

**USING INSTAGRAM CAPTIONS TO IMPROVE STUDENTS' VOCABULARY  
MASTERY: AN EXPERIMENTAL STUDY AT SMPN 4 TANANTOVEA  
DONGGALA**

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**Abstract:** This research aims to determine the effectiveness of using Instagram captions in improving vocabulary mastery of grade eight students of SMPN 4 Tanantovea Donggala, Central Sulawesi. This is a quasi-experimental research design, involving 44 students selected through the total population sampling technique. To collect the data, the paper-and-pencil method with tests (pretest and posttest) was used. Results showed that there was a significant difference between students' vocabulary mastery before and after the intervention. With  $p=0.05$  and  $df=42$ , it was found that the  $t_{counted}$  value of 9.53 is higher than the  $t_{critical}$  value of 1.683. This means the research hypothesis is accepted. In other words, using Instagram captions can improve vocabulary mastery of grade eight students of SMPN 4 Tanantovea Donggala.

**Keywords:** *ict-based media, instagram caption, social-media, vocabulary mastery*

## INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary is one of the elements that support language development. To use the four language skills effectively, students should have vocabulary knowledge. According to (Alqahtani, 2015), "Vocabulary is a crucial aspect in learning a language as languages are based on words (Sinaga et al., 2020). It is almost impossible to learn a language without words even communication between human beings is based on words." It is key to the development of all language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing. In other words, people's ability to listen, speak, read, and write good

English is highly influenced by their vocabulary mastery. The more words they have, the more easily they can express their ideas and understand oral or written words.

Learning vocabulary cannot be instant. Because knowledge of words involves three significant aspects called form, meaning, and use; it takes some time to master the target words (Erniwati et al., 2021). These aspects complement each other as “knowledge of vocabulary enables language use and conversely, language use leads to an increase in vocabulary knowledge” (Nation, 2013). Vocabulary helps people communicate and comprehend language well. When people have a large number of vocabularies in mind, they will easily select words on certain occasions. It is to say that vocabulary knowledge and language use is related and predisposed to support each other.

However, the result of preliminary research showed that very few students could understand what the teacher said. They spent much time getting in-classroom tasks done by consulting their dictionary. The way the teacher taught the students was not interesting at all. The students were always assigned to memorize five words each meeting. As a result, most students found it boring and they were not motivated to learn English. To help students to learn new vocabulary in a more fun way, the Instagram caption is used. Thus, this study aims to determine if using Instagram captions is effective in improving the vocabulary mastery of the intended students.

The Instagram caption is one of some user-friendly features of Instagram that allows users to share photos and videos and build up interactions with others (Gunantar & Transinata, 2019; Lestari, 2019; Kristo, 2015). It can be used as an instructional medium in the EFL classroom to support students’ learning. Through Instagram caption, students can share their personal information by uploading pictures, photos, or videos and then provide a simple description under the pictures, photos, or videos called caption (Alfiyatun, 2018). With the maximum character of 2200 or 330 words of the caption (Avivi & Megawati, 2020), the students can practice their language skills and build motivation to learn more.

Although many researchers had acknowledged the positive impact of using Instagram captions on English language learning, the quality of data collected might be highly subjective due to the nature of qualitative studies. Responses gathered from perspectives only cannot usually be measured for some reason such as the process does

not provide statistical representation, or it involves the researcher's bias. Therefore, it is necessary to carry out experimental research, as this research, to establish the efficacy of Instagram captions on EFL learning as well as to support the previous studies.

Overall, the Instagram caption is considered useful for promoting EFL learning. This feature connects and allows people to have a room for expressing themselves freely as stated by Whiddon (2016, p. 27) that "this could be useful in beginning language classrooms as students build confidence in their writing and develop skills for interacting and sharing opinions with others that may, in turn, contributed to the ease in developing intercultural communicative competence at higher levels. For this reason, a directional alternative hypothesis is proposed that "using Instagram Caption can be effective in improving Vocabulary Mastery of grade eight students of SMPN 4 Tanantovea."

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Learning new vocabulary can be very challenging for junior high school students as teaching vocabulary at school is not in isolation but integrated with the language skills. It means that teaching activities are focused on communicative tasks or activities. Sedyu (2013, p. 36) defines communicative activities as "pieces of classroom work that encourage the students to acquire language knowledge and prepare them for real-life language use." In other words, teaching activities at school emphasized students' participation to do tasks that require communicative language use. On the contrary, teachers at school still apply traditional instructions which focus on segregated language skills. Teaching activities emphasized reading and grammar more; consequently, students' attention lies on form rather than meaning. This makes students bored and less attentive to the content of the lesson. Subsequently, the students find it problematic in comprehending, producing, and manipulating the English language as well as interacting with their peers.

For this reason, integrated-skill instruction needs to be applied to give students opportunities to participate in communicative tasks. Though using Instagram captions at school may not be convenient as a mobile phone is prohibited during school hours, it can provide students more opportunities to develop communication skills. Through Instagram captions, students can learn how to write grammatical sentences. The

students can express themselves freely. As a result, they are encouraged to write on their own. Because using a mobile phone simply goes against school regulation, printing out the picture and caption on Instagram or displaying it through a projector can be a good solution. Thus, the students not only learn new knowledge and skills but also learn about digital technology.

Instagram is selected for its educational purposes including cooperation, collaboration, and sharing of knowledge. A study by (Erarslan, 2019) indicated that students frequently used Instagram as social media platform and favor using it for educational and language learning purposes. Instagram applies to EFL learning classrooms as it facilitates students to learn how to communicate English effectively (Zarei & Rudravarapu, 2019). It adds a new dimension to learning. According to Kamal (2019, p.3), “social media can be used as a source of innovative learning to support students' self-learning. One of the social media that can be used is Instagram. Instagram is an interesting mobile learning medium to improve students' vocabulary mastery.” It also enables students to practice the four language skills in an integrated, natural, and communicative way. In other words, with Instagram captions, students can still have the benefits of practicing all the language skills and the components which inevitably help them upgrade their EFL learning.

Using Instagram captions can promote a better understanding for students learning new vocabulary. Putting a caption on Instagram adjusts students to get used to the new words which subsequently enables them to memorize the words easily. Besides, when the students can see a picture and its caption, they will find it easier to accept the information. (Mansor & Abd Rahim, 2017) reported, “Instagram is an effective tool for students' interaction, especially in the discussion of their task-related activity.” Furthermore, students become more creative in writing as they get motivated to write the best caption (Bestari, 2020). In addition, 75 percent of students' language proficiency can be improved through Instagram (Akhlar et al., 2017). Put simply, using Instagram captions in teaching vocabulary triggers students' engagement in all in-classroom activities which eventually affect their language proficiency.

To teach vocabulary mastery using the Instagram caption, several steps are taken. Firstly, build students' background knowledge by showing or asking some questions related to the topic being discussed. Next, put the students into small groups

of three to four students, and share the class with a picture and caption taken from an Insta story posted on Instagram. To help the students with their pronunciation, read aloud the caption and ask them to repeat it after. Then, assign the group works to identify the class of words (e.g., common noun and descriptive adjective). Last, provide the group works with some pictures to put captions and allow them to present their captions. Finally, assign the students individually to write a simple descriptive paragraph using the words they have learned from the captions to informally assess their understanding and ability in performing the task assigned.

## **METHOD**

This research applied a quasi-experimental design called the non-equivalent control group design. It means, there are two groups involved—the control group and experimental group—each of which consisted of 24 and 20 students respectively. These samples were selected using the total population sampling technique, thus, there were 44 students in total. Both groups were taught using different methods. The control group was taught using the traditional method, while the experimental group was taught with the Instagram caption technique.

The paper-and-pencil method was used to collect the data with tests – pre-test and post-test as the instrument. While the pretest aims to determine prior vocabulary mastery of the students, the posttest is to measure their achievement resulting from the intervention given. The tests consisted of 30 items being classified into three parts; 10 items of multiple-choice, 10 items of completion tests, and 10 items of matching tests. Each item was scored by one; thus, the maximum score was 30. To analyze the data obtained from the tests, a set of formulas suggested by (Arikunto, 2014) were used.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Findings**

After the students' score of both groups on the pre-test was analyzed, it was found that no students met the minimum passing grade of 70 as used at the school. However, the scores of the students in the experimental group improved significantly after the intervention. Thirteen students successfully met the minimum passing grade, while seven students failed in complying with the criterion. It means, that about two-

thirds of the students are positively impacted by the intervention. In contrast, only four students of the control group met the criterion, while the rest 20 students failed. Surely, the group means scores are affected. The mean score of the experimental group rose by 46.67 from 27 on the pre-test, while the control group went up by 14.86 from 28.47.

To determine the difference between the students score and the mean scores of both groups, it is necessary to analyze the deviation scores. The scores provide a comprehensive understanding of the characteristics of the data set as shown in the following tables.

**Table 1. Deviations and Deviations Squared of the Control Group**

No	Initial	Students' Scores		Deviations (d)	Deviations Squared
		Pretest	Posttest		
1	ABR	6.67	23.33	16.67	277.78
2	AN	36.67	43.33	6.67	44.44
3	ANS	13.33	23.33	10.00	100.00
4	AS	60	70	10.00	100.00
5	ASP	23.33	40	16.67	277.78
6	DRA	60	66.67	6.67	44.44
7	GKA	16.67	40	23.33	544.44
8	LV	20	33.33	13.33	177.78
9	MDS	20	26.67	6.67	44.44
10	MH	13.33	26.67	13.33	177.78
11	MN	23.33	43.33	20.00	400.00
12	MS	13.33	30	16.67	277.78
13	MSG	26.67	33.33	6.67	44.44
14	NAM	26.67	26.67	0.00	0.00
15	NAR	40	46.67	6.67	44.44
16	NF	60	66.67	6.67	44.44
17	NFJ	30	43.33	13.33	177.78
18	PDL	36.67	80	43.33	1877.78
19	RS	26.67	46.67	20.00	400.00
20	SLB	13.33	20	6.67	44.44
21	SLV	30	73.33	43.33	1877.78
22	TD	40	46.67	6.67	44.44
23	TRS	6.67	20	13.33	177.78
24	YD	40	70	30.00	900.00
		<b>Total</b>		<b>356.67</b>	<b>8100.00</b>

**Table 2. Deviations and Deviations Squared of the Experimental Group**

No	Initial	Students' Scores		Deviations	Deviations Squared
		Pretest	Posttest		
1	ABZ	30	73.33	43.33	1877.78
2	AFR	30	63.33	33.33	1111.11
3	AID	43.33	66.67	23.33	544.44
4	AK	20	83.33	63.33	4011.11
5	AM	16.67	66.67	50.00	2500
6	ARY	33.33	76.67	43.33	1877.78
7	ASI	40	86.67	46.67	2177.78
8	DW	40	66.67	26.67	711.11
9	ERA	16.67	80	63.33	4011.11
10	FDP	10	63.33	53.33	2844.44
11	FMI	20	73.33	53.33	2844.44
12	HYM	16.67	76.67	60.00	3600
13	IND	16.67	70	53.33	2844.44
14	IR	40	86.67	46.67	2177.78
15	MA	20	60	40.00	1600
16	MUM	20	73.33	53.33	2844.44
17	NAS	40	83.33	43.33	1877.78
18	RVA	33.33	80	46.67	2177.78
19	RZK	23.33	80	56.67	3211.11
20	ULF	30	63.33	33.33	1111.11
<b>Total</b>				<b>933.33</b>	<b>45955.56</b>

Before analyzing t-counted and t-critical values with a significance level of 0.05, it is required to analyze the scores of mean deviations (MD), variance (S<sup>2</sup>), and standard deviation (SD) of both groups. Table 3 below represents those scores.

**Table 3. Mean, Variance, and Standard Deviation of Control and Experimental Group**

	MD	S <sup>2</sup>	SD
<b>Control</b>	14.86	337.5	18.37
<b>Experimental</b>	46.67	2297.76	47.94

**Table 4. Differential Test Results (test t)**

N	44
df (N-2)	42
t <sub>counted</sub>	9.53
t <sub>critical one-tailed</sub>	1.683

Table 4 indicates that with that  $p$  0.05 the calculated  $t$  value of 9.53 is higher than the tabulated  $t$  value of 1.683. When the t-counted value exceeds the t-critical

value, it means the research hypothesis is accepted. In other words, using the Instagram caption technique is effective in improving students' vocabulary mastery.

### **Discussion**

As this research aims to determine the effect of using Instagram captions on vocabulary mastery of grade eight students of SMPN 4 Tanantovea, the focus is directed at teaching common nouns and descriptive adjectives. Data analysis indicated that there was an increase in the students' vocabulary mastery resulting from the intervention. Statistically, it was found that the t-counted value of 9.53 is higher than the t-table value of 1.683. Thus, using Instagram captions can improve the vocabulary mastery of the students.

The findings indicated that the students not only did better on the post-test but also experienced the learning as Al-Ali (2014) stated that Instagram helps create a more personalized learning experience for students. Through Instagram captions the students successfully gained more understanding of the focus of this study, that is to identify the common noun and descriptive adjective from the caption someone posted in his/her Instagram story. Even, they were able to create a simple caption for the image shared on Instagram. These findings are in line with some research findings mentioned that social media can improve students' critical thinking skills, knowledge, communication, and interaction (Al Arif, 2019; Habibi et al., 2018; Balbay & Kilis, 2017). In other words, using Instagram captions in an English language classroom helps students increase both language skills performance and attitudes toward learning.

The findings also support the previous studies. For example, Zarei & Rudravarapu (2019) found that Instagram provides learners with the opportunity to engage in meaningful interactions resulting in better communication skills, language proficiency, grammar, and vocabulary mastery. This is due to "English language learners in particular benefit from the enforcement of vocabulary and concepts through pictures, graphics, and video" (Brozek & Duckworth, 2012, p.15). Furthermore, a study by Klimanova & Dembovskaya (2013) indicated that social media has a considerable impact on less common foreign languages, in terms of oral communication and original native speakers' input. Instagram caption, therefore, can be an alternative way of teaching English vocabulary to English language learners. It has proven to be effective in improving students' vocabulary mastery.



Yet, this study is limited to the equipment and timing of the study. The absence of teaching tools like a projector has negatively impacted the learning process. The school did not have a projector, while the mobile phones were not allowed. Consequently, the students were provided with the printouts of the Instagram caption. Poor quality of printing or fuzzy images made the students confused. This makes the images lose their impact, even distracted. Furthermore, a short period of intervention has affected the result. Longer treatment is likely to have a more significant impact as second language acquisition depends on L2 input. The more learners are exposed to the target language the more and the faster they will learn to use the language (Krüger, 2018). In brief, the vocabulary mastery of the sampled students is most likely to be better if the time spent on intervention is longer.

The result of this research has implications for English language teaching both in theory and practice. The use of ICT-based media has been a part of an educational process for years and this research promotes it in EFL learning classrooms (Sherly et al., 2021). In practice, the use of Instagram Caption effectively arises students' interest to learn as well as allows them to achieve better learning outcomes. This is because "ICTs are not only instruments or tools, but powerful means of communication that generate a very important influence on children and young people, and even create dependence in their use and employment" (Gómez-Galán, 2020, p.1). Moreover, social media can bring many opportunities for foreign language learning. L2 learners experience autonomy in exploring digital resources and documents that represent a powerful framework for many aspects of SLA, enhancing oral, written, and reading competence (Pikhart & Botezat, 2021). In other words, the use of ICT-based media such as Instagram caption benefits EFL students.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS**

### **Conclusions**

Using the Instagram caption technique can improve grade eight students' vocabulary mastery of SMPN 4 Tanantovea Donggala. The statistical analysis shows that the t-counted value is much higher than that of the t-table. The research hypothesis is accepted as the vocabulary mastery of the students gets improved after they were taught for a certain period using the Instagram caption technique. In other words,

teaching vocabulary using the Instagram caption technique has a positive impact on students' academic performance.

### **Suggestions**

Referring to the limitation of the study, English teachers are highly encouraged to wisely use the ICT-based media, especially Instagram captions. It is necessary to consider the availability of tools that support teaching and learning activities at school. Instagram caption technique is proven to have a significant positive impact on EFL learning. Therefore, teachers can apply it when teaching vocabulary or other language skills such as reading and writing. Carrying out classroom action research using Instagram captions helps to determine the long-term impact on students learning behavior and academic achievement. In addition, further fellow researchers can do an investigation of the negative impact of using Instagram captions on EFL learning to add valuable resources on ELT and the use of ICT in EFL classrooms.

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