



Students' Perception of using Instagram to Vocabulary Mastery in University Muhammadiyah Kalimantan Timur

Danung Cipta Wardana¹, Dzul Rachman², Ibrahim³

Muhammadiyah Kalimantan Timur University, Indonesia

2111102421030@umkt.ac.id, dr650@umkt.ac.id², ibr195@umkt.ac.id³

Correspondence author Email: 2111102421030@umkt.ac.id

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Abstract

The integration of social media into education in the contemporary digital era has created novel avenues for engaging students in language acquisition. This research delivers to look at the usage of Instagram as a supplement to promote vocabulary mastery among students at a University Muhammadiyah Kalimantan Timur. Although vocabulary is important in language competency, traditional techniques may fail to engage kids. Instagram, which is frequently used by teenagers for visual communication, gives an opportunity for contextual and interactive vocabulary development. This qualitative descriptive study will involve watching classroom activities and conducting semi-structured interviews to investigate students' involvement, reactions, and vocabulary growth using Instagram-based tasks. The study intends to evaluate the efficacy of Instagram in enhancing vocabulary acquisition, investigate its implementation in the classroom, and comprehend students' perspectives of its utility as an educational resource.

Keywords: Digital Learning Tools; English Language Learning; Instagram; Social Media in Education; Vocabulary Mastery

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1. Introduction

Mastering vocabulary is a key component of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning. Without adequate vocabulary knowledge, students struggle to comprehend texts, express ideas, and engage in meaningful communication (Arbain & Nur, 2017; Wahyudin et al., 2021). However, in many Indonesian classrooms including those at Universitas Muhammadiyah Kalimantan Timur (UMKT) vocabulary is often taught using traditional methods such as memorization, textbook exercises, or isolated word lists. Based on preliminary observations and informal interviews with students and lecturers at UMKT, these



methods frequently fail to engage learners and do not reflect their real-life communication habits or digital experiences.

At the same time, students at UMKT are avid users of Instagram for entertainment and social interaction. Yet, the educational potential of Instagram particularly for learning English vocabulary remains largely untapped in this context. This observation prompts a crucial question: can Instagram, a platform already familiar to students, be transformed into an effective educational tool?

Instagram's visual and interactive features, such as Reels, captions, and Stories, present vocabulary in contextualized, real-world scenarios. According to the Multimedia Learning Theory (Kalyuga, 2021), combining images and text supports better comprehension and memory retention. Beyond this, the study adopts the Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) framework, which emphasizes learning through mobile technology, anytime and anywhere (Gonulal, 2019). MALL highlights personalized, flexible, and informal learning—principles that align with how students naturally use Instagram.

Previous studies highlight the role of Instagram in educational contexts, particularly in language learning. For example, (Al-Ali, 2014) explored how Instagram's visual nature enhances engagement and comprehension. (Agustin et al., 2024; Márquez et al., 2023) discuss Instagram's cultural and communicative functions, yet these works do not critically evaluate its role in structured vocabulary learning in formal education settings.

Other platforms like TikTok and YouTube have also been explored. (Fauziah et al., 2023) found that students learned vocabulary more effectively through short-form video content and trending language, while (Jiang & Zhao, 2025) showed that YouTube could improve learners' motivation and long-term vocabulary retention. However, unlike Instagram, TikTok and YouTube often lack the same two-way interaction in comment sections or DMs, which are more readily used by learners to practice language socially on



Instagram.

The current study extends this conversation by focusing specifically on Instagram within a local Indonesian university context, applying not only multimedia learning theory, but also MALL, social learning theory, and connectivism to more fully capture how digital, networked tools affect vocabulary acquisition.

Despite the theoretical potential, little empirical research has been done in the Indonesian university context to validate Instagram's effectiveness for vocabulary development. Therefore, this study focuses on the local context of UMKT to explore this issue.

2. Method

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research design aimed at exploring how Instagram can support vocabulary development and examining students' perceptions of using the platform in an academic context. Rather than using numerical data, this approach focuses on rich, narrative-based information to capture participants' experiences, engagement levels, and learning outcomes.

2.1. Population and Sample

The research was conducted at Universitas Muhammadiyah Kalimantan Timur (UMKT). The target population consisted of undergraduate students enrolled in an English Education program. One intact class was selected using purposive sampling. The criteria for selection included: (1) students' active use of Instagram, (2) accessibility for observation and interview, and (3) willingness to participate. A total of 10 students participated in the study, which is considered adequate for qualitative inquiry that seeks depth rather than generalizability. Although the sample is not statistically representative, it provides valuable insights into the digital learning habits of EFL learners in a local university context.



2.2 Instrument

Semi-Structured Interview Guide: The interview protocol consisted of open-ended questions grouped into three thematic areas: (1) students' experiences using Instagram for vocabulary learning, (2) perceived effectiveness compared to traditional methods, and (3) challenges and suggestions. Example interview questions included:

- a. "Does Instagram help you remember new English vocabulary? Can you explain how?"
- b. "Can you share your experience of learning English vocabulary through Instagram? What did you do and what your results?"
- c. In your opinion, is learning vocabulary through Instagram more motivating than traditional classroom methods? Why?"
- d. Do you find learning through Instagram more enjoyable than using books or traditional methods? Why do you think so?"

The flexibility of semi-structured interviews allowed for follow-up questions and deeper exploration of student responses.

2.3 Data Collection Techniques

10 participants were invited for in-depth interviews. Participants were selected to reflect a diversity of Instagram usage habits (frequent vs. occasional users) and language proficiency levels.

2.4 Data Analysis Techniques

Thematic analysis followed the (Dull & Reinhardt, 2014) framework:

- a. Data Reduction: Raw transcripts and observation notes were reviewed and coded to extract relevant information related to vocabulary learning through Instagram.
- b. Data Display: Codes were grouped into categories and themes using visual matrices to identify patterns such as learner engagement, self-directed learning strategies, and



motivational factors.

- c. Conclusion Drawing and Verification: Final interpretations were drawn by cross-referencing themes across data sources and conducting member checks with participants to verify accuracy.

This multi-step process ensured a rigorous, transparent, and credible analysis of students' experiences and perceptions.

3. Findings and Discussion

| QUESTION | THEME | STATEMENT |
|---|---|--|
| Using Instagram helps to remember and retain new vocabulary | Using Instagram as a Tool for Learning and Remembering English Vocabulary | <p>“I often come across English learning content while watching Instagram Reels. Through these short videos, I’m introduced to new vocabulary that I haven’t seen before. It’s an easy and engaging way to expand my word knowledge” (R4)</p> <p>“Instagram sometimes helps me remember English vocabulary, particularly when the content is educational. For instance, grammar-focused Reels or videos with definitions really stick in my memory” (R5)</p> <p>“When I scroll through Instagram, I frequently encounter English words in captions or videos. Seeing these words repeatedly helps me retain them naturally” (R2)</p> |



The statements provided align closely with the theme "Using Instagram as a Tool for Learning and Remembering English Vocabulary." Statement R4 highlights how Instagram Reels serve as an effective platform for discovering new vocabulary. The user mentions that English learning content often appears on Reels, allowing them to encounter words they have never seen or heard before. This indicates that Instagram can function as a dynamic and engaging tool for informal vocabulary acquisition. Statement R5 emphasizes the role of content quality in helping users retain vocabulary. Specifically, the user notes that educational Reels, particularly those focused on grammar, are quite helpful for remembering vocabulary, showing that targeted learning content enhances retention. Lastly, statement R2 illustrates how frequent and passive exposure to English while scrolling through Instagram helps users remember new vocabulary. This suggests that repetition and casual interaction with English content on Instagram contribute to vocabulary retention. Together, these statements demonstrate that Instagram supports both the learning and remembering of English vocabulary through engaging, repeated, and educational content.

| QUESTION | THEME | STATEMENT |
|---|---|---|
| Experience learning English vocabulary through Instagram. | Strategies for Learning English Vocabulary through Instagram and Online Resources | “When I see a new English word, I try to understand it in context and then search for more examples. I follow Instagram accounts that consistently post educational content to make this process easier.” (R4) “I usually watch educational videos about English, and afterward, I write down the vocabulary I didn’t know before. I also keep a notebook to review these notes regularly.” (R5) “Instagram Reels are my favorite. I follow several English-learning accounts that post engaging and informative content. I often |



pause the video, write the new words, and try using them in my daily conversations.” (R7)

The statements highlight various effective strategies used by learners to improve their English vocabulary through Instagram and online resources. In statement R4, the user explains their approach of reading and understanding new words, followed by actively seeking out Instagram accounts that post educational and other informative content. This shows a deliberate strategy of learning through consistent exposure to quality content. Statement R5 adds another layer, where the user mentions following dedicated English learning accounts and reinforcing what they learn by taking notes. This indicates a thoughtful and structured approach to vocabulary acquisition, combining visual learning with written practice. Similarly, in statement R7, the user emphasizes the use of Instagram Reels as a primary source of English content, showing how short, engaging videos serve as an effective and accessible learning tool. Collectively, these strategies reflect how learners combine visual content, active note-taking, and selective account-following to make the most of Instagram and online platforms for vocabulary learning.

| QUESTION | THEME | STATEMENT |
|---|--|--|
| Is learning through Instagram more enjoyable than learning in the classroom | Motivation and Engagement in Learning English Vocabulary: Instagram vs. Classroom | “Studying vocabulary on Instagram feels more dynamic. Compared to the classroom, where we often use textbooks, the videos and images on Instagram keep my attention better and make the learning process more fun.” (R2) “I honestly prefer using Instagram for learning English. The content is entertaining but still educational. It doesn’t feel like a burden—it’s something I enjoy doing in |



my free time.” (R6)
“Instagram makes learning English feel enjoyable rather than a chore. The informal style, combined with useful content, keeps me motivated to keep learning.” (R8)

The statements reveal a strong preference for learning English vocabulary through Instagram over traditional classroom settings, primarily due to higher levels of motivation and engagement. In statement R2, the user explains that Instagram content is more interesting and less boring than what is typically found in the classroom, which makes the learning process more engaging. This suggests that the dynamic and entertaining nature of Instagram plays a key role in maintaining learners' interest. Statement R6 reinforces this idea by clearly stating that learning on Instagram is more enjoyable, highlighting the platform's ability to make vocabulary learning feel fun and informal. Similarly, statement R8 reflects a personal preference for Instagram-based learning due to its non-boring and appealing content. Together, these statements emphasize that Instagram provides a more stimulating and enjoyable environment for learning vocabulary compared to the more rigid and formal structure of classroom learning.

| QUESTION | THEME | STATEMENT |
|--|--|---|
| Is learning through Instagram more helpful than using books? | The Impact of Visual and Interactive Content on Learning English Vocabulary: Instagram vs. Traditional Books | “Learning from Instagram is more exciting than reading books because the posts come with pictures, short videos, and even pronunciation guides. Books are static, while Instagram feels alive and current.” (R1) “When I use Instagram, I can scroll through various posts that show vocabulary words with images and sometimes translations. This |



makes the learning faster and easier to remember.” (R3) “The content on Instagram is designed to grab your attention—bright visuals, quick lessons, and clear examples. Books can’t always match that level of engagement.” (R7)

The statements clearly illustrate how visual and interactive content on Instagram enhances the vocabulary learning experience compared to traditional books. In statement R1, the user emphasizes that learning on Instagram is more fun because it includes visuals and videos, which makes the content more dynamic and engaging than plain text in books. Statement R3 further supports this by explaining that the ability to scroll through posts, view new words, see related images, and access translations all contribute to a more enjoyable and effective learning experience. Meanwhile, statement R7 reinforces the idea that Instagram content is intentionally designed to be engaging, helping learners stay interested and motivated. Together, these statements highlight how the visual and interactive features of Instagram not only capture learners’ attention but also support better understanding and retention of English vocabulary compared to traditional book-based learning.

| QUESTION | THEME | STATEMENT |
|---|--|--|
| Suggestions for learning vocabulary more effectively using Instagram. | Personalized and Self-Directed English Vocabulary Learning through Instagram | In my opinion, an effective way to learn on Instagram is to find words, write them down, translate their meanings, and repeat them. (R4) Practicing and chatting with other Instagram users helps in learning vocabulary more effectively. (R7) on Instagram requires self-awareness, setting goals, and |



choosing effective accounts.
(R8)

The statements reflect how learners take personal initiative and apply self-directed strategies to enhance their English vocabulary learning through Instagram. In statement R4, the user describes an effective method involving actively finding new words, writing them down, translating them, and repeating the process to reinforce memory. This shows a structured and intentional approach that depends on personal discipline. Statement R7 adds a social dimension to self-directed learning, where engaging in conversations and practicing vocabulary with other Instagram users becomes a meaningful and practical method for improvement. Meanwhile, statement R8 highlights the importance of self-awareness and goal setting, emphasizing that successful learning on Instagram relies on the learner's ability to choose effective accounts and stay focused. Together, these statements underscore that personalized and self-managed strategies ranging from vocabulary tracking to social interaction and goal setting play a crucial role in making Instagram a powerful tool for English vocabulary development.

This study aims to explore the effectiveness of Instagram in improving vocabulary mastery among students at University Muhammadiyah Kalimantan Timur. It investigates how Instagram is integrated into the vocabulary learning process and examines students' perceptions of using the platform as a tool for learning English vocabulary. Through this research, we seek to understand how social media particularly Instagram can support language acquisition in a more engaging and accessible way. (1) Is Instagram effective in improving vocabulary mastery among students in University Muhammadiyah Kalimantan Timur. (2) How is Instagram integrated into the vocabulary learning process. (3) What are students' perceptions of using Instagram as a tool for learning vocabulary.

The first question Is Instagram effective in improving vocabulary mastery among students in university Muhammadiyah Kalimantan timur. (R5) Instagram sometimes helps me remember English vocabulary, depending on the content in line (Arbain et al., 2017; Auly et al., 2021a). For example, educational Reels about grammar are quite helpful, (R4) English



learning content often appears on Reels, and from there I learn new words I've never seen or heard before, (R1) It has been very helpful, as I personally use English for my activities on Instagram in line. Previous studies have shown that Instagram can be an effective tool for enhancing students' English vocabulary. One study found that using Instagram captions significantly improved students' vocabulary mastery compared to traditional methods, with most students expressing strong interest due to the platform's engaging and accessible format. Another study implemented a Vocabulary Card Bank project, where students regularly posted vocabulary cards on Instagram. The results revealed that students not only expanded their vocabulary beyond textbooks but also improved their sentence construction skills. Both studies highlight Instagram's potential as a practical and motivating platform for vocabulary learning in EFL contexts (Nurlaily, 2021; Prastyo et al., 2022). Moreover, most of the content that appears on my FYP is also in English, so I feel more familiar and comfortable with English-language content in line (Aminah et al., 2019; Erliana & Arbain, 2020; Nurlaily, 2021).

The second question How is Instagram integrated into the vocabulary learning process. (R2) My way of learning English vocabulary on Instagram is by looking up unfamiliar words using Google Translate and then understanding their meanings. (Fauziah et al., 2023; Jiang & Zhao, 2025) Recent studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of social media platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube in enhancing English vocabulary acquisition. One study involving English majors in South Borneo revealed that students used Instagram and TikTok autonomously by saving vocabulary-related content, applying new words in daily activities, and staying motivated through trending slang. Another study in China showed that learners exposed to Instagram and YouTube as supplementary tools significantly outperformed those in traditional classrooms in vocabulary learning, motivation, and enjoyment. These findings highlight the value of integrating dynamic, digital platforms into language learning, offering both educational content and increased learner engagement through self-directed and socially relevant experiences.. (R5) I usually learn from Instagram accounts dedicated to English learning. In line with (Fauziah et al., 2023b) After watching videos or seeing posts, I write notes



to help me remember what I learned. (R7) I often use Instagram, especially the Reels feature, where I find a lot of English content that helps me learn new vocabulary. Studies show Instagram effectively supports vocabulary learning. Using features like filters and posts, students improved vocabulary mastery and motivation. Results highlight Instagram's potential as an engaging learning tool (Auly et al., 2021; Darman Pangaribuan et al., 2025).

The third question What are students' perceptions of using Instagram as a tool for learning vocabulary. (R5) Instagram sometimes helps me remember English vocabulary, depending on the content. For example, educational Reels about grammar are quite helpful. This study explored senior high school students' perceptions of learning vocabulary through the Instagram-assisted Vocabulary Self-Collection Strategy (VSS). The findings revealed that Instagram-supported VSS helped enhance vocabulary acquisition and comprehension, though students also faced certain challenges. Overall, Instagram posts, such as quotes, were seen as useful resources for vocabulary learning outside the classroom (Verawati, V., Yanto, E. and Fitriyana, 2021) (R1) It has been very helpful, as I personally use English for my activities on Instagram. Moreover, most of the content that appears on my FYP is also in English, so I feel more familiar and comfortable with English-language content. Both studies show that students find Instagram helpful and engaging for learning vocabulary. Its flexible and interactive features support independent and informal language learning, making it an effective tool to boost vocabulary and communication skills (Gracella & Rahman Nur, 2020; Nur, 2020; Gonulal, 2019; Muhammad Syafi'i et al., 2024). (R2) Instagram helps me remember new vocabulary, as I often come across English words while scrolling. These studies examined students' perceptions and experiences in using Instagram as a tool for vocabulary and language learning. At UIN Sultan Syarif Kasim Riau, students found Instagram helpful due to its engaging and flexible content, which supported their vocabulary development. Similarly, a broader study of English language learners highlighted Instagram's effectiveness in improving vocabulary and communication skills, with learners expressing positive attitudes toward using



it as a mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) tool (Aminah et al., 2019; Gonulal, 2019; Nur & Jamilah, 2022; Muhammad Syafi'i et al., 2024)

4. Conclusion

This study concludes that Instagram serves as a highly effective, engaging, and flexible platform for improving English vocabulary among EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners. The findings demonstrate that students not only enjoy using Instagram for language learning but also benefit from its features, such as Reels, posts, filters, and interactive educational content. These tools help them acquire new vocabulary both incidentally through everyday exposure and intentionally through following English learning accounts and actively noting unfamiliar words. The informal, visual, and self-directed nature of Instagram contributes to increased motivation, better retention, and enhanced comprehension of vocabulary.

Compared to traditional classroom methods or textbook-based learning, Instagram presents a more dynamic and enjoyable alternative. Many students express that Instagram's content is more interesting, less boring, and more suited to their personal learning styles. Features like short videos, relatable posts, and the ability to engage with global users make the learning experience more immersive and relevant. Moreover, students value the ability to learn at their own pace and in their own time, highlighting the platform's flexibility and accessibility. The results also show that self-awareness, consistent learning habits, and selecting appropriate educational content are key factors in maximizing vocabulary growth via Instagram.

Despite the positive outcomes, some challenges were noted, such as distractions from non-educational content and varying levels of learner discipline. Therefore, future learning designs should consider combining Instagram-based learning with structured guidance and reflective practices to help students stay focused and intentional.

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