

The Effectiveness of Social Media Platforms in Supporting Vocabulary Acquisition at Primary School Level: A Systematic Review

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ABSTRACT

Social media platforms are increasingly integrated into children's daily lives, offering new opportunities to enhance language learning. This systematic review examines the effectiveness of social media in supporting vocabulary acquisition among primary school pupils learning English as a Second Language (ESL). Vocabulary knowledge plays a central role in language proficiency and academic achievement, making it crucial to explore engaging and effective tools for young learners. The review was conducted using the PRISMA 2020 framework and focused on empirical studies published between 2019 and 2025. Searches were carried out in ERIC, Scopus, and Web of Science, and ten peer-reviewed studies met the inclusion criteria. These studies investigated vocabulary learning outcomes associated with platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook. The findings indicate that social media contributes positively to vocabulary development through authentic language exposure, multimodal input, learner engagement, and contextual practice. In addition, these platforms foster motivation and incidental learning, particularly when the content is age-appropriate and supported by teacher guidance. However, the review also highlights key gaps in the literature, including a lack of controlled studies focused on primary school pupils and inconsistencies in vocabulary assessment tools. Overall, the evidence suggests that social media can effectively complement traditional vocabulary instruction. Future research should focus on developing systematic pedagogical strategies to integrate social media into primary ESL education in order to maximise its benefits for vocabulary acquisition.

Keywords: social media, primary school, second language learning, vocabulary acquisition, vocabulary learning

INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary acquisition is a cornerstone of second language learning, particularly for young ESL pupils, as it underpins the development of listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills (Nation, 2013; Schmitt, 2019). A strong vocabulary base facilitates not only academic success but also meaningful social communication (Webb & Nation, 2017; Milton, 2020). However, research consistently shows that vocabulary learning involves more than memorization; it requires the ability to use words accurately, fluently, and appropriately across contexts (Teng & Ismail, 2021). This poses challenges for primary ESL pupils who are still developing cognitively and linguistically, have limited exposure to English outside the classroom, and are often taught through rote-based instruction that lacks contextual richness (Baharudin & Ismail, 2014; Pinter, 2017). Ting and Ismail (2021) further argue that vocabulary remains one of the most persistent barriers in L2 learning, underscoring the need for innovative, learner-centered strategies.

In contrast to traditional methods, social media platforms such as TikTok and YouTube provide multimodal, engaging environments where incidental vocabulary learning occurs through repeated exposure, audiovisual cues, and authentic interaction (Krashen, 1982; Reinders & Benson, 2017). Studies have found that such platforms

enhance learner motivation and autonomy, aligning with pupils' digital habits and offering short-form, relatable content that supports attention and memory (Greenhow & Lewin, 2016; Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2016; Manca, 2020; Sun & Yang, 2020). Nevertheless, much of the existing evidence comes from studies on adolescents and adults. Research focusing on younger ESL pupils is scarce, and few studies examine long-term effects or controlled interventions (Alsulami, 2023; Chou, 2022). This suggests a gap between the acknowledged potential of social media and its documented pedagogical value for children in primary education.

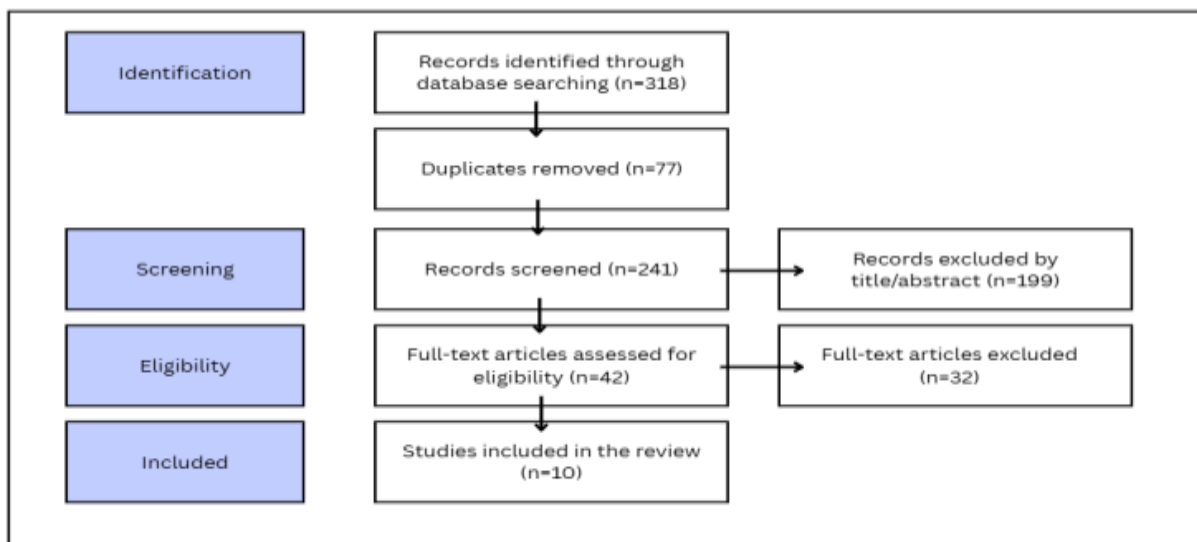
Furthermore, while some works (e.g., Anumanthan & Hashim, 2022) emphasize the educational benefits of digital platforms, the findings are not always consistent. For instance, certain studies report clear gains in vocabulary recognition and recall, whereas others highlight concerns about distraction, superficial learning, or unequal access to digital resources. These contradictions underscore the need for systematic reviews that evaluate not only the benefits but also the limitations of integrating social media into vocabulary instruction.

To address these gaps, the present systematic review investigates the effectiveness of social media platforms in supporting vocabulary acquisition among primary ESL pupils. Specifically, it seeks to answer two questions: (1) What types of social media platforms have been used to support vocabulary acquisition among primary pupils, and how have they been implemented in learning contexts? and (2) What outcomes on vocabulary acquisition have been reported in the literature? By synthesizing current evidence, this study aims to provide educators, researchers, and policymakers with insights into the pedagogical potential and limitations of social media integration in primary ESL classrooms, while also identifying areas requiring further empirical exploration, such as longitudinal studies and age-specific interventions.

METHODOLOGY

This systematic review synthesizes empirical research on the effectiveness of social media platforms in supporting vocabulary acquisition among primary school pupils learning English as a Second Language (ESL). The review was conducted in accordance with the PRISMA 2020 guidelines, which provide a structured framework to ensure transparency, rigor, and replicability throughout the research process (Page et al., 2021). Studies were selected based on predefined inclusion criteria that aligned with the review's objectives, ensuring that only relevant and high-quality sources were considered. By focusing specifically on the integration of social media tools into vocabulary instruction for young ESL learners, this review establishes a clear and systematic foundation for addressing the research questions with reliability and precision..

Figure 1. PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram



Source: Page et al. (2021)

The methodology comprised four key stages that are identification, screening, eligibility and included studies. Figure 1 presents the PRISMA flow diagram showing how the 11 final studies were selected from an initial pool of 318 articles.

Identification Phase

To identify relevant empirical studies for this systematic review, a comprehensive and structured search strategy was employed across three major academic databases: ERIC, Scopus and Web of Science (WoS). These databases were selected based on their extensive coverage of educational, linguistic, and interdisciplinary research relevant to second language learning and digital education. The search was conducted between February to March 2025 and followed the PRISMA 2020 guidelines to ensure methodological transparency and replicability (Page et al., 2021). Boolean operators, truncation, and phrase searching were used to refine and expand results: "social media" OR "TikTok" OR "YouTube" OR "Instagram" OR "Facebook" AND "vocabulary acquisition" OR "vocabulary learning" OR "vocabulary development") AND "primary school" OR "young learners" OR "elementary pupils" AND "ESL" OR "English as a second language" OR "second language learners". Table 1 specifies this. This search syntax was adapted to suit the indexing systems of each database. Where necessary, filters were applied to limit the

results to peer-reviewed journal articles, conference proceedings, or empirical studies published between 2019 and 2025.

Table 1. Search Terms Table based on the databases

Databases	ERIC, Scopus, Web of Science (WoS)		
Search Terms	Keywords i. social media ii. TikTok iii. YouTube iv. Instagram v. Facebook vi. Vocabulary acquisition vii. vocabulary learning viii. vocabulary development ix. primary school x. young learners xi. elementary pupils xii. ESL	Combined using Boolean operators AND, OR.	Keywords: Scopus: ("social media" OR "TikTok" OR "YouTube" OR "Instagram" OR "Facebook") AND ("vocabulary acquisition" OR "vocabulary learning" OR "vocabulary development") AND ("ESL" OR "second language learners") AND ("primary school" OR "young learners") ERIC: ("social media" OR "TikTok") AND ("vocabulary" OR "vocabulary acquisition") AND ("ESL" OR "English as a second language") AND ("elementary" OR "primary school") Web of Science (WoS): ("Facebook" OR "YouTube" OR "Instagram" OR "social media") AND

			("vocabulary acquisition" OR "language learning") AND ("ESL" OR "EFL") AND ("primary" OR "young learners")
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In order to ensure the relevance and also the quality of the studies included in this review, a set of predefined inclusion criteria was applied as summarised in Table 2 for clarity and reference. Firstly, only peer-reviewed articles published in English were considered, to ensure consistency in interpretation and accessibility of content. Secondly, the search was confined to publications from 2019 to 2025, enabling the review to incorporate both recent developments and foundational insights into vocabulary acquisition through social media platforms. Thirdly, studies were selected based on their focus on school-aged ESL or EFL learners, with particular emphasis on primary or elementary school pupils, aligning with the scope of the review. Finally, only research that reported measurable vocabulary acquisition outcomes such as vocabulary test scores, performance assessments, or evidence of vocabulary growth was included. Based on these criteria, an initial pool of 318 studies was identified for subsequent screening and evaluation (see Table 2).

Screening Phase

Table 2. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Criterion	Inclusion Criterion	Exclusion Criterion
Population	School-aged ESL/EFL learners (primarily primary or elementary pupils)	Adult learners, university students, or general population not specified as school-aged
Focus of Study	Vocabulary acquisition or vocabulary learning as a primary outcome	Studies focusing on general language skills without specific attention to vocabulary
Intervention Type	Use of social media platforms (e.g., TikTok, YouTube, Facebook, Instagram)	Studies focusing on non-social media tools (e.g., textbooks, games, apps not involving social media)
Language Learning Context	ESL or EFL context in formal or informal educational settings	First language acquisition, multilingual studies without ESL/EFL focus
Study Design	Empirical research (quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-methods); peer-reviewed journal articles or conference proceedings	Opinion pieces, editorials, conceptual papers, theoretical discussions without empirical data
Publication Year	Published between 2019–2025 to ensure recent and relevant findings	Published before 2019
Language of Publication	Articles published in English	Articles published in languages other than English
Accessibility	Full-text available online or through institutional access	Abstract-only, paywalled without access, or incomplete reports

Following the initial search, a total of 77 duplicate records were removed using database filters and manual checks. This left 241 unique articles for screening. The remaining studies were then assessed based on their titles

and abstracts to determine their relevance to the review's focus on the use of social media platforms in supporting vocabulary acquisition among primary school ESL pupils. During this stage, 199 articles were

excluded for various reasons, including a lack of focus on vocabulary learning or vocabulary acquisition, targeting non-school-aged learners, or addressing unrelated social media tools and language skills. Table 2 illustrates this. Only studies that clearly aligned with the core themes of social media integration, vocabulary development, and ESL learning at the primary level were retained for full-text review.

Eligibility Phase

Out of the 42 full-text articles reviewed, each was carefully assessed using the inclusion and exclusion criteria outlined in Table 2. The goal at this stage was to ensure that each study met the review's specific focus: vocabulary acquisition among primary school ESL or EFL pupils through the use of social media. Articles were excluded if they lacked empirical data, did not target the intended age group, or failed to report clear vocabulary-related outcomes. Studies that focused broadly on digital literacy or language learning without linking to social media platforms like TikTok, YouTube, Facebook, or Instagram were also omitted. After this careful review, 29 articles were excluded, and 10 studies were selected for final inclusion in the systematic synthesis.

These ten studies were then closely analyzed to explore how social media platforms have been integrated into vocabulary learning for young ESL learners. The review examined not just which platforms were used such as TikTok, YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook but also how they were implemented within classroom or informal learning contexts. Attention was given to learning strategies involved, the ways pupils engaged with the content, and the instructional methods applied. Reported outcomes included gains in vocabulary knowledge, use in context, and retention, alongside noted benefits like improved motivation and digital engagement. Limitations, such as access issues or age-appropriateness, were also considered to offer a balanced view.

To ensure a meaningful comparison, key data from each study were extracted and organized. This included publication year, country, participant demographics (age, proficiency level, and sample size), and the specific platform used. Studies employed various research designs quantitative (e.g., vocabulary tests), qualitative (e.g., interviews), and mixed methods to measure vocabulary outcomes like recognition, usage, and long-term retention. Across the board, many studies highlighted positive effects on learner motivation, enthusiasm, and vocabulary development, offering valuable insights into how social media can be meaningfully used to support language learning among young ESL pupils.

Data Analysis

This review employed Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA), following Braun and Clarke's (2019) framework, to interpret and synthesize findings from the ten selected studies. RTA was selected for its flexibility and its emphasis on the researcher's active role in theme development, making it well-suited for integrating diverse evidence from educational research. Guided by the two research questions, the analysis examined both the types of social media platforms used to support vocabulary acquisition among primary ESL pupils and the reported effects of these platforms on learning outcomes. This approach enabled a reflective engagement with the data, combining theoretical perspectives with practical insights.

The analysis proceeded through six phases: familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, constructing themes, reviewing and refining themes, defining and naming them, and writing up the findings. All ten studies were read repeatedly, with key patterns highlighted in relation to social media usage, instructional approaches, and vocabulary outcomes. For Research Question 1, coding focused on platform types (e.g., TikTok, YouTube, Instagram) and their integration into classroom or informal learning contexts, producing themes such as *Platform Diversity*, *Pedagogical Integration*, and *Learner Interaction*. For Research Question 2, coding emphasized reported outcomes, yielding themes such as *Enhanced Retention*, *Increased Motivation*, and *Cognitive-Affective*

Gains, while also capturing challenges like *Digital Distractions* and *Inconsistent Assessment Tools*.

To ensure analytical rigor, reflexivity was practiced throughout the process. The researcher maintained a reflexive journal to critically examine how professional experience as a TESL educator shaped interpretive choices, while peer debriefing helped refine coding and validate emerging themes. This process enhanced transparency and minimized bias. The final thematic map provides a comprehensive overview of how social media tools support vocabulary learning in primary ESL contexts, highlighting the balance between digital engagement, instructional guidance, and learner autonomy.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Overview of the reviewed articles

The review on the selected 10 articles provided answers for the proposed research questions. The summary of findings is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Summary of Findings

No	Authors	Types of social media	Context and results
1	Song & Xiong (2023)	TikTok and Instagram	Comparison between social media and language learning applications Vocabulary Learning Phase: Acquisition and performance Result: Social media outperformed apps in vocabulary performance Implementation for Vocabulary Acquisition/Learning: Students used TikTok and Instagram for short-form vocabulary tasks and visual language exposure.
2	Tardaguila (2024)	Instagram and Facebook	Context: Influence of social media use. Vocabulary Learning Phase: Vocabulary exposure and learning. Results: Positive influence on vocabulary exposure Implementation for vocabulary acquisition/learning: Teachers used Instagram and Facebook to post vocabulary activities and encourage interaction.
3	Sorensen (2021)	Facebook and YouTube	Context: Classroom-based social media integration. Vocabulary Learning Phase: Vocabulary practice and motivation. Result: Pupils reported have higher motivation and learning via social media
4	Kamarudin & Aziz (2023)	Facebook and TikTok	Context: Systematic review of digital use in ESL Vocabulary Learning Phase: General Vocabulary Development Result: Social media is engaging but requires guidance. Implementation for vocabulary acquisition: Reviewed multiple platforms; vocabulary activities were embedded in social interactions and media tasks.
5	Erarslan	Instagram	Context: Formal instruction via Instagram

	(2019)		Vocabulary Learning Phrase: Vocabulary Learning Through Posts Result: Instagram increased motivation and vocabulary recall Implementation for vocabulary acquisition: Learners engaged with Instagram posts used to teach new words and encourage usage in captions and comments.
6	Abbas et al. (2019)	Facebook and YouTube	Context: Online media in ESL instruction Vocabulary Learning Phrase: Acquisition and retention Result: Facebook and YouTube boosted acquisition and vocabulary recall. Implementation for vocabulary acquisition: Facebook groups and YouTube videos provided exposure to new vocabulary through contextual examples.
7	Yunus & Salehi (2019)	Blogs	Context: Blog use for ESL writing using learned vocabulary Vocabulary Learning Phrase: Applying vocabulary learnt Result: Focused on writing skill, limited vocabulary impact. Implementation for vocabulary acquisition: Blog assignments required pupils to apply newly learned vocabulary in creative writing.
8	Ramzan et al. (2023)	YouTube and Facebook	Context: Correlation between usage and academic results Vocabulary Learning Phrase: Motivation to see new words. Result: Found a positive link between media use and academic outcomes. Implementation for vocabulary acquisition: Social media use correlated with vocabulary-rich online interaction, influencing academic performance.
9	Sivagnanam & Yunus (2020)	Facebook and YouTube	Context: Social media use in primary ESL classrooms. Vocabulary Learning Phrase: Vocabulary enhancement. Result: Reported improved vocabulary and learner motivation. Implementation for vocabulary acquisition: Teachers posted vocabulary tasks on Facebook and YouTube; pupils practiced through video-based interaction.
10	Weerasinghe et al. (2022)	Social Medias that have Augmented Reality (AR)	Context: Vocabulary supported AR learning Vocabulary Learning Phrase: Vocabulary acquisition via interactive AR Result: Social media that has AR boosted engagement and vocabulary retention. Implementation for vocabulary acquisition: AR system used visual overlays with vocabulary prompts and interactive scenarios for immersive learning.

Overall findings, platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and blogs were frequently utilised to create engaging, interactive, and learner-centred vocabulary learning experiences. The findings collectively indicate that social media can support vocabulary learning through increased

exposure to authentic language, visual-auditory aids, learner engagement, and the contextual use of new words. These platforms also encourage incidental learning and sustained motivation, particularly when the content is age-appropriate and supported with clear educational guidance. Some studies also highlighted innovative uses of Augmented Reality (AR) in social media, showing that immersive and interactive content can further enhance retention and engagement. However, several authors emphasised that without proper structure and age-appropriate content, social media use can become distracting or ineffective.

MAIN FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The objective of this systematic literature review is to explore how various social media platforms are used to support vocabulary acquisition among primary school ESL pupils and to examine their reported effects on learning outcomes.. A total of 10 peer-reviewed articles published between 2019 and 2025 were reviewed and analysed to answer both research questions.

Types Of Social Media Platforms Have Been Used to Support Vocabulary Acquisition and Its Implementation

The systematic review identified several key social media platforms namely TikTok, YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, and blogs that have been increasingly adopted to support vocabulary acquisition among primary school ESL pupils. These platforms serve dual roles in both formal instructional settings and informal, autonomous learning environments, depending on how they are integrated into the learning context.

Table 4. Themes, Implementation Approaches, and Supporting References of Reviewed Studies Regarding Types of Social Media

Theme	Platform(s)	Implementation Approach	Supporting Studies
Short-form visual content	TikTok, YouTube	Self-guided + teacher-directed videos	Song & Xiong (2023); Abbas et al. (2019)
Peer-based vocabulary practice	Facebook, Instagram	Commenting, reposting, image-captioning	Erarslan (2019); Tardaguila (2024)
Reflective vocabulary writing	Blogs	Personal entries, narrative tasks	Yunus & Salehi (2012)
Immersive visual learning	Vocabulary (AR)	Interactive 3D vocab simulations	Weerasinghe et al. (2022)
Guided daily exposure	Facebook, Instagram	Teacher-led word posts & reels	Sivagnanam & Yunus (2020); Sorensen (2021)
Informal language interaction	Social platforms	Vocabulary use in comments and posts	Ramzan et al. (2023); Kamarudin & Aziz (2023)

TikTok and YouTube emerged as particularly engaging platforms due to their multimodal, short-form video formats, which align closely with the cognitive and attentional needs of younger learners (Song & Xiong, 2023; Abbas et al., 2019). These tools are frequently employed to deliver vocabulary-rich content through visual storytelling, repetitive audio input, and captioned videos, all of which support pronunciation, listening comprehension, and vocabulary retention. In some instructional settings, teachers leveraged TikTok by assigning

mimicking activities where pupils replicated vocabulary-intense dialogues or scenarios, effectively reinforcing word usage through contextual repetition and imitation (Sorensen, 2021; Kamarudin & Aziz, 2023).

In comparison, Instagram and Facebook are more commonly implemented through teacher-directed approaches, such as "word of the day" posts, image-captioning activities, and interactive comment threads. These platforms are particularly effective in fostering written vocabulary practice and facilitating peer-based engagement in a structured digital space, such as closed class groups (Erarslan, 2019; Tardaguila, 2024). The image-centric design of Instagram is especially useful in creating strong word-image associations, which enhances memory and recall (Erarslan, 2019). Facebook, on the other hand, has been used to initiate discussion-based vocabulary tasks and collaborative learning exchanges among pupils.

Although blogs were used less frequently with younger learners, they provided an effective outlet for reflective and expressive vocabulary use, particularly in extended writing tasks. Blog-based activities enabled learners to apply new vocabulary contextually, promoting deeper processing and long-term lexical retention (Yunus & Salehi, 2012). This method also supported the development of learner autonomy as pupils engaged in self-paced content creation and vocabulary exploration.

Additionally, Augmented Reality (AR) tools such as the *Vocabulary* platform presented innovative opportunities for experiential vocabulary learning. AR-enabled systems use keyword visual overlays and interactive 3D environments to connect vocabulary with real-world objects and scenarios. This type of spatial-contextual learning proved highly effective in boosting both pupil engagement and retention, as learners interactively linked language with concrete representations (Weerasinghe et al., 2022).

Across all platforms, three dominant implementation strategies were evident. Teacher-directed activities involved structured tasks and content dissemination by educators (Sorensen, 2021; Sivagnanam & Yunus, 2020). Peer-based interactions encouraged social learning through shared content, feedback, and group discussions (Abbas et al., 2019; Ramzan et al., 2023). Finally, self-guided exploration, particularly prevalent with platforms like TikTok and AR, allowed learners to independently engage with content, fostering intrinsic motivation and personalized vocabulary encounters (Weerasinghe et al., 2022).

Several effective instructional strategies were consistently observed across studies. These included visual scaffolding, such as the use of images and subtitles; repetitive vocabulary exposure through various media; multimodal content delivery combining video, audio, and text; and interactive tasks that promoted vocabulary use in socially meaningful contexts. Ultimately, these findings suggest that the success of social media in supporting vocabulary acquisition is not determined solely by the platform, but rather by how effectively it is pedagogically integrated into the learning experience balancing structure, interaction, and contextual relevance to learners' digital lives (Kamarudin & Aziz, 2023; Song & Xiong, 2023).

While the variety of platforms suggests rich potential for vocabulary learning, effectiveness depends significantly on intentional instructional design. Teacher facilitation played a vital role in framing vocabulary input, scaffolding learning, and guiding interaction, especially for younger pupils who may not yet navigate platforms independently with focus. Moreover, age-appropriate content, platform moderation, and digital literacy training emerged as critical considerations, especially for informal or autonomous use. In conclusion, the studies reviewed show that when integrated with clear learning goals, interactive strategies, and supportive feedback, social media platforms can transform vocabulary learning into an engaging, contextual, and socially meaningful experience for ESL pupils.

Effects Of Using Social Media Platforms on Vocabulary Acquisition Outcomes

The analysis of the reviewed studies revealed that the use of social media platforms has led to consistently positive outcomes in vocabulary acquisition among primary and school-aged ESL pupils. These outcomes were both

quantitatively reflected in gains in vocabulary recognition, usage, recall, and retention—and qualitative, such as improvements in learner motivation, participation, and attitudes toward English language learning.

Table 5. Themes and Observed Effect of Social Media Usage on Vocabulary Acquisition

Theme / Aspect	Observed Effect	Supporting Studies
Vocabulary Recognition	Pupils identified and understood new words more easily through visual content	Song & Xiong (2023); Sorensen (2021)
Vocabulary Usage	Improved application of words in speech and writing tasks	Sivagnanam & Yunus (2020); Tardaguila (2024)
Vocabulary Recall & Retention	Higher retention through repetition and contextual exposure	Abbas et al. (2019); Ramzan et al. (2023)
Learner Motivation	Increased motivation through relatable, interactive content	Erarslan (2019); Sorensen (2021)
Engagement and Participation	More active class involvement and task participation	Kamarudin & Aziz (2023); Sivagnanam & Yunus (2020)
Reduced Anxiety	Low-stakes environment encouraged risk-taking with vocabulary use	Tardaguila (2024); Erarslan (2019)
Autonomy and Digital Confidence	Learners explored vocabulary independently, boosting confidence and retention	Weerasinghe et al. (2022); Yunus & Salehi (2012)
Challenges	Distraction, lack of focus, or platform misuse without clear structure	Kamarudin & Aziz (2023)

The synthesis of findings across the ten studies highlights that social media platforms can significantly enhance vocabulary acquisition among primary ESL pupils, provided they are used with clear pedagogical intent. Improvements were consistently observed in vocabulary recognition, usage, and retention when platforms such as TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram delivered vocabulary in contextually rich and visually engaging formats (Song & Xiong, 2023; Sivagnanam & Yunus, 2020). Multimodal inputs such as video, subtitles, and spoken repetition supported deeper processing, enabling pupils not only to identify new words but also to use them appropriately in oral and written tasks (Sorensen, 2021). Similarly, the algorithmic recirculation of content on platforms like YouTube and Facebook reinforced repeated exposure to target vocabulary, echoing principles of spaced repetition and cognitive reinforcement (Abbas et al., 2019; Ramzan et al., 2023).

Affective outcomes were equally important. Studies showed that social media increased learner motivation, reduced language anxiety, and encouraged participation. Platforms like Instagram and TikTok created low-stakes, socially authentic environments where pupils felt more comfortable experimenting with new vocabulary (Tardaguila, 2024; Erarslan, 2019). This supports Krashen’s (1985) notion of lowering the affective filter, as emotionally supportive digital spaces enabled greater willingness to communicate. Moreover, pupils developed autonomy and digital confidence by independently interacting with real-world content, particularly when tasks were immersive or self-directed (Weerasinghe et al., 2022; Yunus & Salehi, 2012).

Nonetheless, challenges remain. Some pupils were distracted by non-educational content or overwhelmed by the unstructured nature of open platforms (Kamarudin & Aziz, 2023). These findings highlight the importance of scaffolding, content curation, and teacher monitoring. Without such structures, the educational potential of social media risks being diluted by entertainment-driven engagement.

Implications for Educators and Policymakers

For educators, the evidence underscores the importance of moving beyond rote vocabulary teaching toward digitally mediated, context-rich instruction. Teachers should integrate social media tasks that are purposeful such as caption creation, vocabulary challenges, or AR-supported storytelling while providing guidance to ensure age-appropriate use. Professional development is essential to equip teachers with strategies for embedding social media tools meaningfully into ESL pedagogy.

For policymakers, the findings point to the need for curriculum frameworks that recognize digital platforms as legitimate learning spaces. Clear guidelines should be developed for age-appropriate integration, ensuring both safety and pedagogical alignment. Policies on digital literacy, ethical use, and equitable access are vital to prevent disparities in opportunities for technology-enhanced vocabulary learning.

Future Directions

Future research should expand beyond short-term studies by conducting longitudinal investigations that track the sustained impact of social media on vocabulary growth. The integration of AI-driven adaptive learning systems also warrants exploration, as such tools can personalize content delivery, track learner progress, and optimize exposure to target vocabulary. At the same time, ethical considerations such as data privacy, screen time, and the safeguarding of young learners must remain central to discussions on technology use in education. Addressing these issues will help balance innovation with responsibility, ensuring that social media functions as a safe and effective complement to classroom learning.

Taken together, the evidence indicates that when used purposefully and with pedagogical structure, social media platforms can enrich both the cognitive and affective dimensions of vocabulary learning. They offer opportunities for authentic, multimodal, and socially meaningful input that aligns with pupils' digital habits. However, their effectiveness depends on careful integration, teacher guidance, and supportive policies. By bridging digital engagement with instructional goals, educators and policymakers can harness the full potential of social media to advance vocabulary acquisition among primary ESL pupils, while paving the way for future innovations in digitally enhanced language education.

CONCLUSION

This systematic review explored the effectiveness of social media platforms in supporting vocabulary acquisition among primary school ESL pupils. Through the analysis of ten peer-reviewed studies published between 2019 and 2025, it became evident that social media platforms especially TikTok, YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, and AR-supported applications serve as powerful tools for enriching vocabulary learning in both formal and informal contexts. The review revealed that these platforms offer more than just exposure to new vocabulary; they provide multimodal, engaging, and context-rich environments that stimulate both cognitive and emotional engagement with the English language. Pupils benefited from enhanced vocabulary recognition, usage, and retention, supported by visual scaffolding, interactive tasks, and repeated input. Moreover, the integration of social media facilitated greater motivation, participation, and learner autonomy, creating a low-anxiety environment where pupils felt more confident using new words. These benefits were particularly evident when social media was used intentionally with pedagogical support, such as teacher-guided tasks or structured peer collaboration.

For future researchers, the findings from this review call for further investigation into age-appropriate, platform-specific strategies that support sustained vocabulary growth. Mixed-method and longitudinal studies would be particularly valuable in understanding the long-term impact of social media on vocabulary retention, language proficiency, and learner autonomy. Moreover, comparative studies examining different types of digital content (e.g., user-generated vs. curated) may offer deeper insights into what types of input yield the most meaningful learning outcomes. Ultimately, social media should not be seen as a replacement for traditional instruction but as

a complementary tool that, when embedded within sound pedagogical frameworks, can transform vocabulary learning into an interactive, student-centered, and digitally relevant experience.

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