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BREAKING THE LANGUAGE BARRIER: HOW SUBTITLED MOVIES ENHANCE VOCABULARY ACQUISITION IN ENGLISH LEARNERS

Abstract: Vocabulary acquisition is a basement of language learning, yet traditional methods often fail to provide the engagement and contextual richness needed for meaningful learning. This study explores the impact of subtitled movies as an innovative tool for enhancing vocabulary acquisition among English learners. Drawing on survey responses from high school students, university students, and educators, the research highlights the effectiveness of subtitles in fostering comprehension, retention, and contextual understanding of new words. The findings reveal a strong preference for English subtitles, significant acquisition of conversational and idiomatic expressions, and the motivational appeal of using subtitled movies in language learning. This study reveals the value of integrating subtitled content into educational practices, offering evidence-based recommendations for leveraging multimedia to enhance vocabulary development.

Key words: systematic review; video; vocabulary acquisition; vocabulary knowledge, grammar rules, textbook

1. INTRODUCTION

Mastering a new language involves far more than just learning grammar rules or basic sentence structures; it requires the development of a rich and versatile vocabulary to communicate effectively and navigate various social and cultural contexts. For English learners, building a robust vocabulary is a cornerstone of fluency and an essential skill for reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Yet, traditional methods for vocabulary acquisition—such as rote memorization, flashcards, and repetitive exercises in textbooks—often lack the dynamism and contextual richness needed to make learning both engaging and meaningful.

In recent years, educators and linguists have increasingly recognized the potential of multimedia tools, particularly subtitled movies, in addressing these challenges. Subtitled movies represent a unique and powerful medium that combines auditory, visual, and textual elements to create an immersive language-learning experience. Reinders & Benson (2017). Unlike static learning resources, movies expose learners to the natural rhythm, intonation, and pronunciation of spoken English while simultaneously providing written subtitles that reinforce the connection between sounds and words. This multimodal approach supports a deeper understanding of vocabulary, as learners can see, hear, and read new words in context, which enhances retention and facilitates practical usage.

One of the most significant advantages of subtitled movies is their ability to present vocabulary within authentic, culturally rich contexts. Learners encounter a wide range of expressions, idioms, and colloquial phrases that textbooks often overlook. For example, a romantic comedy might introduce conversational phrases commonly used in casual settings, while a historical drama could provide exposure to formal speech and era-specific vocabulary. Subtitles serve as a bridge, allowing learners to decode unfamiliar words without interrupting the flow of the story. This not only aids comprehension but also helps learners understand the nuances of word usage, including tone, register, and connotation.

Moreover, the use of movies in language learning encourages incidental vocabulary acquisition—an organic process where learners pick up new words and phrases unconsciously while focused on enjoying the storyline. Research has shown that incidental learning is particularly effective because it aligns with how individuals acquire their first language, fostering a natural and intuitive grasp of new vocabulary. Subtitled movies make this process enjoyable, reducing the anxiety and tedium often

associated with traditional learning methods. The combination of entertainment and education keeps learners motivated, ensuring consistent exposure to the target language.

This article investigates how subtitled movies impact vocabulary acquisition among English learners across different proficiency levels. It examines learners' preferences for subtitle types (e.g., same-language subtitles or translated subtitles), the frequency and context of their usage, and the perceived effectiveness of subtitled movies as a learning tool. The study draws on data collected from high school students, university students, and English educators to provide a holistic understanding of the phenomenon.

The aim of this article is to explore the potential of subtitled movies as an innovative and effective resource for vocabulary development. It seeks to identify trends in how learners interact with subtitled content, assess its benefits and challenges, and provide evidence-based insights into its role in language education. By highlighting the experiences of both learners and teachers, this study contributes to the growing discussion on the use of multimedia tools in English language learning and offers practical recommendations for educators seeking to integrate subtitled movies into their teaching practices.

2.LITERATURE REVIEW

Reinders & Benson (2017) explore the impact of incidental learning through subtitled movies on vocabulary acquisition. They argue that subtitles provide dual-mode input visual and auditory which enhances comprehension and retention. Their study shows that learners exposed to subtitled videos demonstrate significant improvement in recognizing and using contextually embedded vocabulary. Structured post-viewing tasks, such as summarization or vocabulary quizzes, further consolidate learning. This research supports the role of multimedia in language learning, highlighting that exposure to natural language in movies boosts both receptive and productive vocabulary skills.

Barry Lee Reynolds et al. (2022) A meta-analysis by Reynolds et al. investigates the effects of captioned and subtitled videos on vocabulary learning. The study found that intralingual captions (same-language subtitles) have the strongest impact, allowing learners to link spoken words with their written forms. Animated videos were particularly effective in vocabulary retention. The analysis emphasizes the importance of providing engaging, context-rich content that aligns with learners' cognitive capabilities. Their findings indicate that both intentional and incidental learning conditions are equally effective, making subtitled videos a versatile tool for vocabulary acquisition across diverse proficiency levels

Winke, Gass & Sydorenko (2010) This study delves into how subtitles facilitate vocabulary learning by making language input more comprehensible. The researchers discovered that learners pay more attention to subtitles when encountering unfamiliar words, improving word recognition and meaning retention. A key insight from this study is the benefit of repeated exposure to subtitled content, as it reinforces word forms and contextual usage over time. Their findings underline the interactive nature of learning through subtitles, where learners actively process language input to bridge gaps in comprehension

Vanderplank (2016) focuses on how subtitled movies act as scaffolding tools in vocabulary learning. His research highlights that subtitles support incidental learning by providing contextual cues, enabling learners to infer the meanings of new words. This process mirrors natural language acquisition, where meaning is derived from usage rather than explicit instruction. The study also stresses the motivational aspect of using entertainment media, which keeps learners engaged while subtly improving their vocabulary

Paesani & Allen (2012) examine the pedagogical applications of subtitled movies in language learning classrooms. Their research emphasizes combining subtitled content with active learning techniques, such as discussions and role-playing, to enhance vocabulary acquisition. They found that

integrating subtitles into a structured curriculum fosters deeper lexical understanding by providing opportunities for learners to apply new words in context.

This study underscores the holistic benefits of subtitles, which cater to auditory, visual, and contextual learning styles.

3.METHOD AND MATERIALS

This study adopts a survey-based approach to investigate the role of subtitled movies in enhancing vocabulary acquisition among English learners. The method was designed to collect quantitative data from diverse participants, including university students, high school students, and English language educators, to understand their perspectives and experiences with subtitled movies as a learning tool.

The survey was created using Google Forms and distributed online to ensure accessibility and reach. It consisted of 10 multiple-choice questions, focusing on various aspects of subtitled movies and their impact on vocabulary development. The questions explored the following themes:

1. Frequency of watching subtitled movies in English.
2. Preference for types of subtitles (e.g., same-language subtitles or translated subtitles).
3. Movie genres that participants find most helpful for learning new vocabulary.
4. Self-assessment of vocabulary improvement through subtitled content.
5. Challenges faced while using subtitles for language acquisition.

Analysis

The data collected from the survey were analyzed using quantitative methods. Frequency distributions and percentages were calculated to identify trends and preferences among different participant groups. Cross-tabulation was employed to compare responses between students and educators, providing insights into how subtitled movies are perceived by learners versus teachers.

This survey-based approach offers a comprehensive view of how subtitled movies contribute to vocabulary acquisition, reflecting both learners' experiences and educators' observations. By focusing on measurable data, the study seeks to provide actionable insights into the integration of multimedia resources in English language education.

4.RESULTS

Figure number 1

How often do you watch movies with subtitles in English?
15 ответов

- Daily
- A few times a week
- Occasionally
- Rarely
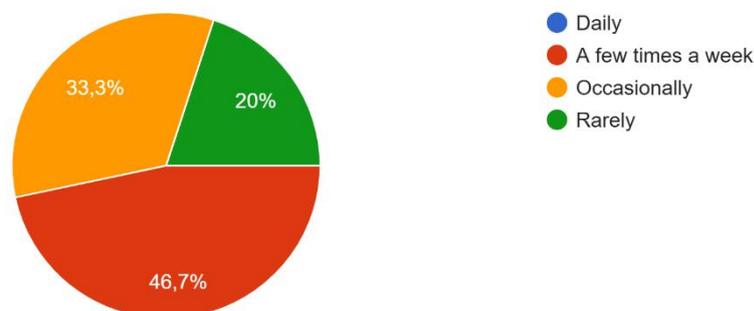
This pie chart displays the frequency with which 15 respondents watch movies with English subtitles. A significant majority, **46.7%,** watch such films a few times a week. A substantial minority,

33.3%, watch them occasionally. A smaller proportion, **20%**, report rarely watching movies with English subtitles, while a negligible percentage watch them daily. The data suggests a prevalent preference for infrequent, yet regular, consumption of films utilizing English subtitles among the surveyed group.
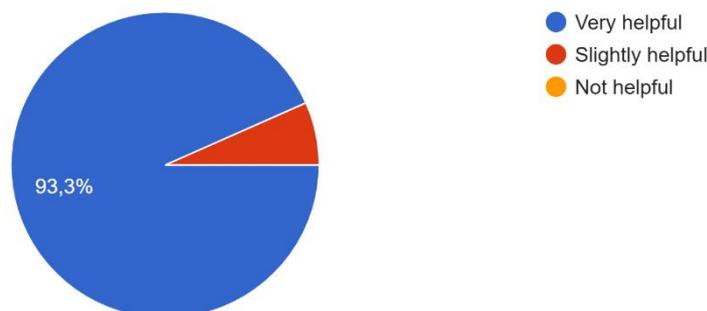
Figure number 2
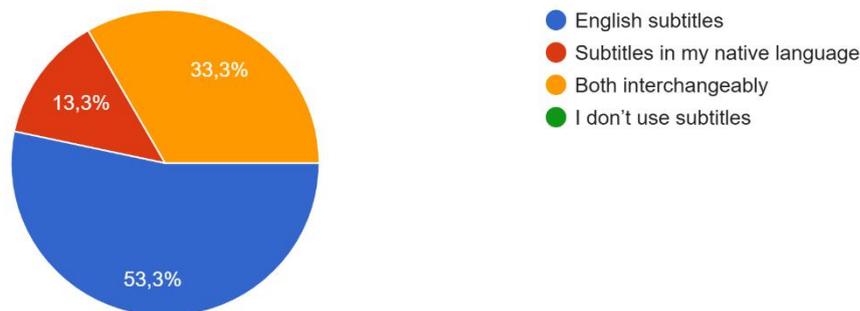
This pie chart illustrates the subtitle preferences of 15 respondents. A clear majority, **53.3%,** consistently utilize English subtitles. A substantial minority, **33.3%,** use both English and their native language subtitles interchangeably. A smaller segment, **13.3%,** exclusively employ subtitles in their native language. Finally, no respondents indicated they never use subtitles. The data highlights a strong preference for English subtitles among the surveyed population, with a notable secondary group opting for a bilingual approach.

Figure number 3

This pie chart presents the responses of 15 individuals regarding the helpfulness of subtitles for understanding new words. An overwhelming majority, **93.3%,** found subtitles to be very helpful. A small percentage, **6.7%,** reported that subtitles were only slightly helpful; no respondents indicated that subtitles were not helpful in this context. The data strongly suggests that subtitles are highly effective in facilitating vocabulary acquisition for the surveyed group.

Figure number 4

Do you pause movies to note or check the meaning of new words?
15 ответов
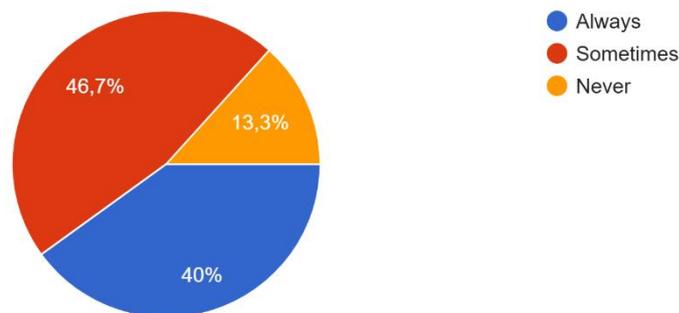
This pie chart illustrates the responses of 15 individuals to the question of whether they pause movies to look up the meaning of new words. The data reveals a near even split between two response categories. A plurality, **46.7%,** sometimes pause to check new words. A significant minority**, 40%,** always pause for this purpose. A smaller proportion, **13.3%,** never pause to clarify unfamiliar vocabulary. This indicates a prevalent practice of pausing films to enhance comprehension, with notable variation in frequency among respondents.

Figure number 5

What type of vocabulary do you feel you learn most from movies?
15 ответов
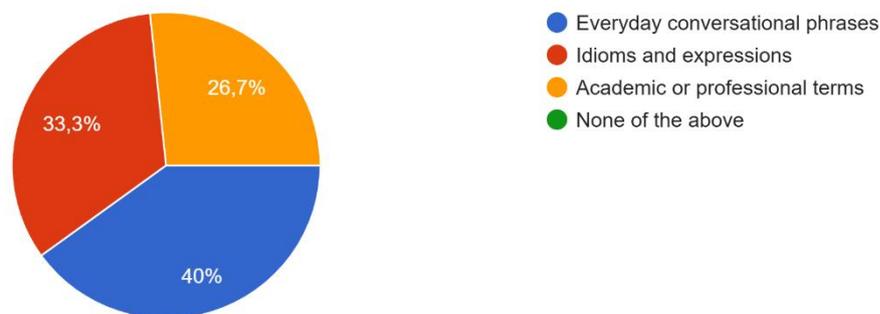
This pie chart presents the results of a survey (15 respondents) on the type of vocabulary most frequently learned from movies. The largest segment, comprising 40% of responses, indicates that everyday conversational phrases are learned most often. A substantial portion, **33.3%,** reported learning idioms and expressions most frequently. A smaller percentage, **26.7%,** indicated that academic or professional terms are most commonly acquired. No respondents selected "none of the above." The data suggests a clear preference for acquiring colloquial vocabulary from film, with idioms and expressions also representing a significant learning source.

Figure number 6

Do you believe that watching movies with subtitles has improved your English vocabulary?
15 ответов

- Yes, significantly
- Yes, to some extent
- Not much
- Not at all
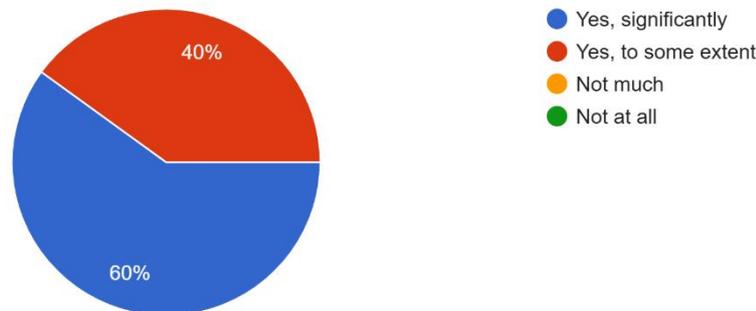
This pie chart presents the findings from a survey of 15 respondents regarding the impact of watching movies with subtitles on their English vocabulary. A clear majority, **60%,** believe that this practice has improved their vocabulary to some extent. A substantial minority, 40%, reported a significant improvement. No respondents indicated that their vocabulary was not improved or that subtitles had no effect. The data strongly suggests a positive correlation between watching movies with subtitles and enhanced English vocabulary acquisition among the surveyed participants. The absence of negative responses further reinforces this positive perception.

Figure number 7

What genre of movies do you find most effective for learning vocabulary?
15 ответов
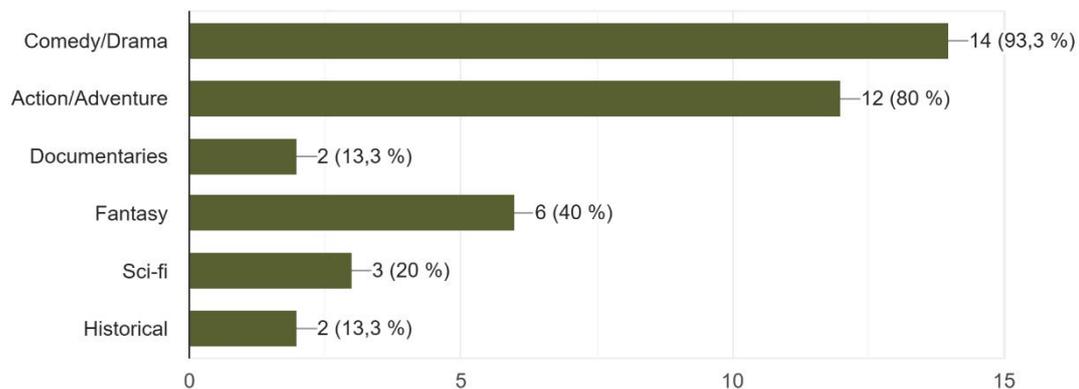
This horizontal bar chart illustrates the responses of 15 participants regarding the most effective movie genre for vocabulary acquisition. Comedy/Drama films emerged as the overwhelmingly preferred genre, with 14 respondents **(93.3%)** selecting this category. Action/Adventure films were the second most popular choice, with 12 respondents **(80%)** finding them effective. Fantasy films received 6 responses **(40%),** while Sci-fi and both Historical and Documentary films each garnered 2 responses **(13.3%)** apiece. The data indicates a strong preference for genres incorporating conversational dialogue, suggesting that realistic language usage significantly

aids vocabulary learning. The relatively low numbers for other genres suggest a potential correlation between genre and learning effectiveness.

Figure number 8
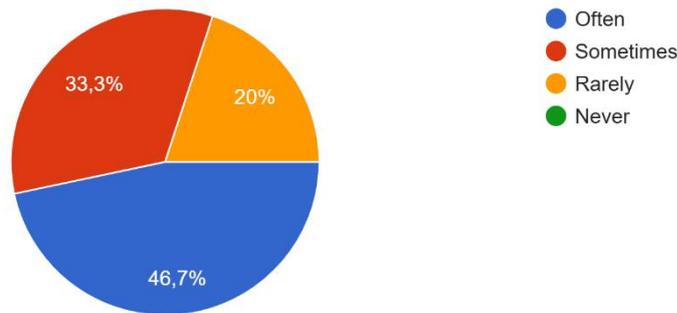
This pie chart displays the frequency with which 15 respondents recall and utilize new vocabulary acquired from movies in their daily lives. The largest segment, at **46.7%,** indicates that respondents often integrate these new words into their speech. A notable portion, **33.3%,** report sometimes remembering and using movie-learned vocabulary. A smaller percentage, **20%,** rarely do so, suggesting a lower retention rate or less frequent application of newly acquired words. No respondents reported never using words learned from movies in real-life situations. The data indicates a generally positive trend of vocabulary integration from films into everyday language.

Figure number 9
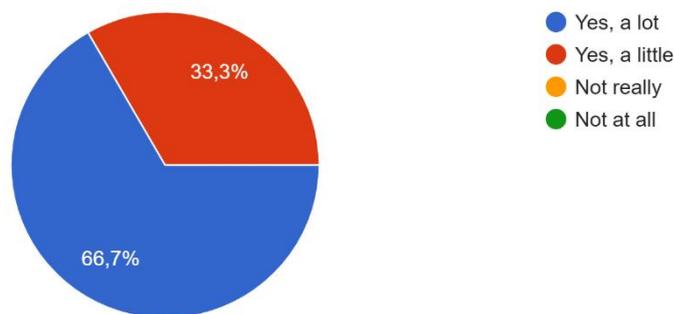
This pie chart illustrates the responses of 15 participants regarding the helpfulness of subtitles in understanding word usage within context. A substantial majority, **66.7%,** reported that subtitles are very helpful in this regard. A considerable minority, **33.3%,** found subtitles to be helpful to some degree, but not extensively. Notably, no respondents reported that subtitles were not helpful or completely unhelpful for comprehending contextual word usage. The data strongly suggests that

subtitles are a valuable tool for understanding nuanced vocabulary within the context of films, with the majority of participants finding them highly beneficial.

Figure number 10

Would you recommend watching subtitled movies to others learning English?
15 ответов
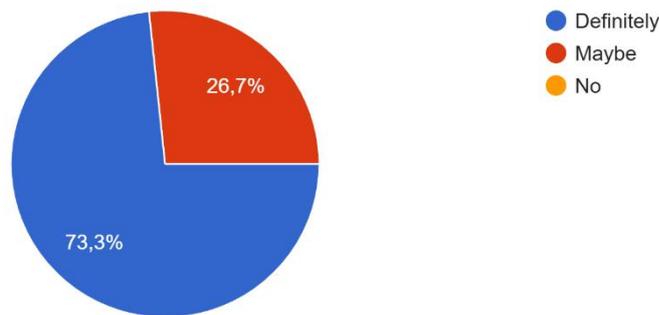
This pie chart presents the results of a survey (15 respondents) querying whether participants would recommend watching subtitled movies to others learning English. A strong majority, **73.3%,** responded affirmatively, indicating a definite recommendation. A smaller proportion, **26.7%,** offered a less decisive response, suggesting a conditional or less certain recommendation. No respondents indicated that they would not recommend this learning method. The data strongly suggests a positive perception of using subtitled movies as an English language learning tool, with a clear majority expressing strong support for this approach. The absence of negative responses further reinforces this positive assessment.

5.DISCUSSION

The findings from this study highlight the significant role of subtitled movies in enhancing vocabulary acquisition among English learners. Participants across different demographics consistently reported positive outcomes, indicating the universal applicability of this multimedia tool in language learning. The analysis revealed several key themes:

1. Engagement with Subtitles: The majority of respondents preferred English subtitles, demonstrating their effectiveness in linking spoken and written language. The frequent use of subtitles suggests that learners perceive them as a critical aid in comprehension and vocabulary development. This aligns with existing literature emphasizing subtitles' role in bridging auditory and visual input to reinforce word retention and contextual understanding.

2. Vocabulary Acquisition: Participants identified conversational phrases and idiomatic expressions as the most frequently acquired vocabulary types. This indicates that subtitled movies provide learners with practical language tools applicable in everyday communication. Additionally, subtitles were found to aid in understanding nuanced vocabulary usage within specific contexts, further enriching learners' lexical knowledge.

3. Learning Strategies: A substantial number of respondents paused movies to look up new words, showcasing an active approach to learning. This practice reflects a combination of intentional and incidental learning, where the immersive nature of movies encourages both deliberate study and natural absorption of vocabulary.

4. Motivational Impact: The overwhelmingly positive responses regarding the recommendation of subtitled movies for language learning underscore their motivational appeal. The

combination of entertainment and education keeps learners engaged, reducing the monotony often associated with traditional methods of vocabulary acquisition.

5. Genre Preferences: Comedy and drama genres emerged as the most effective for vocabulary learning due to their use of relatable and conversational language. This preference underscores the importance of selecting content that mirrors real-life communication, providing learners with practical and transferable linguistic skills.

6.CONCLUSION

The findings of this study show the immense potential of subtitled movies as an innovative and effective tool for vocabulary acquisition among English learners. By integrating auditory, visual, and textual elements, subtitled movies provide learners with a multimodal language-learning experience that extends beyond traditional methods like rote memorization and textbook exercises. This approach not only enhances vocabulary retention but also contextualizes word usage, helping learners develop a nuanced understanding of the language.

One of the most significant takeaways is the ability of subtitled movies to foster incidental learning. Unlike conventional methods that rely on explicit instruction, subtitled movies allow learners to acquire new vocabulary naturally and intuitively while engaging with compelling stories. This aligns with theories of language learning that emphasize the importance of comprehensible input and authentic context in promoting fluency. Furthermore, the findings indicate that genres such as comedy and drama are particularly effective, as they mirror real-life communication and include colloquial expressions and idioms that are directly applicable to everyday conversations.

Another crucial aspect highlighted by this study is the motivational appeal of subtitled movies. Language learning often requires sustained effort, and traditional approaches can sometimes fail to maintain learner interest. Subtitled movies bridge the gap between entertainment and education, offering an engaging way to reinforce vocabulary skills while reducing the monotony associated with repetitive drills or exercises. Learners' preferences for English subtitles and their reported benefits in bridging the gap between spoken and written forms further solidify the role of subtitles in promoting language comprehension.

Educators stand to benefit significantly from incorporating subtitled movies into language curricula. By pairing subtitled content with structured activities such as discussions, vocabulary quizzes, or reflective writing tasks, teachers can amplify the impact of this tool. Such an approach ensures that learners are not only passively consuming content but are also actively engaging with and applying new vocabulary.

In conclusion, subtitled movies represent a multifaceted resource that addresses the cognitive, linguistic, and motivational dimensions of language learning. By providing learners with exposure to authentic language, fostering natural vocabulary acquisition, and maintaining learner engagement, subtitled movies emerge as a valuable addition to modern language education. Future research could explore further dimensions, such as the impact of different subtitle types or the role of specific genres in enhancing advanced linguistic skills, to continue optimizing this approach for diverse learner needs.

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