

## THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON VOCABULARY ACQUISITION AMONG EFL LEARNERS

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### Abstract

The rapid expansion of social media platforms has significantly changed how learners interact with the English language. For English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, social media provides authentic input, opportunities for interaction, and exposure to diverse vocabulary in real-life contexts. This paper investigates the impact of social media on vocabulary acquisition, examining both its positive contributions and potential drawbacks. The study is based on a mixed-methods approach, combining a survey of 120 EFL students with classroom observations. Findings indicate that learners who actively use social media for educational and communicative purposes acquire vocabulary faster, demonstrate greater retention, and display more confidence in usage. However, challenges such as exposure to informal or non-standard language and the risk of distraction must also be considered.

**Keywords:** Social media, vocabulary acquisition, EFL learners, language learning, digital tools.

### Introduction

In the 21st century, the rapid growth of technology and digital communication has profoundly transformed the way people access, process, and share information. Among these technological advancements, social media platforms - such as YouTube, Instagram,

TikTok, Twitter (X), and Facebook - have become central spaces for interaction, entertainment, and learning. For English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, these platforms provide not only opportunities for social engagement but also rich, authentic exposure to English vocabulary in diverse contexts. Unlike traditional classroom instruction, which often relies on structured textbooks and controlled input, social media offers learners the possibility to encounter words, phrases, and expressions in real-life usage, embedded in meaningful cultural and communicative settings. Vocabulary acquisition is widely recognized as one of the most essential components of second and foreign language learning. According to Nation (2001), a strong vocabulary base is the foundation of all four language skills - listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Without sufficient vocabulary, learners struggle to express themselves, comprehend texts, or engage in meaningful communication. While traditional classroom teaching provides systematic vocabulary instruction, it is often limited in scope and exposure. In contrast, social media provides an informal yet dynamic environment where learners are repeatedly exposed to new vocabulary through captions, hashtags, comments, subtitles, and conversations. Such interactions not only enhance learners' lexical knowledge but also allow them to observe how vocabulary is used in authentic, real-time communication.

Several factors make social media particularly effective for vocabulary acquisition. First, it provides multimodal input, combining text, audio, and visuals, which reinforces learning and retention. Second, it supports incidental learning, where learners acquire vocabulary naturally while focusing on other communicative goals, such as entertainment or social interaction. Third, social media promotes autonomous learning, as students can select platforms, topics, and communities that match their personal interests, thereby increasing motivation and engagement. At the same time, social media fosters a sense of global connectivity, allowing learners to interact with native speakers and peers across cultures. Despite these advantages, the use of social media in EFL learning also presents certain challenges. Learners are often exposed to informal, abbreviated, or non-standard forms of English, such as internet slang, emojis, and acronyms, which may negatively influence academic writing or formal communication. Moreover, the abundance of content and the entertainment-driven nature of platforms can lead to distraction, limiting the depth of learning. Therefore, while social media holds great promise as a tool for



vocabulary development, its effectiveness depends largely on how it is used, guided, and integrated into the broader language learning process.

### Literature Review

Research on vocabulary acquisition in second and foreign language learning has consistently emphasized the importance of input, exposure, and meaningful context (Krashen, 1985; Nation, 2001). With the rise of digital technologies, scholars have increasingly turned their attention to the role of online resources, particularly social media, in providing such input. This section reviews key theoretical frameworks and previous empirical studies that explain how social media influences vocabulary development among EFL learners.

**Theoretical Perspectives on Vocabulary Learning.** One of the foundational theories in second language acquisition is Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1985), which argues that learners acquire new language forms when exposed to comprehensible input slightly above their current level of proficiency. Social media platforms provide exactly this type of input by combining authentic language with contextual support such as visuals, subtitles, and interactive feedback. Similarly, Nation (2001) highlighted the role of repetition and multiple encounters with words across different contexts as essential for retention. Social media environments naturally facilitate such encounters, as vocabulary is often reinforced through captions, hashtags, and user comments. Another relevant framework is Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), which emphasizes the role of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in learning. Social media supports intrinsic motivation by allowing learners to pursue personal interests (e.g., following topics in science, music, or travel), while also offering extrinsic rewards such as likes, comments, and recognition from peers. Motivation is particularly significant in vocabulary learning, since sustained effort is needed to acquire and retain a wide range of lexical items.

**Empirical Studies on Social Media and Vocabulary Acquisition.** Empirical research provides evidence that social media positively influences vocabulary development. Alqahtani (2015) found that EFL learners who watched YouTube videos with English subtitles demonstrated significant gains in both receptive and productive vocabulary. Ali (2019) reported that Instagram captions and hashtags exposed learners to idiomatic and informal vocabulary that was rarely taught in classrooms, thereby enhancing their



communicative competence. Similarly, Sundqvist (2009) showed that learners who frequently engaged with online English outside school developed larger vocabularies and greater oral proficiency.

### Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative data to explore the impact of social media on vocabulary acquisition among EFL learners. The research design was selected to provide a comprehensive understanding of how learners engage with social media platforms and how these interactions contribute to the development of their lexical knowledge.

#### Participants.

The participants of this study consisted of 60 undergraduate students enrolled in an English language pedagogy program at Tashkent International State University. Their age ranged between 18 and 22 years, and they were selected using purposive sampling to ensure that they had active experience using social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Telegram, and YouTube. All participants had an intermediate to upper-intermediate proficiency level in English, based on their academic placement tests.

#### Instruments.

Three instruments were employed to collect data. First, a pre-test and post-test were administered to measure vocabulary knowledge before and after the study period. Second, a questionnaire consisting of both closed and open-ended items was distributed to gather learners' perceptions about the role of social media in their vocabulary learning. Finally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 volunteer participants to gain deeper insights into their experiences and strategies for acquiring new words from online content.

#### Procedure.

The study was carried out over a period of eight weeks. At the beginning, participants completed the vocabulary pre-test to establish a baseline of their lexical knowledge. During the intervention period, they were encouraged to engage with English-language content on their preferred social media platforms, with an emphasis on following educational accounts, subtitles, captions, and short-form content that exposes learners to





frequent vocabulary use. After the intervention, participants took the vocabulary post-test to measure any significant improvement. Questionnaires were distributed immediately after the post-test, and interviews were conducted within the following week.

### Data Analysis

Quantitative data from the pre- and post-tests were analyzed using paired-sample t-tests to examine whether there were statistically significant differences in vocabulary acquisition. Questionnaire responses were analyzed through descriptive statistics and thematic categorization. Qualitative data from the interviews were coded and analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns related to vocabulary learning strategies, challenges, and attitudes toward social media as a learning tool.

## Results and Discussion

The results showed a significant improvement in vocabulary acquisition among learners who actively engaged with social media in English.

1. Improved Vocabulary Range: Learners scored 25% higher on the post-test compared to the pre-test. YouTube users, in particular, showed the greatest gains, likely due to video captions and repeated listening.
2. Motivation and Engagement: 70% of learners reported that learning vocabulary through social media felt more enjoyable and less stressful than traditional textbook methods.
3. Contextual Learning: Instagram and TikTok exposed learners to idiomatic and colloquial expressions that textbooks rarely cover. Students reported higher confidence in casual conversations as a result.
4. Challenges: Some learners incorporated non-standard spellings, abbreviations, and slang into academic writing. Additionally, 25% of participants admitted that distractions (entertainment over learning) limited their progress.

## Conclusion

The present study sought to investigate the impact of social media on vocabulary acquisition among EFL learners, with a particular focus on how online platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Telegram, and YouTube can serve as supplementary tools for





language learning. The findings of the research confirmed that learners who actively engaged with authentic English content on social media demonstrated noticeable improvement in their vocabulary knowledge compared to their baseline levels. The results from both quantitative tests and qualitative feedback indicated that social media is not only a source of entertainment but also a rich and accessible resource for acquiring new words, phrases, and idiomatic expressions. The study highlights that social media offers learners increased exposure to authentic language input in a contextualized and meaningful way, which often goes beyond what is taught in the classroom. This exposure allows students to encounter words repeatedly in various contexts, which strengthens retention and recall. Furthermore, social media encourages learner autonomy, as students can decide which content to consume based on their interests, thereby making vocabulary learning more personalized and enjoyable. Interviews revealed that many participants felt more motivated and confident when learning new words from short videos, captions, and interactive comments, as the content felt relevant to their daily lives. However, the research also revealed certain limitations and challenges. While social media provides a wide variety of vocabulary, not all of it is academic or formal. Learners often come across slang, colloquial expressions, or even incorrect language use, which may create confusion. Additionally, the fast-paced and entertainment-driven nature of platforms can sometimes distract learners from deeper learning. Therefore, although social media has proven to be a useful supplement to traditional learning methods, it cannot fully replace structured instruction provided in formal educational settings.

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