5%	18.8%	15.8%	9.9%	11.9 %	74.4%	High
I think reading English subtitles doesn't help me understand the story.	10.9%	14.8%	12.8%	13.9%	47.5 %	86.4%	Very High

Table 4 highlights that a large majority of students (80%) believe that watching Korean dramas with English subtitles significantly motivates them to learn English and improve their vocabulary. Additionally, most students reported that this method provides flexibility for language learning, as they can watch at their own pace and convenience.

There was also a strong consensus (74.4%) that watching Korean dramas with subtitles led to improvements in their vocabulary. These findings emphasize the positive impact that this media consumption practice has on vocabulary enhancement and suggest that the integration of entertainment with language learning offers an engaging and effective approach.

4. Students' Opinion on Language Implementation and Awareness through English Subtitles of Korean Drama

The final aspect analyzed in the study is the students' language implementation and awareness in terms of vocabulary usage. The results show that the majority of students (72.5%) were confident that they could read quickly and identify new words while watching Korean dramas with English subtitles.

Table 5:

Language Implementation and Awareness

Statement	SA (%)	A (%)	N (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Mean (%)	Interpretation
I can read quickly and find new words while reading the English subtitle on Korean drama.	46.5%	24.8%	19.8%	4%	5%	80.8%	Very High
I always get two or more vocabulary after reading the English subtitle of Korean drama.	37.6%	18.8%	23.8%	9.9%	9.9%	72.8%	High
When I find new vocabulary, I always look for the meaning at that time.	14.8%	22.8%	28.7%	15.8%	19.8%	61.4%	High
Sometimes, I find incorrect words (spelling) when I read the English subtitle.	40.6%	12.9%	27.7%	6.9%	11.9%	72.6%	High

Statement	SA (%)	A (%)	N (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Mean (%)	Interpretation
I think the new vocabulary is easy to remember and use in daily expression.	40.6%	15.8%	27.7%	8.9%	6.9%	74.8%	High

Table 5 illustrates that students feel confident about identifying and recalling new vocabulary while reading English subtitles. The majority of students (80.8%) reported that they can quickly identify new words while watching. Furthermore, 72.8% of respondents mentioned that they consistently acquire multiple new words after reading subtitles. This suggests that the process of watching with subtitles helps students build their vocabulary. Although some students noted occasional issues with incorrect spelling in subtitles, they still found the vocabulary useful for daily communication (74.8% agreement).

The findings suggest that watching Korean dramas with English subtitles is a highly beneficial method for vocabulary enhancement. A significant majority of students reported positive experiences in terms of both the accessibility of English subtitles and their ability to improve vocabulary through this medium. Students showed a high level of agreement with the idea that reading subtitles not only motivated them to learn but also allowed them to implement new vocabulary effectively. With an average mean of 75.3% across all categories (experience with the media, benefits for vocabulary enhancement, and language implementation), it is clear that the use of English subtitles in Korean dramas is an effective tool for language learners. Despite some challenges, such as finding accurate subtitles or reading speed, the overall positive feedback emphasizes the value of this method in language acquisition.

Based on the finding above, there are three indicators of students' opinion such as:

Based on the finding above, there are three indicators of students' opinion such as; Students' opinion of reading English subtitle of Korean drama in experience of using the media, in the beneficial of the media, and its vocabulary enhancement in language implementation and awareness.

1. Students' opinion of reading English subtitle of Korean Drama in experience of using the media

The result showed that students' opinion of Reading English subtitle of Korean drama in experience of using the media were at a high level of agreement (76.2%). Most of them have watched the Korean drama and experience it by taking English subtitle. The use of English subtitle on Korean drama can help the viewer understand more about the drama and get new vocabs. It is in line with Hsu (2023) who finds 326 phrasal expressions which are mostly composed of the first 3000 word families. K-poppers and K-drama lovers need subtitle to know everything in K-Pop video, song and K-drama which are based on Korean language. Since there are not many people who speak Korean, the web pages that are releasing such series use the English language in subtitles to make it accessible to a broader audience. Indeed, by the time they improve English vocabulary by enjoying videos or dramas uses English subtitle.

Many Korean dramas have English subtitles on the internet. It makes students easily find and download Korean dramas. Students might feel comfortable to use the English subtitle for watching Korean dramas. (Rinekso et al., (2021) state that learning vocabulary can be done in regards with the students' interests, including watching Korean dramas. Also, from the explanation above, it can be highlighted that students' opinion of reading English subtitle of Korean drama in experiencing the media is at the high level of agreement.

2. Students' opinion of reading subtitles of Korean drama in the beneficial of the media

The study also found that students' opinion of reading English subtitle of Korean drama in the beneficial of the media were at a high level of agreement (77.2%). English subtitle of Korean drama allows students to practice their vocabulary by their-self anywhere and anytime. The result of this statement is supported by Zengin (2019) who says that the film scripts can be used to convert the input provided by the film scripts to intake and uptake and provide good examples regarding the application of own language use in ELT.

The students realized that as media, the Korean dramas play an important role to give language learners motivation effect in acquiring the target language. Prihhartini & Hasan, (2020) show that watching movies greatly expose viewers to language input, which can be a great source of output when interacting within the movie-based community that they belong to Prihhartini & Hasan. Respondents stated that Korean drama served more interesting storyline, at the same time; they realized that they have to improve their vocabulary as they were students of English language department.

By considering this result of the study, the teacher has to know that knowledge and learning is not only be done in the classroom and taught by teacher. Certainly, teachers also have to give them a suggestion to not forget to practice the English vocabulary using the other media that have the positive beneficial for their vocabulary. Besides, students do not only depends on their study on classroom and any knowledge taught by the teacher only.

3. Students' opinion of the vocabulary enhancement in language implementation and awareness

In this aspect, it is found that students' opinion of vocabulary enhancement in language implementation and awareness were at a high level of agreement (72.5%). The highest percentage of vocabulary enhancement in language implementation and awareness found in it was the students are be able to read English subtitle quickly and find new words while reading the English subtitle on Korean drama. The subtitles provide some new vocabulary that students have never seen before. In line with this, Fakhurriana et al., (2024); McDermott et al., (2019) find that using movies might enhances the learning of new vocabularies.

They also notice that their vocabulary is always improving after they watch Korean drama with English subtitle. Many of the respondents agree that they are always find two or more new vocabulary while reading the English subtitle. It is in line with (Soltani, 2015) who finds that learners who watch English subtitled movies can perform better in the vocabulary achievement tests and their score increase significantly.

In the process of watching Korean dramas, the students looked at the English subtitle displayed on the screen and at the same time the students' brain translated as well as stored those words into their memory. Similarly, this also happens for new words. They got the new words, searched the meaning in the dictionary, understood the words contextually and stored them into their memory. Thus, it is believed that learning vocabulary through watching videos with English subtitle helps learners to be better in storing and retrieving vocabulary items (Aidinlou & Moradinejad, 2016).

From these indicators, it is also known that the new vocabulary is easy to remember and use it in the daily expression with the different context. This result also in line with the study of (Ryu: 2017) find that watching the Korean TV drama can give this kind of effect to students through indirect experience. In Korean TV dramas there are lots of casual and

ordinary everyday expressions and the English subtitles give equivalent translations to the viewers so this method could be effective in helping to memorize these expressions.

All in all, this study is designed to analyze students' opinion of reading English subtitle of Korean drama on their vocabulary development. From the three indicators, it can be seen that in the use of the media 76.2%, the beneficial of the media 77.2% and the language implementation and awareness 72.5%.

It can be concluded that the average percentage of these three indicators is 75.3%. Associated with the interval frequency of student of three indicators show that the students' opinion are at a high level of agreement of Reading English subtitle of Korean drama on vocabulary enhancement. English subtitle of Korean drama can plays a medium for improving students' vocabulary. Hsu (2023) says that EFL K-drama fans can encounter most of the first 5000 word families often enough for potential learning to occur through their continually watching up to 48 English-subtitled K-dramas. Through English subtitle of Korean drama, students can find and download it easily. English subtitle of Korean drama is very useful for understanding the whole content. English subtitle of Korean drama might also provide the new vocabulary that the students might never see before.

English subtitle can help students to motivate them to improving their vocabulary. Besides that, the English subtitle of Korean drama can be a media for improving vocabulary have many positive benefits.

Conclusion

In the students' experience, the result can be interpreted that many students are highly agree. Most of the students were know about the Korean drama, and many of them already watching Korean drama use English subtitle. The students stated that it is easy to find and download the English subtitle of Korean drama in the internet. Therefore, in the beneficial of the media the results can be interpreted that many students are highly agree in the use of English subtitle of Korean drama has positive benefit on vocabulary enhancement. Many students agree that by reading the English subtitle of Korean drama was effective to improving and practicing their vocabulary. In the language implementation and awareness, the result can be interpreted that many students are highly agree. It was

easy for the students to remember the new vocabulary in the English subtitle and use the new vocabulary in another daily expression with different context.

From there three indicators, students' opinion of reading English subtitle of Korean drama on their vocabulary development are at the high level of agreement. Students have claimed that they already watch the Korean drama using the English subtitle, and after watch the Korean drama they always gain new vocabulary. Even though some of the students still have some problems using the English subtitles such as misspelling words and grammar. However, the students also be able to improving their vocabulary better. Noticing that this study is limited to the vocabulary enhancement, further researchers may focus on the Korean drama English subtitles in improving any other language skills.

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