Improving Vocabulary Mastery through Japanese Anime Subtitles: An Experimental Study of *A Silent Voice*

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Abstract

Vocabulary mastery plays a central role in language learning as it directly supports the development of other language skills such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing. However, many EFL learners continue to face difficulties in mastering vocabulary due to limited exposure to authentic language input. This study aimed to investigate the impact of Japanese anime subtitles on students' vocabulary mastery. The research employed a quantitative approach using a one-group pretest–posttest design. The participants were tenth-grade students at SMA Ahmad Yani 2 Baureno, who were given a pretest to measure their initial vocabulary mastery, followed by treatment through the use of Japanese anime subtitles, and finally a posttest to measure the outcome of the intervention. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and a paired-samples t-test. The findings indicated that students' vocabulary mastery improved significantly after the treatment, with the mean score increasing from 9.45 in the pretest to 12.41 in the posttest. The results also showed greater consistency in students' performance, as reflected by the narrowing gap between the lowest and highest scores. The t-test confirmed that the improvement was statistically significant, suggesting that the use of subtitled anime had a strong and meaningful effect on vocabulary mastery. In conclusion, the study highlights the potential of integrating Japanese anime subtitles into EFL teaching as an engaging and effective strategy to improve vocabulary mastery, while also recommending future research with larger samples and control groups.

Keywords: vocabulary mastery, anime subtitles, Japanese anime, EFL learning, quantitative research

Introduction

Vocabulary has long been recognized as a core element of language acquisition since it directly underpins learners' competence in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Without adequate vocabulary knowledge, students often struggle to comprehend oral and written texts and encounter difficulties in expressing ideas effectively (Bostancı, 2022). This condition becomes more problematic in EFL contexts, where learners have limited exposure to authentic language input outside the classroom. Consequently, the development of effective vocabulary instruction remains a priority in English language teaching (Carig, 2023).

Traditional approaches such as memorizing isolated word lists and relying heavily on textbook-based activities, although still commonly practiced, are often criticized for being monotonous and detached from real-life use. These methods fail to provide sufficient engagement and contextualization, which are essential for long-term retention of new words (Sonbul & Schmitt, 2010). Research indicates that vocabulary is more successfully acquired when students encounter words in meaningful and interactive contexts, such as through songs, games, stories, or

audiovisual media (Firmansyah, 2021). Hence, the integration of innovative strategies in vocabulary instruction is necessary to address the shortcomings of conventional methods. Motivation also plays a crucial role in ensuring the success of such strategies, as shown by studies linking learners' motivation with better English achievement (Asrifan & Dewi, 2023; Enriquez et al., 2023).

The advancement of digital technology has opened opportunities for integrating multimedia into classroom practices. Multimedia-based learning, which combines visual, auditory, and textual channels, can enhance learners' comprehension and memory by providing multimodal input (Abdulrahaman et al., 2020). According to the Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning (Mayer & Fiorella, 2021), learners process information more effectively when it is presented through complementary channels rather than a single mode. In this regard, Japanese anime has emerged as an appealing medium for younger learners due to its popularity, engaging narratives, and strong cultural resonance (Yusof et al., 2023).

Anime with English subtitles provides multiple layers of comprehensible input that support vocabulary acquisition. Learners are exposed simultaneously to spoken dialogue, written subtitles, and visual context, enabling them to associate new words with meaning more effectively. This process aligns with Krashen's Input Hypothesis, which emphasizes the importance of comprehensible input slightly above learners' current proficiency level to facilitate language acquisition (Fievez et al., 2020; Krashen, 1985; Patrick, 2019). Subtitles serve as a bridge that links listening and reading skills, reinforces vocabulary recognition, and helps students notice language use in authentic contexts (Bostancı, 2022).

A growing body of research has demonstrated the positive impact of subtitles on vocabulary learning. Karimah and Habibi (2019) found that high school students who learned vocabulary through anime subtitles showed greater improvement than those taught with conventional methods. Firmansyah (2021) confirmed that multimodal exposure increased learners' long-term memory of new vocabulary, while Kord et al. (2022) highlighted the role of repeated subtitle exposure in sustainable vocabulary development. Similarly, Nation (2022) emphasized that translanguaging and multimodal input can enhance vocabulary learning in diverse contexts.

Although these findings suggest that subtitles are beneficial for vocabulary instruction, most previous studies have been conducted with university students or learners in urban environments who already have relatively high motivation and access to English media. Limited research has been devoted to exploring the effectiveness of subtitled anime for high school learners in rural or private school settings where students often face motivation problems and restricted access to authentic English input (Mahbub, 2018). This context-specific gap provides the rationale for the present study.

Therefore, this research focuses on examining the effectiveness of using Japanese anime subtitles, specifically *A Silent Voice*, in improving vocabulary mastery among tenth-grade students. By doing so, the study aims to determine whether subtitled anime can serve as an effective and engaging alternative medium for vocabulary learning in EFL classrooms. The findings are expected to contribute to both theoretical insights in multimedia-based language learning and practical innovations for English teachers in similar contexts.

Literature Review

Vocabulary Mastery in Language Learning

Vocabulary plays a central role in second language learning as it provides the foundation for comprehension and communication. Learners with a broad vocabulary can understand texts and express their ideas more effectively, while limited vocabulary knowledge hinders fluency in all four language skills (Nation, 2022). Vocabulary acquisition may occur intentionally through direct instruction or incidentally through exposure to contextualized input (Sonbul & Schmitt, 2010). Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1985) emphasizes that new vocabulary is acquired more effectively when students receive comprehensible input slightly beyond their current proficiency level. In this respect, subtitled audiovisual media can serve as a valuable source of such input.

Multimedia and Language Learning

With the development of digital tools, multimedia resources have become widely integrated into language classrooms. The Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning (Mayer & Fiorella, 2021) states that students learn more deeply when information is presented through both verbal and visual channels rather than a single mode. Studies have confirmed that combining auditory, textual, and visual input increases memory retention and comprehension (Jewitt et al., 2021; Mohamed et al., 2014). This theoretical foundation justifies the use of subtitled videos as effective instructional materials in vocabulary learning.

Anime and Subtitles as a Learning Tool

Anime, as a form of Japanese animation, is highly popular among teenagers worldwide due to its storytelling, cultural value, and emotional appeal (Yusof et al., 2023). Beyond entertainment, anime can provide authentic input that introduces learners to natural expressions, pronunciation, and contextually embedded vocabulary (Karimah & Habibi, 2019). Subtitles enhance this process by providing written forms of the dialogue, allowing students to connect spoken and written input

simultaneously (Bostancı, 2022). This multimodal exposure benefits learners with different learning styles and helps them retain vocabulary more effectively.

Previous Studies

Several empirical studies have confirmed the effectiveness of subtitles in vocabulary learning. Karimah and Habibi (2019) found that students who used anime subtitles showed a 40% improvement in vocabulary scores compared to those learning through traditional methods. Chen (2024) also reported higher vocabulary retention and enthusiasm among learners who engaged with subtitled videos. Firmansyah (2021) demonstrated that multimodal input increased long-term word retention, while Kord et al. (2022) revealed that repeated exposure to subtitled content fostered sustainable vocabulary growth. Nation (2022), focusing on the role of translanguaging and multimodal input, also highlighted how diverse resources can enhance vocabulary learning. These findings collectively support the pedagogical value of subtitled audiovisual materials in vocabulary instruction.

Research Gap and Contribution

Despite substantial evidence supporting subtitled media for language learning, most existing studies have been conducted with university students or learners in urban schools where access to digital resources is high and motivation is relatively strong. Less attention has been given to the use of anime subtitles in private or rural high schools, where students often face low motivation and limited English exposure (Mahbub, 2018). Moreover, while previous studies have investigated various types of video materials, few have examined the specific use of emotionally engaging anime titles such as *A Silent Voice*. The present research seeks to fill this gap by evaluating the effectiveness of using *A Silent Voice* with English subtitles in improving vocabulary mastery among tenth-grade students in an Indonesian private high school. This contribution is expected to extend the application of multimedia-based learning in EFL contexts and provide practical implications for teachers seeking innovative methods of vocabulary instruction.

Research Methods

This study employed a quantitative research method with an experimental approach to examine the effectiveness of Japanese anime subtitles in improving students' vocabulary mastery. A one-group pretest–posttest design was implemented, in which a single group of participants was tested before and after the treatment to determine whether significant improvement occurred. This design was selected because it enables researchers to measure changes in learners' performance resulting from the intervention while maintaining simplicity and feasibility in classroom settings (Sugiyono, 2016).

The population of the study consisted of all tenth-grade students at SMA Ahmad Yani 2 Baureno during the academic year 2024/2025. The sample comprised 22 students from class X-2, including 17 male and 5 female students. Due to the relatively small class size, total sampling was applied so that all members of the population were included as research participants. This group was chosen because preliminary classroom observations indicated that students encountered difficulties in vocabulary mastery, making them relevant subjects for the intervention.

Data were collected through a vocabulary test, which functioned as the primary research instrument. The test consisted of 15 items in the form of gap-filling questions designed to measure students' ability to recognize and recall English vocabulary. Each correct response was awarded one point, and incorrect or unanswered items received zero. Thus, the maximum score for the test was 15. The test items were validated by expert judgment from both an academic advisor and an English teacher at the research site to ensure content validity and suitability for the students' proficiency level.

The operational definitions of the study variables are as follows. The independent variable is the use of anime subtitles, specifically the Japanese anime *A Silent Voice*, presented with English subtitles during classroom sessions. The dependent variable is students' vocabulary mastery, defined as their ability to understand and correctly use English vocabulary as measured by the pretest and posttest scores.

The data collection procedure consisted of three main stages. First, a pretest was administered to assess the students' baseline vocabulary knowledge. Second, the treatment phase was carried out by showing selected clips from *A Silent Voice* with English subtitles. The clips were approximately 5–7 minutes in duration and contained conversational expressions and vocabulary items relevant to students' proficiency level. After watching, students were encouraged to note unfamiliar words and discuss their meanings in class activities facilitated by the teacher. Finally, a posttest of equivalent format to the pretest was administered to measure students' progress after the intervention.

For data analysis, both descriptive and inferential statistics were applied. Descriptive statistics were used to calculate the mean, minimum, maximum, and standard deviation of the pretest and posttest scores, providing an overview of the students' performance. To test whether the difference between the two sets of scores was statistically significant, a paired-samples t-test was conducted with the assistance of SPSS version 27. The level of significance was set at 0.05. The use of this inferential analysis enabled the researcher to determine whether the treatment had a meaningful effect on improving vocabulary mastery.

Findings and Discussion

Findings

This section reports the results of data analysis to determine the effect of Japanese anime subtitles on students' vocabulary mastery. The findings are presented in three main parts: the distribution of individual pretest and posttest scores, the descriptive statistics, and the results of the paired-samples t-test. Each part is explained thoroughly to show the extent of improvement experienced by students after the treatment. Table 1 displays the individual scores of students in both the pretest and posttest. The data reveal that students' vocabulary mastery before the intervention was generally low to moderate. In the pretest, the lowest score recorded was only 2 out of 15, while the highest score reached 14.

Most students scored below 10, which indicates that they had difficulties recalling or recognizing the vocabulary items tested. After receiving the treatment using Japanese anime subtitles, the posttest scores showed a considerable improvement across the sample. The lowest score rose to 7, and the highest score reached 15, which is the maximum possible score. Nearly every student obtained a higher score in the posttest compared to the pretest. This upward shift suggests that the treatment provided meaningful learning support for students regardless of their initial proficiency.

Table 1 The pretest and posttest scores for each students

No.	Pretest	Posttest
1	14	15
2	14	15
3	14	15
4	7	11
5	9	13
6	8	12
7	11	13
8	11	13
9	14	15
10	7	11
11	4	9
12	6	10

13	6	10
14	2	7
15	7	11
16	6	10
17	10	13
18	11	14
19	14	15
20	12	14
21	10	13
22	11	14

A closer inspection of Table 1 shows that the gains were not limited to a few individuals but spread across the group. For instance, one student who scored 5 in the pretest improved to 10 in the posttest, effectively doubling the score. Another student who had already performed relatively well with 12 in the pretest advanced to 15 in the posttest, showing that even higher achievers benefited from the treatment. Importantly, no student showed a decline in performance after the intervention. This consistency highlights the effectiveness of the treatment in enhancing vocabulary mastery for all learners, not just a select group.

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Sum	Mean		Std. Deviation
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic
pretest	22	12	2	14	208	9.45	.752	3.528
posttest	22	8	7	15	273	12.41	.482	2.261
Valid N (listwise)	22							

Table 2 provides the descriptive statistics of the pretest and posttest scores. The mean score in the pretest was 9.45, reflecting the fact that, on average, students answered fewer than two-thirds of the items correctly. In contrast, the posttest mean rose to 12.41, showing that students were able to master more vocabulary items after the intervention. This increase of nearly three points is a meaningful

gain, especially considering that the total number of items was only 15. It suggests that exposure to subtitled anime clips allowed students to acquire new vocabulary within a relatively short treatment period. The minimum and maximum scores also illustrate the improvement more clearly. Before the treatment, the lowest-performing student could only answer two items correctly, which represents very limited vocabulary knowledge. After the intervention, the lowest score improved substantially to seven, meaning that even weaker students made significant progress. On the other hand, the maximum score increased from 14 to 15, indicating that the most proficient students in the class achieved nearly perfect mastery of the tested vocabulary. The narrowing gap between the lowest and highest scores demonstrates that the treatment was inclusive, helping both weaker and stronger learners.

Another noteworthy result from Table 2 is the change in standard deviation. In the pretest, the standard deviation was 3.53, suggesting a wide spread of scores and a high degree of variation among students. After the posttest, the standard deviation decreased to 2.26, meaning that students' performance became more clustered around the mean. This reduction in variability shows that the treatment not only raised the overall achievement but also equalized students' performance, making their mastery levels more consistent across the class.

Figure 1 Students' Vocabulary Mastery Improvement
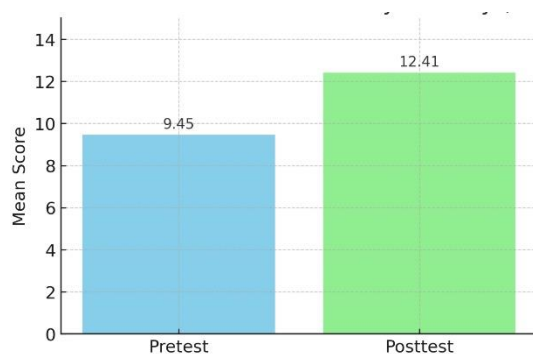
The improvement in students' vocabulary mastery can also be observed visually in the bar chart presented in Figure 1. The chart shows that the mean score in the pretest was 9.45, while in the posttest it increased to 12.41. This difference illustrates a clear upward trend in students' performance after the treatment. The figure confirms the statistical results by providing a simple visual comparison, making it evident that the use of Japanese anime subtitles contributed positively to students' vocabulary development.

In order to determine whether there was a significant difference between students' pretest and posttest scores, a Paired Sample T-Test was conducted. This statistical test is appropriate when comparing two related means, such as measurements taken from the same participants before and after a treatment. The

purpose of this test was to examine whether the treatment applied in this study significantly improved students' performance.

Table 3 Paired Samples Statistics

Pair	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pretest	9.45	22	3.528	0.752
Posttest	12.41	22	2.261	0.482

Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics of the pretest and posttest scores. The mean score of the pretest was 9.45 (SD = 3.528), while the mean score of the posttest was 12.41 (SD = 2.261). Since the posttest mean is higher than the pretest mean, it shows that there was an improvement in students' performance after the treatment was administered.

Table 4 Paired Samples Correlations

Pair	N	Correlation	Sig.
Pretest & Posttest	22	0.984	0.000

Table 4 shows the correlation between pretest and posttest scores. The correlation coefficient was **r** = 0.984 with a significance value of $p < 0.001$. This indicates a very strong and significant positive relationship between pretest and posttest scores. In other words, students who performed well in the pretest also tended to perform well in the posttest, and vice versa.

Table 5 Paired Samples Test

Pair	Mean Difference	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pretest - Posttest	-2.955	1.863	0.291	-10.175	21	0.000

Table 5 contains the main results of the paired sample t-test. The mean difference between pretest and posttest was -2.955, with a t-value of -10.175, degrees of freedom (df) = 21, and a significance value ($p < 0.001$). Since the p-value is smaller than 0.05, it can be concluded that there is a statistically significant difference between pretest and posttest scores. This confirms that the treatment given had a meaningful impact on improving students' outcomes.

Table 6 Paired Samples Effect Sizes

Effect Size	Value	Interpretation
Cohen's d	-2.169	Very large effect

Hedges' correction	-2.130	Very large effect

Table 6 presents the effect size of the treatment. The analysis resulted in a Cohen's d value of -2.169 and Hedges' correction of -2.130, both of which fall into the category of a very large effect size. This means that the treatment had not only a statistically significant effect but also a strong practical impact on students' improvement.

The null hypothesis (H_0) stated that there is no significant difference between the pretest and posttest scores, while the alternative hypothesis (H_1) stated that there is a significant difference between the pretest and posttest scores.

Based on the result of the paired sample t-test, the significance value was $p < 0.001$, which is lower than the alpha level of 0.05. Therefore, H_0 is rejected and H_1 is accepted. This indicates that there is a statistically significant difference between the pretest and posttest scores.

This finding confirms that the increase in students' vocabulary mastery did not occur by chance but was directly attributable to the treatment. In other words, the use of Japanese anime subtitles had a real and measurable effect on improving students' vocabulary achievement. The results of the statistical test provide robust evidence of the effectiveness of the intervention. The high level of significance suggests that the probability of the results occurring randomly is extremely small. Moreover, the magnitude of the mean difference shows that the gain was substantial rather than marginal. This reinforces the conclusion that the integration of subtitled anime into classroom instruction can make a significant contribution to vocabulary development. In addition to statistical significance, the effect size was also taken into consideration. The analysis indicated a large effect, which means that the treatment had not only a measurable but also a meaningful impact on the students' learning outcomes. This finding strengthens the argument that anime subtitles can be used as a practical and engaging tool for vocabulary instruction in EFL classrooms.

Taken together, the findings can be summarized in three major points. First, the individual scores showed a consistent improvement across all students, with no participant experiencing a decline in performance. Second, the descriptive statistics demonstrated a rise in the mean score, an increase in the minimum and maximum scores, and a reduction in score variability. Third, the paired-samples t-test confirmed that the improvement was statistically significant, with a strong effect size. These results collectively indicate that Japanese anime subtitles, particularly from A Silent Voice, were effective in enhancing students' vocabulary mastery. Finally, the patterns observed in these findings set the stage for further discussion. The next section will interpret these results in light of previous research, theoretical perspectives, and the stated objectives of the study. By connecting the findings with existing literature, the discussion will provide a

deeper understanding of how and why anime subtitles can contribute to vocabulary learning in an EFL context

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the effectiveness of Japanese anime subtitles in enhancing students' vocabulary mastery. The findings revealed a statistically significant improvement between the pretest and posttest scores, indicating that the use of anime subtitles, specifically from *A Silent Voice*, provided a meaningful contribution to students' vocabulary learning. This section discusses the implications of the results in relation to the research objectives, theoretical framework, and previous studies.

The first notable outcome is the consistent improvement across all participants. None of the students experienced a decline in performance, and both lower- and higher-achieving students demonstrated progress. This pattern suggests that anime subtitles are inclusive and beneficial for learners with different levels of proficiency. Such findings align with Krashen's (1985) Input Hypothesis, which emphasizes the importance of comprehensible input for language acquisition. Subtitled anime provides learners with multimodal input—spoken language, written text, and visual context—that allows them to grasp and retain new vocabulary more effectively (Mayer & Fiorella, 2021; Jewitt et al., 2021).

The results of this study are consistent with previous research that has highlighted the effectiveness of subtitled audiovisual materials for vocabulary learning. Karimah and Habibi (2019), for example, found that Indonesian students who learned through anime subtitles achieved greater vocabulary gains than those who relied on traditional methods. Similarly, Firmansyah et al. (2021) reported that multimodal learning through anime clips facilitated stronger retention of new words. Chen and Lin (2022) also demonstrated that subtitles in audiovisual materials significantly enhance both vocabulary recognition and recall. The current study supports these findings by showing that anime subtitles not only improved the average scores but also reduced performance variability among students. Moreover, recent reviews on digital and AI-driven storytelling highlight similar trends, showing that multimedia-supported instruction has significant potential for language development (Chen, 2024; Mohamed et al., 2014).

Other studies have also emphasized the motivational aspect of using anime and subtitled videos in the classroom. Bostanci (2022) argued that the integration of learners' media preferences can enhance engagement and lead to better learning outcomes. Nguyen et al. (2021) likewise pointed out that exposure to authentic audiovisual input motivates learners to pay closer attention to language features, which accelerates vocabulary acquisition. The improvement in students' posttest scores in the present study may partly be attributed to increased motivation, as learners were more interested in engaging with the material presented through

anime compared to conventional classroom texts. This is consistent with studies emphasizing the key role of motivation in learning success (Lai, 2011; Tohidi & Jabbari, 2012).

The use of subtitled anime also reflects the broader theoretical perspective of dual coding and multimedia learning. Paivio's dual coding theory and Mayer's multimedia learning principles emphasize that information processed through both verbal and visual channels is more likely to be remembered. In this study, students encountered vocabulary through spoken dialogue, written subtitles, and accompanying visual cues, which together strengthened the encoding of new words. This explains why the posttest scores were significantly higher and why the weakest students showed noticeable progress after the treatment. Such integration of multimodal resources reflects what Hedge (2003) described as a necessary shift in modern language teaching toward more interactive, authentic, and learner-centered approaches.

Despite these similarities, the present findings also extend previous research by demonstrating the potential of subtitled anime in a rural private school setting, which has been underexplored in prior studies. Many earlier works, such as Karimah and Habibi (2019) and Chen and Lin (2022), focused on urban schools or university students, whereas this study confirms that anime subtitles are equally effective in contexts where learners may have more limited exposure to authentic English input. Thus, the research contributes new evidence by validating the effectiveness of anime subtitles in less-privileged educational environments. This also aligns with methodological recommendations in second language research, which stress the importance of applying diverse designs in varied contexts (Mackey & Gass, 2015).

At the same time, the findings should be interpreted with certain limitations. The use of a one-group pretest–posttest design without a control group restricts the ability to generalize the results. Previous studies, such as Nguyen et al. (2021), employed experimental designs with control groups to provide stronger causal evidence. Furthermore, the present study measured only short-term gains in vocabulary mastery. It remains unclear whether the improvement observed would be sustained in the long term. This limitation echoes concerns raised by Firmansyah et al. (2021), who noted that exposure to subtitled videos may produce immediate benefits but requires follow-up activities to ensure long-term retention. Future studies may also explore additional multimedia tools, as systematic reviews show that combining multiple digital resources can further enhance language acquisition (Abdulrahaman et al., 2020).

In conclusion, the findings of this study confirm the effectiveness of Japanese anime subtitles in improving students' vocabulary mastery and reinforce previous evidence on the benefits of multimodal learning. By demonstrating positive outcomes in a rural private school context, the research contributes to filling a gap

in the literature and offers practical insights for language teachers seeking innovative strategies to enhance vocabulary instruction. The discussion also highlights areas for future research, including the use of control groups, larger samples, and longitudinal designs to examine long-term effects.

Conclusion

The present study examined the effect of Japanese anime subtitles on students' vocabulary mastery through a one-group pretest–posttest design. The findings revealed a significant improvement in students' vocabulary scores after the treatment, indicating that the integration of subtitled anime was effective in enhancing vocabulary mastery. This suggests that authentic and engaging media can serve as a valuable resource for EFL instruction, particularly in contexts where learners have limited exposure to natural English input.

Beyond confirming the effectiveness of subtitled anime, the study also contributes practical implications for teachers seeking innovative strategies to foster vocabulary mastery. The results show that subtitled anime can support learners across different proficiency levels by providing both comprehensible input and increased motivation. Nevertheless, the study acknowledges its limitations, particularly the absence of a control group and the focus on short-term outcomes. Future research is encouraged to employ experimental designs with larger samples and to explore long-term mastery in order to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how subtitled media influences students' vocabulary performance.

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