Article

Social Media as a Tool for Vocabulary Learning: Students' Reflections in a Qualitative Study

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A B S T R A C T

Social media has become an integral part of young people's lives and provides informal access to English vocabulary learning. However, research focusing on high school students remains limited. This study addresses this gap by exploring how students reflect on their vocabulary learning through social media. Using a qualitative approach, in-depth interviews were conducted with five students who actively used platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using Miles and Huberman's (1994) interactive model. Findings show that students benefit from multimodal input, subtitles, captions, and interactive features across several platforms. They also report increased motivation due to freedom in choosing content. These results suggest that social media can serve as an effective supplementary resource for vocabulary learning.

Keywords: *Student's Perspective, Social Media, English Vocabulary*

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INTRODUCTION

Mastering vocabulary is a fundamental skill in learning English, as emphasized by Nation (2012), who refers to vocabulary as the "building block of language." Without a solid grasp of vocabulary, skills in reading, writing, listening, and speaking cannot develop fully. Schmitt (2010) further stresses that language learning is not simply about memorizing word meanings, but also about retaining vocabulary long-term and applying it in real-life communication. For high school students in Indonesia, mastering a broad vocabulary is essential for both academic success and readiness to face global challenges.

In the context of vocabulary acquisition theory, researchers agree that rich, repeated, and meaningful exposure is a key factor in lexical development. Richards and Renandya (2002) emphasize the importance of meaningful input, while Nation (2001) underscores the role of repetition and retention. Furthermore, research on vocabulary learning also shows that digital environments provide new opportunities for vocabulary acquisition through multimodal input, a combination of text, audio, visuals, and interactions which has been shown to enhance vocabulary exposure and comprehension (Mayer, 2009; Jiang & Luk, 2019).

Bunmak's study (2021) identified that vocabulary knowledge is essential for language learners since words are materials for students to speak or communicate. If they have limited vocabularies, they will not be able to express their opinion freely; they only speak according to the vocab that they understand. . Meanwhile, Wilkins (1974) argues that while grammar is important, vocabulary is even more critical: "While without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed." This further highlights the centrality of vocabulary in language learning.

On the other hand, the development of digital technology has changed the way the younger generation interacts with language. Data from the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII, 2023) shows that more than 98% of teenagers aged 13–18 actively

use social media daily, especially platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube. This change opens up opportunities for English learners to be more flexible and authentic in their learning, in line with the learning styles of the digital generation. Social media now functions not only as a means of entertainment but also as an informal learning space that can enrich and deepen language experiences.

In the realm of digital learning, previous research has shown that social media supports language learning through multimodal input, access to authentic content, and opportunities for interaction (Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2021; Evans & Tragant, 2020). TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube, for example, have been shown to provide diverse language exposure and support incidental vocabulary learning (Rita & Subekti, 2023; Madani et al., 2023). However, most of these studies have focused on college students or adult learners, so understanding how high school students interpret learning experiences through social media remains very limited.

This research gap is significant because teenagers' characteristics, learning motivations, and social media usage differ from those of other age groups. Furthermore, few studies have explored student reflection as a data source. Yet, student reflection can reveal cognitive processes, learning strategies, and personal meanings that are not readily apparent through quantitative surveys (Lee & Dressman, 2018). Understanding these reflections can help teachers and researchers design learning approaches that are more relevant to the digital practices of today's generation.

Therefore, this study aims to address this gap by exploring high school students' experiences and reflections on using social media as a means of vocabulary acquisition. This approach not only adds a new perspective to the literature on language learning technology but also offers practical contributions for teachers in pedagogically leveraging students' digital habits.

The influence of social media on language learning is significant, especially for Generation Z and Alpha. Sari et al. (2020) noted that the development of social media has made it easier for people to view and learn information online. In the context of language learning, particularly vocabulary learning, social media provides opportunities for students to access various materials independently, tailored to their interests and learning styles. Several studies also support the positive impact of social media on vocabulary learning. Richards et al. (2002) emphasize that exposure to vocabulary through rich and meaningful input is crucial for language learning, while Bizami et al. (2022) show that Facebook can create an authentic English learning environment through social interaction. Similarly, Svitlana et al. (2022) suggest that mobile applications and digital media support independent, personalized, and iterative vocabulary learning, which is highly relevant for long-term retention.

Other studies have also shown the significant influence of social media on English language learning. Pangaribuan et al. (2025) found that systematic use of Instagram in vocabulary learning activities can significantly improve students' mastery and motivation, with pre-test scores increasing from 33.33% to 93.33%. Setiawati et al. (2023) added that the use of text on social media, such as captions accompanying images or videos, is very effective in helping students acquire new vocabulary, due to its engaging and accessible nature. Yunisa and Oktavia (2024) also confirmed that social media generally plays an important role in improving students' vocabulary, as it encourages social interaction and natural exposure to language.

There are several specific benefits of using social media in vocabulary learning. First, the multimodal content (text, audio, and visual) available on platforms like YouTube and Instagram can enrich students' language input, as noted by Mayer (2009). Second, features like subtitles, captions, and comments provide immediate feedback that strengthens students' understanding of new vocabulary. Third, the interactive nature of social media encourages emotional engagement, which, according to Dörnyei (2005), can increase motivation and enrich the learning experience.

However, despite numerous studies examining the influence of social media on language learning, most studies still focus on university students or adult learners (Yunus et al., 2012; Zourou, 2012). Research specifically examining the experiences of high school

students is still limited, even though this group has distinct characteristics, such as varying levels of motivation, intensity of social media use, and limitations in formal learning strategies. Therefore, this study aims to explore high school students' experiences in utilizing social media to enrich their English vocabulary. The focus of this study is to identify the platforms they use, the content they consider useful, their motivational factors, the challenges they face, and a comparison between the effectiveness of learning through social media and learning in the classroom. It is hoped that this research can provide theoretical contributions to the study of technology-based learning and provide practical implications for educators in integrating social media as a supplementary learning resource.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach to explore senior high school students' experiences in using social media as a tool for vocabulary learning. The decision to use a qualitative approach was based on the need to understand students' personal experiences and perceptions in depth, capturing the subjective nature of their interactions with social media platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube. According to Creswell (2018), a qualitative approach is particularly suitable for research that seeks to explore how individuals perceive and make sense of their experiences within specific contexts. In this case, the qualitative approach allows for an in-depth exploration of how students engage with social media to enhance their English vocabulary, providing insights into their motivations, challenges, and the impact of social media on their language learning process.

A purposive sampling technique was used to select participants who met specific criteria: (1) high school students aged 15–17, (2) active users of social media for more than eight hours per week, and (3) consistent use of at least one platform for English vocabulary learning. This sampling ensured that participants possessed sufficient experience to provide meaningful insights (Creswell, 2018). The primary reason for choosing this approach is its ability to gather rich, detailed data that goes beyond surface-level findings. By focusing on students' authentic experiences, this study provides a deeper understanding of how social media can be used effectively for vocabulary acquisition. A case study design was employed to capture the complexities of students' experiences in a specific context. Case studies are valuable because they allow researchers to examine real-life scenarios in detail, thus offering a holistic view of the subject matter (Creswell, 2018). In this research, the case study design facilitated an in-depth exploration of how social media platforms are perceived and utilized by students to improve their English vocabulary.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews with five senior high school students, aged 15 to 17, who were purposely selected based on their active use of social media for English language learning. The interviews focused on key aspects such as the social media platforms they use, the types of content they engage with, the features of these platforms that they find most useful, their motivations for using social media for language learning, and the challenges they face. The interview format allowed students to share their experiences freely and express their thoughts in their own words, ensuring that the data collected reflected their authentic perceptions. All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and translated into English to ensure accuracy in data interpretation.

Semi-structured interviews were used, consisting of 10 open-ended questions covering platform use, learning strategies, motivation, content preferences, and perceived benefits or challenges. Semi-structured interviews allow flexibility while maintaining consistency across participants (Creswell, 2018). Interviews lasted 25–40 minutes and were conducted face-to-face to create a comfortable conversational atmosphere.

To analyze the data, the study employed the interactive model of data analysis proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994), which involves four key stages: data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and verification. The data were collected through the interview process, and then reduced by identifying and categorizing key themes and patterns. The findings were presented in an organized manner, and verification steps were taken to ensure the consistency

and reliability of the data. The analysis ultimately led to the drawing of conclusions based on the To ensure trustworthiness, this study applied Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria. Credibility was supported through member checking, where participants reviewed their transcripts for accuracy. Transferability was strengthened by providing detailed descriptions of the context and participants. Dependability was addressed through maintaining an audit trail of decisions made during data collection and analysis. Confirmability was ensured by documenting reflexive notes to minimize researcher bias. Triangulation was carried out by examining data across multiple platforms mentioned by students (Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, WhatsApp, etc.) to validate recurring patterns.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

This research aimed to explore student reflection of using social media as a tool for vocabulary learning. The findings originate from in-depth interviews with five students that chose about their experiences in using social media as a tool for learning English vocabulary. Specifically, the type of social media they use for English vocabulary learning, the ways of using social media for their English vocabulary learning, and the reasons for choosing particular social media for their English learning.

The Types of social media that Students' Use for Learning Vocabulary

This study found that students used different types of social media for learning vocabulary, and they believed that these medias bring a positive influence on their learning, such as the ease for accessing the learning materials and interesting features. The social media pointed out include Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, Discord, and Twitter (See Table 1).

Table 1. Types of Social Media

Types of social media	
Instagram	Whatsapp
Youtube	Twitter
TikTok	Facebook
Discord	Thread

The findings of this study indicate that social media has become a significant learning space for students, particularly in learning English vocabulary. Several platforms stand out in their daily practice: Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, Discord, Twitter, Thread, and WhatsApp. One student stated: "relying more on Instagram and YouTube when learning English vocabulary" This quote reflects that social media is not just a space for entertainment, but also a means of repeated and varied language exposure. Instagram, for example, provides short texts through memorable captions, photo posts containing English content, and reels which presents short videos that keep students from getting bored, while YouTube offers long videos with broader and deeper context with several features like comment for interaction, automatic subtitle and video transcript feature. Furthermore, some participants emphasized that Instagram is the only social media platform they have, saying, "I only have one social media platform, Instagram, and I also use it." This situation shows that despite students' differing motivations and access, Instagram can still function as a primary media for acquiring vocabulary input. In other words, this platform is positioned not only as a means of entertainment but also contributes to the informal language learning process.

Another finding confirmed TikTok's dominance in students' vocabulary learning practices. One participant stated, "I'm usually more active on TikTok, I follow TikTok more often." This statement indicates that TikTok is both a medium for entertainment and a means of acquiring knowledge, including English vocabulary. TikTok's advantages are also seen in its ease of access to information. This was expressed by a participant who stated, "I use TikTok more often because it's easier to access information." Some respondents even linked TikTok use to the habit of imitating texts, saying, "I often use TikTok because I really like imitating, like reading text, reading prompts. TikTok is more efficient in my opinion because it's more

up-to-date with Gen Z." This demonstrates that the platform appeals to the younger generation through its short, dynamic, and easily accessible content format.

One participant mentioned the use of subtitles in Indonesian language content translated into English, "I'm talking about something like an airline tragedy in Indonesian, but it's subtitled into English as well." This demonstrates that students are not only learning vocabulary from the target language, but also understanding the process of translation between languages, thus increasing their linguistic awareness. With the YouTube subtitle feature which plays a very important role in students' English learning, using the YouTube transcript feature also plays a role in helping students learn to write English more easily. The discussion shifted to the WhatsApp and Discord applications chosen by students. Although not as popular as other platforms, WhatsApp was still mentioned by several participants, "WhatsApp and Discord are usually used for discussions and group corrections." This shows that WhatsApp is indeed present in students' daily lives, although not as a primary medium for vocabulary learning. Its function is more for interpersonal communication, which can allow students to practice and correct each other to learn English vocabulary through writing and speaking, from chat and voice chat.

Continued with threads and twitter which are mostly chosen by students who prefer reading, one of them said "I like Threads because I like reading like quotes, also most of the content is in the form of visual photos containing writing or word" followed by a statement related to twitter which reads "I usually use twitter to read AU and POv content, and usually I read English content from there, over time I learn more and more English vocabulary" the statement explains that twitter and tread as social media also provide written content for English learners to read, where the content is packaged in things they like, not boring, and interesting. Facebook is also one of the social media choices for students in learning English vocabulary, this social media elder also plays a role as an initiator as a place for learning English vocabulary for students. One student stated "in the past I often used Facebook" even though many social media have been born, but with this statement we can see that Facebook also has a history for students in vocabulary lessons using social media which is followed by the statement "especially now Facebook has a reels feature" which presents short interactive videos that make students interested and not easily bored to learn.

Students' use of multiple platforms suggests that vocabulary learning occurs through incidental exposure, in line with Nation's (2001) concept of rich input and repeated encounters. The preference for Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok reflects Mayer's (2009) multimodal learning theory, where visual-audio combinations enhance comprehension and retention. Students' reliance on subtitles, captions, and short videos supports research showing that captioned and multimodal input enhances vocabulary acquisition (Reynolds, Teng & Webb, 2022).

Furthermore, platform selection based on convenience and personal preference aligns with the principle of learner autonomy (Benson, 2011), which suggests that students self-regulate their learning. Instagram and Threads meet the needs of text-oriented learners, while TikTok and YouTube support auditory and visual learners, demonstrating how platform features shape vocabulary exposure. However, some students also expressed a reliance on Indonesian subtitles and algorithm-based content, suggesting potential limitations to developing deeper vocabulary knowledge, such as insufficient exposure to academic or less frequently used words.

The Way to Use Social Media for Their English Vocabulary Learning

Regarding the way students used social media in their vocabulary learning, this study found that they applied a variety of strategies in using social media as learning tools, as described in Table 2.

Table 2. Strategy to Use Social Media for Their English Vocabulary Learning

Types of Social Media	Strategy to Use Social Media for Their English Vocabulary Learning
Instagram	Commenting on other Instagram users' posts as a form of language practice

	Finding the meaning of word in the content of movie clips
	Saving difficult word using bookmark feature for learning later
	Interacting with instagram users to practice English vocabulary
	Acquiring new words or vocabs through visual features
Youtube	Translating the words using the transcript feature
	Using subtitles to understand the meaning of the words
	Repeating new words from the content of videos
	Activating English and Indonesian subtitles
TikTok	Translating the meaning of the words in the lyric of English songs Saving the content for repeated use
	Practicing new vocabs using collaboration feature
	Reviewing vocabulary practice by recording the content
	Reviewing the content to learn slang words or non-formal language
	Reading the content using prompter
Discord	Interacting with other users through group chat
Whatsapp	Pair learning and discussion using private chat and group chat
Twitter	Practicing how to read the sentences using POV and AU content
	Translating visual contents
Facebook	Repeating new vocabs from the reels feature
Thread	Adding new vocabs from captions and writing them in the book
	Finding information how pronounce new words
	Translating visual contents

This finding shows that there were different strategies that students used in learning vocabulary with the use of social media. Student interests play a role in choosing or applying strategies. For example, some students who are more dominant in reading and writing prefer to use the strategy of noting down the vocabulary and learnit again later on. Some of them said "usually after getting new vocabulary I write it down in a book so that if I want to study it again I don't have to look for that content again because sometimes when I search for the content I need, what appears is not what I intended." For students who like to read, they tend to choose visual content such as reading text or images that contain reading in it "because I like to read, so I look for content that is reading but fun, like on Twitter, I usually read AU and POV" followed by the statement "I like the thread application which is a branch of Instagram because in that application, the content is usually more about photos and then there are quotes" from these statements, it can be seen that interest influences the strategies they use and the strategies they use can be used on various types of social media.

Some of them also stated "when I watch English videos, I activate the subtitle feature on YouTube and TikTok, so it's easy to understand what is being said" followed by the statement that "if there is no meaning in an Instagram video and I don't understand, I usually look for it with translation" with the strategy of finding the meaning and activating subtitles being the strategy that most students use to learn English vocabulary by social media. followed by interaction strategies and feedback using the comment feature, they stated that practicing with comments on social media gives a much safer feeling and no judging compared to practicing in real life which sometimes gets pressure, insults, and blame which leads to insecurity. Some of them stated "if I get new vocabulary, I usually use it to comment or practice, then I know how to use it like this and usually I remember it more easily if I keep using the vocabulary" from this

statement practicing has a very strong influence in remembering something new that we have just learned or just got.

Reading and practicing on their own are also used as strategies by some of them, they stated "I like reading content prompters because it can train my pronunciation speed and accuracy" then the statement "I also after getting new vocabulary I record it to practice pronunciation then later I play it again and compare it with the original video" using speaking strategies and direct practice is a very appropriate choice when wanting to focus on fluency and good speaking. Some of them also stated "in vocabulary content I prefer the creator who copies and then gives us the opportunity to repeat" Repetition is a very good strategy to choose when memorizing new vocabulary. Some of those who like to practice speaking directly tend to use strategies by repeating and reading or recording themselves. Apart from practicing, they also use this strategy to evaluate their ability to use the new English vocabulary that they have acquired.

The strategy of saving vocabulary learning content that they want to learn later or re-learn is also one of the strategies they use. One of them said, "I like TikTok because there is a repost feature that if I want to learn about it, I can repost it and use it to learn later." Not only on TikTok social media, the bookmark feature on Instagram is also the best choice for saving content to be studied later. They said, "If IG has a bookmark feature, it can save and group the content that we want." From that statement, saving the content for re-learning when they are in their mood is really helpful because of the feature of social media. From the many variations of strategies they use, we can see that whatever type of social media they use, they use similar strategies depending on and adapting to the features in the existing social media. For example, the bookmark feature on Instagram and the repost feature on TikTok, which are more or less used to save English vocabulary learning content that they want to study later or for relearning. Especially in the video recording feature, particular type of content, and soon and so far that every social media has.

The strategies identified such as repeating new words, activating subtitles, commenting, translating, recording themselves, and saving content are consistent with established vocabulary learning processes. For example, repetition supports memory consolidation (Nation, 2001), while commenting and chatting provide opportunities for meaning-focused output, which promotes deeper lexical processing (Richards & Renandya, 2002).

Using subtitles and transcripts aligns with multimodal learning theory, as students process input through both auditory and visual channels (Mayer, 2009). Students' use of prompters, reading AU/POV text, and engaging with visual–textual content on Threads reflects Jiang and Luk's (2019) argument that social media provides multimodal literacy resources that extend beyond traditional classroom exposure.

Autonomy also plays a major role in how students choose and apply strategies. The freedom to save, repost, and revisit content demonstrates self-directed learning (Benson, 2011). Students set their own pace, review content selectively, and practice without external pressure conditions that reduce the affective filter (Krashen, 1982) and facilitate vocabulary acquisition.

Challenges were also evident, such as difficulty searching for saved content, reliance on translations, and the risk of learning incorrect usage from informal content. These issues highlight the need for guided support to ensure accuracy and prevent fossilization of errors.

The Reason for Choosing several Social Media for Their English Vocabulary Learning

The findings revealed that students selected different social media platforms based on distinct purposes, preferences, and learning opportunities related to English vocabulary development. Each platform such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, Twitter, Whatsapp, Facebook, Thread, and Discord was chosen for some reasons not only for entertainment but also for its potential to provide authentic linguistic input and interactive features. And this following table are the reason of why they are choosing that particular social media for their English vocabulary learning

Table 3. The Reason for Choosing Several Social Media for Their English Vocabulary Learning

Types of Social Media	Strategy to Use Social Media for Their English Vocabulary Learning

Instagram	Following contents based on interests	
	Commenting for practicing writing	
	Exploring interesting contents	
	Bookmarking learning materials	
Youtube	Using subtitle features	
	Using transcript features	
	Watching long-duration videos	
TikTok	Accessing updated contents	
	Watching short-duration videos	
	Enjoying entertaining videos	
	Saving the content for repeated use	
	Collaborating with other users	
	Reposting videos for reviewing	
Discord	Chatting with other users	
Whatsapp	Joining group discussions	
Twitter	Exploring AU and POV contents	
	Following quick updates on issues	
Facebook	Watching reels	
Thread	Reading captions or photos	

These findings show that students have various reasons in choosing particular social media for their tool in learning English language vocabulary. Most of them reasoned that learning English language vocabulary is because they can learn without pressure and they have freedom in exploring what they want to learn. They stated "I often learn vocabulary from content I like, like movies or music, so I don't feel like I'm learning." But also from that table we can see that their reasons are that brands have a connection with each of their interests and learning styles.

Those who prefer reading and are more visual will tend to gravitate towards content that contains reading material, long captions, and visual photos that contain writing such as quotes and poetry. They stated "I like Instagram and thread because there are so many captions and posts to read, and sometimes I find new words I've never heard before." Another added, "On Twitter, I often read AU and POV in English. From there, I learn how people write and use less formal vocabulary." One of them also emphasized, "On social media, you can read light things but still learn. For example, reading quotes or comments from foreigners, I learn new words." From those statements, students choose those social media because of the reading content and the visuals that contain quotes and poetry that sometimes contain new vocabulary for them, and they can learn how to use it in everyday life. and for those who prefer to listening, there is a reason for choosing this social media because the listening content is light for them. One of them stated "I prefer learning through videos or songs because I can hear the pronunciation firsthand. On TikTok or YouTube, I can hear the accent too." other stated "I like watching short videos because I can hear native speakers speak. That way, I learn how to use the words in sentences." These statements show that listening activities are one of the strong reasons why social media is considered effective for learning vocabulary, because through audio and real context, students can learn pronunciation, intonation, and word usage more naturally.

However, it is not uncommon for them to choose social media because they can practice their skills and interact with other people using the English they are learning, either through chat or in the comments column. They affirmed "I like commenting on foreigners' posts in English, so I can practice my writing. Sometimes I even reply, so I can learn how to speak properly." They feel that practicing and interacting through social media gives them a greater sense of security and freedom from worrying about expressing themselves. They often cite unique features on each social media platform, such as subtitles, transcripts, reposts, and more. They affirmed "When I watch a movie, I like to turn on the Indonesian and English subtitles alternately, so I know the meaning and how to read it too." one of them added "I feel that if there are subtitles it will be easier and easier to understand" They also stated that using social media allows them to choose who they want to learn from, and that the content

presented on social media is engaging and entertaining. They agree that learning English through social media is enjoyable and doesn't feel like they're actually studying. They stated ""Usually, food vloggers like Mr. Beast are really interesting, so while watching, you can also learn new vocabulary." added "Sometimes product review content also contains English vocabulary" this shows that learning vocabulary from social media not only from the education content but the light content and authenticity become the reason for choosing social media as a tool for their English language vocabulary learning.

Based on these findings we can conclude that students choosing social media as a tool for learning English language vocabulary is not for no reason. Social media is an effective medium for learning English vocabulary for the current generation. They choose it for various reasons, both because of the features it contains, the interesting and easy to digest content, and the social nature of media which keeps students from getting bored quickly. Students' reasons for choosing particular platforms, such as interactive features, entertaining formats, and accessible vocabulary input, illustrate how motivation and personal relevance shape vocabulary learning. This supports Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), where autonomy and interest enhance intrinsic motivation. Preference for content aligned with personal hobbies (e.g., food vlogs, music, movies) also reflects the role of informal digital learning environments in fostering natural language exposure (Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2021). The emotional comfort students feel when commenting anonymously or practicing without judgment reduces anxiety and encourages more frequent language use.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings highlight how social media functions as a "low-pressure" learning space, aligning with Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis. Students feel safer experimenting with new vocabulary online than in the classroom. However, reliance on algorithmically curated content can result in uneven exposure, with some vocabulary being over-recycled while more complex terminology remains underexplored. This shows that there are limitations in using social media as the only source of learning.

Discussion

In this section is interpretation of findings, linking students' experiences and perceptions with relevant theories. It focuses on students' use of social media as a tool in their vocabulary learning including the type of social media they use, the strategy that they use for English vocabulary learning using social media, and also their reasons for choosing that social media for their English vocabulary learning. The results obtained from the in-depth interview will be followed up and strengthened with a consistent theoretical explanation.

The Types of social media that Students' Use for Learning Vocabulary

The findings of this study reveal that students utilize a variety of social media platforms for learning English vocabulary, including Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, Discord, Twitter, Threads, WhatsApp, and Facebook. The choice of these platforms is based on the unique features and experiences they offer. This aligns with previous research that highlights Instagram and TikTok as effective tools for vocabulary exposure through engaging and interactive visual and multimedia content, which aids in informal vocabulary acquisition (Fauziah et al., 2022). Specifically, the study Analysis of Vocabulary Learning Process from Instagram and TikTok found that both platforms are successful in introducing new vocabulary through frequently updated and visually appealing content, making them effective for informal learning (Fauziah et al., 2022).

YouTube has also emerged as a crucial medium for vocabulary learning, mainly due to its ability to present long-form videos that offer a broader language context. These videos often include discussions, subtitles, and transcripts that help students understand and retain vocabulary (Madani et al., 2023). According to the study The Students' Perceptions on the Use of YouTube in Learning Vocabulary, students reported feeling more comfortable learning vocabulary through YouTube, thanks to its engaging visuals and the convenience of following content with subtitles (Madani et al., 2023). This setup provides students with the opportunity to observe vocabulary used in real-life contexts, which enhances both retention and comprehension of linguistic context.

TikTok, in particular, plays a significant role in vocabulary learning. The study TikTok and Vocabulary Learning: A Survey Study of Indonesian Students by Rita and Subekti (2023) found that students have a very positive attitude toward using TikTok for vocabulary learning. However, the effectiveness of the platform depends heavily on the conscious selection and use of content. In addition, the study Educational Video Quality on TikTok for Vocabulary Teaching indicated that educational videos on TikTok, which focus on visual and cognitive quality, can increase engagement and improve vocabulary learning outcomes (Zulfia & Andini, 2023). Continuing text-based social media platforms like Twitter and Threads are also utilized by students who prefer reading quotes, threads, and written content. While there is limited specific research on Threads compared to Instagram or TikTok, studies on Instagram suggest that captions and post texts can help students acquire vocabulary in an indirect way through exposure to written content (Wardhani & Subekti, 2023). Therefore, text-based platforms or those combining text with visuals are particularly beneficial for students who prefer learning through reading and reflecting on new words.

Finally, interpersonal communication platforms like WhatsApp and Discord, although not the dominant platforms in this study, remain relevant as interactive spaces for practicing vocabulary. Research on peer chat interactions, such as those on WhatsApp, has shown that such platforms can improve vocabulary retention as students are exposed to real-world use in a social context rather than passively consuming content (Zeng & Goh, 2022). Consequently, the platforms chosen by students reflect a balance between accessible and interactive content, as well as their individual learning preferences, whether visual, auditory, text-based, or through live conversations.

The Way to Use Social Media for Their English Vocabulary Learning

The findings of this study reveal that students employ a variety of vocabulary learning strategies tailored to the preferences and features of each social media platform. These strategies include noting vocabulary for review, activating subtitles or searching for translations, practicing vocabulary through comments and direct messages (DMs), repeating content by rewatching or recording themselves, and bookmarking or reposting content for future study. These approaches reflect the adaptation of traditional learning strategies to the digital ecosystem: note-taking for metacognition (reviewing for better understanding) and repetition for memory consolidation (Nation, 2001). A dominant strategy is activating subtitles and using transcripts, which is well-supported by empirical evidence. Meta-analyses and experimental studies have shown that captions or subtitles on videos increase the likelihood of incidental vocabulary learning by integrating both auditory and visual input (Reynolds et al., 2022; Teng, 2022). Furthermore, studies examining dual subtitles or intralingual captioning have also reported positive effects on word recognition and comprehension (Dizon et al., 2021). The field findings, where students activate English or Indonesian subtitles or translate lyrics and videos, align with these results.

The choice of strategy often depends on the platform format. Short videos, such as those on TikTok and Instagram Reels, support microlearning and rapid repetition (Rita et al., 2023; Bai & Guo, 2022), while long-form videos on YouTube are more effective for in-depth, contextual learning through transcripts and subtitles (Madani et al., 2023). WhatsApp and Discord, on the other hand, serve as convenient platforms for collaboration and peer correction, offering spaces for written or oral practice (Balçı, 2021; Nurriza, 2024). This combination of strategies and platform features explains why students can adaptively utilize social media for vocabulary acquisition.

The Reason for Choosing several Social Media for Their English Vocabulary Learning

The findings indicate that students' choice of social media as a tool for learning English vocabulary is shaped by emotional comfort, personal interest, and platform features that support autonomy in learning. Students reported feeling more relaxed and free to explore topics that interest them, aligning with Benson's (2011) theory of learner autonomy, which asserts that self-directed learning in digital spaces empowers students to take control of their learning process. This autonomy is further supported by Deci and Ryan's (2000) Self-Determination Theory, which highlights intrinsic motivation as a key driver in sustaining

learning. Personal relevance of the content also plays a dominant role in students' choices. They prefer learning English vocabulary through topics they find engaging, such as movies, songs, and entertainment videos. This finding supports the idea that learning is more effective when it connects to students' interests (Chik et al., 2022; Li et al., 2021). For example, students who enjoy reading or visual content tend to favor platforms like Instagram, Threads, and Twitter, which present text-based posts, quotes, and captions. These formats allow for natural exposure to vocabulary in meaningful contexts, which promotes incidental vocabulary acquisition (Lai et al., 2022). Richards (2015) and Rassaei (2020) also argued that edutainment media combining education and entertainment helps enhance vocabulary retention by reducing learning anxiety and boosting engagement.

On the other hand, students who prefer listening activities typically opt for TikTok and YouTube, as these platforms provide real examples of pronunciation, intonation, and authentic speech from native speakers. Exposure to this authentic input helps students acquire vocabulary in a more natural way (Reynolds et al., 2022; Teng, 2022). Students also mentioned frequently using subtitles or transcripts, which is consistent with findings by Dizon and Thanyawatpokin (2021), who noted that subtitles enhance comprehension and word recall through dual-channel input. The alternating use of English and Indonesian subtitles further supports the effectiveness of bimodal input in improving language comprehension (Bird et al., 2002). Interaction also plays a key role in students' use of social media for vocabulary learning. Many students expressed that commenting on posts, chatting with friends, or engaging in online discussions feels less intimidating than speaking in a classroom. This supports Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis, which suggests that a low-anxiety environment facilitates language acquisition. Additionally, Zeng and Goh (2022) found that chatting or writing through instant messaging helps learners use vocabulary freely without fear of correction, increasing their confidence. Similarly, Godwin-Jones (2021) highlighted that social media provides informal spaces for learning, where learners can experiment with language use without formal constraints.

Students also emphasized the importance of platform features such as bookmarks, reposts, subtitles, and transcripts, which enable them to review vocabulary through repeated exposure. These features support long-term memory through spaced repetition (Nation, 2001; Ananda et al., 2022). Saving or reposting content allows students to rewatch or reread material when they are ready to study again, which helps reinforce vocabulary learning. This reflects the idea that learners' motivation is shaped not only by content but also by the usability of the platform (Shao & Crook, 2021). Learning from entertaining and authentic content, such as product reviews, food vlogs, or daily conversation videos, feels effortless and enjoyable. Bai and Guo (2022) also found that short-video learning, especially on platforms like TikTok, improves motivation and facilitates incidental vocabulary acquisition among Gen Z learners. Overall, the findings suggest that students choose specific social media platforms for English vocabulary learning based on their personal learning preferences, emotional needs, and the functional features of each platform. Instagram and Threads are favored by students who enjoy reading captions and quotes, while TikTok and YouTube attract those who prefer visual and auditory learning. WhatsApp and Discord serve as platforms for interaction and collaboration. These preferences confirm that vocabulary learning is increasingly driven by informal, interest-based learning in digital spaces, rather than being confined to traditional educational settings (Lai et al., 2022; Godwin-Jones, 2021). Social media, therefore, has become a flexible, learner-centered environment that promotes vocabulary acquisition in engaging, authentic, and meaningful ways.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results of this study, it can be concluded that social media is highly effective as a tool for English vocabulary learning for the current generation. Students choose various platforms—such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, Discord, WhatsApp, Twitter, and Threads—as tools for learning English vocabulary and employ strategies aligned with their

interests and abilities. These strategies include commenting and interacting with other users to practice English, using subtitles and transcription features to understand meaning, recording, reading, and repeating newly learned vocabulary to evaluate their progress, and saving content for review through bookmark and repost features. Students' choices to use social media for learning are driven by clear reasons, including the unique features of each platform, light and engaging content that makes learning entertaining, and a non-judgmental environment that allows them to practice freely. They feel a sense of autonomy because they can choose what to learn and when to learn without pressure, which increases their motivation and enjoyment. Regardless of the platform used, students tend to apply similar strategies and express similar reasons, and they generally agree that social media is an effective tool for learning English vocabulary. In addition to these conclusions, the findings offer several pedagogical implications: teachers can integrate social media–based activities into vocabulary instruction by encouraging the use of captions, subtitles, and short-form videos as supplementary input; educators can guide students in evaluating the accuracy of online vocabulary, selecting credible sources, and applying new words in classroom tasks; and curriculum designers may incorporate multimodal, learner-centered digital resources to better align formal instruction with students' authentic online language practices. However, this study has limitations, including a small number of participants, reliance on self-reported reflections, the absence of direct measures of vocabulary gains or long-term outcomes, and the focus on a single school context, which limits generalizability. Future research could address these limitations by involving larger and more diverse samples, combining interviews with vocabulary assessments, examining specific platform features in greater depth, and conducting longitudinal studies to explore how sustained exposure to multimodal social media input influences vocabulary retention over time, thereby strengthening our understanding of social media's role in vocabulary acquisition and its pedagogical applications.

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