

Impact of Social Media on Learning English Vocabulary

Esha Gul

eshagulahmed1@gmail.com

BS English (Linguistics), University of Peshawar

Corresponding Author: * Esha Gul eshagulahmed1@gmail.com

Received: 29-01-2026

Revised: 15-02-2026

Accepted: 01-03-2026

Published: 28-03-2026

ABSTRACT

This study examines how social platforms which include Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, and YouTube affects vocabulary learning. All generations use social media, which is a popular communication tool. Institutions have included social media platforms like Instagram, WhatsApp, Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube as vocabulary learning aids in addition to using them as communication methods to engage with students and provide fresh material. The question of whether social media platforms are useful teaching and learning tools has emerged as a result of social media's growing popularity. The goal of this study is to determine how social media affects the growth of English vocabulary. The impact of social media on interest in vocabulary learning skills is another goal of this study. Additionally, this study looks into how these platforms affect vocabulary development in both positive and negative ways. This study's data and answers came from a vocabulary test. An online vocabulary test was administered to forty students from the Department of English, ABHC, Abbottabad. The students took the test and shared their results with the researcher. The results clearly demonstrate that students who spend more time on social media have better vocabulary than those who spend less time on it. This study found it difficult to determine how social media helps students acquire language. The responses revealed that most students think social media improves vocabulary acquisition because it increases students' interest in learning a second language, and that those who use social media more frequently have better vocabulary than those who use it less.

Keywords: Vocabulary Learning, ESL Learners, Social Media, English Vocabulary.

INTRODUCTION

Social media is a prevalent communication platform for people of all ages, offering a means for users to communicate, share information and engage in interactive online spaces. It is described as internet-based applications to communicate with others, organizations and communities (Purnama & Asdlori). The growth and popularity of social media platforms has led to its use transcending social purposes and into the academic sphere, where it is becoming a learning resource. Specifically, social media sites allow ongoing exposure to English, through the sharing of videos, status updates, comments and discourse in general, making it possible to develop vocabulary in context (Shahid et al., 2025).

Meanwhile, social networking platforms, like Instagram, also facilitate interaction with features that enable users to create personal profiles, form connections with others and share various activities (Laor, 2022). These sites provide rich opportunities for language exposure and learning through social media. Vocabulary is a critical element in language learning and development as it refers to words that individuals understand and use. Learning vocabulary entails the process of acquiring, understanding and using appropriate words in various forms of communication. For the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learner, vocabulary learning is particularly crucial, as it can affect speaking, reading, listening and writing skills.

In today's digital world, social media platforms are revolutionizing the ways in which that come across and use language. Although often perceived as fostering conciseness and informality, they have important language benefits. Students encounter various content that demonstrates everyday language use and its different levels of formality. They can see how vocabulary is used in various contexts, thus improving their vocabulary skills. The dynamic and situational nature of language on social media allows learners to encounter language in a more authentic way compared to classroom tools such as textbooks, which might present language in a more formalized manner (Das, 2023).

Social media's interactivity also enhances its vocabulary learning potential. There's active engagement in communication through comments, shares and replies. This enables learners to exercise their language skills in context, receive feedback and develop vocabulary skills. Also, international online communities can provide learners with a chance to connect with others, and explore various language and culture variants. This learning is consistent with social constructivist theories which stress social interaction and collaboration as key to learning (Shabur & Siddiki, 2024).

The second key benefit of social media is the exposure to natural language. Students have access to language in its natural context, exposure to idiomatic phrases, and up-to-date vocabulary. Such input facilitates incidental learning of vocabulary, where learners unconsciously learn new words. Moreover, multimedia integration (pictures and videos) aids in understanding and retention, as learners can connect words to visual and situational information (Wati et al., 2024).

However, the use of social media has a mixed effect on vocabulary learning. The casual nature of communication in such media includes the use of abbreviations, acronyms and internet language, which can differ from conventional language norms. This can pose a challenge for language learners who need to be able differentiate between informal and proper language use, especially in educational settings. This underscores the importance of Media Literacy in online content (Song & Xiong, 2023).

Thus, supporting language learners to make effective use of social media means weighing the advantages and disadvantages of social media use. Students should know how to engage in educational events and activities and be aware of the challenges. Teachers can also support learners to use social media effectively and strategically in their language learning so that it is used to supplement structured learning while being incorporated into the learning strategies.

This research seeks to understand how social media affects vocabulary learning of English as a foreign language (EFL). It explores whether higher social media use results in more vocabulary learning, and identifies students' views on the use of social media for language learning.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social media refers to applications supported by technology that enable users to share various types of content. According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), it encompasses internet-based applications rooted in the principles of the Web, enabling users to create and exchange user-generated content. Ahlqvist (2008) further defines it as a means of interaction where people virtually connect to create, share, exchange, and discuss content within communities and networks. Social media is simply a medium for technology-based information creation and sharing by users or groups. These technologies come in a variety of forms, including blogs, networks, forums, microblogs etc. Social media has go positive effects in entertainment, economy and education. Dias-Oliva (2020) notes its positive impact in promoting freedom of speech and informing people about worldwide news, and making friends. But it's worth remembering that while there

are positive impacts there are also potential downside consequences of cyber bullying and cyber stalking (Obar & Wildman, 2015).

Social media is a constructive development in society, providing both means for communication and learning purposes (Venkatesh et.al., 2003). When it comes to group learning, the role of social media is critical and crucial; it is used to exchange information and knowledge between groups of learners. A typical example of this is through the use of Instagram apps in student interactions.

According to Boyd and Ellison (2007), Instagram is a Social Networking Service (SNS) that enables users to create public profiles, connect with other users, view their connections and the connections of others on Instagram, share event experiences with their network of friends or relations. The mobile application aspect of Instagram enables the user to take and share photos and videos. Ultimately, Instagram can be regarded as a social media platform that allows users to share videos or photos, build communities and share news about their lives. This free mobile app was designed in October 2010 by Kevin Systorm and Mike Krieger. Wiktor (2012) suggests that there are educational assets on Instagram, making possible learning with linguistic intelligences. According to Al-Ali (2014) Instagram is a very popular and inspirable Arabic application, particularly interesting for its use in teaching languages, as it offers an active spontaneous learning process. Finally, Ma'ady et al., 2015 stress that there are many useful features in Instagram due to its nature as a social networking platform, where communication is the main feature. Apart from the main feature of Instagram, there are other features such as "Instagram story" and "Instagram live". The "Instagram story" option allows users to post a picture, video or a poll that disappears after 24 hours. The stories content is temporary and unavailable after 24 hours of sharing them. Also, the story contents do not show on the user's grid and feed. On the contrary, "Instagram live" helps users take live shows with other users. These new features offer users many ways to connect with their Instagram fan base in new and engaging ways, promoting knowledge of the user's Instagram offerings and driving traffic to valuable offerings on other websites outside of Instagram. Bintz (2011) perceived vocabulary as "the words that are necessary for effective communication: the words used when speaking (expressive vocabulary) and the words understood when listening (receptive vocabulary)." Vocabulary is integral to the development of proficiency in English or any other new language, as it is the first step in building language skills, and includes progressing on to more complex language structures. Richard and Renandya (2002) suggest that "vocabulary is a key component of language skill and often sets much of the foundation for learners' speech, listening, reading and writing". Some definitions of vocabulary also refer to the totality of words related to a particular subject, to a language or those known or used by an individual (Graves, 2000).

Vocabulary plays a vital role in English language teaching, as students cannot understand and communicate without vocabulary. Wilkins' (1972) view of the importance of vocabulary is "while very little can be conveyed without grammar, nothing can be conveyed without vocabulary". Lewis (1993) aptly described lexis as the "core or heart of language." As learners progress in English proficiency, it becomes vital for them to expand their productive vocabulary and develop personalized strategies for vocabulary acquisition. Learners often instinctively grasp the significance of vocabulary in their language learning journey. As Ojetunde et al., (2025) noted, "learners carry around dictionaries and not grammar books, "underlining how teaching vocabulary aids learners in understanding and interacting effectively in English. Vocabulary learning involves understanding the relationships between words, how to use them in appropriate contexts, and grasping their accurate meanings. Adger et al. (2002), adds that vocabulary encompasses more than just word meanings; it also encompasses the structure of language vocabulary, how words are utilized and stored and the processes by which words are learned, including the connections between words, phrases, and word categories.

Informal nature of communication on social media introduces challenges, as noted by Gorsuch and Taguchi (2022), with learners potentially grappling with internet slang, abbreviations, and non-standard linguistic forms that may deviate from formal language norms. Despite these challenges, researchers such as Sun and Chang (2019) note the communicative nature of social media platforms, enabling social interactions, interactions in real time and peer feedback, which lead to a dynamic—and socially situated—mechanism of learning English vocabulary. Another significant aspect is the role of motivation, as Bailey et al., (2021) highlight intrinsic motivation arising from social interactions and involvement in online communities that strengthens learners' determination to learn vocabulary. Hossain (2024) focuses on the cultural and sociolinguistic aspects, highlighting the role of exposure to diverse language use in different cultural settings in contributing to a more comprehensive learning of the English language.

Moreover, Hockly and Dudeney (2017) underscores the importance of flexibility and digital skills to adapt to the ever-changing platforms of social media and carefully assess and choose online language resources. In summary, this review suggests a sophisticated view of the effects of social media use on English vocabulary learning, highlighting both benefits, such as exposure to authentic language use and interactive learning opportunities, and the challenges of informal social media language use, which need to be taken into account in teaching strategies.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study uses a quantitative, cross sectional, correlational research design to investigate the association between self reported social media use and EFL undergraduate learners' vocabulary knowledge. A comparative strategy was used to determine the difference between mean vocabulary test scores of two naturally occurring groups: high social media and low social media users. Data collection was quantitative to allow for the collection of quantitative, replicable information that can be statistically compared and interpreted with reduced researcher bias and based on the interpretation of the association between social media use and vocabulary proficiency.

Given the exploratory nature of this study, a cross sectional design was suitable as it enables data collection at a single point in time and without interference with the participant's behaviour. It yields a glimpse of the relationship between social media usage and vocabulary knowledge, acknowledging that this is a correlational study and causality cannot be presumed.

Population and Sampling

This study examines undergraduates from English medium universities in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) region of Pakistan. A sample of forty undergraduate students was drawn from this population from the Department of English at Army Burn Hall College (ABHC) in Abbottabad. The researchers used a stratified purposive sampling technique to ensure equal representation from two strata: (a) students self reporting high engagement with social media (for more than three hours a day across all platforms), and (b) students self reporting low engagement with social media (for less than one hour a day). This was done to ensure that two comparison groups, each comprising twenty students, were selected for statistical comparisons. Students were recruited via class announcements and only participants who gave their informed consent were selected.

Instrumentation

The vocabulary test was developed and used as a measurement tool for students on how social media is helping us to improve our vocabulary on a daily basis.

Data Collection Procedure

Survey research was used as the data gathering strategy, and information was gathered through an online vocabulary exam. The administration of the relevant organization gave ethical approval for data collection for this study, and forty students took an online vocabulary exam. An online vocabulary exam was administered to forty college students at ABHC, Abbottabad, who were split into two groups of twenty: those who spent more time on social media and those who spent less. Students attentively completed the test and gave the researcher their percentages, which allowed the researcher to demonstrate the vocabulary differences between the two groups.

Theoretical Framework

This research draws on three theoretical insights. First, Krashen's (1981) Input Hypothesis suggests second language learning takes place when the input learners receive is slightly more advanced than their current level ($i + 1$). Social media offers a rich greater exposure to English words in context and repetition through real posts, text and video content, making it easier for incidental vocabulary learning to occur. Secondly, Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural approach and Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) indicates that learning is socially situated. Through social media, learners can access vocabulary in interactions with their peers, native speakers and groups, with social support and scaffolding to help them develop vocabulary that they cannot otherwise learn on their own. Third, Paivio's (1986) Dual Coding Theory suggest that information is more easily remembered when a verbal and an image code are present. The multimodal nature of social media posts with text, imaging and videos enable learners to create dual memory codes, which improve recall and recognition of new vocabulary. Combined, these theories predict an increase in users' vocabulary proficiency as they engage more with social media, but this effect is moderated by the nature of social media engagement.

Ethical Considerations and Limitations

Before collecting the data, we secured approval from Army Burn Hall College's institutional review board. Data were deidentified, with participant codes using numbers and letters. No rewards were provided for participation and students were informed their marks would not be negatively impacted by non-participation or withdrawal.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This section reports and discusses the results of the study, which involved the vocabulary test with two groups of undergraduate students. The samples included in the study were categorised in Group A, which involved students who reported they had high levels of social media involvement and Group B, involving students who reported less social media use. The aim of this section is to explore variations in vocabulary

size between the groups, and to investigate the connection between social media use and vocabulary acquisition.

We used an online version of the lexical test by Laufer and Nation, which was implemented using the online method by Cobb, to gather data. This test assessed students' productive vocabulary knowledge at various levels. Responses were evaluated with percentages and were used to determine the average score of each student.

RESULTS

Table 1

Group A	Version A results
Participant A	95.4%
Participant B	83.8
Participant C	87.8
Participant D	80.8
Participant E	82.4
Participant F	82.8
Participant G	79.6
Participant H	82.4
Participant I	85.2
Participant J	91.6
Participant K	84
Participant L	85.8
Participant M	84
Participant N	85.4
Participant O	82.4
Participant P	81
Participant Q	82.2
Participant R	84.6
Participant S	85.4

Table 1 presents the results of Group A, which included twenty students who reported frequent use of social media platforms such as Instagram, WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. The scores of this group ranged from approximately 79% to 95%, indicating a consistently high level of vocabulary proficiency. Most participants scored above 80%, suggesting that individuals with higher exposure to social media tend to demonstrate stronger vocabulary knowledge.

In contrast, Table 2 shows the results of Group B, consisting of twenty students who reported limited use of social media. The scores in this group ranged from 24% to approximately 53%, reflecting a noticeably lower level of vocabulary proficiency. The majority of participants in this group scored below 50%, indicating weaker vocabulary knowledge compared to Group A.

Table 2

Group B	Version A Results
Participant A	44.6%

Participant B	42.2%
Participant C	24%
Participant D	44.4%
Participant E	41.8%
Participant F	40.2%
Participant G	39%
Participant H	46.2%
Participant I	38.2%
Participant J	48.6%
Participant K	51.4%
Participant L	53.6%
Participant M	49.6%
Participant N	52.4%
Participant O	40.8%
Participant P	49.6%
Participant Q	52.4%
Participant R	50%
Participant S	45.4%

The comparison between the two groups reveals a substantial difference in average performance. Group A consistently outperformed Group B across all participants, suggesting a positive association between social media usage and vocabulary acquisition. This finding supports the hypothesis that increased engagement with social media contributes to vocabulary development.

One possible explanation for this difference lies in the nature of exposure provided by social media platforms. Students who spend more time on these platforms are likely to encounter a wider range of vocabulary through diverse content, including posts, captions, videos, and online discussions. This exposure facilitates incidental learning, where individuals acquire new words through repeated interaction with language in meaningful contexts rather than through deliberate memorization.

While the findings indicate a positive relationship between social media usage and vocabulary knowledge, it is important to consider the complexity of this relationship. The results do not suggest that social media alone is sufficient for developing a comprehensive vocabulary. The quality and type of engagement with social media content play a crucial role. Learners who actively seek educational or linguistically rich content are more likely to benefit compared to those who primarily engage with entertainment-oriented material.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

The findings imply that learners are increasingly using technology to increase their vocabulary in English. Additionally, technology makes it easier for knowledge to learn. Based on the results and discussion of this study, it can be concluded that students frequently use social media, such as Instagram, YouTube, WhatsApp, Twitter, and Facebook, to learn English vocabulary because of the usability of certain types of technology, such as educational apps, smartphones, and tablets. Instagram is the social media platform that students utilize most frequently to study vocabulary in English. When the instructor permits them to use social media in class, particularly for group discussions, or when they have free time at home, university students use it to study vocabulary in English. Due to the more varied information on social media, students can enhance their vocabulary in English, which motivates them to use social media to learn the language.

Additionally, social media's beneficial effects should be taken into account to raise students' proficiency in expanding their vocabulary in English.

Those who use social media more frequently have better vocabulary than those who use it less frequently. In the context of EFL university students, social media integration must be taken into consideration in order to enhance the students' English vocabulary skills through the use of suitable social media platforms. Social media gives students the chance to engage with native speakers and various online instructors, which helps them expand their vocabulary in English. By engaging with and listening to native speakers on social media, students can improve their vocabulary. Additionally, social media offers a forum for vocabulary development. There are many groups on social media who provide the facility of content vocabulary skills.

Social media helps in learning English vocabulary and it is easily accessible to the students for learning. Furthermore, these language students need to have confined time in the utilization of social media destinations to keep away from time wastage and that they can have quality time in ponders and other progressively advantageous exercises. Then again, picking the correct sort of media or information would be of incredible advantage to the students and also to abstain from subverting languages and web slangs.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this research has illuminated the undeniable influence of social media in enhancing English vocabulary. The in-depth evaluation found that social media platforms are powerful language enhancers, providing extensive resources for exposure to a wide range of language content. It does so by noting and recognizing the benefits of perceptions of community, language-related challenges and resources on social media. This research makes it clear that social media, when strategically harnessed, can play a significant role in enhancing and enriching users' English vocabulary. In this ever-growing tech environment, it is becoming increasingly important to recognise the invaluable contribution of social media in language learning, opening up new and effective avenues to leverage these platforms further for language learning.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The first and most crucial advice is that teachers should continue to experiment with new ways to leverage social media platforms in language learning classrooms, as new platforms emerge with new language applications and uses. The creation of intelligent learning systems that tailor vocabulary lessons according to learners' social media activities has a strong potential. Further, promoting a multicultural language learning environment via cross-border language learning partnerships and social media-based virtual exchanges can also enhance language learners' vocabulary with regional and cultural vocabulary. With the rapid development of artificial intelligence, integration of AI-based language learning platforms into social media platforms can offer personalized and engaging vocabulary lessons. In addition, it is essential to regularly revisit and align digital literacy training to ensure learners are equipped with skills to critically assess language learning resources and adapt to the ever-changing social media environments.

REFERENCES

- Adger, W. N., Kelly, P. M., Winkels, A., Huy, L. Q., & Locke, C. (2002). Migration, remittances, livelihood trajectories, and social resilience. *ambio: A Journal of the Human Environment*, 31(4), 358-366.
- Ahlqvist, T., Bäck, A., Halonen, M., & Heinonen, S. (2008). Social media roadmaps: exploring the futures triggered by social media.

- Al-Ali, S. (2014). Embracing the selfie craze: Exploring the possible use of Instagram as a language mLearning tool. *Issues and Trends in Educational Technology*, 2(2).
- Bailey, D., Almusharraf, N., & Hatcher, R. (2021). Finding satisfaction: Intrinsic motivation for synchronous and asynchronous communication in the online language learning context. *Education and Information Technologies*, 26(3), 2563-2583.
- Bintz, W. P. (2011). Teaching vocabulary across the curriculum. *Middle School Journal*, 42(4), 44-53.
- Boyd, D. M., & Ellison, N. B. (2007). Social network sites: Definition, history, and scholarship. *Journal of computer-mediated Communication*, 13(1), 210-230.
- Das, S. (2023). The digital duality: social media's impact on society, communication, and language. *Journal of Communication and Management*, 2(04), 245-253.
- Dias Oliva, T. (2020). Content moderation technologies: Applying human rights standards to protect freedom of expression. *Human Rights Law Review*, 20(4), 607-640.
- Gorsuch, G., & Taguchi, E. (2022). Foreign language reading fluency and reading fluency methodologies. In *Research Questions in Language Education and Applied Linguistics: A Reference Guide* (pp. 469-474). Cham: Springer International Publishing.
- Graves, K., & Xu, S. (2000). *Designing language courses: A guide for teachers* (p. 308). Boston, MA: Heinle & Heinle.
- Hockly, N., & Dudeney, G. (2017). Digital learning in 2020. In *Digital language learning and teaching* (pp. 235-245). Routledge.
- Hossain, K. I. (2024). Reviewing the role of culture in English language learning: Challenges and opportunities for educators. *Social Sciences & Humanities Open*, 9, 100781.
- Kaplan, A. M., & Haenlein, M. (2010). Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of Social Media. *Business horizons*, 53(1), 59-68.
- Krashen, S. (1981). Second language acquisition. *Second language learning*, 3(7), 19-39.
- Laor, T. (2022). My social network: Group differences in frequency of use, active use, and interactive use on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. *Technology in Society*, 68, 101922.
- Lewis, M. (1993). *The lexical approach* (Vol. 1, p. 993). Hove: Language teaching publications.
- Ma'ady, M. N. P., Hidayat, A. A., Nasution, A. H., Kusumawati, A., & Insani, R. (2025). Maximizing Prospective Students through Instagram-Driven Influence Maximization for University Branding. *JOIV: International Journal on Informatics Visualization*, 9(4), 1717-1723.
- Obar, J. A., & Wildman, S. (2015). Social media definition and the governance challenge: An introduction to the special issue. *Telecommunications policy*, 39(9), 745-750.

- Ojetunde, C. F., Olowofoyeku, P., & Oshoja, T. O. (2025). The Use of Contexts for Effective Teaching and Learning of English Vocabulary in Nigerian Secondary Schools. *Journal of Humanities Education*, 2(1), 94-115.
- Purnama, Y., & Asdlori, A. (2023). The role of social media in students' social perception and interaction: Implications for learning and education. *Technology and Society Perspectives (TACIT)*, 1(2), 45-55.
- Richards, J. C., & Renandya, W. A. (Eds.). (2002). *Methodology in language teaching: An anthology of current practice*. Cambridge university press.
- Shabur, M. A., & Siddiki, M. R. (2024). Investigating social media's impact on the new era of interactive learning: A case study of Bangladesh. *Heliyon*, 10(4).
- Shahid, F., Rafiq, N., & Farid, S. (2025). The Influence of Social Media on English Vocabulary in Pakistan. *The Critical Review of Social Sciences Studies*, 3(2), 1547-1562.
- Song, B., & Xiong, D. (2023). A comparative study of the effects of social media and language learning apps on learners' vocabulary performance. *Asia Pacific Education Review*, 1-12.
- Sun Han Chang, R., Lee, J. C. W., Pedron, S., Harley, B. A., & Rogers, S. A. (2019). Rheological analysis of the gelation kinetics of an enzyme cross-linked PEG hydrogel. *Biomacromolecules*, 20(6), 2198-2206.
- Systrom, K., Vladek, T., & Krieger, M. (2020). *Project title*.
- Venkatesh, V., Morris, M. G., Davis, G. B., & Davis, F. D. (2003). User acceptance of information technology: Toward a unified view1. *MIS quarterly*, 27(3), 425-478.
- Wati, S. O., Budiyanti, K., Mizkat, E., Juita, N., & Ardi, H. (2024). Exploring the benefits and challenges of social media in English language learning: Insights from English education students. *Journal of English Language and Education*, 9(3), 38-45.
- Wilkins, D. A. (1972). *Linguistics in language teaching* (Vol. 111). London: Edward Arno