

High School Students' Perceptions of The Role of Instagram Content on Vocabulary Mastery

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Abstract

Nowadays, English language learning has been transformed along with the development of technology. This causes the use of Instagram as a learning media, especially to improve vocabulary. This study aims to determine students' perceptions of the role Instagram content on vocabulary mastery. The data were analyzed using qualitative descriptive methodology. The respondents of this study were 34 students who use Instagram to learn vocabulary. To get more in-depth information, the researchers also conducted interviews with 5 informants. The findings show that Instagram content is an effective tool to help students improve their English vocabulary. Interaction with various features on Instagram such as reels, quizzes, posts, and stories available also makes learning more interesting and indirectly encourages them to be actively involved. Future research recommendation could curate relevant Instagram content for vocabulary learning and integrate it into classroom learning activities, highlighting the need for a more comprehensive approach.

Keywords: Students' Perceptions; Instagram Content; Vocabulary Mastery

INTRODUCTION

In learning a language, either a native language (Indonesian) or a foreign language (English), there are several aspects that support the success of language learning, one of which is vocabulary. Vocabulary is the most important aspect in language learning. It is believed that without adequate vocabulary students are unlikely to understand expressions or ideas (Abhi Rama et al., 2023; Gultolm et al., 2022; Rita & Subekti, 2024). The richer the vocabulary we have, the more fluent and expressive the communication we can do (Ulfa Azkiya, 2020) (Nurlia, 2024). Vocabulary represents the ideas that a person communicates. Therefore, it is especially important for learners to master the vocabulary of the language for adequate communication. The importance of vocabulary in language learning is also illustrated by Wilkins Thornbury who states that without language, there is little to express; without vocabulary, nothing at all (Suharsol, 2021). It can be defined as a person understands a vocabulary when he or she can: write and pronounce it accurately, understand its meaning and related terms, recognize its use in sentences, and distinguish its appropriate functions in both formal and informal contexts (Ramadhanti et al., 2020).

Understanding vocabulary not only involves cognitive aspects such as knowing the meaning and usage of words, but also involves perceptual aspects. Perception is defined as the mental process by which individuals interpret and give meaning to information received through their sensory experiences, such as sight, hearing, smell, touch, and taste (Qiolng, 2020) (Erin & Maharani, 2023). In the context of language learning, perception plays an important role in understanding the nuances of a word's meaning. On Instagram, we can interact with a community of language learners from different backgrounds, opening up new perspectives on the meaning of a word and enriching our vocabulary.

This results in a connection with social media as a collaborative tool that can support successful learning. According to its definition, social media is an online media, where users through social media-based applications can share, participate, and create content in the form of blogs, wikis, forums, social networks, and virtual spaces supported by increasingly sophisticated multimedia technology (Feri Sulianta, 2021) (Watrianthols, 2019). The term social media first appeared and was introduced by professor J.A. Barnes in 1954. The integration of digital technology in learning is expected to act as a didactic tool, namely as a tool that can trigger students' conceptual understanding of the objects studied and not the other way around (McCarthy, 2018). Students, teachers, the general public, lecturers, and especially students are among the users of these platforms. As the world of technology develops, social media has become an integral part of people's lives. It is important to remember that one of the crucial aspects in today's Alpha generation is the role of English as an international language, which not only serves as a means of communication, but also serves as a learning tool for the technology being developed. In this case, content itself correlates with any form of information delivered through media, both digital and non-digital. Content is any word, image or pixel that can be used by other humans to inform, interact or entertain (Unique, 2016) (Dalimunthe et al., 2024) (Basarah & Rolmaria, 2020). In the context of the EFL (English as a Foreign Language), content can be written, video, voice recording, or even a direct conversation with native speaker. Relevant and topical content may help students learn language in real situations, understand culture, and master language thoroughly. The content of learning and language skills are very closely. The learning materials provide many language examples. By interacting with various types of content, students can easily learn new words, sentence structure, and everyday phrases. Starting from the previous definition, we can conclude that the concept of content includes any form of information, regardless of the medium used to deliver it. Content is summarized into words, images, or even pixels of anything that has the potential to inform, engage, or entertain its viewers so that the content can be said to be useful and of quality both for its purpose and for society (Junaidi & Rickol, 2021). The process of learning English as a foreign language (EFL) is a terminology found in Indonesia where English is used in addition to the mother tongue or in this case local language as the first language and Indonesian as the second language and English as a foreign language (Widiawati, 2022). So departing from this, it is important for us, especially as students, to be able to create interesting and fun English learning. Fun learning is a conducive teaching and learning atmosphere that is able to please students so that they focus their full attention on learning with a high attention span. One way to get interesting and fun learning is by utilizing technology through social media applications that are widely used today, especially Instagram. Such use of social media can be one of the useful tactics to create collaborative learning, as it enables students to learn while playing and interact with their peers (Sol & Brush, 2008). Instagram has gone beyond its function as a photo and video sharing platform. Many users, including students, utilize the platform for various purposes, including learning (Saputera & Tamburian, 2019) (Rivki et al., 2022) (Yuheng et al., 2017). The platform offers various benefits, such as easy access to diverse language content, social interaction with other users, and a more enjoyable learning experience (Chen et al., 2023). The content to be uploaded can contain text or captions that describe the purpose of the content. Various age groups began to access and integrate Instagram in various aspects of life, including learning (Colbena & Muhtadi, 2023). In learning English as a foreign language, visual storytelling content assets can improve students' understanding of the language. Incorporating Instagram into English learning is expected to create challenging opportunities for deeper understanding for students to overcome various barriers. This study was guided by some of principles of constructivism, knowing the opinions of experts, one of which is: Shymansky says that constructivism learning theory is an active activity, in which students build their own knowledge, seeking the meaning of what they learn through social interaction and involvement

with their environment (Rahmat sinaga, 2018) (Masgumelar & Mustafa, 2021) (Sugrah, 2020). Based on his opinion above, it can be understood that constructivism is how to activate students by providing the widest possible space to understand what they have learned by applying the concepts they know and then practicing them in everyday life. This framework will help students understand how viewing and utilizing Instagram content can build vocabulary, emphasizing the role of active engagement, social interaction and personal interpretation during the learning process. Previous research has shown that the use of Instagram influences and improves students' vocabulary. In a study a total of 20 students agreed that the use of Instagram affects their vocabulary (Putri, 2022). Another research also obtained results and discussions that Instagram is an interesting, cheap, fun, and not boring language learning application. As a result, Instagram always displays interesting learning through short videos accompanied by good music and interesting lessons. Interesting lessons make Instagram attract the attention of participants (Prastya Syahputra et al., 2023). Then the last research found that Instagram has the benefit of impacting English learners listening skills and vocabulary (Handayani & Sih Pratiwi, 2023). Although there have been several studies examining students' perceptions of the role of Instagram content on vocabulary mastery, researchers in this study are interested in examining more deeply how Instagram social media is beneficial for vocabulary mastery by exploring students' perceptions through more in-depth interviews. Therefore, the research objective is to find out students' perceptions of the role of Instagram content on vocabulary mastery.

METHOD

In this study, the researchers used descriptive qualitative methods to analyze whether the use of Instagram content in English learning is beneficial to students' acquisition of common vocabulary. Qualitative research starts from a conceptual framework a "system of concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs, and theories" (Maxwell, 2016) that informs the design. The participants in this study were selected based on the criteria of being part of an English class. A total of 34 grade 11 students in a public school in Mojokerto are involved in this study. The final sample consisted of 14 boys and 20 girls aged 16 to 17 years. The researchers have followed research ethics in the data collection process, i.e. the students will be involved voluntarily without coercion. The data collection process was carried out by distributing an open-ended questionnaire focusing on students' perceptions of the role of Instagram content on English vocabulary acquisition in general and later the researcher will obtain data from the results of interviews with 5 people who have filled out the questionnaire and were selected by the researcher based on purposive sampling. Interviews in a study are used as a data collection tool and aim to obtain data as accurately as possible. The interview is divided into four parts:

1. Personal background
2. Social media and Instagram usage
3. Perception of Instagram usage for learning process and
4. Perceived use of Instagram for general vocabulary learning. (Scotlitch Water, 2020).

As with other survey methods, questionnaires play an important role in this study. Open-ended questions allow respondents to express opinions without being influenced by the researcher (Benediktsson et al., 1992). This condition has an impact on the quality of the data collected. Open-ended questions provide opportunities for respondents to express their opinions freely and in depth, thus minimizing social bias that may arise due to limited answer options that tend to direct respondents to certain answers. The data obtained was then analyzed by reducing the data, presenting the data, and drawing conclusions. Data reduction is the process of selecting (Rijali, 2019), focusing on simplifying, abstracting and transforming rough data that emerges from written notes in the field. The results will be presented in narrative form to facilitate understanding.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

In this section the researchers present the results of the study on high school students' perceptions of the role of Instagram content on vocabulary mastery. The thematic analysis of the qualitative data from the open-ended questionnaires and in-depth interviews revealed several main themes. Themes reflecting students' key perceptions. Six themes related to students' perceptions of the role of Instagram content on vocabulary mastery. Each theme is explained below.

Theme 1: How long have you been learning English

The students revealed that the duration of learning they experienced varied greatly. Many of them have been learning English since elementary school. A small number of other respondents also reported that they had been learning English since kindergarten, indicating that early exposure to English is common among students today. Parental interest and support as well as the school environment greatly influence the beginning of learning a foreign language. While other students have also been learning English for between 1 and 6 years. This flexibility in learning duration reflects the different interests and opportunities that each student has.

Theme 2: How often do you use Instagram to learn English vocabulary?

Most of the students admit that they often use Instagram as a medium for learning English vocabulary. The visual and interactive features of this platform, such as images, videos and interesting captions, make the learning process more fun and memorable. However, there are also a small number of students who do not use Instagram for this purpose very often. The reasons vary, ranging from different learning preferences to a lack of awareness of Instagram's potential as a learning tool.

One respondent revealed that she accidentally absorbed new vocabulary while browsing the Instagram homepage. This phenomenon shows that language learning can happen naturally and not always planned. Another student shared that she often opens the Instagram when she encounters unfamiliar vocabulary in her favorite song or movie. This indicates that personal interest can be a strong motivation in the language learning process.

Another noted "*often, because English is often encountered in school subjects.*" This highlights the importance of learning contexts in everyday life. When students encounter the same vocabulary in various situations, their understanding of the world will be stronger and more sustainable.

Theme 3: Do you follow any Instagram accounts that educate about English vocabulary? Give an example of the name of the account (just one)

The majority of students actively follow Instagram accounts that educate about English vocabulary. Some of the English accounts followed by students include: @zelynafah, @kmapunginggris_ed, @vocabulary.grammar, @mr.johnhid, and @englishnesia. While some other students stated that they did not follow these educational accounts. One student stated that "*no, but there is a video that has been through the reels Instagram homepage, the account name is forgotten*".

Theme 4: Do you think Instagram content can be a useful platform for English language learning?

The final results regarding the benefits of Instagram content for English language learning showed positive results. Most students stated that Instagram content made a significant contribution and was useful in their English learning process. Student A wrote "*yes, it is useful because it can be indirect or online learning, and it becomes new knowledge for all of us that we don't know yet*". Then student B also stated "*yes, because with social media like Instagram, students like us can access more accounts about educational learning about language*".

learning". Meanwhile, student C also argued "yes, it is very useful for learning because almost every day we open it and accidentally sometimes many posts use English and we will automatically know the meaning of the new vocabulary".

Nonetheless, this also reveals that there is a small group of students who are still doubtful or unsure of the benefits of Instagram in English learning. Some students may feel distracted by irrelevant content or worry about potential distractions from overusing the platform.

Theme 5: How effective do you think Instagram content is in helping you learn new English vocabulary?

The data on this theme shows that the majority of students found Instagram content effective in helping them learn new vocabulary. One student A wrote "Effective because there are many interesting contents to learn any vocabulary". While another student B also added "very effective because we can access anywhere and anytime". The flexibility of time and place in accessing Instagram content is also attraction for students. Student C stated that "Effective, because, usually the platform provides several posts related to news or issues that occur abroad, so we can get new vocabulary from the content and comments of the posts".

However, only a small number of students considered that it depends on the content presented and only for certain people. Student D wrote that "It depends on the person who learns it (there are some who have difficulty understanding even though it has been repeated, some can only understand when taught face-to-face". This highlights the importance of individual comprehension in absorbing new information, emphasizing that not everyone can easily understand new vocabulary just by reading content on Instagram. This thus signifies that although Instagram offers great potential as a learning tool, its success is highly dependent on individual factors such as learning style, motivation, and basic language ability.

Theme 6: What type of Instagram content have you found most helpful in vocabulary learning? (e.g. posts, stories, reels)?

The results show that most students find the content of Instagram posts effective in helping them learn new vocabulary. This shows that the format of the posts, such as images with text, is quite interesting and easy for students to understand. Student A stated that "posts, because through typing/writing it is easier for us to read and know the correct 'spelling' through reading from the post". In addition, there is also student B who added "posts, because in posts there is usually a direct translation and we can learn in real time to know the meaning". The minority felt that other features such as stories, infographics, quizzes and reels offered by Instagram also contributed positively and effectively in helping them learn vocabulary. Only a minority of students were not convinced of the effectiveness of Instagram content types in vocabulary learning. Thus, it can be said that Instagram content, especially in the form of posts, is considered quite effective by students in helping them learn new vocabulary.

Table 1. Thematic Summary of Findings on the Role of Instagram in Vocabulary Mastery

Emergent Themes	Students' Responses
Self-development to achieve an aspiration	Because English is an international language and the student really want to be able to understand everything so that when she go abroad or find a job it will be easier [International Language]. Most students used to aspire to be a flight attendant and translator so they wanted to learn English [aspiration].
Frequency of use	Quite often, not more than an hour because it often appears on the homepage when scrolling down [Less than 1 hour].

learning resources	The students follow some: @Roy.muhammad @Mr.Johnhid @dcc_english. @boardicle. @kampunginggrism.
Visual interest	Many students think the Instagram is very interesting because when there are pictures, it's easier to understand and easy to note down [very interesting].
User format	Reels can be viewed repeatedly and can be saved in our own account. reels also provide images with sound so that at the same time we can learn listening [reels]. Some students choose the post because it can be seen again [post].
Interaction preferences	The students like quiz because the question is more challenging, fun and we can interact with the quiz so we don't get bored quickly [quiz].

Discussion

A Means of Self-Development to Achieve a Goal Through Instagram Content

The findings reveal that the role of Instagram content contributes positively to students as a means to learn English vocabulary. It is also a bridge and motivation for most of them who have great aspirations and dreams. Open-ended responses support this finding, with most students agreeing that Instagram content can motivate them to achieve their dreams. Mastering English opens up wider career opportunities, both at home and abroad. Many multinational companies use English as the main working language. From the in-depth interviews, many students reported that they wanted to be an airplane stewardess, train stewardess, and a translator. For example, one student shared. *"I want to be an airplane stewardess, on the other hand I also want to be a train stewardess, so I have to be able to learn English"*. This reflection shows that the Instagram platform is not just for entertainment, but also an effective tool to motivate students to learn English.

Students also note that English is the most widely used international language for communication in various countries and fields. English makes it easier for us to interact with people from different countries when traveling. As explained by one student *"I learn English because I want to understand everything, if I go abroad or find a job it is easier or easier"*. From this statement, the understanding that English is the key to opening many doors has become a strong motivation for students to learn English seriously. Then another student also said *"because I like listening to western songs and watching foreign movies so I want to directly understand the meaning and without having to use subtitles"*.

This finding emphasizes that Instagram social media as a collaborative tool that can support successful learning (Feri Sulianta, 2021) (Watrianthols, 2019). As the world of technology develops, social media becomes an integral part of people's lives. It is important to remember that one of the crucial aspects in today's generation is the role of English as an international language, which not only serves as a communication tool. The integration of digital technology in learning is expected to act as a didactic tool that can trigger conceptual understanding of the objects studied (McCarthy, 2018).

Perceived Use of Instagram Content

The majority of students find Instagram content very interesting. Many of them liked the content on Instagram because of its visual nature. The attractive images make the subject matter easier to understand and remember, as if it is engraved directly in the mind. Visualization through images on Instagram is very effective for students. Our eyes and brain are interconnected, so information that is conveyed visually is more quickly processed and remembered. As one of the students said, *“I think it's very interesting because when there are pictures, it's easier to understand and easy to note down”*. Others explained that Instagram content is very interesting because it is visual, interactive and relevant. Interesting and up-to-date pictures make Instagram an effective and fun platform.

In addition to being interesting the students also reported that they spend approximately one hour per day learning English vocabulary through Instagram. One student explained *“Quite often, not more than an hour because it often appears on the homepage when scrolling down”*. Then other students also stated that they take the time to learn English vocabulary during their break time at school. This consistent study habit not only helps them improve their vocabulary quickly, but also makes the students more familiar with English every day. Students also often follow educational accounts that share tips and tricks for learning English vocabulary. One of the students said that *“I follow several accounts that I met on Instagram, for example: @Mr.Johnhid and @kampuninggrism”*. The rest of the students also explained that they followed accounts belonging to @Roy.muhammad, @dcc_english, @boardicle.

In addition to following the accounts above, most students also engage and participate in a quiz shared through stories or posts on Instagram. These quizzes are usually in the form of multiple choice, matching, or fill in the blank words related to English vocabulary. As one student explained that *“I like quiz because the question is more challenging, fun and we can interact with the quiz so we don't get bored quickly”*. The statement indicates that through quizzes, students not only test their understanding of the material, but also experience a fun sensation of competence.

Reels are also part of the format on Instagram that students are most interested in. This format allows them to express their creativity through short, engaging videos. With various effects, music and filters available, students can create unique and entertaining content, while learning English in a fun way. One student argued that *“In my opinion, reels can be viewed repeatedly and can be saved in our own account. Reels also provide images with sound so that at the same time we can learn listening”*. Meanwhile, a minority of students said *“I'm more into the post because it can be seen again”*. From this description, we can conclude that both have a significant impact on each other's usage patterns.

Overall, the Instagram content guided the students and encouraged them to continue to improve. Initially students were actively involved in the role of social media use, but over time, they realized that this platform is not just for fun, but can also be an effective tool to learn and grow. Through inspirational and educational content, students are motivated to pursue their goals, be it in academics, career or personal development. To reinforce this process, students need to build a positive network on Instagram, by following accounts that are relevant to their interests and goals. The use of this platform can be one useful tactic to create challenging opportunities for deeper understanding for students to overcome barriers(Saputera & Tamburian, 2019).

CONCLUSION

The findings show that Instagram content is an effective tool to help students improve their English vocabulary. Students reported that features such as reels, posts and stories rich in new vocabulary in relevant contexts made learning more interesting and memorable. In addition,

interaction with peers or through a quiz encourages them to use new vocabulary actively and get immediate feedback.

However, research also reveals that not all Instagram content is equally effective. Students tend to be easily hesitant in trying something new. In addition, the quality of the content is also very influential. Content that contains quizzes, is in the form of video, and has music effects will more easily attract users interest. Suggestions for improvement, such as curating relevant Instagram content for vocabulary learning and integrating it into classroom learning activities, highlight the need for a more integrated approach. By utilizing the potential of Instagram for learning, vocabulary teaching can be more engaging, relevant, and effective in meeting students' diverse learning styles.

A limitation of this study is the small sample size, consisting of only 34 students from one school, which may not be representative of the student population or arguably a smaller scope. This limits the generalizability of the findings to the educational context of the event, in terms of a variety of backgrounds. In addition, this study only focused on students' perceptions of Instagram content, with no direct objective measurement of vocabulary improvement. This study also relied on data through open-ended questionnaires and in-depth interviews, which could be influenced by students' subjective perceptions or social desirability bias that could affect the research. This study did not examine the relationship between frequency of Instagram content use and vocabulary acquisition improvement. It will show whether there is a significant relationship between the amount of time spent consuming Instagram content and students' learning outcomes.

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