

Social Media Utilization For Vocabulary Enhancement In First Year Undergraduates

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Abstract

This study investigates the utilization patterns, perceptions, and motivating factors associated with the use of social media as a tool for vocabulary learning among first-year undergraduate students across diverse academic majors. Data were collected from 152 participants representing healthcare, technical, business, and social sciences majors through a survey-based approach. The findings reveal that a significant proportion of first-year students across all majors report frequent usage of social media platforms for vocabulary learning, with variations observed in the perceived effectiveness of these platforms. Convenience and accessibility emerged as primary motivators, followed by factors such as engagement, variety of resources, real-life context, and motivation/accountability. The study highlights the multifaceted nature of students' motivations and preferences in utilizing social media for language acquisition purposes. These insights have implications for language education practices, suggesting the need for educators to integrate social media into language learning curricula to better support students' diverse learning needs and enhance the overall learning experience.

Key words: Social media, vocabulary learning, first-year students, academic majors

I. Introduction

1.1. Background to the study

In recent years, the integration of social media into educational settings has garnered increasing attention as a potential tool for enhancing various aspects of learning, including vocabulary acquisition. As language proficiency is a crucial component of academic success, particularly for first-year students transitioning into higher education, understanding effective strategies to support vocabulary development is paramount.

Vocabulary acquisition plays a pivotal role in language learning, influencing reading comprehension, writing proficiency, and overall communication skills. Traditionally, vocabulary instruction has been conducted through classroom-based activities, such as vocabulary drills, reading assignments, and teacher-led discussions. However, the emergence of digital technologies, particularly social media platforms, offers new opportunities to supplement and enhance traditional instructional methods.

Social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Tik-Tok, have become ubiquitous in contemporary society, shaping how individuals communicate, share information, and interact with others. These platforms provide a rich and dynamic environment for language learners to engage with authentic language input, interact with native speakers, and access a wealth of resources tailored to their learning needs.

Despite the growing interest in leveraging social media for language learning, research specifically focusing on its role in enhancing vocabulary acquisition among first-year students remains limited. Given the unique challenges faced by first-year students, including the transition to college-level academic discourse and the development of academic vocabulary, it is essential to explore innovative approaches to support their language learning needs.

This research aims to address this gap by investigating the utilization of social media platforms as a supplementary tool for enhancing vocabulary acquisition among first-year students. By examining the ways in which social media can facilitate vocabulary learning, foster engagement, and provide opportunities for authentic language practice, this study seeks to provide insights into effective pedagogical strategies for integrating digital technologies into language learning curricula.

Through a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative analysis of vocabulary acquisition outcomes with qualitative exploration of students' perceptions and experiences, this research seeks to offer practical recommendations for educators and language instructors seeking to leverage social media effectively in supporting vocabulary development for first-year students.

1.2. Statement of the problem

While traditional vocabulary instruction methods have long been employed in language learning contexts, the integration of social media platforms offers new avenues for enhancing vocabulary acquisition among first-year students. Despite the increasing prevalence of social media in educational settings, empirical research specifically investigating the role of social media in

vocabulary development for first-year students remains limited. Several studies have explored the potential benefits of incorporating social media into language learning contexts. For instance, Bensalem (2018) investigated the impact of WhatsApp on vocabulary acquisition among ESL learners, highlighting the role of instant messaging in providing authentic language practice and fostering peer interaction. Similarly, Athukorala (2021) explored the use of WeChat, a popular Chinese social media platform, in facilitating vocabulary learning and communication among university students, emphasizing the importance of contextualized learning experiences.

However, gaps persist in understanding the effectiveness of integrating social media into language learning curricula, identifying optimal pedagogical strategies, and examining students' perceptions and experiences regarding social media-based vocabulary learning activities, particularly among first-year students transitioning into higher education.

1.3. Objectives of the study

The first objective of this study is to examine the varied patterns of social media usage for vocabulary learning among first-year students across different academic majors, including an exploration of the frequency and extent of social media usage. The second objective is to investigate students' perceptions toward the effectiveness of using social media as a tool for vocabulary learning across various majors, focusing on the perceived benefits and limitations of incorporating social media into language learning practices. Finally, the study attempts to identify and analyze the factors affecting first-year students' motivation to use social media for vocabulary learning, exploring the underlying reasons and preferences behind their engagement with social media platforms for language acquisition within healthcare, technical, business, and social sciences majors.

1.4. Research questions

This study aims to address these gaps by investigating the following research questions:

- 1.4.1. *How do first-year students of different majors vary in their frequency of using social media for vocabulary learning?*
- 1.4.2. *What are the perceived levels of effectiveness of social media for vocabulary learning among first-year students in different academic majors?*
- 1.4.3. *What factors motivate first-year students to use social media as a tool for learning new vocabulary, and how do these motivations differ across healthcare, technical, business, and social sciences majors?*

II. Literature Review

2.1. Theories of vocabulary acquisition

Vocabulary is fundamental to language acquisition and communication. It serves as the building blocks upon which all other aspects of language learning rely. It is considered the vehicle through which individuals express their thoughts, ideas, and emotions. Without an adequate vocabulary, communication becomes limited and ineffective (Nation, 2013). Numerous vocabulary acquisition theories highlight the importance of vocabulary knowledge in language learning and academic success. Skinner (1957) proposed that learners acquire new words through repeated exposure and reinforcement of correct usage. According to Skinner, reinforcement strengthens the association between a stimulus (the word) and a response (understanding or using the word correctly). Positive reinforcement, such as praise or rewards, encourages learners to continue using newly acquired words. For example, when a child correctly identifies or uses a new word, they might receive praise from a teacher or parent, reinforcing the connection between the word and its meaning. *Piaget's Cognitive Theory* (1969) emphasizes the mental processes involved in vocabulary learning, particularly focusing on how individuals construct knowledge and understanding through their interactions with the environment. Piaget proposed that cognitive development occurs through assimilation, accommodation, and the organization of information into schemas. *The Incidental Learning Theory* which was associated with Long (1983) emphasized the significance of implicit learning processes, suggesting that learners acquire language incidentally through exposure to authentic language use. Long's research has contributed to the understanding of how learners acquire vocabulary and language structures without explicit instruction, particularly through exposure to comprehensible input. *The Vocabulary Threshold Hypothesis* by Nation (1990) suggests that learners need to acquire a certain threshold level of vocabulary knowledge to achieve reading comprehension without the constant need for a dictionary. This hypothesis implies that once learners surpass this threshold, their ability to understand written texts significantly improves, leading to more efficient language learning. High-frequency words and words with broad applicability across different contexts are often considered more crucial for language proficiency.

2.2. Research on vocabulary acquisition through social media

Studies investigating the effectiveness of social media for vocabulary acquisition among language learners have provided valuable insights into the benefits and challenges of incorporating social media into language learning contexts. Lotherington and Jenson (2011) explored the use of social media tools such as blogs, wikis, and podcasts for language learning in a Canadian university context. They found that social media enhanced vocabulary acquisition by providing opportunities for collaborative learning, multimodal interaction, and creative expression. Lomicka and Lord (2012) explored the use of Facebook for language learning among university students. They found that students perceived Facebook as a valuable tool for vocabulary acquisition, providing opportunities for authentic language use, interaction with peers, and exposure to diverse language varieties. The interactive features of Facebook, such as comments, likes, and sharing, foster active participation and collaboration among learners, leading to increased engagement with vocabulary learning activities. Luo and Wang (2015) investigated the impact of using WeChat, a popular messaging app in China, on vocabulary acquisition among English language learners. They found that WeChat facilitated

vocabulary learning through real-time communication, collaborative activities, and access to authentic language input. In 2012, Sung and Mayer examined the effectiveness of using Twitter for vocabulary learning in English as a Second Language (ESL) context. They found that Twitter-based vocabulary instruction improved students' vocabulary knowledge and retention, particularly when combined with explicit vocabulary instruction and interactive tasks. Alzamil and Chau (2020) conducted a meta-analysis of studies examining the role of social media in language learning and teaching. They found that social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube offer diverse opportunities for vocabulary acquisition, including exposure to authentic language input, interactive communication, and personalized learning experiences.

2.3. Social media in language learning: benefits and challenges

Social media could be defined as websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking or platforms such as Facebook and Twitter that allow people to interact on the web or using mobile phones. Arguably, the very core of these web-based services is that they allow the users to construct a personal profile that can be later revealed to the public and to articulate a list of so-called "friends" that other users with whom one is willing to share an on-line connection (Boyd & Ellison, 2007).

The increasing role of social media in language learning contexts has been a notable trend in recent years. Social media platforms offer a dynamic and interactive environment for language learners to engage with the target language in authentic and meaningful ways. Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Tik-Tok provide a plethora of informal learning opportunities. Language learners can follow accounts related to their target language, join language exchange groups, and participate in discussions with native speakers and other learners (Alzamil & Chau, 2020). Social media exposes learners to authentic language input in various contexts, including everyday conversations, news, entertainment, and cultural events. This exposure helps learners develop their listening, reading, and comprehension skills while also familiarizing them with colloquial expressions and slang. These platforms facilitate real-time communication through text, voice, and video messaging. Language learners can practice speaking and writing with native speakers or fellow learners, receive immediate feedback, and engage in meaningful conversations that simulate real-life communication scenarios (Lamy & Zourou, 2013). Social media fosters the formation of online language learning communities where learners can connect, collaborate, and support each other in their language learning journey. These communities may include forums, Facebook groups, subedits, and language exchange platforms where learners can share resources, ask questions, and seek advice from peers and experienced language learners. The algorithms used in these media advantage users data to personalize the language learning experience by recommending relevant content, learning resources, and language learning apps based on learners' interests, proficiency level, and learning goals. This personalization enhances learner engagement and motivation by providing tailored learning experiences (Warschauer & Whittaker, 2016).

Apart from above mentioned benefits of social media in language learning, it also poses some challenges of integrating social media into language learning curricula. In the first place, it is not easy to control the quality of the posts. The vast amount of user-generated content on social media platforms makes it challenging to ensure the accuracy and reliability of language learning materials, leading to potential misinformation and confusion among learners (Alzamil & Chau, 2020). In the second place, social media platforms often collect and use personal data for targeted advertising and algorithmic recommendations, raising privacy concerns among learners, educators, and parents (Thorne, 2016). Besides, the immersive and interactive nature of social media can be distracting for learners, potentially diverting their attention away from focused language learning tasks and goals (Warschauer & Whittaker, 2016). Alzamil & Chau, (2020) concern about pedagogical integration to ensure alignment with learning objectives, assessment criteria, and instructional methods

2.4. Traditional vocabulary instruction versus social media-based vocabulary learning

Traditional vocabulary instruction often follows a structured curriculum with predefined lists of words grouped by theme, frequency, or difficulty level. Instruction typically includes activities such as vocabulary drills, matching exercises, and fill-in-the-blank worksheets. This approach provides a systematic framework for vocabulary acquisition (Nation, 2001). The teacher plays a central role in delivering vocabulary instruction, explaining word meanings, providing examples, and offering feedback to students. Instruction is typically conducted face-to-face, with limited opportunities for student-led exploration and interaction. This model ensures guidance and support from an experienced educator (Schmitt, 2000). Vocabulary instruction in the classroom often emphasizes the use of context to infer word meanings through reading passages, listening activities, and classroom discussions. Teachers may provide explicit instruction on word roots, prefixes, suffixes, and collocations to help students understand and remember new vocabulary. This contextualized approach enhances comprehension and retention (Nation, 2001). Classroom-based vocabulary instruction may provide limited exposure to authentic language use outside of the classroom context. Students may encounter vocabulary primarily in the context of textbook materials, which may not reflect the diverse range of language varieties and registers encountered in real-life communication. This limitation can hinder learners' ability to apply vocabulary in authentic contexts (Schmitt, 2000).

Social media-based vocabulary learning, on the other hand, offers informal and authentic opportunities for vocabulary learning through exposure to real-life language use in diverse contexts. Learners encounter vocabulary naturally in their social media feeds, including text posts, comments, captions, and multimedia content. This immersion in authentic language enhances learners' exposure to real-world vocabulary usage (Lomicka & Lord, 2012). Social media enables users to create and share their own content, including blog posts, tweets, videos, and memes, which often incorporate informal language, slang, and idiomatic expressions. Learners can engage with user-generated content to explore new vocabulary in context and learn from authentic language models. This interactive and dynamic learning environment fosters engagement and exploration (Black, 2009). Social

media facilitates interactive and collaborative vocabulary learning experiences through features such as comments, likes, shares, and direct messaging. Learners can engage in conversations, ask questions, and receive feedback from native speakers and fellow learners in real time. This collaborative aspect promotes interaction and peer-to-peer learning (Lomicka & Lord, 2012).

2.5. Summary and gaps in the literature

While existing research suggests positive effects of social media-based learning on vocabulary acquisition, further investigation is needed to assess the long-term effects of such interventions. Longitudinal studies could examine the durability of vocabulary gains over time and investigate the sustainability of motivation and engagement in social media-based language learning environments. Otherwise, most studies on social media-based language learning have focused on intermediate to advanced learners. More research is needed to explore the effectiveness of social media interventions for vocabulary acquisition among learners at different proficiency levels, including beginners and learners with diverse linguistic backgrounds. Comparative studies could examine the effectiveness of different social media platforms for vocabulary acquisition and retention. By comparing the outcomes of interventions using various platforms, researchers can identify the unique affordances and limitations of each platform and provide evidence-based recommendations for language learning practitioners. Further investigation is needed to explore effective pedagogical strategies for integrating social media into language learning curricula. Studies could examine the impact of different instructional designs, task types, and scaffolding techniques on vocabulary learning outcomes in social media-based learning environments. Research should continue to explore learner perceptions and preferences regarding social media-based language learning. Understanding learners' attitudes, motivations, and usage patterns can inform the design of effective and learner-centered interventions that maximize engagement and learning outcomes.

In summary, while existing literature provides valuable insights into the benefits of social media-based learning for vocabulary acquisition, there are still several areas requiring further investigation, including the long-term effects of social media interventions, effectiveness across proficiency levels, comparative studies of different platforms, pedagogical design considerations, and learner perceptions and preferences. Addressing these gaps can contribute to the development of evidence-based practices for integrating social media into language learning contexts.

III. Methodology

3.1. Research design

By using a cross-sectional survey design, the study collects data through a survey administered to students from different majors. The study primarily employs descriptive statistics (e.g., frequencies, percentages) to summarize and analyze the data collected. The survey gathers information on students' motivations for using social media as a tool for learning new vocabulary, as well as their perceptions of its effectiveness. The analysis examines the relationship between students' majors and their motivations for using social media for vocabulary learning. It explores how different factors (e.g., convenience, engagement, resource variety) vary across majors. This aligns with the objectives of a cross-sectional study, which aims to observe and describe relationships between variables at a specific point in time.

3.2. Research participants

The presents study involved a total of 152 first-year students representing four distinct academic majors: healthcare, technical, business, and social sciences. These participants were recruited from Dai Nam University, ensuring a diverse representation across different fields of study. The sample size of 152 students provides a robust basis for analyzing the motivations and perceptions of students towards using social media as a tool for learning new vocabulary. By including students from various majors, the study captures a broad spectrum of perspectives, allowing for comprehensive insights into the factors influencing language learning preferences among first-year undergraduates (Table 1).

	Majors	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Healthcare Students	35	23.0	23.0	23.0
	Technical Students	38	25.0	25.0	48.0
Valid	Business Students	39	25.7	25.7	73.7
	SS Students	40	26.3	26.3	100.0
	Total	152	100.0	100.0	

Table 1: Frequency and percentage of the participants

3.3. Data analysis

The data collected from the survey responses of 152 first-year students representing healthcare, technical, business, and social sciences majors were subjected to thorough analysis. Initially, descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages were computed to summarize the responses and provide an overview of students' motivations for using social media as a tool for learning new vocabulary. Subsequently, cross-tabulations were conducted to explore the relationships between students' academic majors and their motivations. This analytical approach allowed us to identify patterns and trends within the data, enabling us to draw meaningful conclusions about the factors influencing students' preferences for language learning methods. Additionally, graphical representations, such as cross-tabulation tables, were utilized to visually illustrate the distribution of responses across different variables, enhancing the clarity and interpretability of the findings. Overall, our data analysis strategy was designed to

provide a comprehensive understanding of the motivations driving students' use of social media for vocabulary learning across various academic disciplines.

IV. Results

4.1. Varied patterns of social media usage for vocabulary learning

Across all majors, the majority of students report using social media for vocabulary learning multiple times a day, ranging from 46.1% to 70.0% within each major. This indicates that a significant proportion of first-year students utilize social media platforms frequently as a tool for vocabulary acquisition. There is variability in the distribution of social media usage frequencies across different majors. For example, social sciences students have the highest proportion of individuals using social media multiple times a day (70.0%), followed by healthcare students (60.0%). In contrast, technical students have a higher proportion reporting usage several times a week (55.3%), while business students exhibit a more balanced distribution across frequency categories. Despite differences in the specific frequency distributions, all majors demonstrate a consistent trend of moderate to high usage of social media for vocabulary learning. Even the lowest reported frequency category ("rarely") still represents a notable proportion of students within each major, ranging from 5.0% to 21.1% (Table 2).

These findings suggest that social media plays a significant role in the vocabulary learning practices of first-year students across various academic disciplines. Educators and curriculum designers should consider leveraging social media platforms as a supplementary tool for vocabulary acquisition, given their widespread usage among students.

		How often do you use social media for vocabulary learning?					
		Majors				Total	
		Healthcare Students	Technical Students	Business Students	SS Students		
Frequency	Whenever I am free	Count	5	3	4	9	21
		%	14.3%	7.9%	10.3%	22.5%	13.8%
	Multiple times a day	Count	21	2	19	28	70
		%	60.0%	5.3%	48.7%	70.0%	46.1%
	Several time a week	Count	5	21	10	0	36
		%	14.3%	55.3%	25.6%	0.0%	23.7%
	Rarely	Count	2	8	3	2	15
		%	5.7%	21.1%	7.7%	5.0%	9.9%
	Never	Count	2	4	3	1	10
		%	5.7%	10.5%	7.7%	2.5%	6.6%
Total	Count	35	38	39	40	152	
	%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	

Table 2: Frequency of using social media for vocabulary learning

4.2. Students' perceptions toward the effectiveness of social media

Based on the analysis of the data on the perceived effectiveness of using social media for vocabulary learning among first-year students across different majors, several key insights have emerged. These insights shed light on students' perceptions and attitudes towards social media as a tool for language acquisition. Firstly, it's evident that there is a varied perception of social media effectiveness across majors. For example, while 55.0% of social sciences students perceive social media as very effective, 84.2% of technical students consider it somewhat effective. However, only 11.4% of healthcare students and 20.5% of business students perceive social media as very effective. Despite the variation across majors, the majority of students perceive social media as effective or somewhat effective for vocabulary learning. Specifically, 74.4% of social sciences students, 84.2% of technical students, 58.9% of business students, and 73.4% of healthcare students hold this view. However, there are challenges and limitations perceived by some students regarding the effectiveness of social media for vocabulary learning. For instance, 25.6% of business students and 13.2% of healthcare students perceive social media as not very effective or not effective at all (Table 3).

These findings have significant implications for language education practices. Educators may consider incorporating social media-based learning activities into language courses, especially in majors where social media is perceived as highly effective. Additionally, further qualitative research could explore the underlying reasons behind students' perceptions to inform the development of more targeted and effective language learning strategies using social media.

How do you perceive the effectiveness of using social media for vocabulary learning?

		Majors				Total	
		Healthcare Students	Technical Students	Business Students	SS Students		
Levels of effectiveness	Very effective	Count	4	0	8	22	34
		%	11.4%	0.0%	20.5%	55.0%	22.4%
	Somewhat effective	Count	16	32	15	16	79
		%	45.7%	84.2%	38.5%	40.0%	52.0%
	Not very effective	Count	11	2	6	1	20
		%	31.4%	5.3%	15.4%	2.5%	13.2%
	Not effective at all	Count	4	4	10	1	19
		%	11.4%	10.5%	25.6%	2.5%	12.5%
Total	Count	35	38	39	40	152	
	%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	

Table 3: Perceptions of the effectiveness of using social media for vocabulary learning

4.3. Factor affecting motivation to the use of social media

In examining the data on what motivates students to use social media as a tool for learning new vocabulary, several key factors have emerged. These factors shed light on the preferences and priorities of students when it comes to language learning methods (Table 4).

The most commonly cited factor motivating students across all majors is convenience and accessibility, with 35.5% of students overall mentioning this. Business students have the highest proportion citing convenience and accessibility (43.6%), followed closely by healthcare students (31.4%) and technical students (31.6%).

While engagement and interactivity are less frequently mentioned, they still play a role for some students, particularly in healthcare and technical majors. Healthcare students have the highest proportion mentioning engagement and interactivity (25.7%), followed by technical students (7.9%).

A moderate proportion of students across majors valued the variety of resources offered by social media platforms for vocabulary learning. Technical students have the highest proportion mentioning the variety of resources (23.7%), followed by social sciences students (22.5%).

Many students across majors appreciate the real-life context and authenticity provided by social media for vocabulary learning. Business students have the highest proportion mentioning real-life context and authenticity (28.2%), followed closely by social sciences students (27.5%).

While fewer students mention motivation and accountability as motivators, it still holds importance for some. Business students have the highest proportion mentioning motivation and accountability (17.9%), followed by social sciences students (15.0%).

Overall, the data suggest that students are motivated to use social media for vocabulary learning for various reasons, including convenience, engagement, resource variety, real-life context, motivation, and accountability. These findings underscore the diverse preferences and priorities of students across different majors when it comes to language learning methods.

What motivates you to use social media as a tool for learning new vocabulary instead of more traditional methods like textbooks or drills?

		Majors				Total	
		Healthcare Students	Technical Students	Business Students	SS Students		
Factors	Convenience and Accessibility	Count	11	12	17	14	54
		%	31.4%	31.6%	43.6%	35.0%	35.5%
	Engagement and Interactivity	Count	9	3	0	0	12
		%	25.7%	7.9%	0.0%	0.0%	7.9%
	Variety of Resources	Count	6	9	4	9	28
		%	17.1%	23.7%	10.3%	22.5%	18.4%
	Real-life Context and Authenticity	Count	6	9	11	11	37
		%	17.1%	23.7%	28.2%	27.5%	24.3%

Motivation and Accountability	Count	3	5	7	6	21
	%	8.6%	13.2%	17.9%	15.0%	13.8%
Total	Count	35	38	39	40	152
	%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Table 4: Factors that motivate students using social media for vocabulary learning

V. Conclusions and Discussions

The present study investigated the usage patterns, perceptions, and motivating factors associated with the use of social media as a tool for vocabulary learning among first-year students across healthcare, technical, business, and social sciences majors. The findings offer valuable insights into the role of social media in language acquisition practices within higher education contexts.

Across all majors, a significant proportion of first-year students reported frequent usage of social media platforms for vocabulary learning, with the majority utilizing these platforms multiple times a day. This underscores the widespread adoption of social media as a supplementary tool for language acquisition among undergraduate students.

Students' perceptions of the effectiveness of social media varied across majors, with differences observed in the perceived benefits and limitations of utilizing social media for vocabulary learning. While the majority of students perceived social media as effective or somewhat effective, variations existed in the degree of effectiveness attributed to these platforms, highlighting the nuanced perspectives among different academic disciplines.

Furthermore, the study identified several motivating factors driving students' engagement with social media for vocabulary learning. Convenience and accessibility emerged as primary motivators across all majors, followed by factors such as engagement and interactivity, variety of resources, real-life context, and motivation/accountability. These findings emphasize the multifaceted nature of students' motivations and preferences when it comes to utilizing social media for language acquisition purposes.

Overall, the study underscores the significance of social media in students' vocabulary learning practices, educational institutions can better support students' language acquisition goals and enhance the overall learning experience.

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