



**EFL STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES IN INCIDENTAL
VOCABULARY LEARNING VIA INSTAGRAM
COMMENTS: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY**



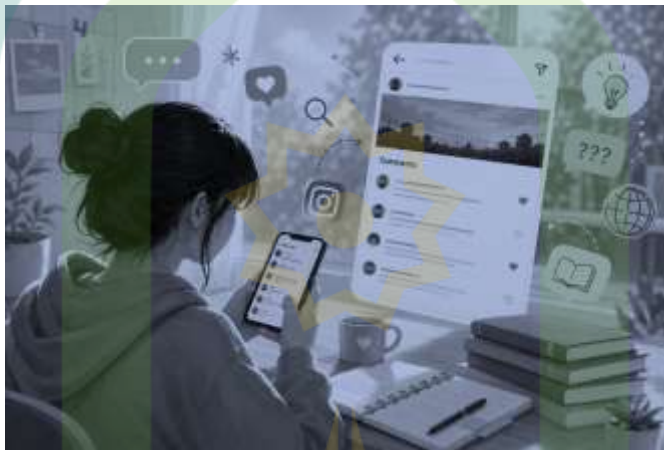
INDRIANA SYAFIRA

SN.20522095

2026



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A THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Degree of
Sarjana Pendidikan in the English Education Department



By:

INDRIANA SYAFIRA
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**ENGLISH EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
FACULTY OF EDUCATION AND TEACHER TRAINING
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K.H. ABDURRAHMAN WAHID PEKALONGAN
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Yth. Dekan FTIK IAIN Pekalongan
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di
PEKALONGAN

Assalamu 'alaikum Wr.Wb.

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Wassalamu'alaikum Wr.Wb.

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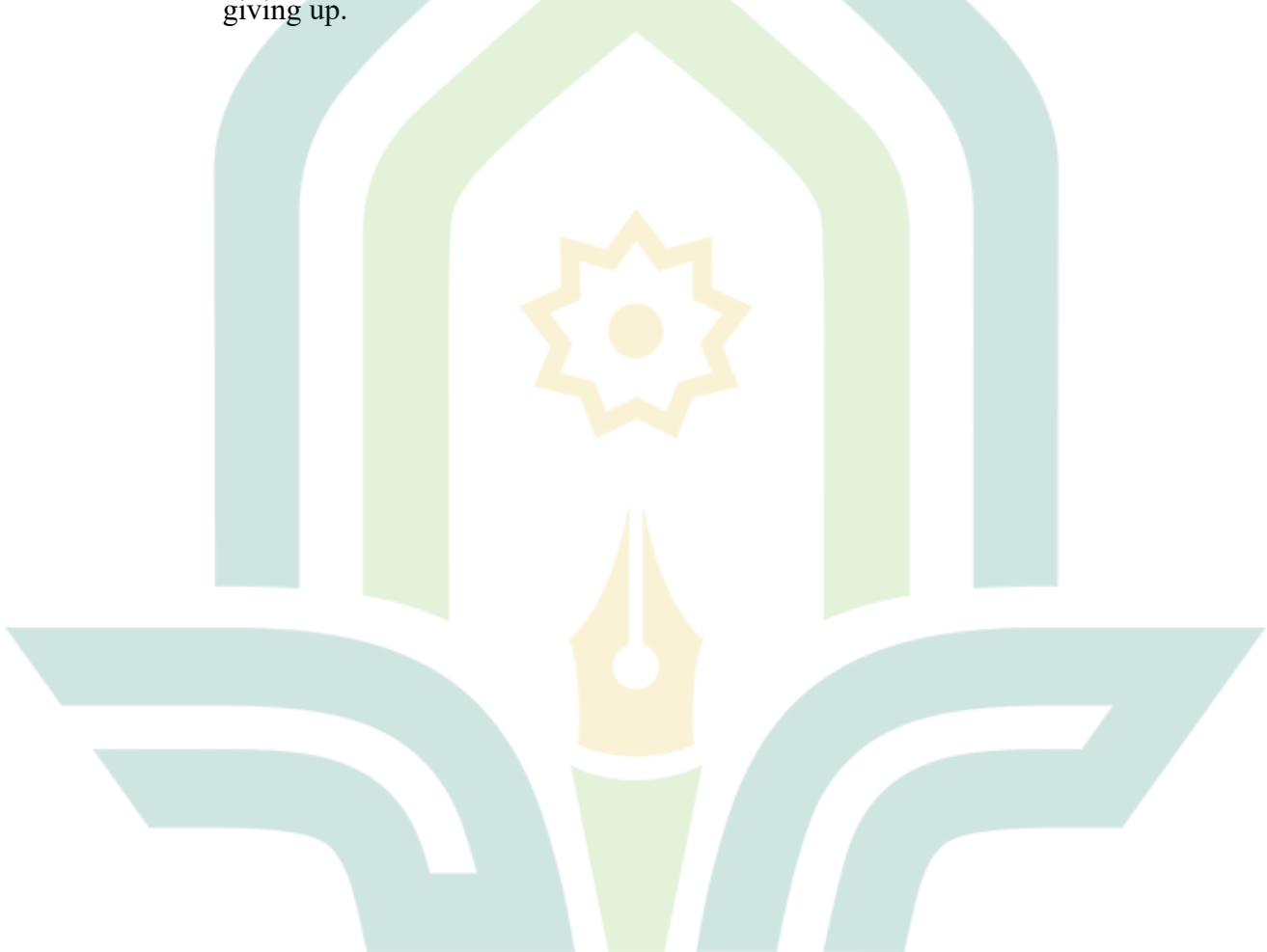
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All praise be to Allah SWT, the Most Merciful and Most Compassionate, whose boundless grace, mercy, and guidance have carried me through every step of this journey. By His will, I have finally completed this undergraduate thesis. May this humble work bring benefit to others and remain a meaningful part of my lifelong pursuit of knowledge. Peace and blessings be upon Prophet Muhammad SAW, whose noble teachings continue to illuminate the path of wisdom, kindness, and faith. This accomplishment would never have been possible without the love, prayers, and unwavering support of many remarkable people. Therefore, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to:

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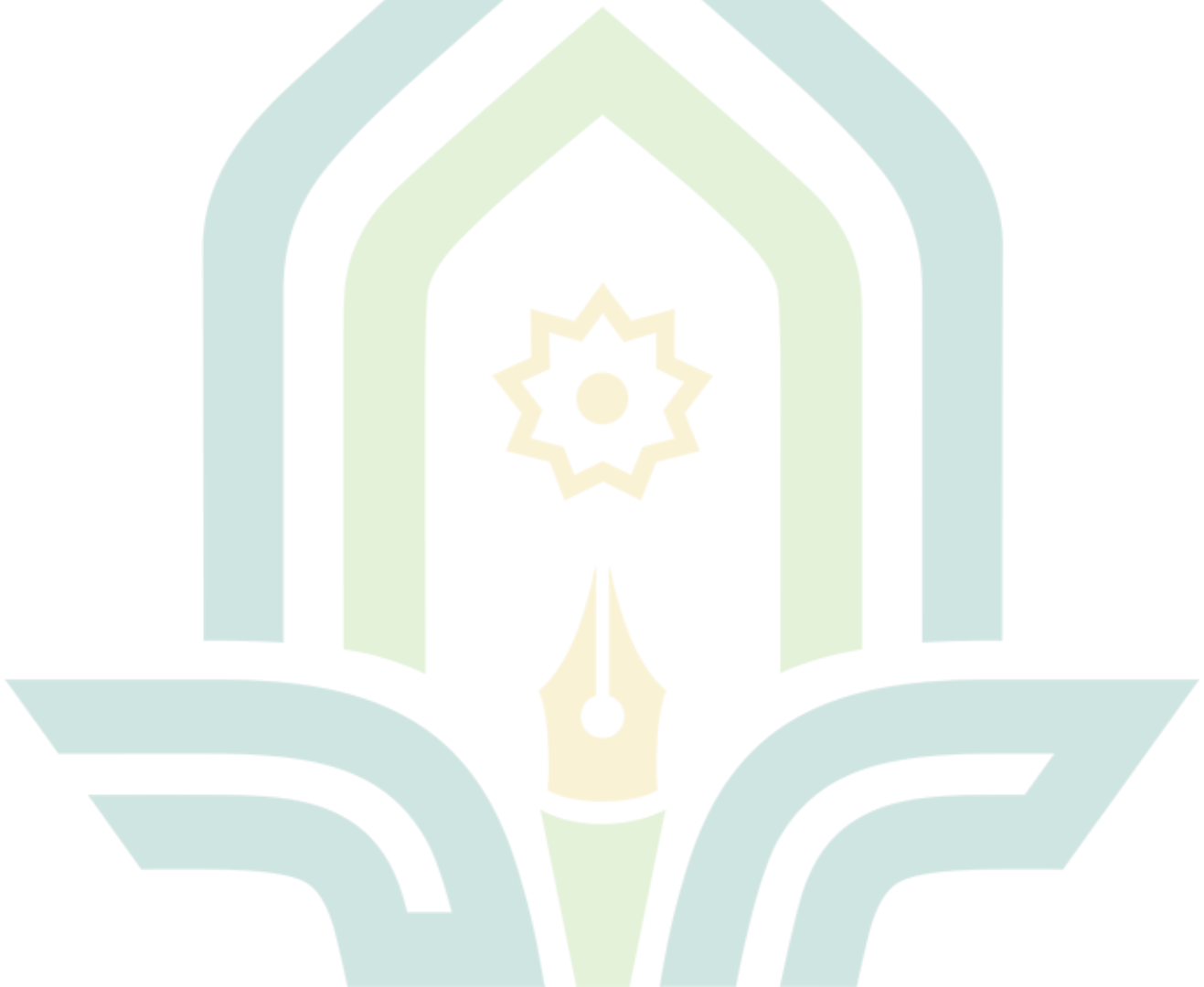
MOTTO

“Be Brave”

(Indriana Syafira)

“You can’t be good at everything, but it doesn’t mean you can’t do anything”

(Jeon Wonwoo)



ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan pengalaman mahasiswa EFL dalam mempelajari kosakata bahasa Inggris secara tidak sengaja (incidental vocabulary learning) melalui kolom komentar Instagram. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode narrative inquiry, di mana data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur dan dokumentasi tangkapan layar komentar Instagram dari empat mahasiswa Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris di sebuah Universitas Islam di Pekalongan. Data dianalisis menggunakan analisis tematik untuk mengidentifikasi pola dan tema yang muncul dari cerita pengalaman partisipan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa mahasiswa mempelajari kosakata baru melalui beberapa cara, yaitu pengulangan kemunculan kata dalam berbagai komentar, interaksi dengan pengguna lain yang memberikan penjelasan makna, serta pemahaman makna kata berdasarkan konteks postingan dan percakapan yang sedang berlangsung. Selain itu, ditemukan pula berbagai tantangan yang dihadapi mahasiswa, seperti kesulitan memahami singkatan atau bahasa gaul, beserta strategi yang mereka gunakan untuk mengatasinya, seperti membaca balasan komentar, menebak makna dari konteks, atau menggunakan fitur terjemahan. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa kolom komentar Instagram dapat menjadi sumber pembelajaran kosakata yang alami dan bermakna di luar kelas, karena memberikan paparan bahasa yang autentik dan sesuai dengan kebutuhan komunikasi sehari-hari mahasiswa.

Keywords: *pembelajaran kosakata insidental, kolom komentar Instagram, narrative inquiry, mahasiswa EFL, pengalaman belajar*

ABSTRACT

This study aims to describe the experiences of EFL students in learning English vocabulary through incidental vocabulary learning (IVL) via Instagram comments. This study employs a qualitative approach using the narrative inquiry method, in which data were collected through semi-structured interviews and screenshots of Instagram comments from four students in the English Language Education Program at an Islamic university in Pekalongan. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns and themes emerging from the participants' accounts of their experiences. The results indicate that students acquired new vocabulary through several means: repeated exposure to words in various comments, interactions with other users who provided explanations of meanings, and inferring word meanings based on the context of posts and ongoing conversations. In addition, the study identified various challenges faced by the students, such as difficulty understanding abbreviations or slang, along with the strategies they used to overcome them, such as reading replies to comments, inferring meaning from context, or using translation features. These findings suggest that Instagram comment sections can serve as a natural and meaningful source of vocabulary learning outside the classroom, as they provide authentic language exposure that aligns with students' daily communication needs.

Keywords: *Incidental vocabulary learning, Instagram comments section, narrative inquiry, EFL students, learning experiences*

PREFACE

All praise and thanks be to Allah SWT for the countless blessings, guidance, mercy, health, and strength that have enabled me to complete this thesis entitled "EFL Students' Experiences in Incidental Vocabulary Learning Via Instagram Comments: A Narrative Inquiry." This thesis is submitted to the English Education Department of UIN K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid Pekalongan as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for obtaining the degree of Sarjana Pendidikan (S.Pd.) in the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education. I realize that this thesis is not perfect. Therefore, suggestions and constructive criticism are highly appreciated for its improvement. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to:

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Pekalongan, 1 Juli 2026

The Researcher

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of The Study

Vocabulary is an important component in learning foreign language. Vocabulary mastery helps students understand spoken and written texts, express ideas clearly, and participate effectively in communication. Furthermore, vocabulary also plays a role in supporting the development of other language skills, such as reading, writing, speaking, and listening, because most meaning in communication is conveyed through words (Nation, 2013). Therefore, the more vocabulary a learner masters, the greater their ability to comprehend information and use language effectively in various communication situations (Schmitt, 2010).

Vocabulary mastery is not only related to knowing the meaning of a word, but also includes understanding how the word is used in various contexts. Vocabulary knowledge encompasses several aspects such as word form, meaning, and word usage in specific sentences and communication situations. Nation (2013) explains that vocabulary knowledge encompasses three main components: form, meaning, and use. Understanding these various aspects helps learners use words more appropriately in communication. Extensive vocabulary knowledge also helps learners comprehend information in a variety of different language contexts (Kyle & Webb, 2020).

Vocabulary is not only learned through formal classroom learning activities but can also be acquired through various language use activities in everyday life. Learners often encounter new words when reading texts, watching videos, or interacting with various forms of language in their environment. One process that enables this is incidental vocabulary learning. Hulstijn (2001) defines incidental vocabulary learning as the process of acquiring new vocabulary without the primary goal of intentionally learning the words, but rather as a result of understanding information in a context. In this situation, the

learner's attention is usually more focused on understanding the message content than on learning the words specifically. Language exposure through various language activities allows learners to acquire new vocabulary indirectly (Schmitt, 2020). In addition to understanding how vocabulary can be acquired incidentally, it is also important to explore how learners experience this process in their daily interactions with language.

In language learning studies, the term English as a Foreign Language (EFL) refers to situations where English is learned in a country where the language is not the primary language of everyday life. Richards & Schmidt, (2013) define EFL as English learning that takes place in an environment where the language is not widely used in everyday communication. In this context, learners' opportunities to use English outside of the formal learning environment are often limited. Therefore, learners in EFL contexts often seek additional sources of language exposure outside the classroom to help develop their language skills (Reinders & Benson, 2017).

The development of digital technology provides greater opportunities for learners to be exposed to English outside the classroom. Through the internet and various digital platforms, users can access various types of English language texts, such as articles, videos, and social media content. These activities allow learners to discover new vocabulary in more authentic contexts. Exposure to various forms of digital text also helps learners understand how language is used in everyday life (Godwin-Jones, 2018).

One of the digital environments widely used by students today is social media. These platforms not only serve as a means of communication but also provide a space for users to read and interact with various forms of text written by other users. Through these activities, users are exposed to various forms of more natural language usage. Ali (2014) emphasizes that interaction on social media can also help language learners develop language skills through more authentic communication.

Through these interactions, learners are exposed to language that is commonly used in real online communication. Social media can provide a communication environment that allows learners to interact with language more naturally (Mills, 2011)

In today's digital era, social media use has become part of students' daily lives. Many students access various social media platforms, such as Instagram, to view posts, read captions, and participate in interactions in the comments section. In these activities, students often encounter English words and phrases, even though they have no specific intention of learning them. Language exposure through digital activities such as social media can provide learners with opportunities to interact with the language more authentically outside the classroom (Godwin-Jones, 2018). Social media also provides opportunities for incidental vocabulary learning because learners are exposed to a wide range of English words through online interactions (Sidgi, 2021). This suggests that social media has the potential to be a source of language exposure, enabling students to discover new vocabulary in their daily activities.

Among various social media platforms, Instagram is one of the most popular applications among students. Instagram allows users to share photos, videos, and text accompanied by captions and interactions between users. Through these activities, users frequently read various forms of text that appear on the platform, potentially exposing them to new vocabulary in various language contexts. Previous research has shown that using Instagram in language learning can help improve vocabulary learning and help students remember new words (Rajayi & Maleki, 2023). Furthermore, Instagram use can also increase student engagement in the language learning process (Handayani, 2016).

Besides captions on posts, another feature of Instagram that contains a large amount of language interaction is the comments section. Unlike captions, which are usually written by the content creator, Instagram comments contain spontaneous

interactions among users and often reflect authentic everyday language use. The comments section includes various forms of informal expressions, abbreviations, slang, and conversational language that naturally emerge through online communication. This situation allows users to encounter new vocabulary while reading comments on a post. Exposure to words that appear repeatedly in online interactions can help learners understand the meaning of words and their use in specific contexts (Rajayi & Maleki, 2023).

However, most research on the use of social media in language learning has focused more on primary content such as images, videos, captions or educational accounts on Instagram. These studies generally examine vocabulary learning outcomes, students' vocabulary improvement, or the effectiveness of Instagram as a learning tool. In contrast, the comments section, which contains more spontaneous and authentic language interaction among users, has received relatively little attention in the context of incidental vocabulary learning. Furthermore, research exploring learners' experiences in acquiring vocabulary through their everyday interactions with Instagram comments is still limited. Understanding learners' experiences is crucial for gaining a clearer understanding of how language learning occurs in everyday life (Barkhuizen, 2021). Previous studies have shown that social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok can provide rich and natural exposure to language, helping learners acquire vocabulary in an incidental and engaging way through content such as images, videos, captions, and trends (Ali, 2014; Dewi Js, 2024; Fauziah et al., 2023; Hikmah et al., 2022; Muluk et al., 2025). However, little attention has been given to how EFL students experience incidental vocabulary learning specifically through Instagram comments as a form of authentic language interaction.

To understand these experiences more deeply, this study employed a narrative inquiry approach, focusing on individual stories and experiences in interpreting their learning process.

Narrative inquiry is a research approach that examines human experiences through the stories they tell (Clandinin, & Connelly, 2000), which is grounded in John Dewey, (1938) concept of experience as continuous and interactive. This approach allows researchers to gain a deeper understanding of language learning experiences from the learners' own perspectives.

Based on this description, this study aims to explore EFL students' experiences of incidental vocabulary learning through Instagram comments. This research focuses not only on the number of vocabulary items students may acquire, but also on how they experience this process when interacting with social media in their daily lives. By understanding learners' experiences directly, this study is expected to provide a clearer understanding of how Instagram, particularly the comments section, can function as a potential source of incidental vocabulary learning outside the classroom.

1.2 Formulation of the Problems

Based on the background of the research above, this study formulates the following research questions:

How do EFL students experience incidental vocabulary learning through Instagram comments?

1.3 Aims of The Study

The aims of the study are:

To describe students' experiences in learning incidental vocabularies through Instagram comments

1.4 Operational Definitions

The researcher provides several definitions related to the research to avoid misunderstandings regarding the various terms in this research.

- 1. Incidental Vocabulary Learning:** Incidental vocabulary learning is an unintentional acquisition of new vocabulary while engage in other activities (Hulstijn, 2001)

2. **Instagram Comment:** Instagram comments are user-generated textual responses to posted photos, functioning as conversational engagement within the platform (Hu, 2014)
3. **EFL Students’:** EFL learners are students learning English in a context where English is not the primary language of communication (Brown, 1994)
4. **Experience:** In this study, experience is defined as an ongoing process in which an individual actively engages with his or her surrounding environment, shaped by two interconnected principles: continuity, which refers to how past experiences influence present and future ones, and interaction, which refers to the interplay between the individual's internal conditions and the external environment (Dewey, 1938)

1.5 Significance of The Study

1. **Theoretical:** This study clarifies how students learn English vocabulary incidentally through interactions in Instagram comments. The findings contribute to the understanding of incidental vocabulary learning (Hulstijn, 2001) by illustrating how vocabulary can be acquired unintentionally through everyday interactions in Instagram comments. The study also supports the application of Nation (2001) concept of vocabulary knowledge by illustrating how learners develop vocabulary form, meaning, and use. In addition, the findings supports Dewey's (1938) concept of experience by showing how vocabulary learning develops through continuity and interaction. Furthermore, the study illustrates how Narrative Inquiry (Clandinin and Connelly 2000) can be used to explore students's vocabulary learning experiences can be understood through the dimensions of temporality, sociality, and place.

- 2. Empirical:** This study provides the evidence of how EFL students in Indonesia can acquire new vocabulary from Instagram comments. The data found in this study can be used as additional reference for other studies discussing vocabulary learning through social media.
- 3. Practical:** This study is useful for teachers and students because it shows that Instagram comments can serve as a potential source of authentic vocabulary exposure that is relevant to students' daily lives. The results of this study can help teachers design learning activities that are more interesting and relevant to students.



CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

5.1 Summary of the Findings

In conclusion, this study shows that EFL students can acquire English vocabulary incidentally through Instagram comments. EFL students use Instagram especially for entertainment purposes, such as watching Reels, following content they like, or simply spending their free time. However, when reading comments to understand the content of conversations, jokes, or ongoing discussions, they encounter various English vocabulary words and abbreviations that they did not previously know. Participants gradually improved their understanding of unfamiliar words through repeated exposure, the contextual information in Instagram comments, and interactions with other users. These findings suggest that vocabulary acquisition can occur without any specific intention to learn English. Therefore, Instagram comment sections can serve as a space that supports natural vocabulary learning in everyday activities.

In addition to acquiring new vocabulary, participants also demonstrated various ways of understanding and learning those words. They paid attention to words that caught their interest, guessed meanings based on context, making use of other users' comments and replies, and using Instagram's translation feature, Google Translate, or Google Search when they encountered difficulties. Participants also faced several challenges, such as unfamiliar words, abbreviations, slang, words with more than one meaning, and terms specific to certain topics. To deal with these challenges, they used different strategies, including using contextual clues, reading comments and replies, and using digital translation tools. Overall, these findings indicate that vocabulary learning through Instagram comments is influenced by repeated exposure, context, social interaction, and the strategies employed by learners. However, the findings also suggest that the vocabulary learning experienced by the participants remained partial.

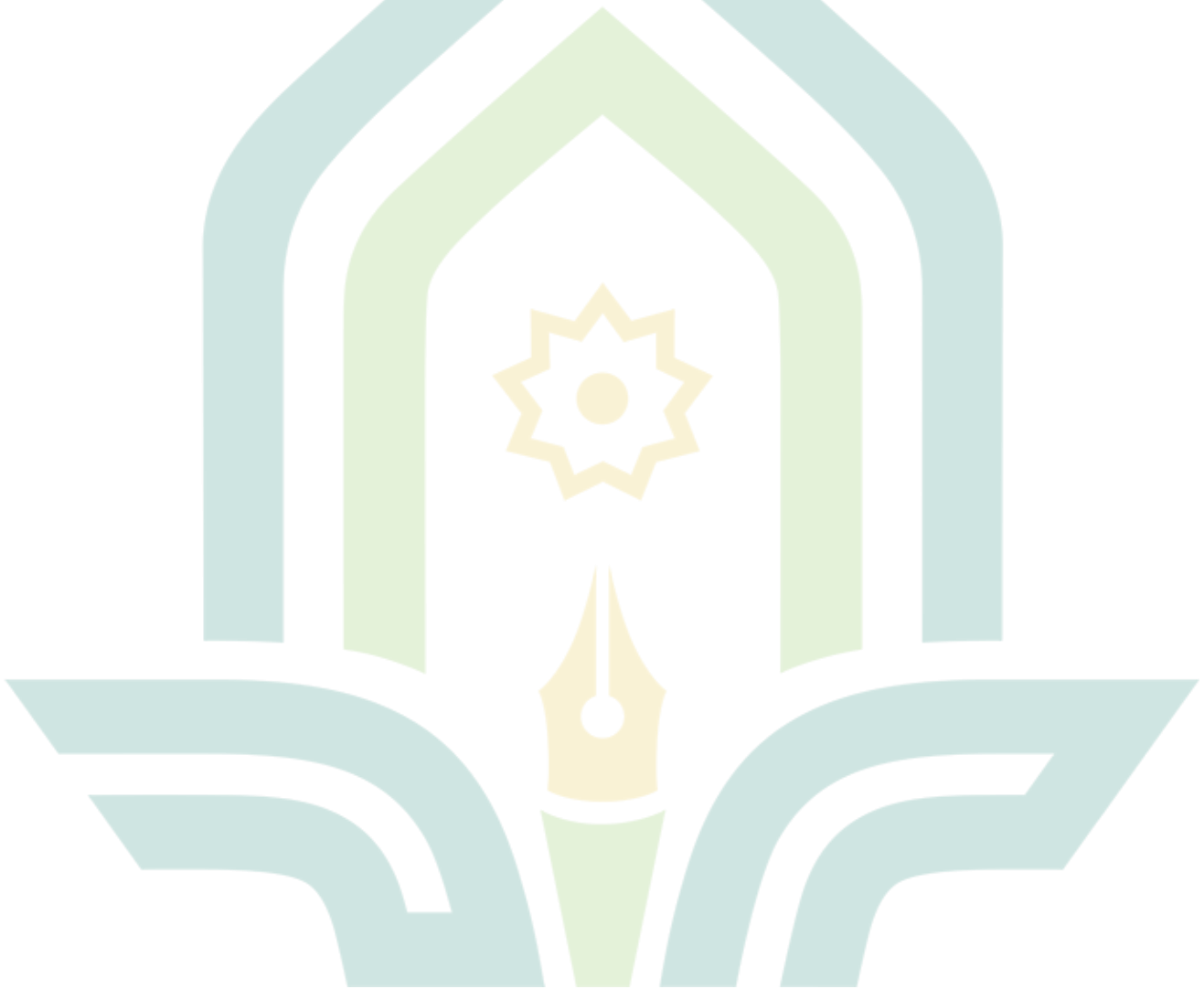
Although participants were able to recognize unfamiliar vocabulary and understand its meanings while reading Instagram comments, they generally did not report actively using the newly learned vocabulary in communication. This indicates that the learning observed in this study mainly reflected receptive vocabulary development rather than productive vocabulary. Nevertheless, Instagram comment sections may serve as a valuable starting point for incidental vocabulary learning by providing authentic language exposure that can support further vocabulary development.

5.2 Recommendations

The researcher provides several recommendations for EFL students' and future researchers, including the following:

1. The findings of this study are expected to encourage EFL students to view Instagram comments not only as a space for entertainment and communication, but also as a potential source of vocabulary learning. Students are encouraged to pay more attention to unfamiliar words or expressions that appear in Instagram comments and make use of available resources, such as contextual clues, discussions with other users, and translation tools, to support their understanding of new vocabulary. In this way, vocabulary learning can occur naturally through everyday social media activities.
2. Future researchers are encouraged to explore the challenges and strategies involved in incidental vocabulary learning in greater depth, particularly when learners encounter slang, abbreviations, or specific topic vocabulary in online environments. Future studies may also investigate incidental vocabulary learning across different social media platforms or among participants with different English proficiency levels to obtain broader insights into learners' experiences. Furthermore, since this study focused on four EFL students and Instagram comments, future studies may involve a larger number of participants and explore other aspects of incidental vocabulary learning, such as vocabulary retention, vocabulary use,

repeated exposure, or the role of digital tools in supporting vocabulary development. Future studies may also examine how incidental vocabulary learning through social media contributes to the development of productive vocabulary by examining learners' active use of newly acquired vocabulary in speaking or writing.



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