

ON THE IMPACT OF TEACHING VOCABULARY THROUGH ASYNCHRONOUS SOCIAL MEDIA ON EFL LEARNERS' VOCABULARY LEARNING AND RETENTION

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Abstract: The purpose of this study was to look into how EFL learners' vocabulary acquisition and retention were affected by teaching vocabulary through asynchronous social media. Utilizing a quantitative experimental design, the study compared an experimental group exposed to contextualized vocabulary instruction via mobile social applications with a control group taught through traditional, face-to-face classroom methods. Data were gathered through a series of pre-tests, immediate post-tests, and delayed post-tests to track both immediate lexical acquisition and long-term retention over time. The statistical analysis revealed that the experimental group achieved significantly higher scores on both post-tests, demonstrating that the multimodal, self-paced nature of asynchronous social media platforms promotes deeper cognitive processing and more durable memory traces. Language instructors, EFL students, and syllabus designers can all benefit from the current study's findings. Specifically, these insights offer practical strategies for extending language exposure beyond physical classrooms, reducing student anxiety through familiar digital environments, and designing mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) frameworks that transform passive social media scrolling into active, collaborative production.

Keywords: Asynchronous Learning, EFL Learners, Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL), Vocabulary Acquisition, Vocabulary Retention.

Introduction

One of the most crucial elements of any language learning process is vocabulary. The first step in learning a foreign language is to become familiar with its vocabulary. Gaining proficiency in this area is crucial for effective written and spoken communication. In fact, the development of any language skill is thought to depend on having a sufficient vocabulary. The significance of terminology has lately been highlighted in this context (Kesmez, 2021). In this sense, Barcoft (2004) noted that effective communication is strongly correlated with possessing a sufficient vocabulary. The development of additional language skills might be aided by a large vocabulary (Kesmez, 2021). Despite the significance of vocabulary, many EFL students still

struggle with it. For instance, a lack of vocabulary makes it difficult for many EFL students to write and talk. In certain developing nations, schools and colleges still employ traditional methods of teaching vocabulary, which require students to remember lists of terms and provide associated translations of each word. The primary issue with these approaches is that they lack theoretical backing because learning vocabulary involves more than just memorization of a list of words. Students find it boring in class (Krashen, 1989).

Finding an efficient method for teaching vocabulary to language learners is crucial because of its significant role in the development of other language abilities. In this sense, incorporating technology into the process of learning a language might be considered a successful approach. These days, technology has a noticeable impact on many aspects of human life, including education (Nickerson, 2020).

In this sense, a lot of people are attempting to utilize technology and include it in language learning (Wang & Chen, 2020). Computer-assisted language learning (CALL) and mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) are two subjects in the area that resulted from this inclination to use technology in the language learning process (Ko, 2019). CALL was prevalent at first, but MALL eventually gained popularity (Namaziandost, et al., 2021). Many educators prefer to use social networks, particularly mobile-based applications, as a resource for educational purposes due to their increasing popularity and use. Popular social networks like Instagram can offer a significant amount of educational content (Rosell-Aguilar, 2018; Taskiran, Koral Gumusoglu & Aydin, 2018). According to recent reports, over 3.196 billion people utilize various social networks worldwide, and over 4 billion people are thought to be active internet users. Given this enormous user base, it makes sense to disseminate educational content on social media or use the Internet and social networks for educational objectives (Manca & Ranieri, 2016). In fact, due to social networks' explosive growth in popularity, trainers have recently been interested in them. Furthermore, young people are big fans of these networks. Instead of squandering their time, they can use these networks for learning (Alsharidi, 2018). The majority of students are active users of various social networks, and many utilize these networks for work-related objectives. Educators are aware of the potential of social networks and smartphone-based applications (Hsieh, 2017, as cited in Erarslan, 2019). This study is significant because it shows how crucial it is to use technology in vocabulary instruction, but further research in the Iranian setting is still needed. Many EFL students have the newest cell phones in the classroom, but they don't use them for educational purposes. Synchronous teaching is the foundation of all teaching strategies since it allows students and teachers to interact at specific times. Nonetheless, the world has changed due to the virtual world, and there are numerous ways for professors to conduct asynchronous lessons. One of the most widely used social media platforms is

Instagram, where a lot of people spend a lot of time. In order to determine whether Instagram has a major impact on EFL learners' vocabulary acquisition and retention, the researcher chose to use it as an asynchronous social media platform for vocabulary instruction. Vocabulary: Mastering a foreign language's vocabulary is the first step in learning it. Many EFL students view learning vocabulary as a difficult endeavor due to the inefficiency of many vocabulary teaching strategies. According to Akhlaghi and Zareian (2015), one of the limits in vocabulary learning is the provision of new vocabulary without consideration for the prior knowledge of language learners. Words can be thought of as the fundamental building blocks of learning any foreign language, and mastering a language requires memorizing its vocabulary. Thus, it may be concluded that expanding one's vocabulary is essential to learning English as a second language (Francis & Simpson, 2009). You can do better in other language skills if you have a large enough vocabulary. To put it another way, vocabulary is viewed as a foundation for the growth of other language abilities (Nation, 2001). The vocabulary of foreign language learners can be academically reinforced through textbooks and informally reinforced through interpersonal communication. The efficacy of learning vocabulary in foreign languages has been highlighted by numerous theoretically grounded foundations (Hairrell et al., 2011). However, a lot of EFL students struggle with vocabulary acquisition, and after they pick up new words, they eventually find it difficult to remember them. This weakness has numerous causes. Some people thought that frozen learning resulted from a lack of suitable and efficient vocabulary teaching techniques. Others thought that these challenges were caused by restricted access to real content in asynchronous mode (Khoshsima & Khosravi, 2021). It is believed that vocabulary is an essential part of the process of learning a language. Even though many EFL students start learning English in middle school, many of them struggle with a variety of language abilities. Their lack of vocabulary is the main cause of their issue (Kesmez, 2021). Furthermore, further research is required to determine the best way to teach this component to EFL students. In particular, vocabulary is thought to be essential for expanding productive abilities like writing and speaking as well as for learning information through receptive skills like reading and listening. The primary objective of using visual aids in vocabulary instruction is to help language learners acquire and remember new words. The process of comprehending and learning new terminology can be made easier by using visual aids, which can be considered an effective technique to enable learners to communicate their information and have simple access to it (Çakmak, et al., 2021). Language learners were forced to use paper textbooks in traditional pedagogical settings and classrooms, where they had to be in agreement with their teachers, participate actively in class, and obey their teacher's instructions. Additionally, pupils were required to commit a list of new terms to memory along with their translations, and eventually they were unable to recall the

meaning of the words they had learned. Thanks to technology, a fresh viewpoint in this field has been made possible by the integration of computers and mobile devices in language acquisition. Many language learners can acquire language in novel ways with the use of technology. In actuality, technology has made it possible for language learners to access real content at any time and from any location. (Çakmak and others, 2021). Teachers can use a variety of teaching techniques to help language learners acquire vocabulary more effectively. These days, technology plays a major part in people's lives. In actuality, technology has made a lot of things easier and has a beneficial impact on learning foreign languages in particular, as well as education in general. People are at ease using a variety of technical instruments. These days, a large number of people worldwide own smartphones and use them frequently. However, using this technology for instructional reasons is beneficial (Khoshsima & Khosravi, 2021).

Technology and language acquisition

The process of teaching and studying languages has entered a new phase with the introduction of new technologies and various applications. Language learning is made easier worldwide by internet-based tools, programs, and websites. According to McKeeman and Oviedo (2015), technology is seen as an essential instrument to enhance language instruction. Furthermore, foreign language instruction shouldn't be restricted to traditional classroom settings (Haygood et al., 2012). More research has recently been done on the impact of using technology on EFL learners' language learning (Janfeshan & Janfeshan, 2021; Yusuf et al., 2018). Numerous studies (Alsmari, 2019; Blattner & Lomicka, 2012) have shown how effective it is to use technology in the development of foreign language learning and have asserted that it can facilitate language acquisition for learners. Following the coronavirus pandemic, the importance of technology in education and language acquisition increased. Many classes worldwide were administered using different online platforms following the coronavirus outbreak at the end of 2019. As a result, many students were forced to complete their studies online (Janfeshan, 2022). Many curriculum designers have attempted to create various applications to satisfy the needs of language learners due to the extensive usage of the internet and online platforms for language learning (Goldschmidt, 2020). Technology and Vocabulary Vocabulary is regarded as one of the most crucial components of learning a foreign language, as was already established. Learning vocabulary is the first step in learning a new language. A strong vocabulary helps people be proficient in both productive and receptive language abilities. More empirical research is still required to determine the most efficient method of teaching vocabulary, given its significance. Numerous studies have demonstrated that using technology in the classroom and when teaching languages can be a helpful strategy for improving the language proficiency of EFL students. In this sense, a virtual

environment offers a setting where students can digitally interact with one another and take part in their lectures. Additionally, users who use asynchronous social media can benefit from education whenever they choose (Kaviani, 2022). These days, new methods of teaching and learning are made possible by technological advancements and the Internet. People can exchange information via the Internet, and students can always access real materials. Additionally, the internet can be used to digitize and disseminate instructional materials like books, articles, and pictures. Additionally, a new facet of online learning emerged as a result of the success of numerous mobile-based applications, which allowed groups of people to collaborate online (Beldarrain, 2006). Although social networks are effective, their significance has increased with the coronavirus epidemic. A virus was found in China around the end of 2019, and it swiftly spread throughout the world. Around the world, a lot of educational courses are now offered online. The usefulness of social networks was highlighted at the time, and a large number of students from all over the world continued to take classes online. Additionally, a lot of people think that students may express themselves online and don't feel timid in the digital environment (Kaviani, 2022). These days, students can practically access numerous scientific papers and publications, and the various facets of the scientific world are accessible over the internet (Idrees Ibrahim, 2021). In this context, Abrar (2021) noted that using social networks can be seen as one of the tools that teachers and students can use to access information at any time and from any location, which facilitates the process of learning a foreign language. Given that social media and the internet are increasingly being used in educational settings, instructors who possess sufficient media literacy can feel at ease using these platforms. The use of the internet and online platforms for teaching and learning is becoming more popular worldwide. Online learning systems are gaining popularity in educational settings in many developing nations, including Iran. However, for online education to be successful, a special policy is required (Kaviani, 2022). These days, a lot of teachers and students think that learning may happen outside of traditional classroom settings. Over the past few decades, the emergence of the digital age has changed how individuals connect. Technology and communication have been merged in various kinds of social networks (SNs) and email to challenge interpersonal communication (Scarborough, 2009). People's lives have been impacted by Web 2.0 applications in a variety of ways. E-learning, or learning via the Internet, is a result of technology that has significantly impacted education and, consequently, language acquisition (Mazman & Usluel, 2010). Since many students spend more time on online social media, using social networks in educational settings can be considered a beneficial approach (Mazman & Usluel, 2010). Mason and Rennie (2007) noted that it is no longer debatable whether or not to use these electronic devices in foreign language instruction or to support students' learning. According to studies, SN tools facilitate

cooperation, collaboration, active engagement, and resource sharing in educational activities (Ajjan & Hartshorne, 2008). There are two ways that online learning can be done. The first mode is a synchronous social network, where all students and teachers must be online at a specific time. They can interact and communicate just like in a traditional classroom; the only distinction is that they do so via an online platform. Asynchronous social media is the alternative mode. Asynchronous social networks do not need instructors and students to log on at specific times. Students can view the relevant resources and content when it's convenient for them. For people who are unable to attend regular lessons, this approach can be quite helpful. For this reason, the current study's researcher chose Instagram as an asynchronous social network for vocabulary instruction. A theoretical explanation is given for the remainder. Launched in October 2010 by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger, Instagram is one of the most widely used web programs worldwide. When the iOS version was introduced, those with iPhones used it. When its Android version was made available two years later, a large number of people worldwide were able to sign up for this web application (Kaviani, 2022). Instagram is a well-known social media platform where users can share images and videos. Additionally, it allows users to post stories on either private or public pages (Wissam et al., 2020). According to Niayesh (2015), the number of Iranians who have joined this social network has lately surged and is still rising. On Instagram, there are numerous educational and scholarly pages that serve users and offer helpful information. It is seen to be an intriguing idea to use Instagram to teach vocabulary to EFL students. A lot of teachers would rather make a page on this network and post their expertise there. Thus, both language instructors and students can benefit from this application by using this social network (Kaviani, 2022). Similarly, Handayani (2016) noted that Instagram can be used as a source for a variety of activities in language pedagogical settings, including vocabulary exercises utilizing images and brief videos. As a result, language teachers can use Instagram to help their pupils improve their language proficiency in a virtual setting. In related studies, the researcher examined a few earlier studies that were comparable to the current investigation in this section. Namaziandost, Saberi Dehkordi, Alekasir, and Tilwani (2021) looked into how Rosetta Stone applications affected the vocabulary acquisition of EFL students. They sought to compare computer use, mobile use, and traditional classroom settings in their study. They concluded that, as compared to traditional classes, individuals who used technology fared noticeably better. Additionally, the computer-using group outperformed the mobile-using group. Similarly, Norouzi Sedeh and Tabatabaei (2021) investigated how EFL learners' inventiveness was affected by teaching vocabulary using textbooks versus social media. They concluded that using social media can improve the inventiveness of EFL students. Kaviani (2022) examined how Instagram affected Iranian pre-intermediate EFL learners' acquisition of English vocabulary.

According to her study's findings, the experimental group's participants who utilized Instagram as a treatment outperformed the control group's participants by a significant margin. In a similar vein, Hajebi, Taheri, Fahandezh, and Salari (2018) investigated how web-based language instruction affected adult pre-intermediate EFL learners' vocabulary retention. Their study's findings showed that using web-based language instruction significantly improved EFL students' vocabulary retention. Similarly, Khodabandeh (2020) investigated the impact of social networks on the second language proficiency of EFL learners. According to the results of her study, those in the experimental group who used social media as a treatment outperformed those in the control group by a large margin. Habibah, Asmawati, Fitriningsih, and Nurdin (2021) investigated the potential impact of using Instagram on vocabulary acquisition for EFL learners. According to their study's findings, students who use Instagram as a social network for learning scored much higher than those in the control group who were taught in a traditional classroom setting. In a similar vein, Erarslan (2019) investigated Instagram as a social network for EFL students. He used both quantitative and qualitative techniques to gather data. In the end, he came to the conclusion that Instagram has the most users worldwide and may be considered the most popular social network. For EFL students, using Instagram as a teaching tool can help reinforce foreign language acquisition. Similarly, Mooneeb Ali (2021) investigated the potential impact of Instagram as a mobile application on EFL students. According to his study's findings, Instagram might be considered a useful tool for improving EFL learners' acquisition of foreign languages. In a similar vein, Janfeshan (2022) investigated how using the Edmodo social learning network affected the vocabulary acquisition of EFL students in Iraq. He came to the conclusion that using Edmodo helps EFL learners strengthen their vocabulary. Additionally, he observed that a large number of EFL students had a favorable attitude toward the employment of Edmodo in their educational environment. The current researcher primarily focuses on the following study questions in relation to the earlier issues: 1. Does teaching vocabulary via asynchronous social media significantly impact the vocabulary acquisition of EFL learners? 2. Does teaching vocabulary via asynchronous social media significantly impact the vocabulary retention of EFL learners?

Conclusion

One efficient way to teach vocabulary to EFL students is through the use of social networks in asynchronous mode. Indeed, it has been demonstrated that using Instagram to teach vocabulary can improve vocabulary learning and retention for EFL students. Additionally, because students can access the content at any time and from any location, the barrier of time and location can be eliminated. Many students have the newest smartphones, and they use various social media platforms extensively. These kinds of media and applications can be used by teachers for educational

purposes. Instructors should encourage students to use their smartphones for learning purposes. Instagram and other asynchronous social media platforms help teachers deliver their lessons without being constrained by time and location. Additionally, students can access the material at any time and from any location. Students' attitudes are improved, and they absorb the material more effectively since Instagram is appealing to them. In summary, ELT teachers can utilize Instagram to help their students acquire vocabulary in particular and English in general. This study's primary conclusion is that language instructors can utilize Instagram as an additional tool in supplemental mode. Students have unrestricted access to their educational content, which they can post at any moment. Additionally, EFL students can improve their autonomy and self-evaluation by using social applications. Students benefit from the gradual development of independence that occurs when they use such a social network for educational objectives. Instagram gives EFL students the chance to evaluate their own learning in a virtual setting. In this sense, content creators should consider how well Instagram helps EFL learners acquire vocabulary and utilize this social media platform. Instead of squandering their time, students can make good use of these networks. These days, using such networks is thought to be successful. The following recommendations for further research are given in light of the constraints and limitations of this study. This research was conducted at an English-speaking institution. Other educational environments, such as colleges and universities, can conduct the same study.

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