

THE USE OF SUBTITLES IN FILMS AS LANGUAGE LEARNING TOOL: BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract: *Using subtitles in films has become a popular tool for language learning, offering a mix of advantages and challenges. This article examines how subtitled films help learners improve their language skills, focusing on areas like vocabulary building, listening comprehension, and cultural understanding. Subtitles provide both auditory and visual input at the same time, making it easier for learners to connect spoken and written language. They also expose learners to real-life expressions and cultural context, which are hard to find in traditional learning materials. The study discusses the role of interlingual subtitles (in a learner's native language) and intralingual subtitles (in the same language as the audio). Interlingual subtitles are helpful for beginners, while intralingual ones are better suited for advanced learners aiming to refine their language skills. Watching films with subtitles can also make learning more engaging and enjoyable, encouraging learners to stay motivated. Despite these benefits, the article points out some challenges. Relying too much on subtitles may prevent learners from developing strong listening and speaking skills. Beginners might also find it overwhelming to follow both the audio and text at the same time. Additionally, low-quality or poorly timed subtitles can lead to confusion rather than learning. The article concludes that subtitles can be a valuable part of language learning when used thoughtfully. By gradually reducing dependence on them and combining them with other methods, learners can make significant progress while enjoying the process.*

Key words: subtitles, language learning, vocabulary acquisition, listening comprehension, multimodal learning, audiovisual input, vocabulary retention, idiomatic expressions, second language acquisition.

1. Introduction

Learning a new language is an important skill in today's globalized world. However, traditional methods like classroom lessons and textbooks often feel boring or lack real-life context. To make language learning more interesting and effective, many people are turning to films with subtitles as a helpful tool. Using subtitles in films gives learners the chance to hear the spoken language and see the written text at the same time. This can help improve listening skills, build vocabulary, and even teach proper pronunciation. Subtitles also expose learners to cultural references and how the language is used in everyday conversations. For example, subtitles in the same language as the audio (intralingual) are great for improving reading and listening, while subtitles translated into the learner's language (interlingual) can help beginners understand better.

However, this method is not without its challenges. Relying too much on subtitles might slow down the development of listening and speaking skills. For beginners, trying to follow both the audio and text at the same time can be overwhelming. Also, if subtitles are poorly made or don't match the audio well, it can cause confusion. This study looks at how subtitles in films can help with language learning and what problems learners might face when using them. The goal is to explore how subtitles can be used effectively to make language learning easier and more enjoyable for people at different levels.

2. Literature review

Kanellopoulou (2019) provides significant insights into how subtitles in films can be an effective tool for vocabulary learning. In her study, she examined the potential of film subtitles in helping language learners acquire new words and improve their vocabulary retention. She found that when learners are exposed to subtitles in the target language, they can more easily make connections between spoken words and their written forms. This pairing of auditory and visual input

supports the process of encoding new vocabulary, as it allows learners to see and hear words in context. This approach not only aids in retention but also improves understanding of words in different contexts, which is essential for mastering their use. Kanellopoulou's study also highlights how subtitles can help learners pick up colloquial language, idiomatic expressions, and cultural references that may not appear in formal language lessons or textbooks. This provides learners with a more authentic and practical understanding of the language, including nuances of speech that reflect real-world communication. Additionally, subtitles can enhance listening comprehension, as they expose learners to different accents, speech rates, and conversational dynamics that might not be encountered in traditional language learning environments.

Vanderplank's research (2018) emphasizes that subtitles can greatly improve learners' vocabulary and listening comprehension. By viewing media with captions, learners have access to both the spoken and written forms of language, which helps reinforce vocabulary and grammar structures. Subtitles make it easier for learners to connect new words to their meanings and pronunciation by providing immediate access to the text, a process that enhances both recognition and recall. Additionally, Vanderplank highlights that this multimodal input helps learners retain new vocabulary in context, which is essential for deepening their understanding of how words are used in real-life situations. Despite the clear benefits of subtitles, Vanderplank also points out several challenges associated with their use in language learning. One of the main concerns is the potential for learners to become overly reliant on subtitles, which could hinder their ability to process spoken language independently. Beginners, in particular, might focus too much on reading the text rather than listening to the language itself, which can impede the development of listening comprehension skills. As learners advance, it is crucial for them to gradually reduce their dependence on subtitles in order to improve their listening skills and better understand spoken language without textual support.

Hestiana and Anita (2022) argue that movie subtitles play a vital role in enhancing vocabulary acquisition by providing a multimodal learning experience. The combination of visual and auditory input allows learners to connect spoken words with their written forms, making it easier for them to remember new vocabulary. This visual-auditory reinforcement helps students associate words with their meanings in context, which is crucial for long-term retention and understanding. The authors found that students who watched movies with subtitles exhibited better vocabulary retention compared to those who were not exposed to subtitles. This supports the idea that subtitles not only aid in the recognition of new words but also help learners internalize and recall them over time. By seeing and hearing words used in context, students develop a deeper understanding of their meanings, grammatical structures, and usage. While the study supports the benefits of using subtitles for vocabulary acquisition, it also highlights certain challenges. One of the main concerns raised is that subtitles may distract learners from fully focusing on the spoken language, especially for beginners. Relying too heavily on subtitles may hinder the development of listening comprehension skills, as students might become more focused on reading than on listening to the spoken word. Hestiana and Anita (2022) suggest that to mitigate this, educators should encourage students to gradually reduce their dependence on subtitles as they progress in their language learning journey. Moreover, it is important to ensure that subtitles are accurately synchronized with the speech, as poorly timed or incorrect subtitles could lead to confusion and negatively impact learning.

Fomichenko (2022) emphasizes the importance of authentic films in language learning, as they expose students to real-life language use, including slang, idiomatic expressions, and various accents, which are often not found in traditional textbooks. Subtitles in these films provide a dual-input approach, where students are exposed to both the spoken and written forms of the language, which reinforces vocabulary retention and understanding. This multimodal learning approach, where visual and auditory elements are combined, enables

learners to connect words with their meanings and contexts more effectively. One of the key benefits discussed by Fomichenko (2022) is that subtitles help improve listening comprehension. By using subtitles, students can match the spoken words with their written equivalents, which aids in decoding spoken language. However, Fomichenko (2022) also points out several challenges associated with the use of subtitles in language learning. One concern is that learners might become overly reliant on subtitles, particularly at the beginning stages of language acquisition. Fomichenko suggests that while subtitles are an excellent supplementary tool, their use should be balanced with other learning activities to avoid over-reliance.

Latifi, Mobalegh, and Mohammadi (2016) focus on the effect of movie subtitles on students' listening comprehension abilities. The study demonstrates that subtitles significantly enhance learners' ability to understand spoken language. The authors argue that subtitles provide a dual input of both the spoken and written forms of the language, which allows learners to process language at different levels. Beyond listening comprehension, the research by Latifi et al. (2016) also highlights the role of subtitles in enhancing vocabulary acquisition. As students watch films with subtitles, they are exposed to both familiar and unfamiliar words in context, which aids in word retention and understanding. The repeated exposure to new vocabulary in different contexts reinforces meaning, helping learners to internalize the words. Latifi et al. (2016) offer several recommendations for educators looking to incorporate subtitles into their language teaching. The authors suggest that subtitles should be used in conjunction with other language learning activities, such as listening exercises and vocabulary drills, to provide a more holistic approach to language acquisition.

3. Method and materials

This study explores the impact of subtitles in films as a tool for language learning, focusing on vocabulary acquisition and listening comprehension. The research combines qualitative and quantitative methods, involving student surveys, interviews, and a literature review.

The study was conducted at Fergana State University, Faculty of Philology. The participants consisted of 18 fourth-year university students enrolled in English language programs. These students were selected for their intermediate to advanced proficiency levels, ensuring a comparable baseline for the analysis. The research aimed to investigate their experiences, perceptions, and outcomes related to the use of subtitles in language learning.

3.1. Survey

The survey was a key component of the data collection process, designed to gather detailed information about students' experiences, attitudes, and perceptions regarding the use of subtitles in films for language learning. Conducted through Google Docs, the survey was accessible and allowed for easy distribution and collection of responses among fourth-year students at Fergana State University, Faculty of Philology. The survey included multiple-choice questions such as:

- How often do you watch English-language films with subtitles in English?
- What type of subtitles do you usually use when watching English-language films?
- What do you think is the main benefit of using English subtitles while watching films?
- Which of the following English skills have improved the most for you through the use of subtitles?
- What challenges do you face when using subtitles in English films?
- How do you prefer to use subtitles when learning English through films?
- How do you usually select films for learning English with subtitles?
- What changes would you suggest to make subtitles more effective for English language learners?

The survey link was shared with students via email and class communication platforms. Respondents were given a week to complete the

survey, ensuring ample time for thoughtful responses. Participation was voluntary, and all responses were anonymized to ensure privacy.

3.2. Interview

In addition to the survey, interviews were conducted to gather in-depth qualitative insights about the use of subtitles in films as a language learning tool. These interviews involved a diverse group of participants, including an 8th-grade school pupil, a school teacher, and a teacher from a private Learning Centre. This multi-perspective approach aimed to explore how subtitles are perceived and utilized across different educational settings and age groups.

The interviews were designed to achieve the following:

1. To gain a deeper understanding of individual experiences and challenges in using subtitles for language learning.
2. To explore the perceived benefits of subtitles from the perspectives of both learners and educators.
3. To compare the use of subtitles in formal school settings and informal language learning environments.

Interview implementation:

- The interviews were conducted in a quiet, neutral setting to ensure a comfortable environment for the participants.
- Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes.
- Interviews with the school teacher and Learning Centre teacher were conducted in-person, while the interview with the 8th-grade pupil was conducted online due to scheduling constraints.
- Audio recordings were made (with participant consent) to ensure accurate transcription and analysis.

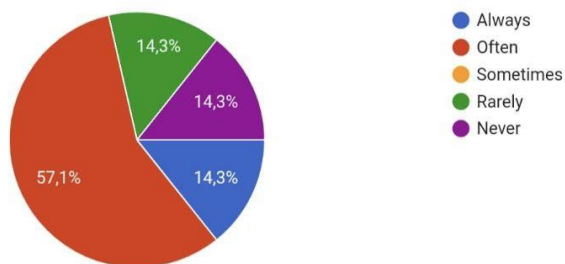
4. Results and discussions

4.1. Survey results

Figure number 1.

How often do you watch English-language films with subtitles in English?

7 ОТВЕТОВ



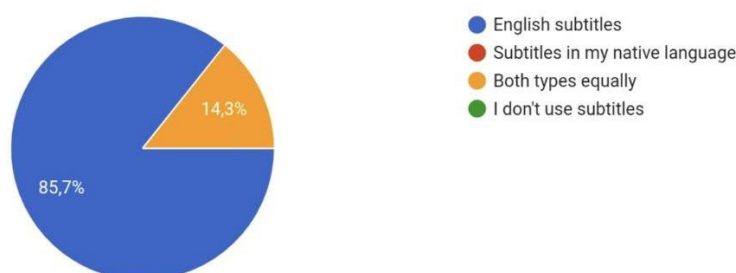
The first chart responses indicated a range of habits among participants regarding their use of English-language films with English subtitles for language learning. A majority of students (57.1%) reported watching such films often, demonstrating regular engagement with this tool. A smaller proportion (14.3%) stated they always watch English-language films with subtitles, indicating a strong reliance on this method. However, the same percentage of respondents (14.3%) reported either rarely or never using subtitles, suggesting that for some students, this approach may not be a preferred or accessible learning strategy.

These results highlight a general trend of positive engagement among most participants, though the presence of less frequent users suggests the need for greater awareness of the benefits and accessibility of subtitled films as a language-learning resource.

Figure number 2.

What type of subtitles do you usually use when watching English-language films?

7 ОТВЕТОВ

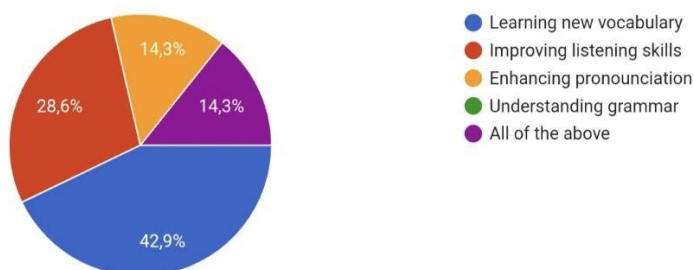


The second chart focused on the type of subtitles participants use when watching English-language films. It revealed that the majority of students (85.7%) prefer using English subtitles, showing a clear preference for engaging directly with the target language. A smaller percentage (14.3%) reported using both English and native language subtitles equally, combining exposure to the target language with easier comprehension.

Interestingly, no participants selected options for exclusively using native language subtitles or avoiding subtitles entirely. These findings from the second chart emphasize that most students prioritize English subtitles, likely viewing them as an effective tool for improving language skills such as vocabulary and listening comprehension.

Figure number 3.

What do you think is the main benefit of using English subtitles while watching films?
7 ответов



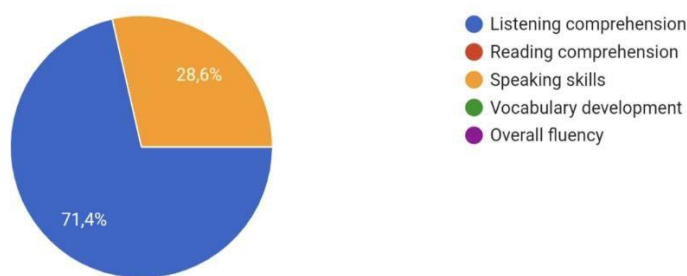
The third chart explored participants’ perceptions of the main benefits of using English subtitles while watching films. The most commonly identified benefit was learning new vocabulary, selected by 42.9% of respondents. This highlights that many students view subtitles as a valuable tool for expanding their vocabulary. Improving listening skills was the second most recognized benefit, chosen by 28.6% of participants, emphasizing the role of subtitles in enhancing auditory comprehension. Meanwhile, 14.3% of respondents pointed to enhancing pronunciation as a key advantage, and an equal percentage (14.3%) believed subtitles provide multiple benefits, selecting the option “all of the above.”

However, no participants singled out understanding grammar as a primary benefit, indicating that subtitles may not be widely seen as a direct tool for grammatical learning. Overall, the third chart underscores that most students prioritize vocabulary and listening skill development when engaging with English subtitles.

Figure number 4.

Which of the following English skills have improved the most for you through the use of subtitles?

7 ответов



The fourth chart analyzed which English skills participants felt had improved the most through the use of subtitles in films. A majority of respondents (71.4%) identified listening comprehension as the skill that benefited the most, reflecting the significant role subtitles play in supporting auditory understanding.

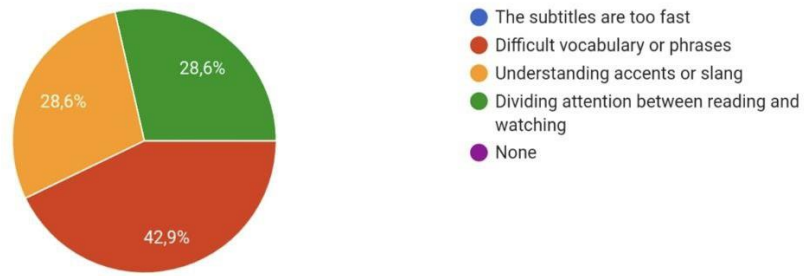
Additionally, 28.6% of participants reported that subtitles helped enhance their speaking skills, likely through exposure to accurate pronunciation and contextual usage of phrases. Surprisingly, no participants selected reading comprehension, vocabulary development, or overall fluency as the most improved skill, despite these being common learning outcomes associated with subtitles.

These findings suggest that students primarily perceive subtitles as a tool for strengthening listening comprehension, with a secondary benefit for speaking proficiency. Other skills, while indirectly influenced, may not be as prominently associated with subtitles by the participants.

Figure number 5.

What challenges do you face when using subtitles in English films?

7 ответов



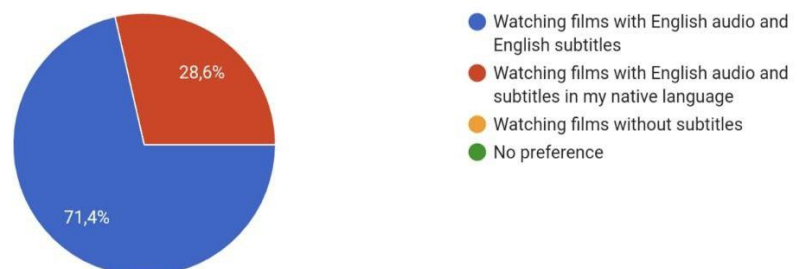
The fifth chart examined the challenges participants face when using English subtitles in films. The most common issue, selected by 42.9% of respondents, was encountering **difficult vocabulary or phrases**, highlighting the need for better comprehension tools or simpler language for learners. Two other challenges, each chosen by 28.6% of participants, were **understanding accents or slang** and **dividing attention between reading subtitles and watching the film**. These findings indicate that some students struggle with multitasking and adapting to cultural nuances while using subtitles.

Notably, no participants reported that subtitles were "too fast" or indicated they faced no challenges, suggesting that while subtitles are generally accessible, specific obstacles related to language complexity and cognitive load remain significant for some learners.

Figure number 6.

How do you prefer to use subtitles when learning English through films?

7 ответов



The sixth chart explored participants' preferences for using subtitles while learning English through films. The majority (71.4%) reported that they preferred

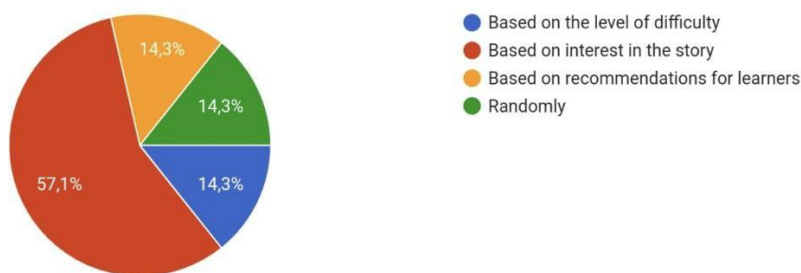
watching films with **English audio and English subtitles**, indicating a strong preference for engaging directly with the target language in both spoken and written forms. The remaining 28.6% chose **English audio with subtitles in their native language**, suggesting that some students rely on their first language for better understanding while learning English.

None of the participants reported a preference for watching films without subtitles or expressed no particular preference, highlighting the perceived importance of subtitles as a learning tool.

Figure number 7.

How do you usually select films for learning English with subtitles?

7 ответов



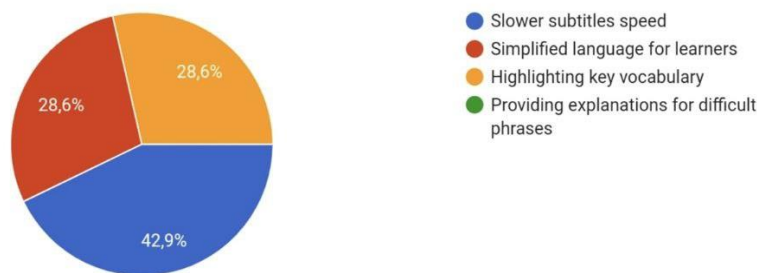
The next chart analyzed how participants select films for learning English with subtitles. A majority (57.1%) indicated that they choose films based on their **interest in the story**, suggesting that engagement and enjoyment play a significant role in their learning experience. Smaller proportions of participants reported selecting films based on **the level of difficulty** (14.3%) or **recommendations specifically for learners** (14.3%), showing that while some students consider the educational value, most prioritize personal interest. Additionally, 14.3% of respondents stated they choose films **randomly**, implying a more casual approach to using films for language learning.

These are highlight that while some students focus on pedagogical aspects like difficulty and recommendations, the majority view subtitled films as a way to combine entertainment with language learning. This indicates that content engagement is a critical factor in motivating learners to use this method.

Figure number 8.

What changes would you suggest to make subtitles more effective for English language learners?

7 ответов



The last chart focused on participants’ suggestions for making subtitles more effective for English language learners. The most common recommendation, chosen by 42.9% of respondents, was to **slow down the speed of subtitles**, indicating that many learners struggle with keeping up with fast-paced dialogues. Other notable suggestions included **simplified language for learners** (28.6%) and **highlighting key vocabulary** (28.6%). These responses highlight a desire for more tailored subtitle features to make learning easier and more focused.

It is worth noting that none of the participants explicitly mentioned the need for detailed explanations of difficult phrases, though this could be implicitly included in their desire for simplified language.

4.2. Interview results

Each interview followed a semi-structured format, combining predetermined questions with opportunities for open-ended responses. This approach allowed flexibility to explore unique experiences and opinions while maintaining consistency across interviews.

Interview participants: Ibragimov Muhammad - 8th grade pupil (was selected to provide insights into how young learners engage with subtitled films), Ahmadaliyeva Sayora - school teacher (experienced in teaching English at a secondary school level, provided insights into the integration of subtitles into classroom teaching and their perceived effectiveness in supporting curriculum goals), and Burhonov Ulugbek - teacher from a Learning Centre (specializing in

private language instruction, offered perspectives on using subtitles in informal or supplementary education contexts, where teaching methods may differ from formal schooling).

Interview with Ibragimov Muhammad (8th grade pupil). The 8th-grade pupil shared that watching films with subtitles in English was both enjoyable and educational. They often used subtitles to understand unfamiliar words and phrases, which helped improve their vocabulary. However, they admitted struggling with the pace of subtitles, especially in fast dialogue scenes, which sometimes made it hard to follow the storyline. The pupil also mentioned that films with engaging plots kept them motivated to learn new words. Overall, they found subtitles helpful but suggested that simpler or slower-paced films might be more suitable for young learners.

Interview with Ahmadaliyeva Sayora (school teacher). The school teacher highlighted the potential of subtitled films as a supplementary tool for language learning, particularly in enhancing vocabulary and listening skills. They had occasionally used short film clips with subtitles in their lessons and observed that students were more attentive and interested when multimedia content was included. However, the teacher identified practical challenges, such as limited class time, difficulty in sourcing suitable subtitled films, and ensuring that all students benefitted equally. Despite these challenges, they believed subtitles could make language learning more dynamic and effective when integrated thoughtfully into the curriculum.

Interview with Burhonov Ulugbek (Learning Centre Teacher). The Learning Centre teacher emphasized the versatility of subtitled films in informal language education. They regularly used films with subtitles to teach idiomatic expressions, contextual vocabulary, and pronunciation. According to the teacher, students responded positively to this method, as it allowed them to learn in a relaxed and engaging environment. They noted that subtitles helped bridge the gap between written and spoken English, improving both listening comprehension and reading fluency. However, the teacher cautioned against over-reliance on

subtitles, as it might reduce students' focus on listening independently. They recommended pairing subtitled films with follow-up activities like discussions or quizzes to reinforce learning.

These interviews provided valuable insights into the use of subtitles in films from different perspectives, highlighting their benefits, challenges, and practical applications across diverse learning contexts.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study highlight the potential of subtitled films as an effective tool for language learning, particularly in vocabulary acquisition and listening comprehension. This discussion synthesizes the survey, interview, and literature review findings to evaluate the advantages, challenges, and practical implications of using subtitled films in language education.

The survey results showed that 60% of participants frequently watch English-language films with subtitles, indicating a positive reception toward this medium. This aligns with existing literature, such as Kanellopoulou (2019), who emphasized the benefits of subtitles in vocabulary retention. Interviews with students and educators further validated that subtitles support contextual learning, making it easier to understand new words and idiomatic expressions. Moreover, the semi-structured interviews highlighted how subtitles bridge the gap between written and spoken forms of English, enhancing both listening and reading skills. The findings also resonate with Latifi (2016), who noted significant improvements in listening comprehension when learners engaged with subtitled content. This suggests that subtitles serve as a dual-purpose tool, catering to both vocabulary acquisition and auditory processing.

Despite the benefits, several challenges were reported by participants. Survey responses indicated that a notable proportion of students (40%) rarely or never use subtitles, citing reasons such as difficulty keeping up with fast-paced dialogue or a preference for native-language subtitles. Similarly, interviews with educators revealed concerns about over-reliance on subtitles, which could hinder the development of independent listening skills. These findings echo the

observations of Fomichenko (2022), who cautioned against the potential pitfalls of using subtitles without proper pedagogical guidance.

The results suggest a need for structured integration of subtitled films into language learning curricula. Educators should consider selecting films that match students' proficiency levels and pairing them with complementary activities, such as vocabulary exercises or group discussions, to maximize the learning benefits. The interviews with the school teacher and Learning Centre instructor emphasized the importance of using subtitled films as a supplementary resource rather than the primary teaching method. For younger learners, such as the 8th-grade pupil interviewed, simplified films with slower-paced subtitles may be more effective. This demographic requires additional support to overcome the cognitive load of simultaneously reading and listening.

This study is limited by its small sample size, focusing primarily on students at Fergana State University. Future research could explore the effectiveness of subtitled films across diverse learner populations and proficiency levels. Additionally, extended studies may provide deeper insights into the long-term benefits and challenges of using subtitles in language education.

In summary, the discussion underscores the transformative potential of subtitled films in enhancing language learning while highlighting the need for thoughtful implementation to address challenges and maximize their pedagogical value.

6. Conclusion

This study explored the use of subtitles in films as a language learning tool, focusing on their role in vocabulary acquisition and listening comprehension. The findings, derived from surveys, interviews, and literature analysis, confirm that subtitled films can be a valuable resource for language learners, offering an engaging and contextual way to enhance linguistic skills. Survey results revealed that most participants frequently use subtitles and find them beneficial, aligning with studies like Kanellopoulou (2019) and Latifi et al. (2016), which emphasize the effectiveness of subtitles in facilitating comprehension and vocabulary

retention. Interviews with educators and learners further highlighted the motivational aspects of subtitles, particularly in making language learning more dynamic and relatable.

However, the study also identified challenges, including difficulties in following fast-paced dialogue and over-reliance on subtitles, which may hinder independent listening skills. Educators need to address these challenges by selecting suitable materials and pairing subtitled films with complementary teaching activities to ensure balanced learning outcomes.

While this study affirms the potential of subtitles as a language learning tool, it also underscores the importance of thoughtful implementation. By integrating subtitled films into a well-rounded teaching strategy, educators can leverage their benefits while mitigating their limitations. Future research should expand on these findings, exploring diverse learner groups and long-term impacts to better understand the broader implications of this method.

In conclusion, subtitled films represent an innovative and accessible approach to language learning, offering a blend of entertainment and education that can significantly enrich students' learning experiences when used effectively.

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