



## Learners' Perceptions of Vocabulary Improvement through Social Media Engagement with Global Issues

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Received: 14 July 2025

Accepted: 25 August 2025

Published: 10 October 2025

### CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Abdul Samad, N. Z., Mohamed, N., Ali, N., & Che Mat, A. (2025). Learners' perceptions of vocabulary improvement through social media engagement with global issues. *Journal of Creative Practices in Language Learning and Teaching*, 13(3), 213-232. 10.24191/cplt.v13i3.7494



## ABSTRACT

Social media has become a dominant platform of informal learning, where students' engagement with global issues significantly influences vocabulary development. This study investigates learners' perceptions of vocabulary improvement through their interaction with social media discussions of current issues. A quantitative survey was administered to 129 diploma students from three faculties at UiTM Dungun, Terengganu. The questionnaire examined students' preferred social media platforms, their awareness of global issues, and their recognition of vocabulary items frequently encountered online. The findings indicate that *Instagram*, *TikTok*, and *YouTube* were the most commonly used platforms and that students reported high awareness of global issues such as the Israel–Palestine conflict. Vocabulary recognition patterns demonstrate not only incidental learning but also learners' ability to contextualize new terms within global discourses, echoing findings that informal digital spaces significantly foster incidental vocabulary growth. The study concludes that social media can be integrated as an informal but valuable complement to classroom vocabulary learning, while it stresses the importance of pedagogical strategies to bridge informal and formal learning environments.

**Keywords:** social media, awareness, incidental vocabulary learning, global issues, ESL

## INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary refers to the words that someone understands and uses in a language, both in speech and writing. Language mastery, as explained by Swan (2017, as cited in Sidgi, 2021), hinges on the learner's ability to acquire, adapt, and overcome challenges while using a wide range of vocabulary. Nugroho and Arini (2021) also suggest that a learner's vocabulary knowledge significantly impacts language proficiency, as it serves as the foundation for listening, speaking, reading and writing. Even more recent views, such as that of Fengyu (2023), recognize the need for vocabulary knowledge to be applied to real life situations to develop deeper communicative competence. Altogether, these views suggest that vocabulary indeed enables an individual to express thoughts in a clear, thoughtful and skillful manner.

Students acquire vocabulary knowledge in the classroom through the direct teaching of vocabulary, reading activities, and various formal exercises. Although classroom instruction plays a critical role in the education of a child, most children find it difficult to learn vocabulary through formal classroom instruction. Arju (2013) pointed out that classroom teaching seems to be heavily geared towards the teaching of vocabulary using word lists, which is often monotonous and less effective in teaching vocabulary. In a comparison of rote memorization and keyword or contextual methods, contextual learning was underscored to facilitate a stronger and longer retention of vocabulary, especially when a child's understanding of the concepts is the focus (Rodríguez & Sadowki, 2000; Zohrabi et al., 2018). For this reason, children often find it difficult to move from the knowledge of vocabulary to actual communication, indicating that memorization is not enough to facilitate the retention and effective use of vocabulary in the years to come.

The advent of social media has encouraged the acquisition of vocabulary through videos, captions, and hashtags which enables learners to grasp language in a contextual, dynamic, and multifaceted



manner. This phenomenon aligns with the principles of constructivism and incidental learning, which emphasize the value of authentic engagement rooted in real-world contexts and nurtures retention and motivation (Shafaei, 2011; Numonova, 2024). In addition, this type of environment mirrors extramural English learning, which refers to the acquisition of language outside the classroom through informal means like gaming, streaming, or online debates (Jensen & Lauridsen, 2023; Altendorf, 2023).

The present study seeks to explore the relationship between students' exposure to current events on social media, particularly regarding the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, and their vocabulary acquisition. As the primary focus of the study, the relationship between the learners' social media activity and vocabulary acquisition, knowledge of current affairs, interaction, and vocabulary expansion is examined.

## Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study.

1. Which social media platforms are commonly used by students?
2. How aware are students of current issues on social media?
3. How do current issues on social media platforms affect students' ability to expand their English vocabulary, particularly in terms of incidental and contextual learning?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Social Media and Vocabulary Development

Social media encompasses the set of online tools for content production, sharing, and interaction, which makes them good avenues for communication. In the education sphere, these tools enhance the learning process by promoting collaborative learning, knowledge sharing, and accessing various materials (Saini & Mir, 2023). In regard to vocabulary acquisition, social media offers learners constant exposure to diverse forms of authentic media and opportunities to interact with real life professional communities. Learners, as noted by Khan et al. (2016), on this type of engagement, begin to encounter phrases and expressions which enrich their lexical vocabulary. Wu and Wu, (2011, as cited in Yadav, 2021) advanced the social media argument by stating its usefulness for the teaching and learning of grammar, vocabulary, and overall fluency.

Recent studies provide further support for this perspective. As an instance, Song and Xiong (2023) observed that vocabulary learning via social learning applications and social media platforms has varying effectiveness, with more formal digital devices often having an advantage over informal platforms in retention. However, platforms such as Instagram and TikTok do provide contextualized vocabulary and contextualized dialogues supporting incidental learning (Sutasini Sivagnanam & Melor Md Yunus, 2020). In the same manner, Calafato and Clausen (2024) put forth the argument that learners purposefully engage in extramural activities, such as social media gaming, to improve both their receptive and productive vocabulary skills.

Unlike in traditional classrooms, where vocabulary learning typically depends on the student's ability to memorize, social media offers an interactive, constructivist approach to learning (Sidgi,



2021). An upper-level college study showed that vocabulary instruction relies heavily on listing and rote learning as the primary instructional strategy. This approach diminishes motivation, the development of practical skills, and authentic interaction (Samoshkina, 2024). In contrast, social media exposes learners to varied inputs which, in turn, help learners use vocabulary actively and contextually (Zahirah Zainal & Nor Hanim Rahmat, 2020). This supports the extramural English hypothesis where learners acquire the language informally through engagement with content beyond the classroom, in digital context.

Additionally, social media improves learners' confidence and motivation, reducing affective barriers. As Zahirah Zainal and Nor Hanim Rahmat (2020) pointed out, Twitter and Facebook foster learners' authentic dialogues, motivating them to understand and retain vocabulary. Their consistent engagement accelerates the active use of vocabulary, minimizing error apprehension and encouraging linguistic risk-taking. Gibbins and Greenhow (2016), Shafaei (2011), and Numonova (2024) document the effectiveness of visual-verbal aids, such as memes and subtitled videos, on retention as a result of multimodal retention. Collaborative learning stands out as another important social affordance where learners co-construct meaning, clarify usage through peer interactions, and negotiate the appropriate vocabulary in authentic debates (Rouis et al., 2011).

### **The Crucial Role of Vocabulary in Understanding Current Events**

Vocabulary plays a fundamental role in enabling learners to comprehend reading and listening materials, both of which are indispensable for interpreting and engaging with current events. Strong lexical knowledge allows individuals to process information more efficiently and accurately, supporting the construction of meaningful mental representations of both oral and written discourse (Spies, 2023). According to Nelson and Wigg (2018, as cited in Spies, 2023), learners with a more developed vocabulary base are better prepared to decode complex messages, extract essential meaning, and respond critically to the texts they encounter. Without adequate vocabulary, learners face significant challenges in accessing the full depth of information presented in public, academic, and media discourse.

Recent scholarship emphasizes that political discourse, in particular, exposes learners to specialized terminology across domains such as international relations, law, and human rights. Such exposure is essential for fostering both comprehension and critical engagement with pressing global issues (Garcia & Ulbig, 2023; Kurbanova, 2023; Pešić, 2024). For example, Dikarsa et al. (2020) highlight how students' engagement with political news on platforms like Instagram provided authentic opportunities to interact with terminology while simultaneously enhancing critical thinking and political literacy skills. The ability to navigate terms such as *ceasefire*, *genocide*, or *diplomatic negotiations* is not merely a linguistic exercise but an intellectual necessity for evaluating competing perspectives and identifying ideological framing in the media. Misunderstandings and oversimplification occur when culturally and politically loaded vocabulary is mistranslated or not understood, highlighting the critical role of lexical competence in grasping political discourse (Gasparyan & Ishkhanyan, 2024). Without this linguistic competence, students risk misinterpreting or oversimplifying the nuanced debates that shape sociopolitical life.



Exposure to politically relevant vocabulary not only broadens lexical knowledge but also contributes directly to the development of critical thinking skills. Learners who are familiar with political lexis are more capable of articulating arguments, evaluating policy discussions, and positioning themselves in relation to global issues. This link between vocabulary knowledge and civic literacy underscores the dual function of vocabulary instruction: on the one hand, it facilitates comprehension of complex texts, and on the other, it equips learners to actively participate in democratic dialogue. Integrating politically and socially relevant vocabulary into language pedagogy thus strengthens both linguistic proficiency and civic competence, ensuring that students can engage meaningfully with the sociopolitical realities of the world around them.

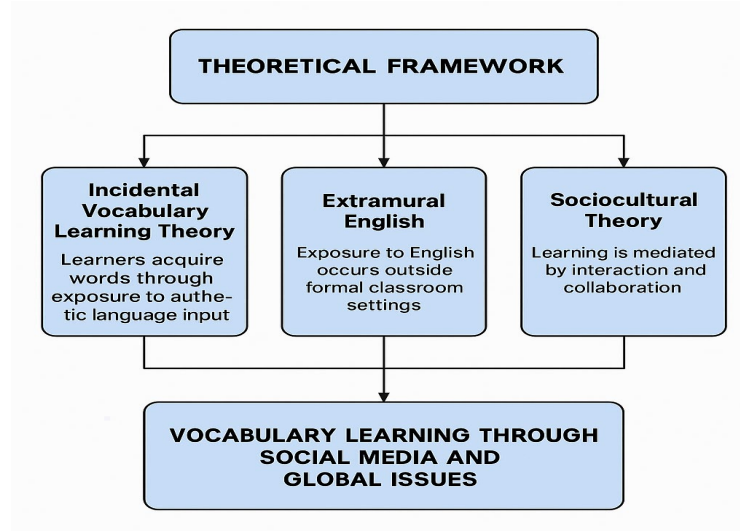
### **Teaching and Learning Vocabulary through Current Events**

Emphasis on definitions, rote memorization, and drills have been the trademark features of traditional approaches to vocabulary instruction. Such approaches have received heavy criticism for a lack of meaningful application of vocabulary knowledge, and failure to ensure long-term retention (Wood et al., 2011). Learners who acquire vocabulary through isolation often find the vocabulary to be inert, unable to use it in effective real-life communication. For this reason, there is a growing advocacy towards context-driven acquisition, where learners meet new vocabulary in meaningful context and through communicative frameworks. With this, learners have the opportunity to process vocabulary more deeply and integrate it into their active language repertoire. Blachowicz et al. (2005) have shown that repeatedly encountering words in different contexts improves retention. In the same way, Stahl and Nagy (2006) insisted that while direct instruction has its benefits, it is most effective when used with authentic contexts that allow for meaningful interaction.

More recent research has applied these concepts to the scope of digital learning. With the use of current events, Haque et al. (2024) demonstrated how digital media tools are capable of enhancing engagement with vocabulary at the learner level. Godwin-Jones (2023) also describes how discussion and debate forums on social media not only foster the incidental acquisition of vocabulary but also immerse learners in authentic discourse, which is the real world. These adaptations are aligned to constructivist approaches to learning, which view knowledge as emerging from participation, active engagement, negotiation of meaning, and thoughtful reflection. Onstructors provide learners with authentic contexts to use new vocabulary through headline analysis, viewpoint comparison, and even online debate participation. Digital platforms facilitate the connection between instructional practices and actual language usage, thereby enhancing retention as well as critical engagement.

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This study is grounded in three interrelated theoretical perspectives that explain how learners enhance their vocabulary through social media engagement on global issues.



**Figure 1.** Theoretical Framework of the Study

This study is grounded in three complementary theoretical perspectives: Incidental Vocabulary Learning, Extramural English, and Sociocultural Theory. These frameworks provide a comprehensive lens to explain how students' engagement with social media on global issues facilitates vocabulary acquisition.

### **1. Incidental Vocabulary Learning Theory**

Vocabulary development often occurs unintentionally through exposure to authentic language input. Nation (2013) emphasizes that learners acquire words more effectively when they encounter them repeatedly in meaningful contexts rather than through rote memorization. This position is supported by more recent work demonstrating that digital platforms provide multimodal input (audio, video, captions) that facilitates incidental vocabulary uptake (Pu et al., 2024). In social media environments, students are continuously exposed to specialized terminology, colloquial expressions, and hashtags embedded in real-world discourse, making vocabulary acquisition a by-product of engagement rather than explicit instruction.

### **2. Extramural English**

Sundqvist and Sylvén (2016) introduced the concept of *extramural English*, referring to all exposure to English that occurs outside formal classroom instruction, such as through online gaming, digital media, and social networking. Social media is an integral part of this environment, offering learners opportunities to consume and produce English spontaneously. Research has confirmed that extramural English fosters vocabulary growth and motivation by linking language to learners' interests and global issues (Zahirah Zainal & Nor Hanim Rahmat, 2020; Mahmood et al., 2024). In this study, students' use of platforms like *Instagram*, *TikTok*, and *YouTube* illustrates how extramural English settings can become rich domains for incidental vocabulary learning.



### 3. Constructivist Learning Theory (Social Constructivism)

Rooted in Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, language learning is understood as a socially mediated process shaped by interaction, collaboration, and scaffolding. The *Zone of Proximal Development* (ZPD) highlights how learners acquire new language forms by engaging with peers and more knowledgeable users. In digital spaces, this manifests in comment threads, online debates, and shared multimedia content. Recent studies confirm that interaction in social media fosters both collaborative knowledge construction and vocabulary development (Yadav, 2021; Hanan et al., 2023). For example, discussions around global events expose learners to politically charged vocabulary and encourage critical engagement with terms that carry cultural and ideological weight

By integrating these perspectives, the framework explains how exposure (Incidental Learning), context (Extramural English), and interaction (Sociocultural Theory) jointly support vocabulary growth. This triangulation underscores the potential of social media to act not merely as an entertainment tool but as a dynamic space for meaningful, socially constructed language learning.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

This study employed a quantitative survey design, which is suitable for capturing learners' perceptions across a large population in a systematic manner. Quantitative surveys are particularly effective in identifying trends and patterns in learners' use of social media for language learning (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Cohen et al., 2018). By using this approach, the study was able to provide measurable insights into students' vocabulary improvement linked to their engagement with social media content on global issues.

### Participants

The participants were 129 diploma students randomly selected from three faculties at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Dungun, Terengganu: the Faculty of Accountancy, the Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management, and the Academy of Contemporary Islamic Studies. Random sampling was used to ensure representativeness and minimize bias (Etikan & Bala, 2017). The inclusion of students from different faculties enhanced the validity of findings by reflecting diverse academic backgrounds and exposure levels.

### Research Instrument

Data were collected using a **structured questionnaire** administered through Google Forms. The instrument consisted of three main sections:

1. **Social media usage** – identifying preferred platforms and frequency of use.
2. **Awareness of global issues** – measuring students' knowledge of current events.
3. **Vocabulary recognition** – assessing familiarity with vocabulary items associated with global issues (e.g., Israel–Palestine conflict).



Structured questionnaires are widely recognized for their reliability and efficiency in gathering large-scale data (Vania, 2019). The items were adapted and contextualized based on prior studies on vocabulary and social media learning (Ali et al., 2025; Mahmood et al., 2024).

### **Data Collection Procedures**

The survey was conducted in-class under the supervision of course lecturers to ensure authenticity of responses. Students were given limited time to respond, which reduced the likelihood of consulting external resources (e.g., online searches). This approach ensured that responses more accurately reflected students' existing knowledge and perceptions rather than external assistance.

To enhance reliability, the data collection process was monitored and standardized across all participating groups. Ethical procedures were observed by securing informed consent and ensuring voluntary participation.

### **Data Analysis**

The data obtained via Google Forms were transferred to SPSS version 26 for analysis. The study used descriptive statistics of social media usage, awareness on global issues, and self-perception on vocabulary enhancement by students. Descriptive statistics were considered appropriate because the study was exploratory in nature and aimed at identifying patterns and trends rather than testing causal relationships (Cohen et al., 2018).

As an illustration, students' preferred social media platforms were summarized using frequencies and percentages, while the overall awareness and perceived vocabulary development were measured using means. This approach enabled direct alignment of the findings with the research questions.

No inferential statistics were necessary because the goal was to map perceptions across the sample and not to analyze any predictive or causal relationships. This aligns with perception-based approaches in applied linguistics (Etikan & Bala, 2017; Vania, 2019). This approach, however, was noted as a study limitation, and the authors suggested future research incorporate inferential techniques, like correlation or regression analyses, to explore the potential relationship between social media usage and vocabulary expansion.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The collected data for the study are examined, and the results are presented according to the research questions of the study.

### **Research Question 1: Which social media platforms are mostly used by students?**

The participants were asked to tick 3 primary social media platforms that they are prioritised in utilising it.



**Table 1.** Frequencies of preferred social media platforms

<b>Platform</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
<i>Instagram</i>	123	95.3
<i>TikTok</i>	119	92.2
<i>YouTube</i>	81	62.8
<i>Snapchat</i>	7	5.4
<i>Pinterest</i>	5	3.9
<i>LinkedIn</i>	0	0.0

Table 1 presents the predominant *social media platforms* utilised by students, based on 129 responses. The data highlights *Instagram* (95.3%) and *TikTok* (92.2%) as the two most preferred platforms, followed by *YouTube* (62.8%). In contrast, platforms such as *Pinterest* (3.9%), *Snapchat* (5.4%), and *LinkedIn* (0%) were the least favoured.

This distribution reflects the contemporary *social media* landscape among youth, where visually driven and interactive platforms dominate digital habits. The prominence of *Instagram*, *TikTok*, and *YouTube* is particularly significant for vocabulary acquisition, as these platforms combine audio-visual content with captions, hashtags, and comments; features that naturally facilitate incidental language learning (Sutasini Sivagnanam & Melor Md Yunus, 2020; Hanan et al., 2023). Users engage in both receptive (viewing, reading) and productive (posting, commenting) modes, providing authentic exposure to contemporary English vocabulary, slang, idiomatic expressions, and colloquial structures.

Critically, these platforms differ in their affordances for language learning. *TikTok* offers short, captioned videos rich in spoken and written cues, which Pu et al. (2024) identify as beneficial for incidental vocabulary uptake via multimodal input. *Instagram*'s integration of captions, reels, and stories encourages repeated encounters with bite-sized lexical input, reinforcing recognition and contextual use. *YouTube*, while less dominant in this dataset, remains a valuable site for both passive and active vocabulary development through its diverse, often educational content (Al-Riyami & Dayananda, 2022).

Importantly, recent uses-and-gratifications studies confirm that *TikTok*, *Instagram*, and *YouTube* are predominantly entertainment-oriented platforms, where entertainment and passing time are the strongest motivations among youth users (Niu et al., 2023). This helps explain why students gravitate towards these platforms and why the vocabulary encountered there often reflects colloquial, emotive, and event-driven registers.

However, the underutilisation of academically inclined platforms such as *LinkedIn* (0%) and *Pinterest* (3.9%) highlights students' tendency to favour entertainment over professional or technical language exposure. This points to a gap in engagement with platforms that could expand learners' access to academic or formal vocabulary, potentially limiting the breadth of their lexical advancement.

In summary, the findings confirm that students predominantly interact with visually immersive and socially interactive platforms such as *TikTok*, *Instagram*, and *YouTube* which act as dynamic



spaces for incidental vocabulary learning, especially in conversational and contemporary English. At the same time, their limited engagement with academically oriented platforms raises questions about the scope and register of vocabulary acquisition achievable through entertainment-based *social media*.

**Research Question 2: How aware are students of current issues on social media?**

**Table 2.** Students’ awareness of current issues on social media

Questionnaire	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I actively engage with global news through social media platforms	28	99	1	1
I stay updated on the latest developments about Palestine and Israel through social media platforms.	59	68	1	1

Table 2 displays students’ awareness of contemporary issues on *social media*, focusing on their active engagement with global news and their efforts to stay informed. In this study, the Israel–Palestine conflict was selected as the sole context for measuring awareness, since it was the most salient issue during the data-collection period. Respondents were not presented with multiple issues to choose from. This clarification ensures that the findings reflect exposure to one globally prominent conflict, rather than a selection among alternatives.

The results indicate that social media functions as a primary channel for news consumption among students, particularly regarding globally significant matters. This high level of engagement aligns with recent research showing that youth increasingly rely on *TikTok*, *Instagram*, and *YouTube* not only for entertainment but also as informal news sources (Reuters Institute, 2022; Pew Research Center, 2024).

Exposure to global issues through these platforms is crucial not only for raising awareness but also for vocabulary development, as students frequently encounter specialized terms, sociopolitical jargon, and culturally nuanced language. For instance, vocabulary items such as *ceasefire*, *occupation*, *displacement*, and *humanitarian crisis* are commonly embedded in conflict-related discourse, providing authentic opportunities for incidental acquisition. This supports Pešić’s (2024) argument that engaging with authentic, real-time content in digital spaces enhances incidental vocabulary learning, especially when learners interact with topics of high personal and global relevance.

Finally, social media environments are described as dynamic because content is algorithmically curated, multimodal, and updated in real time, combining video, captions, hashtags, and user



comments. These features expose learners to a continuous flow of contextually embedded vocabulary. The next section builds on this by examining how such exposure influences vocabulary uptake patterns in greater depth as in Table 3 and Table 4.

**Table 3.** Simple Common Questions to Test Students' General Knowledge

Questions	Correct Answers	Wrong Answers
Who is the Prime Minister of Israel at that time?	107	22
Who is the President of the United States of America at that time?	110	19
Who is the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom at that time?	99	30
Familiar phrases and frequently said during the solidarity (from the river to the sea)	96	33

Table 3 presents the results of four general knowledge questions designed to test students' awareness of contemporary global topics during the survey period. The questions targeted knowledge of key political leaders and a widely circulated political slogan ("From the river to the sea"). The data show relatively high awareness, although performance varied across items.

These findings suggest that students are more informed about high-profile political figures, such as heads of state, who receive extensive coverage in both mainstream and *social media*. This pattern is consistent with prior research indicating that the salience and frequency of coverage directly shape youth awareness of international affairs (Reuters Institute, 2022). The high recognition of figures like the Prime Minister of Israel and the President of the United States demonstrates that learners' digital engagement has expanded their knowledge of political discourse, including vocabulary such as *presidency*, *prime ministerial*, and *diplomatic relations*.

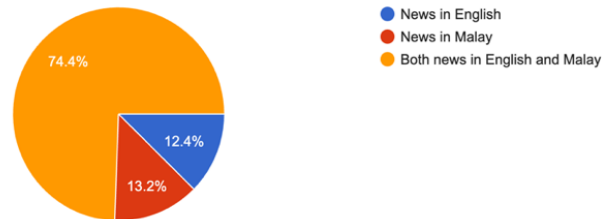
In contrast, the comparatively lower recognition of movement-specific slogans such as "*From the river to the sea*" indicates that learners' exposure to cause-specific discourse is less consistent. As Pešić (2024) argues, these slogans and discursive markers often carry strong ideological, historical, and socio-political connotations, requiring deeper cultural and contextual understanding. Nonetheless, students' ability to recognize the slogan at all reflects meaningful engagement with activist and solidarity discourse on social media, where domain-specific lexis and emotionally charged expressions circulate widely.

Overall, the results from Table 3 indicate that students possess a relatively high level of awareness of current issues through *social media*, particularly in relation to prominent leaders and major conflicts. However, awareness of movement-specific vocabulary remains less robust, pointing to the uneven nature of lexical exposure in digital environments. This finding highlights the need for intentional pedagogical support to help students critically interpret politically loaded expressions while strengthening vocabulary knowledge.



### Research Question 3: How do current issues on social media platforms affect students' ability to broaden their English vocabulary?

Which language do you predominantly choose to consume on social media platforms in terms of both visual and auditory content?  
129 responses



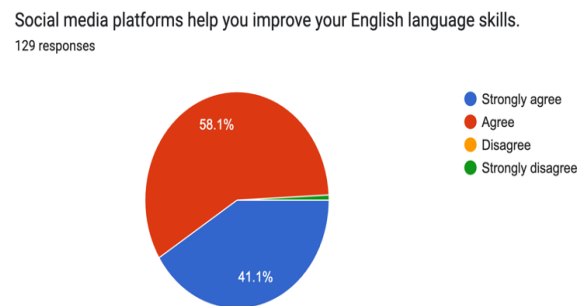
**Figure 2.** The choice of language by students on social media platforms.

Figure 2 illustrates students' language preferences when consuming news on *social media* platforms. The results show that a significant majority of students (74.4%) engage with news content in both English and Malay, while smaller proportions consume news exclusively in English (12.4%) or Malay (13.2%).

This bilingual preference suggests that most learners adopt a code-switching approach when navigating *social media*. Research indicates that bilingual digital consumption can foster cross-linguistic transfer and metalinguistic awareness, which in turn support vocabulary development in both languages (Cenoz & Gorter, 2011; Mahmood et al., 2024). However, the relatively low percentage of students who rely exclusively on English news content may limit opportunities for extensive English vocabulary expansion, since consistent and immersive exposure is a key factor in second-language lexical growth (Nation, 2013).

The predominance of bilingual news consumption also aligns with findings that learners often use their first language as a scaffolding tool to understand complex or unfamiliar content online (Lomicka & Lord, 2016). While this strategy can aid comprehension and reduce cognitive overload, it can simultaneously reduce the likelihood of incidental acquisition of low-frequency or context-specific English terms, such as those tied to political or humanitarian discourse.

Overall, the findings from Figure 2 highlight that while *social media* provides rich opportunities for vocabulary expansion, the language choices students make critically shape the extent of their learning outcomes. To maximise the potential of *social media* as a vocabulary resource, educators should encourage purposeful engagement with English-medium content, while also acknowledging the supportive role of bilingualism in mediating understanding and retention.



**Figure 3.** Students' perception towards social media that can help them improve their English language skills.

Figure 3 illustrates students' perceptions of whether *social media* platforms contribute to improving their English language skills, based on 129 responses. The data reveal that 58.1% of respondents agreed and 41.1% strongly agreed with the statement. Notably, no respondents expressed disagreement, reflecting unanimous positive perceptions of *social media* as a language learning tool.

This overwhelmingly positive response is consistent with studies that highlight *social media* as a dynamic and accessible space for language learning, particularly in vocabulary acquisition. According to Hanan et al. (2023), these platforms expose users to diverse, authentic, and contextually embedded language use, which enhances retention and fosters incidental learning. Similarly, *Instagram*, *YouTube*, and *Twitter* integrate multimedia input, colloquial expressions, and interactive comment sections that encourage contextual vocabulary uptake (Mahmood et al., 2024).

The absence of negative responses suggests a strong acceptance of *social media* as an informal yet effective complement to formal learning. This trend echoes Al-Riyami and Dayananda (2022), who argue that online interactions can supplement classroom instruction by offering authentic exposure to communicative practices. The participatory nature of *social media* requires learners to both interpret and generate content, reinforcing their vocabulary development across receptive (listening, reading) and productive (speaking, writing) skills.

Critically, while students perceive vocabulary gains, such perceptions should be interpreted with caution. Prior research has warned that informal digital discourse often carries non-standard grammar, simplified registers, or politicised rhetoric (Reuters Institute, 2022). Without pedagogical guidance, there is a risk of learners internalising inaccurate or overly colloquial forms. This limitation underscores the importance of framing *social media* not as a substitute for structured vocabulary instruction, but as a complementary resource that can be scaffolded within academic contexts.



**Table 4.** These are 25 English words or phrases that frequently appear on social media platforms that relate to Israel and Palestine issues.

<b>Word/Phrases</b>	<b>Yes. I know it before the issue occurs</b>	<b>I learn it when I watch the news</b>	<b>No. I don't know</b>
Genocide	48	53	28
Terrorist	90	33	6
Under the rubble	21	60	48
Hamas	78	47	4
Ambassador	86	26	17
Antisemitism	24	41	64
Illegal occupation	63	42	24
Holocaust	18	34	77
Dehumanising	26	45	58
Solidarity	76	45	8
Massacred	35	33	61
Ceasefire	46	55	28
Hostages	62	36	31
Destruction	57	38	34
Bombarded	56	39	34
Martyr	20	34	75
Weapons	105	17	7
Ethnic cleansing	56	44	29
White phosphorus	32	46	51
Human shields	71	41	17
Zionist	56	46	27
Apartheid			
Demolished	40	38	51
Devastation	45	33	51
Propaganda	96	24	9
Illegal settlements	78	31	20

Table 4 categorises students' vocabulary knowledge into three groups:

1. Words known prior to the conflict ("Yes. I know it before the issue occurs"),
2. Words learned during exposure to *social media* and news coverage ("I learn it when I watched the news"), and
3. Words unfamiliar to them ("No. I don't know").

The 25 vocabulary items in Table 4 were researcher-provided in the questionnaire, not generated by students. These terms were selected because they appeared frequently in social media coverage of the Israel–Palestine conflict during the survey period (e.g., *genocide*, *ceasefire*, *occupation*,



*propaganda*). Students were asked to indicate whether they had known these terms previously, learned them through exposure to news/social media, or still did not know them. This procedure ensures reliability of measurement and addresses the reviewer's concern about the source of vocabulary items.

The results reveal that while some words (e.g., *terrorist*, *propaganda*, *illegal settlements*) were already widely recognised, others such as *under the rubble*, *ceasefire*, and *devastation* were more often reported as learned incidentally from news exposure. This finding reinforces existing literature on incidental vocabulary acquisition through event-driven discourse (Ali et al., 2025; Lomicka & Lord, 2016).

However, several terms (*white phosphorus*, *dehumanising*, *demolished*) remained unfamiliar to a notable proportion of students, suggesting that technical or specialised lexis is less accessible in general social media streams. This gap is consistent with studies showing that while *social media* provides authentic and engaging contexts, it does not always provide sufficient depth for comprehensive vocabulary development without explicit support (Mahmood et al., 2024).

An important trend is the relatively high uptake of emotionally charged or politically salient vocabulary (e.g., *genocide*, *Holocaust*, *hostages*). Scholars argue that emotionally engaging or morally loaded content can enhance retention and deepen cognitive processing of vocabulary (Schmitt, 2014). Thus, learners' encounters with such terminology online may foster not only lexical expansion but also greater critical awareness of global discourse.

These findings highlight the importance of integrating current events into language instruction; while also teaching students to critically evaluate the ways such terms are framed in digital discourse. Explicit teaching of less frequent or technical vocabulary is necessary to complement incidental learning. Furthermore, embedding critical media literacy skills can equip learners to interpret politicised terminology and understand its role in shaping narratives (Reuters Institute, 2022).

## CONCLUSION

This research showed how social media could be used in language acquisition to assist learners in vocabulary construction and improve their interaction with genuine language. In particular, the findings highlighted the positive perceptions of the students regarding the use of social media to engage with real-time content, which corresponds to the objectives of the examination of the students' awareness of current events and their influence on vocabulary development. Yet, the findings are limited in their generalizability due to the small number of respondents.

Instead of looking at the broader picture of the digital contexts, the current research concentrated on social media in the form of *Instagram*, *TikTok*, and *YouTube*. These social media accounts not only served as sources of entertainment, but also as informal windows to the language. In order to better implement them in the classroom, teachers need to use organized, systematic approaches, including but not limited to, task-based language activities, vocabulary scavenger hunts on trending themes, and structured reflections of the students' social media feeds which are current



and event-based. All these methods foster relevant, situated chances for the development of vocabulary, higher order thinking skills, and critical reflection.

Further investigation should explore students' use of social media in relation to their proficiency and the specific type of content. An effective method would be to allow students to choose the current issues they would like to study, thus increasing their motivation and relevance. In addition, changing and increasing the sample sizes would permit a demographic comparative analysis and strengthen the generalizability of the findings.

In a purposeful integration of social media in class assignments, the use of social media in teaching allows instructors to connect the content of lessons to the everyday life of the students, thus fostering self-direction, cross-cultural awareness, and functional communication skills.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest to disclose.

### **Acknowledgement**

We would like to extend our sincerest gratitude to the ESL students and lecturers of Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Cawangan Terengganu, Kampus Dungun, Malaysia, for their willingness to participate voluntarily in this study and for providing their consent. Their involvement was crucial to the success of our research, and we express our heartfelt thanks for their cooperation.



### **Authors' Contributions**

The authors confirm contribution to the paper as follows; study conception, design and data collection was conducted by NZAS. The authors including NM, NA, and ACM conducted analysis and interpretation of results, draft manuscript preparation, reviewed the results, read and approved the final version of the manuscript.