

IMPROVING VOCABULARY WHILE WATCHING KOREAN DRAMAS: A CASE OF INDONESIAN EFL UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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Abstract

Myriad studies have been discussing the role of subtitle for improving students' vocabulary mastery. Yet, the use of English subtitle in Korean dramas is scarcely explored. Within a qualitative approach, this study aims at investigating how Indonesian EFL university students employ Korean dramas with English subtitle for improving their vocabulary. Twenty-three EFL university students were involved to participate in this study. Interview and questionnaire were applied as data collection methods. The results of the study revealed that the students enjoyed learning vocabulary through English subtitle while watching Korean dramas. They were motivated to learn vocabulary because of interesting storyline, editing effect and scene/setting served by Korean dramas. Pedagogically, this study implies that learning vocabulary can be done in regards with the students' interests, including watching Korean dramas. Further research focusing on the employment of English subtitle for improving reading skill is interestingly to be carried out.

Keywords: EFL university students, English subtitle, Korean dramas, vocabulary learning

Introduction

Learning vocabulary is quite essential to support students' ability in comprehending any information presented in English. Correspondingly, vocabulary plays a significant role in language acquisition (Cameron, 2001). Many ways of learning vocabulary have been explored like through game-based learning (Derakhshan & Khatir, 2015; Wu, 2018; Huyen & Nga, 2003), through songs (Abidin et al., 2011; Davis & Fan, 2016) and through stories (Ramírez Verdugo & Alonso Belmonte, 2007; Abasi & Soori, 2014). However, there are still limited studies exploring the use of movies/dramas with subtitles to improve vocabulary. Meanwhile, the demand of watching Korean dramas by adolescents is quite high and most of them use English subtitles. Looking at this opportunity, it is interesting and plausible to research the role of Korean dramas with English subtitles for improving students' vocabulary. Thus, the present study discusses this issue.

English vocabulary

Vocabulary is one of the micro skills of English. As a micro skill, vocabulary has an important role in providing the fluency understanding of English. Vocabulary can be defined as a number of words in the target language which has meanings (Nunan, 1999; Hornby, 1995; Richards & Schmidt, 2002). When people deal with an English communication, they need many vocabularies to provide their understanding of a representation of some objects. Thus, vocabulary which belongs to the core component of language proficiency provides the foundation of learners' ability to speak, listen, read and write (Richards & Renandya, 2002). Vocabulary mastery makes people who learn English will be easier to understand the sentences and paragraphs in English. Although another micro skill such as grammar is important to be acquired, vocabulary plays more significant role in the process of meaning making since ones with limited vocabulary will be more difficult to get the meaning of texts rather than with low grammatical knowledge. In line with this, Harmer (1991) argues that knowing a word (vocabulary) means knowing about the meaning, the word use, the word formation and the word grammar. Therefore, knowing vocabulary overwhelms the concept of knowing a complete meaning of written texts. In addition, the word "vocabulary" is also related and interchangeable with others terms, namely lexis and lexicon (Jackson & Amvela, 2000).

As one of the micro skills of English, vocabulary is certainly taught to the EFL university students. As students of English Department, they are demanded to master as many as possible the English words. Generally, they have to master at least 5000-6000 common words of English. When the students are taught by the lecturer, they should read many paragraphs to increase their vocabulary mastery since they need to store a certain total number of the target language words from written texts (Nunan, 1999; Hornby, 1995). Sometimes, reading too many paragraphs can make the students are bored. It happened because reading too much paragraphs will involve their brain to process a complex set of lexemes, containing a single word, compound words, and idioms (Richards & Schmidt, 2010). In addition, their brains are also demanded to obtain the meaning since ones can know a word if they are able to recognize its meaning (Cameron, 2001; Kamil & Hiebert: 2005).

Korean dramas

Korean dramas are quite popular recently. The Korean dramas are very popular Indonesia starting from 2010 – till now. Commonly, the ones who like Korean dramas are women. Some of them like Korean dramas because of the actor and actress and some others like the plot of the story. Korean dramas are produced by South Korea. According to Korean Culture and Information Service (2011), Korean Drama begins from "Hallyu" which literally means "Korean wave". That term was first coined in China in the mid-1990s by Beijing journalists for describing the fast-growing popularity of Korean entertainment and culture in that country. Knowing the potency of their popularity, Korean televisions stations created a massive sensation by airing the Korean dramas on Japanese television stations. Moving to the year of 2011, many of Korean dramas are popularly published by the three prominent national channels in South Korea, namely MBS, MBC and SBS. These three channels play important roles in promoting the Korean dramas across countries including Japan, China, Indonesia, USA, European countries, Middle East

countries and African countries. Korean Culture and Information (2011) states that the era of Korean television broadcasting was began in 1956 with the establishment of HLKZ-TV. This small experimental network would later become the part of KBS (Korean Broadcasting System). Then, in 1961, KBS which belongs to the first national public broadcaster in South Korea, started to publish the Korean dramas. Moreover, in the development of Korean dramas, there are some eras, namely The Age of Enlightenment (1960), The Age of True Entertainment (1970), The Portraits of a Modern Korea (1980), More Ideas, Better results (1990) and the Present K-Drama goes to Global (2000-now).

English subtitle

Subtitle refers to the audiovisual translation made for audiences to understand the content of images/videos/films by reading the statements of the dialogues on the screen (Reich, 2006). Based on pre-liminary observation, most of EFL university students watch Korean dramas with English subtitles. They enjoyed using the English subtitle in Korean dramas rather than use Indonesian subtitle. In line with this, some studies reveal that using English subtitle can support the vocabulary learning environment. Thus, using audio-video media completed with English subtitles allow learners to learn English through multisensory channels and enhance their vocabulary level (Harji, Woods & Alavi, 2010). In addition, Koolstra and Beentjes (1999) argue that English subtitles on television programs or audio-video media provide a rich context for language acquisition especially in terms of vocabulary acquisition. A study exploring the effects of film subtitles on English listening and vocabulary found that subtitles help students a lot in understanding the content of the film (Napikul, Cedar & Roongrattanakool, 2018). The subtitles provide some new vocabulary that students have never seen before. In line with this, another study claimed that using subtitled movies clearly enhances the learning of new vocabulary among ESP students (Bellalem, Neddar, Bouagada & Djelloul, 2018).

Research questions

Different from those previous related studies, this study specifically investigates how Indonesian EFL university students employ Korean dramas with English subtitle for improving their vocabulary. Two research questions were administered in this study.

1. How are the EFL university students' experiences in watching Korean dramas with English subtitle for improving their vocabulary?
2. Why do the EFL university students like to learn English vocabulary through English subtitle in Korean dramas?

Method

Context of the study

Since this study aimed at investigating the issue of watching Korean dramas with English subtitle for improving EFL university students' vocabulary mastery, a qualitative case study research design was chosen to be employed as the procedure of conducting this study. There are a number of reasons that support this study to be declared as a case study. A case study involves the researchers to be instrument within the context of a unique, special or interesting research in order to seek and

understand social phenomena naturally (Creswell, 2009; Boyce, Neale & Thapa &, 2006; Merriam, 2009). A specific case of this study was the situation of EFL university students in acquiring English vocabulary while watching Korean dramas. Another significant reason is that a case study tries to answer “how” and “why” questions (Yin, 2003, p.1). Thus, this study comes up with two research questions in form of how and why questions. In this case, how and why questions are typically resulting more advanced and insightful information.

Data collection and analysis methods

This study mainly employed semi-structured interviews for gathering the data. However, online questionnaires were also applied to back up and strengthen the interviews’ data. Twenty-three EFL university students from three public universities in Java were voluntarily involved to be the participants of this study. They fill out the online questionnaire and then five of them were selected purposively to follow the interview sections. Furthermore, data from the interview were analyzed thematically through coding and memoing. The analysis also follows three stages of qualitative data analysis namely 1) data reduction, 2) data display and 3) drawing and verifying conclusions (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Meanwhile, data from the questionnaire were described in form of tables and percentages.

Researcher positionality

Talking about positionality, all of the researchers did not have power over the participants. Online questionnaires were distributed to EFL students among three public universities randomly. Then, ones who ever watched Korean dramas and interested to participate in this study could just fill out the online questionnaires voluntarily. The total number of participants filling out the questionnaires was twenty-three students and the researchers selected five of them purposively in regards with their availability to be interviewed, frequency of watching Korean dramas and use of English subtitle. When interviewing these five participants, the researchers always maintained their objectivity.

Findings and Discussion

Findings

Based on the interview and questionnaire, the researchers gained rich information concerning with the issue of using English subtitle in Korean dramas for improving EFL university students’ vocabulary. In this section, the researchers presented the result of the study in accordance with the research questions aforementioned. Before moving to the main discussion, the participants’ profile would be addressed. The researchers involved 23 EFL university students to fill out the questionnaire. They involved in this study voluntarily based on their willingness. The participants were various since they were coming from three different universities. The participants were dominantly coming from university A and university B since these two universities offer both English language education study program and English literature study program while university C only offers English literature study program. Likewise, mostly the participants were female since generally male students were not really interested in Korean dramas. The brief participants’ profile is presented in table 1.

Table 1. The participants' profile

Category	Sub-category	Total
University	University A	8 (34.8%)
	University B	14 (60.9%)
	University C	1 (4.3%)
Gender	Male	2 (8.7%)
	Female	21 (91.3%)

Moreover, from the 23 participants, the researchers selected the 5 participants to be interviewed. The selection of the interviewee was done purposively by considering some aspects such as their availability to be interviewed, the frequency of watching Korean dramas and the use of English subtitle while watching the Korean dramas.

The EFL university students' experiences in learning vocabulary through Korean dramas with English subtitle

The questionnaire contained ten questions/ statements addressing the use of English subtitle while watching Korean dramas by the EFL university students. From those statements, the researchers considered that the statements number 3, 4, 5, 7, and 8 aligned with the first research question. Those statements represented the EFL university students' experiences in using English while watching Korean dramas. Table 2. Shows the percentage of the participants' responses. Mostly, the participants agreed (each item got >51%) with the statements that they enjoyed watching Korean dramas with English subtitle, preferred to learn vocabulary through Korean dramas with English subtitle than reading many books, found the meaning of word either directly or indirectly and sometimes they also found incorrect words.

Table 2. The participants' responses related to their experiences watching Korean dramas with English subtitle

No.	Statements	Percentage
3.	Find the meaning of the words gained from English subtitle in Korean dramas by that time	80.4%
4.	Find the meaning of the words gained from English subtitle in Korean dramas later on.	64.1%
5.	Find incorrect words (spelling)	69.6%
7.	Enjoy watching Korean dramas with English subtitle	83.7%
8.	Prefer to watch Korean dramas with English subtitle rather than reading many books	69.6%

Meanwhile, based on the result of the interview, the participants explained their experiences during watching Korean dramas with English subtitle. Firstly, they felt that Korean dramas were interesting in terms of the storyline, editing effect and scene/setting. Some of the participants claimed that the film director always produced creative story line. Therefore, the storyline was not monotonous. It was a bit difficult to predict the story line of the Korean dramas. This made the audiences always curious with the story. Similarly, the editing effect and scene/setting provided in the Korean dramas were attractive for the participants. Even, the

participants also compared the Korean dramas with Indonesian soap opera. They argued that Korean dramas provide better storyline, editing effect and scene/setting. With interesting storyline, editing effect, and scene/setting, the participants seemed to be more motivated to watch the Korean dramas. As a result, they were also encouraged to learn English vocabulary through the English subtitle.

“Yes, I really love watching Korean dramas. Maybe, the first reason is because of the storyline. They have a very great and interesting storyline. Different from the one in Indonesia which commonly provides monotonous and predictable storyline. Korean drama storyline is very creative and unpredictable. It makes me always be curious to follow the story in the drama. In addition, the visual or editing effect is amazing”

“Yes, I do love watching Korean dramas. Because I think that the storylines are really good and it is different Indonesian dramas/sinetron because the episode is not really that a lot like Indonesian”

Interviewee’s quotation

Secondly, some participants also stated that they used the English subtitle while watching Korean dramas frequently. However, they have different frequency of using English subtitle for watching the Korean dramas. Three of the participants stated that they often used the English subtitle while the rest of the participants claimed that they were not always using the English subtitle. One of the participants stated that he/she was rarely using English subtitle for Korean dramas but commonly he/she used it for Korean movie. For additional information, Korean dramas and Korean movies are actually alike. If Korean dramas are made in series, the Korean movies are produced in a single format just like a film.

“Yes, I always watch Korean dramas with English subtitles”

“I usually watch Korean dramas using English subtitle. Actually, English subtitle is better, not only for consuming but also It can improve my English skill”

Interviewee’s quotation

Thirdly, the participants were not only feeling about the more interesting storyline, editing effect and scene/setting of the Korean dramas but also feeling more comfortable to use the English subtitle for watching the Korean dramas. Some of the participants claimed that using English subtitle was more comfortable because it would help them easier to get the essence/content of the drama. Meanwhile, another participant also realized that using English subtitle would improve their English vocabulary. In addition, the conversation in the drama is mostly related to daily life. In this case, they learn English vocabulary with less effort since they enjoyed the drama.

“When I watch Korean dramas with English subtitle, I feel that I can easily get the essence or the main content of the drama. I think using English subtitle is more fun and comfortable rather than using Indonesian subtitle. Maybe, the reason is that it is more challenging to use the English subtitle.”

Interviewee’s quotation

The reasons why EFL university students like to learn English vocabulary through English subtitle in Korean dramas

This section discussed the reasons why the EFL university students prefer to learn English vocabulary through English subtitle in Korean dramas. From the ten item statements of the questionnaire, the researcher considered the statements number 1, 2, 6, 9 and 10 as the representation of EFL university students' reasons to learn English vocabulary through watching Korean dramas with English subtitle. The percentage of the participants' responses is shown in table 3. From table 3, it can be said that the majority of the participants agree with those statements since each statement shows more than >51% score of agreement. They agree that the reasons of watching Korean dramas with English subtitle are for motivating and improving their vocabulary learning. In addition, watching Korean dramas with English subtitle will help them to find new words after watching the dramas.

Table 3. The participants' responses related to their reasons to learn English vocabulary through English subtitle in Korean dramas

No.	Statements	Percentage
1.	Learn many vocabularies through Korean dramas with English subtitle	85.9%
2.	Find new vocabulary by watching Korean dramas with English subtitle	88%
6.	Watching Korean dramas with English vocabulary improves my vocabulary	81.5%
9.	Watching Korean dramas with English subtitle is motivating	76.1%
10.	Get at least two new words after watching Korean dramas with English subtitle	88%

Moreover, based on the interview result, the participants explained some reasons to learn vocabulary through Korean dramas with English subtitle. Firstly, the participants thought that through watching Korean dramas with English subtitle, they can find new vocabulary. This finding is also supported by the statement number 2 in the questionnaire. Most of the participants found new vocabulary while or after watching the Korean dramas. However, some participants already forget the vocabulary that they found from the drama. This might happen because they did not make a list of the vocabulary.

“Yes. Sometimes I find new vocabulary and I started to write the new expressions, vocabulary. However, I forget some of them. Commonly I got the new words in the most outstanding drama such as Goblin and The Heirs”

“I found some but sometimes I forget. Mm... just like the word “snore” and “yummy”. I found them first in English subtitle when watching Korean dramas”

Interviewee's quotation

Secondly, the participants claimed that they enjoyed learning vocabulary through watching Korean dramas with English subtitle. They felt more comfortable to use the English subtitle because they can learn English as well as refresh their

mind through watching Korean dramas. English subtitle also helped them to get the essence of the drama easily. Although sometimes they found difficult words, they still enjoyed the drama.

“Yes, I do. Because it is more challenging and I can get the essence of the story easily”

“Yes, I do. Because it is more comfortable and it makes me enjoy the dramas”

Interviewee’s quotation

Thirdly, the participants believed that watching Korean dramas with English subtitle will improve their vocabulary mastery. Learning English vocabulary through something that they like is very exciting. Although not all the vocabularies were related to their daily life, at least they can increase their vocabulary mastery gradually.

“For improving vocabulary, I think yes. Because it is not only improving my vocabulary but also enlightening my insight. Most of Korean dramas take issue about love story and that will broaden my insight. Commonly, I just guess the meaning of the new words that I did not know yet. Then I will find the meaning of the words in dictionary if I am really curious of that words”

Interviewee’s quotation

The last reason is that watching Korean dramas with English subtitle can be an alternative way to learn English. Mostly, the participants thought that it was fun to learn English vocabulary through watching Korean dramas. It is like they do their hobbies and at the same time they are learning new vocabulary. It is effortless and enjoyable.

“I think yes. Because sometimes it’s difficult when we try to open dictionary only for remembering the vocabulary but when watch the movie, I think it’s easier and fun way to learn vocabulary”

“Yes, it’s a good way to learn English vocabulary because we don’t have to be stress remembering vocabulary from dictionary or vocabulary list but we can use the vocabulary in the subtitle and watch the scenario in the movies”

Interviewee’s quotation

The following table presents the summary of the participants’ experiences and reasons of learning vocabulary through watching Korean dramas with English subtitle.

Table 4. The summary of the research findings

Research questions	Findings
RQ1. How are the EFL university students’ experiences in watching Korean dramas with English subtitle for improving their vocabulary?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Motivating to learn vocabulary since Korean dramas provide more interesting storyline, editing effect and scene/setting. ▪ Mostly, the students use English subtitle frequently. ▪ More comfortable to use English subtitle.

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- RQ2. Why do the EFL university students like to learn English vocabulary through English subtitle in Korean dramas?
- Can find new English vocabulary while watching Korean dramas.
 - Enjoyed watching Korean dramas with English subtitle.
 - Believed that watching Korean dramas with English subtitle will improve vocabulary mastery.
 - As an alternative way to learn English vocabulary
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Discussion

This study deals with the issue of watching Korean dramas with English subtitle for improving EFL university students' vocabulary. Research on the use of subtitle has already been done by many researchers (e.g. Sirmandi & Sardareh, 2016; Etemadi, 2012, Sabouri, Zohrabi & Osbouei, 2015). Various results on the use of subtitle for improving vocabulary become the foundation for conducting other studies, including the current study. In the context of utilizing subtitle for learning vocabulary, Neves (2008) differentiates the types of subtitle into two categories, namely intralingual and interlingual. Intralingual refers to the subtitle which has the same language with the sound of the dialogues while interlingual belongs to the subtitle which provides different language with the sound of the dialogue. In relation to the current study, Korean dramas with English subtitle may refer to interlingual subtitle since the dialogues spoken in Korean languages while the subtitles are in English. Correspondingly, Bravo (2005) believed that both interlingual and intralingual subtitle give benefits for language learners although they perform different outcome. Language learners with low level of proficiency is better to use the interlingual subtitle while the advance learners may use the intralingual subtitle. In this case, the interlingual subtitle refers to the condition where the spoken dialogues are in English while the subtitle is in mother tongue or the first language of the audiences. However, it was rather different to be applied in the context of the current study. The current study deals with the condition where the spoken dialogues are in Korean language, the subtitle is in English while the audiences' mother tongue/first language is Bahasa Indonesia. This condition may lead to a bit different result regarding to the use of interlingual and intralingual subtitle. In the context of the current study, the interlingual subtitle is used for intermediate till advance learners. This is because the audiences were the students of English language department. Meanwhile they also got more challenges since they listened to Korean language and at the same time, they understood the Korean dialogues by using English subtitle.

The findings of the current study also reveal that EFL university students were comfortable to use the English subtitle for watching Korean dramas. They claimed that they could get the essence of the dramas easily. This proves that subtitle can help learners to understand the conversation (Liando, Sahetapy, & Maru, 2018). This might happen because the students were the students of English language department, meaning that they were supposed to have known at least 1000-2000 common words. More than that, the EFL university students got the benefit from the English subtitle for not only understanding the conversation but also comprehending the whole movie content easily (Hinkin, 2009; Meskill, 1996). 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).

Moreover, watching Korean dramas with English subtitle can motivate the students in learning vocabulary. As explained in the previous section, the EFL university students enjoyed watching the Korean dramas because they felt that Korean dramas served more interesting storyline, editing effect and scene/setting. At the same time, they realized that they have to improve their vocabulary as they were students of English language department. Therefore, as media, the Korean dramas play an important role to give language learners motivation effect in acquiring the target language (Danan, 2004). Likewise, Chang (2004) argued that foreign films which provide subtitles can increase the audiences' motivation to acquire the language. Another study also reported that humorous movie clips give positive effects for developing students' vocabulary learning (Mahdiloo & Izadapanah, 2017). In this case the humorous movie clips attract the students' attention as well as the storyline, editing effect and scene/setting of Korean dramas in the current study. In terms of gender, a study reported that there was no significant difference between males and females in terms of acquiring new vocabulary through subtitled movie (Sabouri, Zohrabi, & Osbouei, 2015). Regarding to this issue, this study has not investigated the differences between male and female students in acquiring vocabulary through watching Korean dramas with English subtitle yet. However, learning vocabulary through watching Korean dramas with English subtitle tends to be more effective for female students since Korean dramas are dominantly liked by female students. Last of all, watching Korean dramas with English subtitle can be an alternative way for students to improve their vocabulary.

Conclusion

Regarding to the data results and discussions, this study confirms that watching Korean dramas with English subtitle can improve the EFL university students' vocabulary mastery. In terms of the students' experiences in watching Korean dramas with English subtitle, the results of the study reveal that the students were more comfortable to use English subtitle, most of the students used English subtitle frequently and Korean dramas served more interesting storyline, editing effect and scene/setting. In this case, the interesting story line, editing effect and scene/setting could encourage students to learn vocabulary through the English subtitle embedded in Korean dramas. Meanwhile, the students were comfortable to use English subtitle since they could get the essence of the movie content easily. Moreover, some reasons of why the students liked to learn English vocabulary through watching Korean dramas with English subtitle include the opportunity to find new vocabulary while watching Korean dramas, the enjoyment of watching Korean dramas with English subtitle, the belief of vocabulary improvement through watching Korean dramas with English subtitle and the opinion that watching Korean dramas with English subtitle can be an alternative way for improving vocabulary. Pedagogically, the findings of this study imply that learning vocabulary

can be done from the students' hobby. From this we see that learning vocabulary through something that the students fond of can enhance their motivation as well as their effort to learn vocabulary. Furthermore, the researchers suggested further research to broaden the scope of subtitling issue by investigating the use of subtitle for improving reading skill.

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