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A Systematic Literature Review of Netflix for Language Learning

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Abstract

Although many language learners now turn to Netflix outside the classroom, there is still limited evidence on how—and how much—it supports language learning. Following PRISMA guidelines, this systematic review draws on studies retrieved from ERIC, Scopus, and Web of Science. From 420 records, eight peer-reviewed empirical studies met the inclusion criteria and were analysed. Collectively, the results indicate that Netflix can help enhance vocabulary, improve listening skills, increase learner motivation, and provide access to authentic linguistic and cultural input. Netflix's multimodal content also encourages learner autonomy and incidental learning. Conversely, the study reveals persistent challenges, including cognitive overload, minimal pedagogical guidance, and a heavy reliance on self-reported data, with the existing literature being methodologically narrow and context-specific. The article urges for more longitudinal and experimental research, closer attention to subtitle use, and more deliberate integration of Netflix into language teaching practice.

Keywords: digital media, language learning, learner autonomy, multimodal input, Netflix, subtitles, vocabulary acquisition

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Introduction

Subscription-based video streaming services (e.g., Amazon Prime Video, Disney Plus, Hulu, and Netflix) have grown in popularity, changing media consumption patterns (Chan-Olmsted & Luo, 2024). While these video streaming platforms primarily serve as entertainment tools, they have also emerged as promising instruments for language learning (Gouleti, 2023). Access to extensive multilingual content, interactive subtitles, and personalized viewing options make these platforms immersive language learning environments for learners to engage in real-world language use (Tsai et al., 2024). It is well-established that authentic audio-visual input contributes to vocabulary gains, grammatical knowledge, listening comprehension, and pronunciation improvement (Caruana, 2021; Muñoz, 2022; Perez, 2022). However, relevant studies remain disconnected across diverse methodologies and contexts despite the growing interest in digital media's role in language learning and teaching.

Language learning is increasingly occurring outside traditional classroom settings, driven by the widespread use of digital technologies. Informal language learning—learning outside structured educational programs—has gained traction as learners use online resources, including streaming platforms, to acquire new languages (Kusyk et al., 2025). Many learners report engagement in self-directed learning strategies (e.g., binge-watching foreign-language content, using subtitles interactively, and repeatedly viewing specific scenes) for improved comprehension (Hsu, 2023; Lai et al., 2022b). However, the effectiveness and challenges of such approaches require further exploration.

While the use of digital media in language education has gained traction over the past decade, systematic evidence on the role of commercial streaming platforms like Netflix remains limited. Although widely used by learners for informal exposure to target languages (Alm, 2023; Dizon, 2023a), the academic investigation of Netflix as a structured or semi-structured learning tool is still in its early stages. A systematic literature review is therefore necessary to synthesize emerging insights and evaluate the extent to which Netflix has been studied within the domain of language learning.

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While some studies focused on subtitling and vocabulary gains (Dizon & Thanyawatpokin, 2021; Lo, 2024), others examined learner motivation, engagement, and cognitive load (Pannatier & Bétrancourt, 2024; Szarkowska et al., 2024). Three well-established academic databases indexing high-quality peer-reviewed work, ERIC, Scopus, and Web of Science (Baas et al., 2020; Boudah, 2011; Zhu & Liu, 2020), form the basis of this review. The scholarly literature on Netflix's use for language learning stays scattered despite its worldwide presence and growing importance in digital education (Castañeda & Williamson, 2021). This observation emphasizes the uniqueness of the field and the need for a unified knowledge of current results.

Relevant literature revealed only one study that could be considered a review. Naranjo and Fernández-Ramírez (2022) bibliometrically examined 210 Web of Science-indexed articles on Netflix within the context of communication and FRT (Film, radio, and television). As can be observed, this study is beyond the current study's scope. Taken all into consideration, this review aims to address the following questions:

RQ (1): What are the documentary characteristics of the reviewed studies?

RQ (2): What are the methodological characteristics of the reviewed studies?

RQ (3): What affordances of Netflix were cited in the analyzed studies?

RQ (4): What downsides of Netflix were cited in the analyzed studies?

RQ (5): What research gaps exist in the literature, and what future research directions are recommended?

Literature Review

Informal Language Learning

There is compelling evidence that most language learning usually occurs outside the classroom (Lai et al., 2022a; Liu & Ma, 2024; Wei, 2022). This can be understandable since this uninstructed setting helps lower their affective filter (Alm, 2021; Zadorozhnyy & Lee, 2025). Also, such settings conceptually refer to environments where individuals have no learning intents (Dizon, 2021). Put differently, language learning serves an instrumental purpose, motivating individuals through communicative or entertaining activities (e.g., games, social media, or videos). Previous researchers referred to informal learning in different terms, such as extramural English (Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2016), incidental language learning (Rodgers, 2015), informal digital learning of English (IDLE; Lee, 2021), online informal learning of English (OILE; Sockett, 2014), naturalistic CALL (Chik, 2013), and digital language learning (Carrier & Nye, 2017).

Extramural English (EE) concerns the English to which learners are exposed outside the classroom (Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2016). Earlier research indicated the positive impact of EE on vocabulary learning (Busby, 2024; Leona et al., 2021), learner engagement (Tsang & Lam, 2024), L2 proficiency (Sylvén & Sundqvist, 2012), writing production (Kaatari et al., 2023), formation of global mindsets (Avello et al., 2019), willingness to communicate (WTC; Liu et al., 2024), and lower L2 anxiety (Uztosun & Kök, 2024). As a video streaming platform, Netflix aligns perfectly with the EE principles. For instance, learners can choose what (content), when (time), how often (frequency and repetition), and how to watch (with/without subtitles and dual subtitles), concurring with learner autonomy (Zhang & Liu, 2024). Similarly, motivation and engagement levels of language learners are high in Netflix-based language learning due to binge culture, personalization, and entertainment value (Tsai et al., 2024). Additionally, the native-speaker dialogues, colloquial expressions, and cultural references embedded in Netflix content expose learners to authentic language input (Bagni & Sumra, 2022). Equally, repeated linguistic exposure in context, multimodal input (audio, visual, textual), and diverse international content further facilitate incidental vocabulary learning, listening comprehension, and intercultural awareness (Dizon & Thanyawatpokin, 2021; Haris, 2024).

Incidental language learning (ILL) refers to learning that occurs as a by-product of another activity without deliberate effort (Hulstijn, 2003). Unlike intentional learning, incidental learning occurs in meaningful activities, such as listening to music and watching videos in the target language. ILL accords well with Krashen's (1978) input hypothesis and Schmidt's (1990) noticing hypothesis, where comprehensible and meaningful input becomes paramount. Netflix's authentic and context-rich content not only fosters incidental vocabulary learning but also helps learners with sociolinguistic variations (accentual differences), pronunciation, and pragmatics (language in use and context) (Alsuhaim, 2024; Bagni & Sumra, 2022; Özbek, 2024). In a study, Bisson et al.

(2015) showed that verbal and pictorial information support incidental vocabulary learning. However, Bergström et al. (2025) argued that textbooks do not provide structural support for vocabulary acquisition. In another study, Rodgers (2015) reported some evidence for incidental learning in language content courses but urged more intentional integration for maximized learning potential. In addition, Tjandra's study (2021) indicates that multilingual signage benefits English language learners by boosting their language awareness, reinforcing their identity and sense of belonging, and providing opportunities for incidental language learning in their first and second languages.

Informal digital learning of English (IDLE) refers to using digital tools and online platforms to acquire English outside formal instruction (Lee, 2021). It encompasses various activities, ranging from watching videos/movies to social media engagement. As with previous informal learning concepts, IDLE principles (i.e., autonomy, authenticity, multimodality, and personalization) also coincide with Netflix as a language learning resource (Dizon, 2023a). In a study, Lee and Sylvén (2021) discovered increasing communication among Korean and Swedish students while engaging in IDLE activities. In another, Lee (2019) concluded that frequent IDLE activities may not always result in vocabulary gains. However, contradictory findings were reported in another study, reporting the positive impact of IDLE on vocabulary learning (Rezai et al., 2024). A positive correlation between IDLE and foreign language enjoyment was also reported in earlier research (Lee & Lee, 2021). Supporting evidence came from Liu et al.'s study (2024), indicating the positive relationship between IDLE and ideal L2 self and L2 vision. However, challenges include potential overreliance on L1 subtitles, lack of explicit instruction, and the need for learner training (Perez, 2022; Pujadas & Muñoz, 2024). Teachers can integrate Netflix into guided activities to maximize its benefits, fostering reflective and strategic language engagement.

Online informal learning of English (OILE) refers to acquiring English through unstructured, non-institutionalized, and self-directed digital activities (Sockett, 2014). OILE differs from structured education as it happens naturally in online settings, where learners interact with genuine English content via social media, gaming, streaming services, and digital communication. According to the OILE framework, Netflix is a prominent tool for its accessibility and extensive multilingual content (Alm, 2023), engaging learners with authentic English-language media and promoting language use and comprehension through multimodal input (Dizon & Thanyawatpokin, 2021). Features like customizable subtitles and playback controls support learner autonomy and self-regulation (Errabo et al., 2024). Tools like Language Reactor also improve its educational value by offering on-screen bilingual subtitles and integrated dictionaries (Gouleti, 2023). In an earlier study, Jurkovič (2019) found that EFL students used OILE mainly for receptive activities. Lai and Wang's study (2025) indicated that the links between informal digital activities and vocabulary comprehension varied based on whether the vocabulary was high-frequency or low-frequency. Equally, Naghdipour (2022) showed that students use digital technologies to communicate on informal platforms and effectively fulfill classroom writing tasks.

According to Chik (2013), naturalistic CALL refers to learner engagement with a second (L2) or foreign language in digital settings to explore their interests in informal learning contexts rather than with the specific goal of language acquisition. Unlike traditional CALL, which is typically task-based and classroom-integrated, naturalistic CALL promotes incidental learning, autonomy, and immersive engagement through everyday technologies such as mobile apps, video games, and streaming services. Netflix exemplifies a powerful tool within naturalistic CALL by bridging entertainment and language learning, fostering an immersive, autonomous, and context-rich environment for L2 development outside formal instruction (Dizon, 2023b). Relevant prior studies revealed that online multiplayer games (Soyoof et al., 2025), social media (Barrot, 2022), online communities (Sockett & Toffoli, 2012), streaming platforms and video content (Shafirova & Araújo e Sá, 2024), artificial intelligence (AI) chatbots (Yuan, 2024), intelligent personal assistants (Dizon, 2023a), virtual reality (VR; Parmaxi, 2023), and augmented reality (AR; Parmaxi & Demetriou, 2020) contribute positively to language learning.

Digital language learning (DLL) applies to acquiring a language through digital tools and technologies, including mobile apps, online platforms, VR, AI, and social media (Carrier & Nye, 2017). Due to its highly interdisciplinary characteristics, DLL can combine the cognitive, social, emotional, and neural aspects of second language learning with innovative technologies (e.g., AI, VR, and big data analytics) (Li & Lan, 2022). As part of the broader digital learning ecosystem, Netflix offers unique affordances for language acquisition. It provides learners with extensive multimodal input—including visual, auditory, and textual cues—through multilingual subtitles, dual-language audio tracks, and interactive subtitle tools (e.g., Language Reactor) (Alm, 2023; Gouleti, 2023). Netflix's affordances align with principles of input enhancement (Robinson, 2012) and dual coding theory (Wong & Samudra, 2021), facilitating comprehension, vocabulary, and intercultural awareness. In a previous study, Slamet (2024) found that ChatGPT as a DLL assistant offered potential advantages (e.g., improved

language skills and personalized learning experiences) and challenges (e.g., issues with language accuracy and reliance on technology). In another study, Kazu and Kuvvetli (2025) confirmed that digital language learning tools such as Duolingo are effective and can enhance traditional language education.

Overall, the growing body of research shows that language learning mostly takes place outside the classroom, especially with the introduction of various digital tools and platforms. Multiple forms and means of informal language learning demonstrate that digital environments predominantly foster language learning, notably resulting in vocabulary gains, engagement, and proficiency in an L2. The sustained evolution of digital technologies (e.g., AR, VR, and AI) presents opportunities and challenges, highlighting the need for further research to optimize their effectiveness.

Subscription Video Streaming in Language Education

Despite the extensive literature on using video in language education (Jao et al., 2024; Teng, 2025), utilizing subscription video streaming (SVS) services for language learning and teaching is relatively new. SVS platforms are subscription video on demand (SVOD) that allow viewers unlimited access to the content library after subscription payment. Popular SVSS platforms include Amazon Prime Video, Apple TV Plus, Disney+, HBO Max, Hulu, and Netflix. A common characteristic of such services is that they provide authentic and multimodal language exposure through movies, shows, and digital content (Gouleti, 2023). They also foster incidental learning of a foreign language, aid listening comprehension, and promote vocabulary acquisition (Chen & Chen, 2021; Dizon, 2021; Perez, 2022). Supportive features like subtitles, dubbing, and interactive extensions enhance engagement and comprehension (Alm, 2023; Sockett, 2023). However, their effectiveness depends relatively on shadowing, repetition, and selective use of subtitles (Dizon, 2021; Fouz-González & Mora, 2025; Martinsen et al., 2017). Nevertheless, integrating SVS services into language education might personalize learning and bridge the gap between classroom instruction and real-world interaction.

One SVS platform that has recently grown in popularity is Netflix – initially a DVD-by-mail rental service founded in 1997, pioneering the streaming industry in 2007 (Au-Yong-Oliveira et al., 2020). With its vast library of multilingual content, Netflix might be a valuable language-learning platform. Common features like adjustable playback speed, dubbing, interactive transcripts, and L2 subtitles might facilitate incidental vocabulary learning, listening comprehension, and pronunciation and foster cultural exposure (Dizon & Thanyawatpokin, 2021; Gouleti et al., 2020). With 301.63 million paid memberships globally, Netflix is the most subscribed SVOD platform (Manfredi, 2025). Key benefits of Netflix include bimodal input (L2 audio + subtitles), personalized learning options (AI-driven content recommendations), engaging and authentic contexts (variety of language use), and language learning extensions (the language reactor tool) (Haris, 2024).

Previous research indicates potential benefits of multimodal input for language learning (Muñoz, 2022). Similarly, AI-driven recommendations prompt more user engagement, leading potentially to an immersive learning experience (Vallabhaneni et al., 2024). Additionally, authentic language use through videos result in more interaction and promising learning outcomes (Hwang et al., 2025). Equally, tools like Language Reactor foster better comprehension by allowing users to view dual subtitles, replay segments, and save words (Gouleti, 2023; Popova & Miralpeix, 2024).

Given Netflix's potential for language learning and a literature gap, this study intends to explore the existing literature on Netflix in language education using a systematic literature review methodology. Accordingly, it aims to bridge this literature gap by documenting current and illuminating future research on this SVS platform.

Netflix as a Language Learning Tool

With over 300 million global subscribers and content available in more than 30 languages (Stoll, 2025), Netflix has developed into a powerful platform for entertainment and language learning (Alm, 2021; Sulaiman & Boonsuk, 2025). Its role in informal, autonomous learning environments is increasingly recognized, particularly due to its user-friendly features (e.g., multilingual subtitles, audio language options, and adaptive streaming technology), which provide accessible and authentic linguistic input to users worldwide (Haris, 2024). These affordances distinguish it from other traditional language learning tools and even from earlier forms of audiovisual media like DVDs or broadcast television.

A distinguishing feature of Netflix is its support for subtitles in multiple languages, enabling learners to watch documentaries, movies, or shows in the target language and engage with the content and subtitles (Mahzari et al., 2021). Research supports this multimodal input for vocabulary learning, facilitates comprehension, and increases learner motivation (Xing & Zhang, 2025; Zhang & Zou, 2022). Also, Netflix's binge-watching culture and AI-backed personalized content recommendations help prolong engagement (Baranidharan & Kulkarni, 2025), aligning with the principles of extensive viewing (Webb, 2015).

Another feature that contributes to Netflix's educational value is the variety of culture-embedded content. The platform offers authentic media from various countries, which in turn helps foster linguistic and cultural exposure. This coincides with the multiliteracies framework, emphasizing the importance of meaning-making across cultural, linguistic, and semiotic boundaries (Karkar-Esperat, 2025).

Importantly, learners often utilize Netflix as part of informal, self-directed learning ecologies (Murray et al., 2022). Online forums, such as Reddit or language learning YouTube channels, are full of learner-generated tips and discussions about using Netflix to boost specific language skills (Dron & Anderson, 2014). This social layer of engagement demonstrates how Netflix serves as more than a content provider—it also functions as a learning hub embedded in digital peer communities (Flavin & Flavin, 2020).

Despite these affordances, Netflix's educational application remains underexplored in formal classroom contexts. Many Netflix features are leveraged by learners independently (Dizon & Thanyawatpokin, 2021), which poses questions about teacher mediation, content selection, and instructional design. As such, there is increasing scholarly interest in examining how Netflix can be systematically used within blended or flipped classrooms or how it might complement traditional pedagogical approaches.

In brief, Netflix might serve as a valuable means of language learning, especially in informal and semi-formal learning contexts (Godwin-Jones, 2018). Its diverse features, from technical capabilities (e.g., dual subtitling) to rich and diverse cultural content and global accessibility, contribute to its value for language learners and teachers (Gouleti et al., 2020). However, its pedagogical impact and implementation strategies warrant further empirical and theoretical investigation.

Conceptual Framework

Conceptually, this study is based principally on Hallinger and Kovačević's (2019) knowledge base. Their framework comprises four dimensions: size, time, space, and composition. The first dimension (i.e., size) is measured by the size of the volume of publications in a given field. However, this study extends this and includes research productivity (total publications) and impact (citation count), as applied in Barrot's (2022) study. These two metrics are commonly used to assess research performance (Barrot, 2022; Maral, 2024; Pranckutė, 2021). Also, exploring the knowledge base of a given field requires an accumulation of empirical research before applying findings to functional knowledge (Hallinger & Suriyankietkaew, 2018).

The second dimension (i.e., time) pertains to the publication trajectories in a particular period (Hallinger & Kovačević, 2019). The current study considers time as the global growth in publication trends in any country with no temporal limitations. This temporal data can be used to track authorial, geographical, and topical trends across a specific time (Barrot, 2022; Hallinger, 2020).

The third dimension (i.e., space) of knowledge mapping concerns the topic's geographical dissemination in the scientific literature (Hallinger & Kovačević, 2019). Scholarly data about the regional distribution of publications provides valuable insights into academic capacity and knowledge breadth about a specific topic internationally (Barrot, 2022; Castillo & Hallinger, 2018; Manca, 2020).

The last component (i.e., composition) refers to the intellectual structure of the scientific literature (Barrot, 2022; Hallinger & Kovačević, 2019). Intellectual structure alludes to the research traditions within the studied scientific field, their disciplinary makeup, significant research themes, and how they are interconnected (Zupic & Čater, 2015). This review draws on authorial, documentary, and topical impact and distribution concerning Netflix as a language learning tool.

Method

The study employed a systematic literature review (SLR) methodology to map out the research on language education through Netflix. SLR aims to identify all relevant studies that answer a specific question comprehensively and assesses each study's validity (or soundness), taking this into account when reaching conclusions (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006). According to Munn et al. (2018), SLR is conducted to "(i) uncover the international evidence, (ii) confirm current practice/ address any variation/ identify new practices, (iii) identify and inform areas for future research, (iv) identify and investigate conflicting results, and (v) produce statements to guide decision-making" (p. 2). All these purposes lay the foundation of this study's motivation.

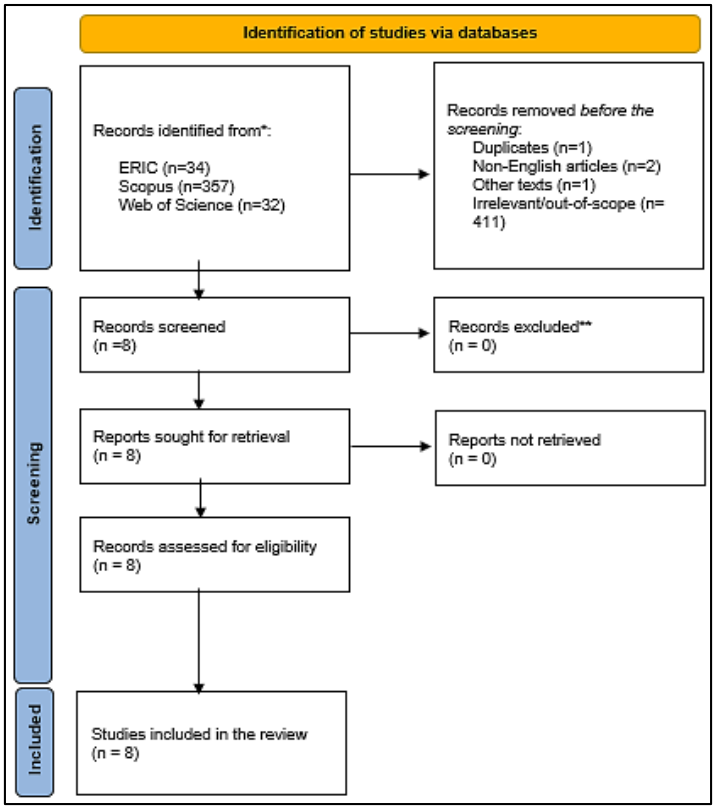
The SLR followed the updated guidelines of the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA 2020) (Page et al., 2021). Academic circles highly respect these guidelines for their comprehensive and transparent approach to conducting systematic reviews (Kolaski et al., 2023), making them an ideal framework for our research. We developed a review protocol to identify data sources, create a search strategy, formulate query strings, and establish inclusion/exclusion criteria.

Databases

The research incorporated various databases to ensure comprehensive disciplinary representation, wide-ranging content, extensive abstract and citation coverage, strict selection standards, and literature pertinent to education. Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) focuses on education-related literature (Boudah, 2011), making it particularly valuable for language education and educational technology research. It compiles various scholarly materials from diverse fields of study, making it viable for gathering even unconventional ones to ensure that a systematic literature review includes all relevant work. Equally, Scopus, with its access to high-quality, peer-reviewed research and advanced citation tracking (Baas et al., 2020), is essential in identifying leading studies and trends in an SLR, keeping you abreast of the latest developments. The Web of Science (WoS) is well-suited for conducting systematic reviews that demand top-notch, peer-reviewed research and for evaluating citations to gauge the impact of research in a particular field (Zhu & Liu, 2020).

Figure 1

The PRISMA Flowchart for the SLR



Search Strategy

A systematic search was conducted across various databases, including ERIC, Scopus, and the Web of Science (WoS) using the following Boolean operators (AND, OR) were applied to refine the search: “Netflix” AND (“language” OR “learning” OR “vocabulary” OR “pronunciation” OR “speaking” OR “writing” OR “grammar” OR “education”). The ERIC search was limited by peer-review only articles. The Scopus search was conducted in article title, abstract, and keywords. The WoS search was performed only in titles. These queries yielded 34 results on ERIC, 357 on Scopus, and 32 on the WoS. The search strings on the three databases are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Search Strings on the Databases

Database	Search string
ERIC	"Netflix" AND ("language" OR "grammar" OR "vocabulary" OR "pronunciation" OR "listening" OR "speaking" OR "writing" OR "education")
Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY (netflix AND language OR learning OR vocabulary OR pronunciation OR speaking OR writing OR grammar OR education) AND (LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE , "ar")) AND (LIMIT-TO (SRCTYPE , "j")) AND (LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE , "English")) AND (LIMIT-TO (PUBSTAGE , "final"))
WoS	Search: "Netflix" AND ("language" OR "learning" OR "vocabulary" OR "pronunciation" OR "speaking" OR "writing" OR "grammar" OR "education") (Title) Date Run: Thu Apr 03 2025 11:01:54 GMT+0300 (GMT+03:00) Results: 32

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Studies were included if they were published as peer-reviewed articles in English on language learning through Netflix. An additional inclusion criterion was indexing in ERIC, Scopus, and WoS. No temporal limitations were imposed. However, studies were excluded if they were not in English, did not focus specifically on Netflix and language learning, were other document types (e.g., conference proceedings, book chapters, and theses), and were inaccessible. Other than ERIC, Scopus, and WoS, all studies indexed in different databases (e.g., Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, ProQuest, etc.) were excluded.

Screening and Selection Process

Two independent reviewers screened the titles and abstracts. Accordingly, 354 articles on Scopus were removed at the initial screening due to being out-of-scope. Twenty-seven papers were excluded from the WoS search for irrelevance and two for being non-English ($n = 2$). Of the 34 results on ERIC, one was removed for being a duplicate, one for being another text type, and 30 for irrelevance. Full-text screening was conducted for studies that met the initial criteria. Discrepancies were resolved through discussion. Overall, the screening and selection process resulted in eight papers for analysis.

Coding Scheme

For the first research question, the researcher used a self-prepared spreadsheet to itemize the documentary characteristics of the analyzed studies. This spreadsheet consists of 11 sections: document type, area of focus, journal titles, journal indexing, publication year, number of authors, authors’ countries, keywords, references, and citations. For the second research question, the researcher utilized a modified version of the paper classification form (PCF) initially developed by Sozbilir et al. (2012) and adapted to English language teaching by Yağız et al. (2016) for documentary and methodological properties. The form is divided into seven sections that offer detailed information regarding identification, participants, methodologies, data collection instruments, sample size, and the approach used for data analysis. For the third and fourth research questions, pre-determined codes (i.e., affordances and challenges of Netflix as a language learning tool) were employed for content/thematic analysis.

For the last research question, the researcher used a comparative table including the following codes: language skills covered, target language/learner demographics, research methodologies used, and learning conditions.

Data Extraction and Analysis

The study employs qualitative content analysis (QCA) to analyze relevant documentary and methodological data, such as document types, focus areas, journal titles, publication years, research designs, and data analysis methods. QCA is an effective method for interpreting qualitative data in a systematic and context-specific manner (Selvi, 2020). It also draws on thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to discover recurring themes and patterns in the analyzed studies with regard to Netflix's affordances and challenges.

Limitations

This review, while intended to be comprehensive and transparent, recognizes some methodological limitations. First, articles written only in English were included in the review for the position of English as an international language (Selvi et al., 2023). However, this could present a language bias (Pieper & Puljak, 2021). Second, although the review included major databases (ERIC, Scopus, and WoS), it excluded others (e.g., Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, and JSTOR). This decision was made to ensure a focus on peer-reviewed and high-impact publications, as the selected databases offer rigorous indexing standards and disciplinary relevance (Fitzgerald et al., 2025; Harzing & Alakangas, 2016; Pranckutė, 2021). In addition, while platforms like Google Scholar offer broader coverage, they often include non-peer-reviewed sources and grey literature, which may compromise consistency in quality (Halevi et al., 2017).

Results and Discussion

The findings are organized into five headings in accordance with the research questions. First, the documentary characteristics of the analyzed studies are presented. Then, their methodological characteristics are listed. The possible advantages and disadvantages of YouGlish are provided next. Finally, literature gaps and future directions are presented.

Documentary Characteristics

Documentary characteristics refer to publication year, journal titles, journal indexing, authors' countries, area of focus, keywords, and citations. These qualities are crucial for revealing the use of reliable sources, alignment of literature with specific research topics, relevance, academic rigor, credibility, currency, period of interest, level of collaboration, geographical diversity, cultural/contextual influence, core themes, well-supported research foundation, and academic impact.

Concerning the publication years of Netflix studies, research on Netflix as a streaming medium for language learning emerged in ERIC-, Scopus-, and WoS-indexed journals in 2020. There was a minor increase in 2021 ($n = 3$), possibly due to the rise in online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, when digital tools like Netflix gained educational attention (Aslan et al., 2022). No studies are listed for 2021, which may result from a publication lag or fewer contributions during that period. However, interest remained steady in 2023 and 2024, suggesting a sustained scholarly attention and area of inquiry. Overall, the data suggests that Netflix is a relatively recent and emerging research area as a language-learning tool. We can expect further studies in this area with continued interest in multimodal and informal learning (Dressman & Sadler, 2020; Lim et al., 2022).

Table 2 presents data on the publication venues and their impact through h-indices and indexed databases of the Netflix research.

Table 2

Information on Journal Title and Indexation

Journal Title	*h-index	Indexation
Profile Issues in Teachers Professional Development	11	ERIC, Scopus, WoS
The EuroCALL Review	*	ERIC
Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sport & Tourism Education	40	WoS

Journal Title	*h-index	Indexation
Computer-Assisted Language Learning Electronic Journal	15	Scopus
Asian ESP Journal	15	Scopus
Arab World English Journal (AWEJ)	15	ERIC & WoS
Computer Assisted Language Learning	75	WoS
Interdisciplinary Description of Complex Systems	*	WoS

* The h-indices were retrieved from SCImago (https://www.scimagojr.com/) and CoLab (https://colab.ws/)

H-index refers to research output based on the total number of publications and the total number of citations to those works (Hirsch, 2005). The publication of Netflix-based language learning studies across high-impact and specialized journals indexed in Scopus, WoS, and ERIC suggests a growing scholarly interest in the topic. The variation in h-index values and disciplinary backgrounds of the journals indicates that this emerging interdisciplinary field is gaining traction in language education, media literacy, and educational technology. However, unindexed or lower-impact journals also show room for greater integration into top-tier educational research outlets.

Regarding authorship, most articles were published by multiple authors (n = 5, 62.5%), three studies (37.5%) were conducted by single authors, indicating no collaboration.

Collaborative research dominates in this field, suggesting that examining Netflix as a language learning tool may benefit from interdisciplinary or team-based approaches (Gouleti et al., 2020). This could reflect the multifaceted nature of the topic, often involving insights from language acquisition, media studies, and educational technology (Tsai et al., 2024).

As for the authors' countries, the analysis reveals that research on Netflix in language education is conducted across a diverse set of 11 countries, suggesting Netflix's pertinence as a language learning tool exceeds regional boundaries (Lotz, 2021) and attracts scholarly attention from Asia, Europe, the Middle East, Oceania, and North Africa. Equally, Saudi Arabia's relatively dominant representation ($n = 2$) may reflect a growing interest in digital learning research within the region, particularly in the EFL context (Al-Mwzaiji & Muhammad, 2023). The global investment in integrating digital streaming platforms into language learning methodologies (Ravshanovna, 2024) supports Netflix's relevance in multilingual and multicultural educational contexts.

Concerning the focus areas in the analyzed studies, the research aims and their areas of focus are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

The Areas of Focus in the Analyzed Articles

Research Aim	Area of Focus/Subcategory
Study 1: to integrate multimodal communication into the EFL classroom to enhance the development of students' multimodal communicative competence, multiliteracies, and 21st-century skills	AoF: Skills & Competency Development SC: Multiliteracies, digital/media literacy, multimodal learning
Study 2: to introduce the concept of intra-formal learning by exploring how language learners can draw on informal viewing experiences, such as watching Netflix, to enrich formal language learning through reflective and extensive engagement	AoF: Learning Context SC: Blended/formal-informal integration
Study 3: to examine the impact of utilizing trade show related videos on Netflix on the learning motivation and multilingual listening ability of MICE learners	AoF: Affective & Receptive Skills SC: Motivation, listening, multilingual learners (specific domain: MICE = Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions)
Study 4: to investigate the comparative effects of L1 subtitles, L2 captions, and dual subtitles on vocabulary acquisition and listening comprehension among EFL learners viewing L2 video content on Netflix.	AoF: Media Tools & Language Acquisition SC: Subtitling effects on vocabulary & listening

Research Aim	Area of Focus/Subcategory
Study 5: to explore the role of Arabic subtitling provided by Netflix in the language acquisition of learners of Arabic as a Second Language (ASL)	AoF: Language-Specific Acquisition SC: Arabic L2 learning, subtitling impact
Study 6: to explore how Netflix will impact Saudi EFL learners' strategic listening skills in the future from the teachers' perspectives	AoF: Teacher Beliefs & Strategic Skills SC: Listening strategies, teacher insights, foresight
Study 7: to investigate the effects of watching an entire season of a French series with the streaming service Netflix in an out-of-classroom context	AoF: Learning Context SC: Informal learning environments
Study 8: to investigate whether and how Netflix programs support the development of second foreign language competence among translation students through the use of video-based media.	AoF: General Language Learning Support SC: Broad second/foreign language acquisition

AoF: Area of focus; SC: Subcategory

The focus on multimodal communicative competence and 21st-century skills (Study 1) coincides with the need to prepare learners for digitally mediated communication (O'Kane & Cathro, 2025). Accordingly, language educators should integrate digital media (e.g., Netflix) to foster visual literacy, media interpretation, and interactive listening beyond traditional approaches. Study 2 and Study 7 explore learning beyond the classroom, acknowledging that students often engage with language outside school structures (Tragant et al., 2022). In this regard, teachers should validate and incorporate informal learning experiences (like Netflix viewing) into curricular design. This supports autonomous learning and enhances engagement (Lai et al., 2024).

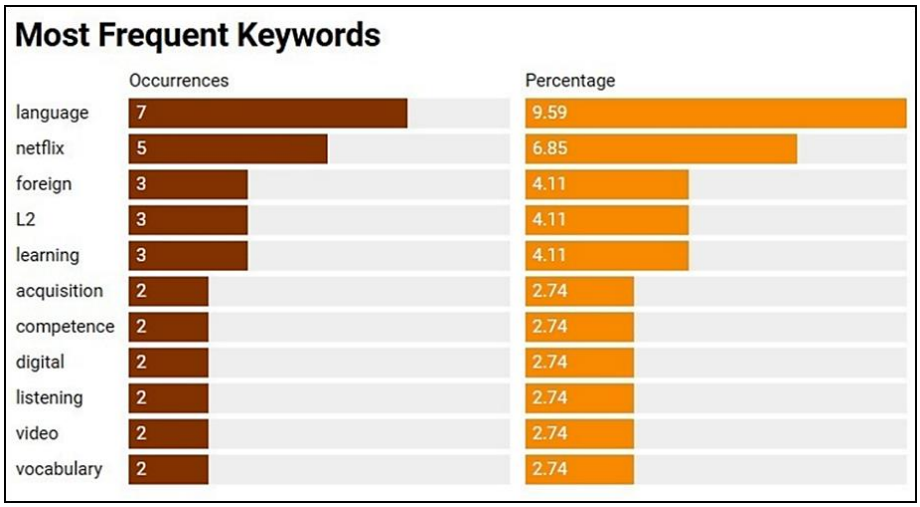
Study 3 highlights motivation and multilingual listening, reminding that that emotional engagement and multilingual exposure are crucial for language education (Dekeyser et al., 2024; Hiver et al., 2024). In this context, Netflix offers authentic and emotionally engaging input, and exposure to multiple accents and registers might boost motivation. Studies 4 and 5 explore how different subtitling types (L1, L2, dual) affect learning outcomes. Educators should strategically guide learners in using subtitles (e.g., starting with dual, then L2-only) to scaffold vocabulary growth and listening comprehension (Dizon & Thanyawatpokin, 2021; Li & Hennebry-Leung, 2024). Also, research into less commonly taught languages (e.g., Arabic) is critical for inclusive pedagogy.

Study 6 examines teachers' foresight on how Netflix might shape listening strategies. Hence, teacher training should include awareness of digital tools' pedagogical potential (Pongsakdi et al., 2021), encouraging teachers to support students in developing strategic listening habits (e.g., rewinding, focusing on prosody, decoding meaning through context). Study 8 reflects a general belief in Netflix's supportive role in second language learning. In this regard, Netflix can function as a supplementary tool across proficiency levels and languages, providing real-world exposure and culturally embedded contexts.

The keyword frequency analysis (Figure 2) revealed 71 words, 51 of which are unique, indicating a wide but thematically cohesive research focus. The most dominant terms are "language," "Netflix," "foreign," "L2," and "learning," whose frequencies range between 3 and 7, suggesting they are central themes in this research domain. Other frequently appearing words include "acquisition," "competence," "foreign," "competence," "digital," "listening," "video," and "vocabulary," reflecting a pedagogical emphasis on language skills (e.g., Alutaybi & Alfares, 2023; Dizon & Thanyawatpokin, 2021; Fievez et al., 2023; Mahzari et al., 2021).

Figure 2

Most Frequent Keywords Used by the Authors in the Abstracts



Additionally, the presence of terms such as "ASL," "Arabic," "German," "EFL," and "Saudi" implies that research spans multiple languages and contexts, indicating Netflix's global applicability in language education (Gouleti et al., 2020; Hilgendorf, 2024). The strong visibility of pedagogical terms (e.g., vocabulary, competence, acquisition) and technological tools (e.g., subtitles, streaming, captions) suggests a convergent research trend that blends second language acquisition theory with digital media innovation. Similarly, including "gamification" and "motivation" highlights a learner-centered approach, where engagement and educational psychology also play a significant role.

Concerning the citational impact, the highest average is found in studies with two authors 28.5 citations per paper), followed by single-author studies (= 25.3) and multi-author (3+) studies (= 17.7). Having two authors may strike an effective balance between collaborative input and focused execution, leading to higher visibility and impact. Contrary to what might be expected, more authors do not necessarily result in more citations (Waltman et al., 2013), although the limited sample size warrants cautious interpretation.

Methodological Characteristics

Methodological characteristics include research design, research method, context, countries, sampling technique, sample size, target population, data collection instrument, and data analysis. These properties are essential to understanding research categorization, methodological rigor, research applicability, geographical differences, representativeness, generalizability, statistical power, reliability, relevance, accurate/valid measurement, and the soundness of evidence.

Regarding the research design, 50% of the studies (4 out of 8) did not specify their methodology, suggesting a lack of formal design or omission in reporting. Among the specified types, quasi-experimental methods are most common (25%), reflecting a tendency toward examining cause-effect relationships, such as subtitle use (e.g., Mahzari et al., 2021) and vocabulary gain (e.g., Fievez et al., 2023). One study (Türkmen, 2020) adopted a case study approach, while another (Alutaybi & Alfares, 2023) used a mixed method for a richer perspective. The variety of research designs (i.e., quasi-experimental, mixed methods, case studies) reflects an emerging but methodologically diverse field still in exploratory stages. However, the lack of methodological transparency in half of the studies signals a need for more rigorous reporting standards in future research (Zogmeister et al., 2024).

The current study also analyzed the research contexts where Netflix-based studies were conducted. Universities were the most common context for conducting the research (3 studies), likely due to easier access to adult L2 learners and research infrastructure. Rubio-López (2024) focused on secondary education, implying Netflix's applicability at earlier levels. Alutaybi and Alfares's study (2023) involved various educational institutions, indicating broader data collection across various settings. Similar to the research design, the context was unspecified in two studies, limiting their interpretability. The dominance of higher education contexts

(university and college) suggests that Netflix as a language tool is primarily being explored in adult or tertiary learning environments.

The studies use diverse data collection tools, with questionnaires being the most popular (e.g., Tsai et al., 2024; Dizon & Thanyawatpokin, 2021). This can reveal a trend for catching learners' subjective experiences, while studies employing vocabulary tests and interviews (e.g., Fievez et al., 2023; Alutaybi & Alfares, 2023) aim to assess both qualitative and quantitative dimensions of that learning. Notably, digital-native tools like tweets (Mahzari et al., 2021) and Netflix-based tasks reflect revolutionary practices. To that extent, the limited use of standardized tests suggests certain future studies could benefit. Integrating stronger assessment frameworks into them could benefit such studies.

Netflix's Affordances in Language Learning

The analysis of the reviewed studies reveals various pedagogical affordances of Netflix that can be categorized into the following themes: (i) vocabulary acquisition and listening comprehension, (ii) multiliteracies and strategic learning, (iii) motivation and engagement, and (iv) cultural and authentic language exposure.

Regarding the first theme, multiple studies found that Netflix significantly enhanced vocabulary retention and listening skills, with dual subtitles promoting both vocabulary gain and comprehension (Dizon & Thanyawatpokin, 2021) and the value of glossed captions and repeated exposure to vocabulary items (Fievez et al., 2023). Mahzari et al. (2021) also reported gains in listening, reading, and vocabulary acquisition through Arabic subtitled content. Previous studies also revealed the benefits of glossed captions in vocabulary and listening gains (Çekiç, 2024; Lee & Choi, 2024; Teng, 2022).

Concerning the second theme, Rubio-López (2024) highlighted that watching Netflix develops 21st-century skills (e.g., critical thinking, creativity, and communication) while supporting verbal communicative competence. This finding coincides with previous studies (Giri & Rana, 2022; Gonen & Kızılay, 2023). Similarly, Alm (2021) found that learners employed strategic viewing (e.g., repeated watching, pausing, and noting vocabulary), demonstrating autonomous, reflective learning behavior and aligning with previous scholarly work (Paradita et al., 2025; Vanderplank & Teng, 2024).

About the third theme, several studies (e.g., Tsai et al., 2024) highlight heightened learner motivation and engagement through Netflix. Correspondingly, Türkmen (2020) noted students' positive attitudes and viewing Netflix as educational and entertaining. This aligns with earlier motivational studies on audiovisual input (Pattemore & Muñoz, 2024; Perez, 2022).

With respect to the last theme, Netflix provides access to authentic language and diverse cultural contexts. This can help learners understand pragmatics, idioms, and dialects (Mahzari et al., 2021). Equally, this real-world exposure supports experiential learning principles (Lin et al., 2023) and offers rich sociolinguistic input (Lewis III & Datzman, 2020).

The pedagogical affordances of Netflix for language education are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4

A Summary of the Key Findings for Netflix's Affordances in Language Learning

Study	Affordance Summary
Rubio-López (2024)	Enhances multiliteracies and 21st-century skills (communication, critical thinking, creativity); promotes verbal communicative competence.
Alm (2021)	Supports strategic learning and frequent language exposure through learner-driven viewing habits; promotes reflective viewing and extensive listening.
Tsai et al. (2024)	Boosts motivation, listening comprehension, accent perception, and strategy use; aligns with constructivist and experiential learning theories.
Dizon & Thanyawatpokin (2021)	Dual subtitles improve vocabulary and listening comprehension; offers an informal yet structured learning context.
Mahzari et al. (2021)	Arabic subtitling improves listening, reading, and vocabulary; introduces vernacular dialects, enhancing authenticity.

Study	Affordance Summary
Alutaybi & Alfares (2023)	Netflix supports strategic listening (planning, inferencing, evaluating); helps connect prior knowledge to new contexts.
Fievez et al. (2023)	Glossed captions and frequency of word exposure foster incidental vocabulary learning; vocabulary size and word-related factors mediate learning.
Türkmen (2020)	Promotes pronunciation, listening, and vocabulary development; seen as a motivational and cultural tool.

Netflix's Challenges in Language Learning

Despite Netflix's many benefits, the research also highlights several challenges and limitations, including (i) lack of structured guidance, (ii) subtitles and split attention, (iii) perception-based evidence, and (iv) teacher preparedness and systemic barriers.

Concerning the first theme, Alm (2021) noted that learners' focus on entertainment over intentional learning might potentially undermine pedagogical outcomes (Krüger, 2023). Similarly, Tsai et al. (2024) acknowledged the method's reliance on learner autonomy, which may not be evenly distributed across all students, as supported in earlier work (Panmei & Waluyo, 2022).

As for the second theme, despite the benefits of dual subtitles (Lo, 2024), cognitive overload may occur as excessive linguistic inputs might split attention and reduce processing efficiency (Dizon & Thanyawatpokin, 2021). Equally, the lack of significant difference between caption types (Fievez et al., 2023) suggests the role other factors (e.g., vocabulary size or viewing habits) play in the tool's effectiveness. This finding aligns with previous work (Pujadas & Muñoz, 2024).

Regarding the third theme, self-reported data in Alutaybi and Alfares's study (2023) limits generalizability (Darwin et al., 2024). Likewise, Türkmen's (2020) emphasis on the misalignment between positive learner perceptions and measurable outcomes points to a disconnect between belief and actual learning (Yang & Hong, 2022).

In terms of the last theme, the lack of teacher training in using multimodal tools is a significant obstacle, with Rubio-López (2024) and Mahzari et al. (2021) emphasizing the need for professional development in digital literacies. Technology integration remains limited in many traditional settings, especially in Arabic-speaking regions (Elmahdi et al., 2025).

The pedagogical challenges of Netflix for language education are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5

A Summary of the Key Findings for Netflix's Challenges in Language Learning

Study	Challenge Summary
Rubio-López (2024)	Calls for teacher training in multimodality and digital literacies.
Alm (2021)	Viewers may prioritize entertainment over learning; informal context may limit strategic engagement.
Tsai et al. (2024)	No direct challenge noted, but relies on learner autonomy and motivation, which may vary.
Dizon & Thanyawatpokin (2021)	Focus on L1 subtitles may limit L2 exposure; dual subtitle effectiveness unclear due to divided attention.
Mahzari et al. (2021)	Teaching in Arabic contexts still rooted in traditional environments; limited tech integration.
Alutaybi & Alfares (2023)	Findings are based on perceptions, not actual learning outcomes.
Fievez et al. (2023)	No significant difference between caption/subtitle groups; frequency distribution affects learning efficacy.
Türkmen (2020)	High belief in benefit doesn't always translate into measurable outcomes; more empirical data needed.

Netflix's value lies in how it is used, not just that it is used. Teachers should provide guided viewing strategies (e.g., vocabulary tasks, comprehension questions, or reflection logs) to turn passive watching into active learning (Vanderplank, 2016; Tsai et al., 2024). Since the platform depends on learners' self-regulation, educators must help students develop compelling viewing strategies (e.g., intelligently using captions, pausing to note phrases, or replaying difficult scenes) (Alm, 2021). Institutions should invest in training programs to help teachers design lessons using Netflix and similar tools. These programs could involve technical skills and pedagogical strategies to incorporate multimodal content (Rubio-López, 2024). More experimental and longitudinal studies are needed to move beyond self-perceptions and explore the causal effects of Netflix on L2 acquisition. Researchers should also explore how learner traits (e.g., motivation, proficiency level) affect the tool's efficacy (Alutaybi & Alfares, 2023; Türkmen, 2020).

Literature Gaps and Future Directions

Several studies (e.g., Alutaybi & Alfares, 2023; Türkmen, 2020) rely primarily on self-reported perceptions rather than empirical data or controlled experiments. While learner attitudes are necessary, studies that measure actual learning gains in vocabulary, listening, pronunciation, and overall proficiency are needed. Prospective researchers should, therefore, design longitudinal studies with pretest-posttest experiments to assess retention and long-term language development, which would provide more substantial evidence of causality and learning depth.

While several studies explored subtitles (e.g., Dizon & Thanyawatpokin, 2021; Fievez et al., 2023), their designs often lack comparative depth. For instance, Fievez et al. (2023) found no significant differences between subtitle groups, suggesting other variables (like vocabulary size or prior knowledge) might be at play. Accordingly, future research should examine how different subtitle types (L1, L2, dual, glossed) affect learners with varying proficiency levels and whether adaptive or personalized subtitle systems offer better outcomes.

Additionally, studies like Rubio-López (2024) and Mahzari et al. (2021) note that teacher preparedness and integration into formal instruction are often overlooked. Most research focuses on independent or informal learning through Netflix. In this sense, future research could examine teacher-mediated Netflix use, including case studies on lesson design, assessment techniques, and student-teacher interaction around audiovisual content. Professional development programs for instructors should also be evaluated.

Furthermore, most existing studies were conducted in specific educational or national contexts (e.g., Saudi Arabia, Taiwan, Japan). The transferability of findings to other contexts or learner populations remains underexplored. Consequently, comparative studies across different countries, age groups, and language pairs (e.g., learning English vs. learning Japanese through English subtitles) can illuminate contextual influences on learning outcomes.

Moreover, many studies emphasize outcomes (vocabulary, motivation) but neglect how cognitive processes like working memory, attention span, or learning strategies mediate learning with Netflix. For that reason, future studies should adopt neurocognitive or psycholinguistic frameworks to analyze how learners interact with subtitles, narrative structures, and character dialogue. Tools like eye-tracking, reaction time tasks, or brain-based measures could deepen this understanding.

The summary of gaps and future research agenda are presented in Table 6.

Table 6

Literature Gaps and Directions in Future Research on Netflix

Research Gap	Suggested Future Direction
Lack of empirical data	Longitudinal, experimental studies
Subtitles not well controlled	Adaptive, comparative subtitle research
Teacher role underexplored	Studies on guided classroom use
Limited contexts	Cross-cultural, multilingual studies
Cognitive/affective factors	Eye-tracking, attention studies

Conclusion

This systematic review of eight studies explored Netflix's role as a language learning tool and revealed both pedagogical affordances and challenges in its application to language education. One consistently highlighted finding in the analyzed studies was the platform's potential to foster vocabulary, listening, motivation, and cultural literacy through authentic and engaging content. It was also found that Netflix could enhance formal and informal language learning when supported by the strategic use of subtitles, autonomous learning practices, and digital engagement.

Nonetheless, the current literature review also reveals notable limitations. The heavy reliance on self-reported data, lack of experimental data, and disregard for teacher mediation and instructional design are what the analyzed studies have. More research is needed to explore the potential role of cognitive factors (e.g., attention and processing load) and learner traits (e.g., proficiency level and motivation) in shaping outcomes.

Considering these findings, future work should proceed toward longitudinal and cross-context studies, focusing on direct measurement of learning outcomes, documentative subtitle strategies, and embedding Netflix into a pedagogy of formal practice. Similarly, teachers need professional development on multimodal and digital literacies to fully realize the educational power of streaming media.

Although Netflix provides rich possibilities to revamp language education, it is only effective with pragmatic research-embedded integration into curricula at scale by teacher trainers. As digital media evolves language use and acquisition, bridging entertainment to education continues to be challenging and necessary.

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Netflix'in Dil Öğrenimi İçin Kullanımına Dair Sistematik Bir Literatür İncelemesi

Öz

Birçok dil öğrenicisi artık sınıf dışında Netflix'e yönelse de, Netflix'in dil öğrenimini nasıl ve ne kadar desteklediğine dair kanıtlar hala sınırlıdır. PRISMA yönergesini takip eden bu sistematik inceleme, ERIC, Scopus ve Web of Science'tan elde edilen çalışmaları temel almaktadır. 420 kayıttan, dahil etme kriterlerini karşılayan sekiz hakemli ampirik çalışma analiz edilmiştir. Sonuçlar, Netflix'in kelime dağarcığını geliştirmeye, dinleme becerilerini iyileştirmeye, öğrenci motivasyonunu artırmaya ve otantik dilsel ve kültürel girdiye erişim sağlamaya yardımcı olabileceğini göstermektedir. Netflix'in çok modlu içeriği ayrıca öğrenci özerkliğini ve tesadüfî öğrenmeyi teşvik etmektedir. Öte yandan, çalışma, bilişsel aşırı yüklenme, minimal pedagojik rehberlik ve öz bildirim verilerine aşırı bağımlılık gibi kalıcı zorlukları ortaya koymaktadır; mevcut literatür metodolojik olarak dar ve bağlama özgüdür. Makale, daha fazla boylamsal ve deneysel araştırmayı, altyazı kullanımına daha yakından dikkat edilmesini ve Netflix'in dil öğretimi uygulamasına daha bilinçli bir şekilde entegre edilmesini önermektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: dijital medya, dil öğrenimi, öğrenci özerkliği, çok modlu girdi, Netflix, altyazılar, kelime dağarcığı edinimi