Instagram as a Tool in Teaching Vocabulary among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Students

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Abstract— Recent transitions from the conventional to digital teaching methods have been evaluated to assist educators in offering a more engaging education for the students. The study of Kukulska-Hulme & Shield (2008) is essential to comprehending how Mobile-assisted language instruction is effective for instructors to use it in the classroom. While studies have been done to use Instagram in Teaching, these studies have not specified a specific level of EFL students. The study's findings shed light on the notion of using Instagram as a tool in the classroom as opposed to using it merely as for students' entertainment. To address this, a quasi-experimental approach was employed to comprehend the effectiveness of Instagram in students' vocabulary learning in the Center for English Language Studies at Lapulapu-Cebu International College. These 30 students were divided into two groups, the control group and experimental group where they needed to answer a researcher-made questionnaire for their pretest and their posttest. The data is then treated using a t-test for correlated samples and t-test for two independent samples. The findings of this study proved that there was a significant difference between the control group and the experimental group's posttest scores after the intervention was given. Although there was no significant difference between their score in the pretest, this only proves that the students have the same level before doing the study. This study concludes that Instagram is an effective tool towards teaching vocabulary among EFL students as this is supported by the result of the posttest scores of the experimental groups' posttest scores. The researcher highly recommends further studies about using Facebook in teaching vocabulary, using Instagram in teaching grammar or using memes in teaching vocabulary among EFL students.

Keywords— control group, experimental group, pretest, posttest, proposed action plan, Instagram, vocabulary

I. INTRODUCTION

The advent of technology and global standards demands for individuals that can communicate effectively in English and at the same time keep up with the digital age. Social media platforms are now essential to this convergence of changing how people communicate, do business, and share knowledge. Globally, internet penetration reached 67.1% of the world's population in January 2024, with social media users accounting for 59.4%. This gives significance to the utilization of social media in modern life.

Social media has become a part of the daily routines of students in terms of language and communication experience, news feeds, and information exchange. Instagram alone with 1.6 billion users worldwide would be a great avenue for learning. It provides students learning English with a modern approach to improving their speaking, listening, reading, and writing abilities. For instance, Instagram, with its visual and interactive features, presents a unique opportunity for students to utilize not just for past time but also for vocabulary acquisition (Muftah, 2022).

EFL students often use Instagram in learning the English language. Specifically, EFL students start to utilize Instagram in learning new vocabulary that they read in Instagram posts. Hence, EFL learners need to find ways to learn the language, they usually seek alternative avenues such as, enrolling in English online classes, studying abroad or simply doing self-study. Roughly 750 million EFL students learn English around the world and are motivated by extrinsic factors to learn the English language (Nuraeni, 2020). For instance, gaining a competitive advantage in their studies, better career opportunities, and work promotion (Ly, 2022).

Despite this, EFL students still encounter several significant challenges when learning the English language. Obstacles such as identifying spelling and sounds, and figuring out meaning denotatively and connotatively. In addition, inefficiency and demotivating nature of traditional teaching and lack of training of teachers in technology integration results in students being unmotivated to learn the English language. These difficulties may affect the development of the English language learning of the EFL students as well as their capacity for clear and precise communication.

In the Center for English Language Studies, although social media like Instagram has become a widely used medium for communication and a cultural tool in the daily lives of EFL students. there was still a sizable pedagogical integration gap in formal language instruction. The promise of these platforms for independent learning is frequently highlighted in current literature, but localized, theory-driven methods for their methodical use within a structured classroom setting are lacking. Specifically, the lack of research towards Instagram's multimedia richness and interactivity. Empirical models demonstrating how these traits can be pedagogically built to consistently provide Krashen's understandable i+1 input are lacking. Seldom does current research explain how teachers can purposefully set up these quick lines of contact to serve as the More Knowledgeable Other (MKO).

As a faculty of the Center for English Language Studies in Lapulapu-Cebu International College, the researcher knows the courses and its intended targets and how each course helps the students improve their vocabulary skills. A crucial pedagogical gap was discovered through ongoing observation. Although students regularly and independently utilize social media sites like Instagram during their free time, its potential as an organized, theory-driven instrument for classroom vocabulary acquisition is still unrealized. Because of this distinct viewpoint, the researcher can design and carry out a study that aims to turn Instagram from a leisure activity into an evidence-based teaching approach. The objective is to provide a

pertinent framework for enhancing language competency within the Center for English Language Studies curriculum.

Research Objectives

This study aimed to determine the effectiveness of using Instagram (IG) as a tool in teaching English vocabulary among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students.

Specifically, it sought answers to the following questions:

1. What are the pretest performances of the control and experimental groups?

2. What are the posttest performances of the control and experimental groups?

3. Is there a significant difference between the pretest performances of the control and experimental groups?

4. Is there a significant difference between the pretest and posttest performance of the control and experimental groups?

5. Is there a significant difference between the posttest performance of the control and experimental groups?

6. Based on the findings of the study, what action plan can be proposed?

II.   THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

This study is anchored primarily on the Social Constructivism Theory of Lev Semyonovich Vygotsky (1962). It is then supported by the Input Hypothesis Theory of Stephen Krashen (1977) and Mobile-Assisted Language Learning Framework of George Chinnery (MALL) (2006).

Social Constructivism

The main theory that supports this study is a prominent learning theory that emphasizes the crucial role of social interaction and cultural context in the development of cognition and learning (Vygotsky, 1977). Unlike theories that focus solely on individual cognitive processes, Social Constructivism posits that learning is a collaborative activity. Knowledge and understanding are first constructed in social interactions with more knowledgeable others, such as teachers, parents, or peers. Through dialogue, collaboration, and shared experiences, learners internalize these socially constructed understandings, making them their own. This social dimension is not merely a facilitator of learning but an integral part of the cognitive development process itself (Wertsch, 1991).

A key concept within Social Constructivism of Vygotsky is the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). . The ZPD

represents the space between what a learner can do independently and what they can achieve with guidance and support from a more knowledgeable other. Effective teaching, according to this theory, occurs within the ZPD, providing "scaffolding" – temporary support tailored to the learner's needs – to help them bridge the gap between their current abilities and their potential. As learners interact within their ZPD, they gradually develop the skills and understanding necessary to perform tasks independently. This highlights the importance of collaborative learning activities and the role of the instructor as a facilitator who guides and supports learning rather than simply transmitting information.

In essence, Social Constructivism re-frames learning as a social process embedded within a cultural context. Cognitive development is seen as a result of internalizing social media activities and knowledge. The theory underscores the significance of interaction, collaboration, and the guidance of more knowledgeable individuals in fostering learning and development. By emphasizing the social origins of thought and the importance of the ZPD, Vygotsky's work has had a profound impact on educational practices, advocating for learning environments that are interactive, collaborative, and responsive to the individual needs of learners within their social and cultural settings (Daniels, 2001).

To establish a more comprehensive theoretical basis, the primary theory is supported by two auxiliary theories to provide a robust conceptual framework.

Input Hypothesis

The first auxiliary theory of this study is the Input Hypothesis of Stephen Krashen (1977). It is a cornerstone of second language acquisition theory as it posits that learners acquire a new language not by directly learning its rules, but by understanding input that is slightly beyond their current level of linguistic competence. This "comprehensible input" is often referred to as "i+1," where "i" represents the learner's current level of language ability, and "+1" represents the next stage of language development.

In addition, the Input Hypothesis emphasizes that input should be meaningful and contextualized. Learners progress when they focus on understanding the message, rather than focusing on grammatical structures. Krashen argues that when learners are exposed to comprehensible input, they can aturally acquire the new language structures within that input.

A key aspect of the Input Hypothesis is the distinction between "acquisition" and "learning." He suggested that acquisition is a subconscious process, similar to how children acquire their first language, while learning is a conscious process, such as studying grammar rules. He argues that acquisition is far more crucial for developing fluency and natural language use.

The implications of the Input Hypothesis for language teaching are significant. It suggests that teachers should prioritize activities that provide learners with a large amount of comprehensible input, such as reading, listening, and communicative tasks. Error correction should be minimized, especially during the early stages of acquisition, as it can raise the affective filter and hinder the natural acquisition process. In essence, Krashen's Input Hypothesis suggests that providing learners with a rich environment of comprehensible input is essential for successful language acquisition. This has significant implications for language teaching, advocating for methods that prioritize meaningful communication and understanding over explicit grammar instruction.

Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL)

The second auxiliary theory of the current study is the widely recognized Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) of George Chinnery (2019). Its perspective emphasizes the unique affordances of mobile devices – their portability, ubiquity, connectivity, interactivity, and context sensitivity – and how these can be leveraged to enhance language learning in ways that traditional methods often cannot. His work underscores the potential of mobile technologies to support learning anytime, anywhere, and in authentic contexts.

A central tenet approach to MALL is the focus on learner autonomy and personalized learning experiences. Mobile devices empower learners to take greater control over their learning journey by providing access to a vast array of resources, tools, and communication channels. Learners can engage with language learning materials at their own pace, in their own time, and according to their individual needs and preferences. His work highlights the importance of designing MALL activities that encourage active learner participation, exploration, and self-reflection. This includes utilizing features like language learning apps, mobile dictionaries, audio and video recording tools, and social networking platforms accessible via mobile devices.

Furthermore, his conceptualization of MALL emphasizes the integration of mobile learning into broader pedagogical frameworks rather than viewing it as a standalone tool. He advocates for the thoughtful and principled use of mobile technologies to complement and enhance classroom-based instruction, extending learning opportunities beyond the physical boundaries of the classroom. This involves considering how mobile devices can facilitate authentic communication, collaborative tasks, contextualized learning experiences, and the development of digital

literacies. Ultimately, his work provides a comprehensive perspective on MALL, emphasizing its potential to foster flexible, engaging, and effective language learning opportunities in the digital age.

III.   METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study utilized the quasi-experimental method using Instagram to acquire new vocabulary among EFL students in the Center for English Language Studies at Lapulapu-Cebu International College.

Research Environment

The study was conducted in the Center for English Language Studies department of Lapulapu-Cebu International College, located in Ticgahon 1 Bankal, Lapu-Lapu City, Cebu, Philippines. Lapulapu-Cebu International College is a nonsectarian international educational institution that offers English as a Foreign Language together with five college courses namely Tourism Management, Foreign Language, Physical Therapy, Civil Engineering, and English Language Studies. Lapulapu-Cebu International College is an emerging school established in 2020. Despite the school being a newly established institution, it has been active in creating partnerships not only here in the Philippines but also in other countries such as Korea, Taiwan, Japan, Vietnam, Mongolia, and the USA. The school has strong ties with the prestigious shipbuilding company in the Philippines, Tsuneishi Heavy Industries Cebu.

Research Participants

The respondents of this study were 30 B1 Level students, who took a diagnostic exam before enrolling into the Center for English Language studies and were placed in the B1 level based on the Common European Reference Framework. The Center for English Language Studies follows the internationally acknowledged CEFR in identifying which class level each student should be placed in. Considering that the respondents are on the same CEFR level the control and experimental group were two different classes. The control group was in one class with 15 students, and the experimental group was in another class with 15 students. The experimental group was required to have an Instagram account. Another group was selected for pilot testing.

Research Instrument

This study utilized the final exam of the Center for English Language Studies Vocabulary Builder Class that served as the pretest and the posttest (see Appendix B for the Instrument). The selection of the research instrument was based on the course as mentioned earlier, as this final exam covers the vocabulary for the entire course. The instrument is a 40-item matching type test with no time limit.. This is a standardized test created by (CELS) as a final exam for EFL students taking the Vocabulary Builder course. In addition, the research instrument was pilot tested by a separate group. The scoring range is as follows: Scores from 0-8 were given a description of *Minimal proficiency,* with an interpretation that students possessed very little functional vocabulary knowledge from the intervention. Scores from 9-16 were given a description of *Limited proficiency,* with an interpretation that students struggle with core concepts, indicating significant gaps in receptive vocabulary. Scores from 17-24 were given a description of *Moderate proficiency*, with an interpretation that students have a working, adequate understanding of the vocabulary, but knowledge is inconsistent across subtopics. Scores from 25-32 were given a description of *High proficiency,* with an interpretation that students show a solid and reliable knowledge base of the vocabulary items. Lastly, scores from 33-40 were given a description of *Very High proficiency,* with an interpretation that students demonstrate exceptional ability to recognize and associate the target vocabulary with its definition.

Research Procedure

To conduct the study, the researcher sought authorization from the Director of the Center for English Language Studies. The researcher personally conducted the study during the Vocabulary Builder class.

Before the actual gathering of data, the researcher provided a brief background about Instagram. The researcher used one class as the experimental group and another class as the control group. When the group was finalized, the researcher recommended the experimental group to use Instagram on activities. All the respondents are on the same B1 CEFR level.

The second meeting was used to administer the pretest for both the control group and the experimental group to determine the respondents' vocabulary level. The students completed a standardized test that was created by the Center for English Language Studies as a final assessment for EFL students taking up the Vocabulary Builder course. When the researcher gathered the result, it was given to a certified statistician for it to get analyzed.

The third day was used to conduct the intervention, where the researcher started by discussing the target vocabulary for the day. After the discussion, the researcher let the experimental group use Instagram and search for the day's target vocabulary by reading posts and captions that contain the target vocabulary. After searching, the students made their own sentences based on how they understood

the words in the post's caption. Conversely, the control group made their own sentences based on how they understood the discussion of the researcher.

This process was repeated for a month to allow the experimental group practice utilizing Instagram to search for appropriate English vocabulary. 4 times a week different words were given to the class as part of the activity.

IV. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Table 2 shows the pretest performances of the control and experimental group.

Table 2: Pretest Scores of the Control and Experimental Groups

Pretest	Control Group		Experimental Group		Description
Score Ranges	Frequency	Per Cent (%)	Frequency	Per Cent (%)	
33 - 40	0	0.00	0	0.00	Very High Proficiency
25 - 32	10	66.67	7	46.67	High Proficiency
17 - 24	5	33.33	8	53.33	Moderate Proficiency
9 - 16	0	0.00	0	0.00	Limited Proficiency
0 - 8	0	0.00	0	0.00	Minimal Proficiency
Mean:	25.07		24.80		
Standard Dev.	2.52		3.30		

Table 2 shows that ten (10) research subjects (66.67%) in the control group scored between 25 and 32, indicating *a high proficiency* level. The remaining five (5) research subjects (33.33%) got a score between 17 and 24, indicating a *moderate proficiency* level. On the other hand, seven (7) research subjects (46.67%) in the experimental group scored between 25 and 32, indicating a *high proficiency* level. The remaining eight (8) research subjects (53.33%) got a score between 17 and 24, indicating a *moderate proficiency* level. Furthermore, the mean of the control group (25.07) and experimental group (24.80) has a standard deviation of 2.52 and 3.30, respectively.

The findings imply that before the experiment began, the students in both groups had similar levels of English proficiency. They were categorized under h*igh proficiency*

and *moderate proficiency,* and were competent. This data guarantees that any notable variations observed following the intervention can be ascribed to the instructional strategy rather than to one group's intrinsic superiority over the other.

This assertion is supported by Brown & Lee (2015) who stated that any subsequent significant differences in the post-test scores can be reliably attributed to the treatment variable and not to any pre-existing knowledge disparities between the groups by confirming that students began at essentially the same baseline level. When evaluating the Instagram tool's potential effectiveness, this methodological rigor guarantees that the study's conclusions may be relied upon.

Table 3 shows the pretest scores of the control and experimental groups.

Table 3: Posttest Scores of the Control and Experimental Groups

Posttest	Control Group		Experimental Group		Description
Score Ranges	Frequency	Per Cent (%)	Frequency	Per Cent (%)	
33 – 40	0	0.00	15	100.00	Very High Proficiency
25 – 32	14	93.33	0	0.00	High Proficiency
17 – 24	1	6.67	0	0.00	Moderate Proficiency
9 – 16	0	0.00	0	0.00	Limited Proficiency
0 - 8	0	0.00	0	0.00	Minimal Proficiency
Mean:	29.40		35.93		
Standard Dev.	1.72		0.96		

Table 3 shows that 14 research subjects (93.33%) in the control group scored between 25 and 32, indicating a *high proficiency* level. Only one (1) research subject (6.67%) got a score between 17 and 24, indicating a *moderate proficiency* level. On the other hand, all research subjects (100.00%) in the experimental group scored between 33 and 40, indicating a *very high proficiency* level. Furthermore, the mean of the control group (29.40) and experimental group (35.93) has a standard deviation of 1.72 and 0.96, respectively. The findings clearly show that using Instagram is an excellent way to improve students' English vocabulary skills.

This outcome is in line with research by Agustin and Ayu (2025) and Çakmak et al. (2021), which showed that visual input enhances vocabulary acquisition more than textual input alone. Additionally, students can bridge meaning through the use of visuals and real-world context on Instagram, which effectively fulfills the scaffolding role within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Daniels, 2001).

Furthermore, it is supported by Chinnery's (2006) claims about Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL), demonstrating that social media platforms' universality, portability, and multi modality provide special affordances that conventional approaches are unable to match.

Table 4 shows the test of hypothesis on the significance of the difference of the pretest scores of the control and experimental groups.

Table 4: Difference of the Pretest Scores of the Control and Experimental Groups

Group	Mean	df	Computed Value	Critical Value	Decision on Ho	Interpretation
Control Group	25.07	28	0.2488	2.0484	Failed to Reject Ho	No Significant Difference
Experimental Group	24.80					

Table 4 shows the result of the test of hypothesis conducted at 0.05 level of significance regarding the significance of the difference of the pretest scores of the research subjects in the control and experimental groups. As indicated, the computed value (0.2488) is less than the critical value (2.0484) which led to the non-rejection of the null hypothesis. Hence, the test concluded that there was no significant difference between the pretest scores of the research subjects in the control and experimental groups. In other words, the level of proficiency on vocabulary of the research subjects in the control and experimental groups before the experiment are comparable.

The findings imply that there was a difference in the control and experimental groups' pretest scores. However, the difference is not that significant and cannot affect the entirety of the difference between their vocabulary skills. It is then supported by Krashen (1977) in his Input Hypothesis which implicated that, in order to assess whether the technology (the i+1 input delivery) is better, a valid comparison study must first make sure that the baseline proficiency (i) is the same for both groups.

Furthermore, the results of this study align with those of other experimental designs, most notably Al-Malki (2025) and Kaviani (2022), who also showed that structured Instagram activities result in noticeably higher vocabulary acquisition gains than traditional instruction. Affective aspects contribute to this accomplishment since the platform's engaging features increase extrinsic motivation (Nuraeni, 2020), which speeds up learning and produces the higher achievement seen in the gain scores (Syakir & Sjahruddin, 2021).

Table 5 shows the test of hypotheses on the significance of the differences between the pretest and posttest scores of the control and experimental groups.

Table 5: Differences of the Pretest and Posttest Scores of the Control and Experimental Groups

	Mean	df	Computed Value	Critical Value	Decision on Ho	Interpretation
Control Group						
Pretest	25.07	14	6.5000	2.1448	Reject Ho	Significantly Different
Posttest	29.40					
Experimental Group						
Pretest	24.80	14	12.6863	2.1448	Reject Ho	Significantly Different
Posttest	35.93					

Table 5 shows the results of the hypothesis test conducted regarding the differences in the pretest and posttest scores of the control and experimental groups at a 0.05 level of significance. For the control group, the computed value (6.5000) is greater than the critical value (2.1448), which resulted in the rejection of the null hypothesis that there was no significant difference between the pretest and posttest scores of the research subjects in the control group. For the experimental group, the computed value (12.6863) is greater than the critical value (2.1448), resulting in the rejection of the null hypothesis that there was no significant difference between the pretest and posttest scores of the research subjects in the experimental group. Rejection of the null hypothesis that there was no significant difference between the pretest and posttest scores of the control and experimental groups has proved that there was a significant difference between the two sets of scores. This data implies that traditional and using Instagram in teaching vocabulary are effective.

The findings agree with Karim et al (2022) in their assertion that students utilize social media as a means of resolving their language problems. Photographs in social media posts facilitate comprehension of the content and group activity on social media. However, it contradicts the notion of Hsieh, P. & Tsai, C. (2017) that the impact size—the extent of the difference—between groups receiving MALL assistance and groups receiving traditional training was typically negligible or nonexistent across a wide range of research topics as this study compared a traditional method compared to a cutting edge method. The superiority of the scores of the experimental group is only applicable for the traditional method.

Table 6 shows the test of hypothesis on the significance of the difference of the posttest scores of the control and experimental groups.

Table 6: Difference of the Posttest Scores of the Control and Experimental Groups

Group	Mean	df	Computed Value	Critical Value	Decision on Ho	Interpretation
Control Group	29.40	28	12.8208	2.0484	Reject Ho	Significantly Different
Experimental Group	35.93					

Table 6 shows the difference of the posttest scores of the control and experimental groups. The result of the test of hypothesis conducted at 0.05 level of significance regarding the significance of the difference of the posttest scores of the research subjects in the control and experimental groups. As indicated, the computed value (12.8208) is greater than the critical value (2.0484), which led to the rejection of the null hypothesis that there was no significant difference between the pretest scores of the research subjects in the control and experimental groups. Hence, the test concluded that there was a significant difference between the posttest scores of the research subjects in the control and experimental groups. Based on the means, the experimental group has a higher mean than the control group. This finding implies that the use of Instagram as a tool in teaching English language among non-English speaking international students is indeed effective.

The findings of this table is congruent with Syafi'i et al. (2024) who asserted that students exposed to a range of terminology through Instagram photographs, stories, and captions, improves their comprehension and allows them to utilize new words in context. Chinnery (2006), also implicated that integration of social media creates a multi-

modal, constant, and authentic environment for vocabulary learning that was statistically superior to tradition.

Furthermore, compared to groups that simply acquired the vocabulary through conventional text-only input, students demonstrated noticeably better retention and recall when new vocabulary was connected to a combination of visual stimuli (pictures) and audio/text (Olusegun et al., 2024). However, this contradicts the assumption of Sweller, J. (1994) about the risks associated with segmentation and redundancy. The brain might disregard the intricate linguistic input in favor of the instant visual cue if the image and the title both express the same straightforward meaning. Students would then find it challenging to construct formal and abstract statements.

V. CONCLUSION

Utilization of Instagram as a tool in teaching vocabulary among EFL students has been proven to be effective in learning new vocabulary, as reflected in the individual posttest scores of the experimental group. Although, the control and experimental groups' pretest scores yielded with similar proficiency. Remarkably, the students from the experimental groups' posttest scores suggest that utilizing Instagram led to a significant enhancement

compared to using the Google search engine. The experimental group has been exposed to utilizing Instagram. This allowed the students to visualize the words using the photos and the videos.

VI.   RECOMMENDATION

In light of the findings of the study, the following recommendations for future research are given:

1. utilization of Instagram in teaching reading skills for EFL students;

2. using Instagram in teaching basic grammar for EFL students; and

3. using Instagram memes in teaching vocabulary.

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