

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF TRADITIONAL VS. SOCIAL MEDIA-BASED APPROACHES IN VOCABULARY ACQUISITION

Diorbek Ashirov¹

Berdakh Karakalpak State University Nukus, Uzbekistan

KEYWORDS

vocabulary acquisition, EFL learners, social media-based learning, traditional methods, digital tools, language learning strategies, interactive learning.

ABSTRACT

This study explores the effectiveness of traditional versus social media-based methods in vocabulary acquisition among EFL learners. Drawing on previous research, it compares how learners engage with vocabulary through conventional classroom techniques and modern digital platforms. The findings suggest that social media-based learning fosters better retention, motivation, and contextual usage due to its interactive and authentic environment. While traditional methods provide structure and depth, social media encourages active participation and real-life application. The study highlights the importance of integrating both approaches to create a balanced and effective vocabulary learning experience.

2181-2675/© 2025 in XALQARO TADQIQOT LLC.

DOI: **10.5281/zenodo.15776993**

This is an open access article under the Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/deed.ru>)

Introduction

Vocabulary plays a central role in learning a new language. Without adequate knowledge of words and their meanings, learners struggle to understand texts, express themselves clearly, or engage in meaningful conversations. As such, vocabulary acquisition has always been a key area of focus in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. Traditionally, methods like word lists, flashcards, dictionary use, and rote memorization have been widely used to help learners build their vocabulary. These approaches are structured and effective to some degree, especially in terms of helping students retain isolated words. However, they are often criticized for being repetitive, uninspiring, and disconnected from real-life language use. In recent years, the widespread use of digital tools and social media platforms has introduced new possibilities for vocabulary learning. Applications like Instagram, Telegram, TikTok, and Facebook are no longer just spaces for

¹ Berdakh Karakalpak State University Nukus, Uzbekistan

entertainment—they have also emerged as informal learning environments. Learners are increasingly exposed to English content through captions, short videos, memes, and interactive posts. These formats provide context, visual cues, and instant feedback, all of which are important for language acquisition. Unlike traditional methods, social media-based learning is more dynamic, personalized, and often more engaging for students. The aim of this study is to compare the outcomes of traditional versus social media-based vocabulary learning in the EFL context. Specifically, the study investigates which approach leads to better retention, engagement, and practical use of new vocabulary. By analyzing these two methods, this research hopes to provide insight into how teachers can make informed decisions about vocabulary instruction in modern classrooms. In doing so, the study also contributes to the broader discussion of integrating digital tools into language education in a meaningful way.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative comparative approach to explore the effectiveness of traditional versus social media-based methods for vocabulary acquisition in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. Rather than relying on experimental data or a participant-based survey, the research draws upon existing literature, classroom observations, and analysis of pedagogical tools commonly used in both approaches. The traditional approach in this study is understood to include vocabulary instruction through printed materials, word lists, bilingual dictionaries, and teacher-led activities such as gap-fill exercises and matching tasks. These methods are typically linear and form-focused, aiming at memorization and recall. The primary sources for analysis in this category included textbook activities, teacher manuals, and curriculum guides currently in use in many EFL institutions. To compare the two approaches, the study examined how each method supports vocabulary acquisition based on three criteria: (1) retention and recall of new words, (2) learner engagement and motivation, and (3) contextual understanding and usage. These criteria were chosen because they reflect both cognitive and affective dimensions of vocabulary learning, and are commonly emphasized in second language acquisition research (Nation, 2001; Schmitt, 2008).

Results

The comparative analysis of traditional and social media-based approaches to vocabulary acquisition revealed distinct strengths and limitations within each method. Findings were categorized according to three key criteria: retention and recall, learner engagement, and contextual usage.

Traditional vocabulary instruction was found to be more effective in supporting initial memorization and controlled recall of target words. As noted by Nation (2001), structured repetition, word lists, and direct instruction techniques used in textbooks help learners to store new words in long-term memory. Classroom observations and literature indicate that students often perform well on written tests and quizzes following such instruction, especially when the words are presented in thematic sets and reviewed regularly. However, social media-based methods, while less structured, also contributed

to vocabulary retention—particularly for high-frequency and context-rich words. Learners exposed to repeated use of vocabulary in digital posts, captions, and interactions demonstrated the ability to remember and reuse words in spontaneous communication. Schmitt (2008) suggests that this incidental learning, though less predictable, can be highly effective over time when exposure is meaningful and frequent. One of the strongest advantages of social media-based vocabulary instruction was the level of learner engagement it generated. Students appeared more motivated when they could interact with language in dynamic, real-world contexts. Likes, shares, and peer comments on platforms like Instagram or Telegram acted as informal feedback mechanisms, making the learning process feel less isolating and more enjoyable. This finding is consistent with Kabilan et al. (2010), who observed that students felt more personally invested in vocabulary tasks when they were linked to social identity and everyday communication. Unlike traditional methods, which sometimes lead to passive learning, social media encourages active participation. Learners tend to remember vocabulary better when they have used it to express themselves in a public or semi-public forum. In terms of using vocabulary appropriately in context, social media approaches again showed notable advantages. Learners were exposed to words in authentic usage scenarios—comments, hashtags, memes, or real-life dialogues—which helped them develop a deeper understanding of meaning and nuance. This aligns with Schmitt (2008), who emphasized the importance of contextual richness for vocabulary depth.

Discussion

This study set out to compare traditional and social media-based approaches to vocabulary acquisition in EFL contexts. The findings highlight the strengths and limitations of each method, offering insights into how they support vocabulary learning, retention, motivation, and contextual use. First, traditional instruction proved effective for initial vocabulary retention and recall. This aligns with Nation's (2001) emphasis on explicit teaching, where learners are provided clear definitions, example sentences, and repetitive practice. These methods are structured, focused, and have long been used to help learners build foundational vocabulary. However, the social media-based approach also demonstrated its value, particularly in reinforcing vocabulary through incidental learning and contextual exposure. Schmitt (2008) pointed out that repeated encounters with vocabulary in meaningful contexts contribute significantly to long-term retention. On platforms like Instagram, Telegram, or Facebook, learners encountered target vocabulary naturally—whether in captions, memes, or comments—making the learning process more intuitive and memorable. A major strength of social media use in vocabulary learning lies in learner motivation and engagement. Social platforms offer personalized, interactive experiences that traditional classrooms may lack. This supports Kabilan et al. (2010), who noted that students find social media motivating and relevant to their lives. According to Ryan and Deci's (2000) Self-Determination Theory, such platforms promote autonomy, competence, and relatedness—all essential for intrinsic motivation. Likes, shares, and peer interaction provide instant feedback and a sense of achievement,

reinforcing learning in ways traditional methods often do not. In terms of communicative competence, social media offers a dynamic environment for applying vocabulary in real-life contexts. Learners use new words in writing posts, replying to comments, or summarizing videos, gaining practical experience with language use. Thorne and Reinhardt (2008) highlighted how informal digital communication can bridge the gap between classroom learning and real-world application. In contrast, traditional instruction may focus more on isolated word lists or gap-fill exercises, which do not always reflect authentic usage. That said, social media-based learning also has limitations. Not all learners are comfortable using these platforms for educational purposes, and the informal nature of language online can lead to inaccuracies. Kessler (2013) cautioned that digital spaces can sometimes promote non-standard usage, so teacher guidance is essential. Overall, the findings suggest that a blended approach—combining traditional instruction for foundational knowledge and social media for contextual practice—can maximize vocabulary acquisition. As Ellis (2003) noted in his work on Task-Based Language Teaching, learners benefit most when language is used meaningfully and purposefully.

Conclusion

This study explored the comparative effectiveness of traditional and social media-based approaches in vocabulary acquisition for EFL learners. The findings indicate that while traditional methods remain effective for introducing new vocabulary and ensuring accurate usage through structured activities, social media platforms offer a valuable complement by providing opportunities for contextualized, meaningful, and engaging language use. Social media's strength lies in its ability to promote learner autonomy, motivation, and real-world application. Through platforms like Instagram, Telegram, and Facebook, learners can repeatedly encounter and use vocabulary in authentic settings, making the learning process more dynamic and memorable. These results support previous research (e.g., Schmitt, 2008; Kabilan et al., 2010; Thorne & Reinhardt, 2008), emphasizing the importance of combining explicit instruction with communicative, digital contexts.

References

1. Kabilan, M. K., Ahmad, N., & Abidin, M. J. Z. (2010). Facebook: An online environment for learning of English in institutions of higher education? *Internet and Higher Education*, 13(4), 179–187. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.iheduc.2010.07.003>
2. Schmitt, N. (2008). Review article: Instructed second language vocabulary learning. *Language Teaching Research*, 12(3), 329–363. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168808089921>
3. Thorne, S. L., & Reinhardt, J. (2008). "Bridging activities," new media literacies, and advanced foreign language proficiency. *CALICO Journal*, 25(3), 558–572. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24147844>
4. Warschauer, M., & Kern, R. (2000). *Network-based language teaching: Concepts and practice*. Cambridge University Press.

5. Nation, I. S. P. (2001). Learning vocabulary in another language. Cambridge University Press.
6. Godwin-Jones, R. (2018). Using mobile technology to develop language skills and cultural understanding. *Language Learning & Technology*, 22(3), 104–120. <http://llt.msu.edu/issues/october2018/emerging.pdf>
7. Wang, S., & Vásquez, C. (2012). Web 2.0 and second language learning: What does the research tell us? *CALICO Journal*, 29(3), 412–430. <https://doi.org/10.11139/cj.29.3.412-430>