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Analysis of Vocabulary Learning Difficulties, Learning Preferences, and Digital Media Use Based on Junior High School Students' Perceptions

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ABSTRACT
This study aims to analyze junior high school students' perceived difficulties in learning English vocabulary, their vocabulary learning preferences, and their perceptions of digital media use in vocabulary learning. A quantitative descriptive research design was employed. The participants consisted of 60 junior high school students who completed a structured questionnaire containing 20 closed-ended items measured on a five-point Likert scale. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, and mean scores. The findings indicate that 77.3% of the students agreed or strongly agreed that they experienced difficulties in learning vocabulary, particularly in remembering new words, understanding meanings, and applying vocabulary in appropriate contexts. Regarding learning preferences, 71.9% of the students showed positive responses toward having specific needs and preferences for vocabulary learning, particularly through familiar topics, visual support, example sentences, repetition, and interactive activities. Furthermore, 75.6% of the students expressed positive perceptions of digital media in supporting vocabulary learning. Digital tools were perceived as useful for making learning more enjoyable, engaging, and motivating, although their use was often focused on drills and quizzes. These findings indicate that junior high school students require vocabulary instruction that is contextualized, interactive, and aligned with their learning preferences. Digital media can support such instruction when its use is guided by students' learning needs and appropriate pedagogical objectives. The study recommends integrating digital media not only for repetitive practice but also for contextualized and communicative vocabulary learning activities.

Keywords: Vocabulary Learning Difficulties, Learning Preferences, Digital Media, Junior High School Students, Vocabulary Learning.

INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary is a fundamental component of language proficiency, forming the backbone of effective communication across reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills. A strong vocabulary not only enables students to comprehend and produce language more accurately but also facilitates cognitive processes such as critical thinking, comprehension, and problem-solving (Putra & Putri, 2023). However, students often face considerable challenges in acquiring and retaining new vocabulary. These difficulties may result from multiple factors, including limited exposure to authentic language use, insufficient opportunities for contextual practice, and differences in students' learning preferences (Muryani et al., 2024). Traditional teaching approaches, which frequently emphasize rote memorization and repetitive drills, may further exacerbate the problem by providing limited meaningful and context-rich learning experiences (Wu, 2024). Consequently, many students struggle to apply newly learned words in communicative situations, which may affect their overall language development and engagement in the learning process.

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In response to these challenges, the integration of digital media into language learning has gained substantial attention. Interactive platforms such as Quizlet, Wordwall, and Kahoot! offer dynamic and engaging ways to practice vocabulary through features such as gamification, instant feedback, and interactive exercises (Haque et al., 2024). Previous research suggests that digital tools can enhance student motivation, foster active learning, and support differentiated instruction by accommodating learners' needs. Digital media can also provide students with access to authentic and multimodal language input, potentially connecting classroom instruction with real-world language use (Singer, 2025). These affordances make digital media a potentially useful resource for supporting vocabulary learning.

Despite the increasing use of digital media in language learning, students' actual vocabulary learning difficulties and preferences need to be considered when such media are integrated into instruction. Previous studies have often focused on the adoption of digital tools or their potential learning benefits, while less attention has been given to students' perceptions of their vocabulary learning difficulties, learning preferences, and the role of digital media in addressing those needs. This issue is particularly relevant in junior high school contexts, where students may experience difficulties in retaining vocabulary, understanding word meanings, and applying new vocabulary appropriately. Understanding these aspects quantitatively can provide useful evidence for teachers when designing vocabulary instruction and selecting appropriate digital learning activities.

Therefore, this study focuses on three related aspects of junior high school students' vocabulary learning: perceived vocabulary learning difficulties, vocabulary learning preferences, and perceptions of digital media use in vocabulary learning. Rather than examining the effectiveness of a particular digital tool, the study describes the tendencies in students' responses to these three aspects using descriptive statistical analysis. This approach provides empirical information about the extent to which students perceive vocabulary learning as difficult, demonstrate particular learning preferences, and view digital media positively as a support for vocabulary learning.

The purpose of this study is to analyze junior high school students' perceptions of vocabulary learning difficulties, learning preferences, and digital media use in vocabulary learning. Specifically, the study aims to determine whether the majority of students tend to perceive vocabulary learning as difficult, whether they demonstrate positive vocabulary learning preferences, and whether they have positive perceptions of digital media use in vocabulary learning. Based on these objectives, the study hypothesizes that the majority of junior high school students perceive English vocabulary learning as difficult, demonstrate positive vocabulary learning preferences and needs, and have positive perceptions of the use of digital media in vocabulary learning.

METHODS

This study employed a quantitative descriptive research design using a survey method. The design was selected to obtain quantitative information about junior high school students' perceptions of vocabulary learning difficulties, vocabulary learning preferences, and the use of digital media in vocabulary learning. The study focused on describing the tendencies of students' responses based on descriptive statistical analysis rather than examining the causal effect of digital media on vocabulary learning outcomes.

The participants consisted of 60 tenth-grade students from a junior high school. The participants were selected based on their accessibility and willingness to participate in the study. The participants were informed about the purpose of the study and were assured that their responses would remain anonymous and would be used solely for research purposes. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire consisting of 20 closed-ended items. Each item was

measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The questionnaire was designed to obtain students' perceptions across three main aspects: (1) vocabulary learning difficulties, (2) vocabulary learning needs and preferences, and (3) digital media use in supporting vocabulary learning.

The questionnaire was adapted from relevant previous studies and modified to suit the junior high school context. Before administration, the instrument was reviewed to ensure the clarity and relevance of the items to the objectives of the study. The questionnaire was administered during regular class sessions with prior permission from the school and English teachers. Students completed the questionnaire individually and were given sufficient explanation regarding how to respond to each item. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The analysis included frequencies, percentages, and mean scores to identify the tendencies of students' responses to each of the three aspects examined in the study. For the hypothesis analysis, the percentage of positive responses was used to determine whether the majority of students demonstrated the tendency stated in each hypothesis. The first hypothesis concerned students' perceptions of vocabulary learning difficulties, the second concerned their vocabulary learning preferences and needs, and the third concerned their perceptions of digital media use in vocabulary learning.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study are presented according to the three aspects examined through the questionnaire: students' perceived vocabulary learning difficulties, vocabulary learning preferences and needs, and perceptions of digital media use in vocabulary learning. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, and mean scores. The results are discussed in relation to the three hypotheses proposed in the study.

Students' Perceived Vocabulary Learning Difficulties

The first hypothesis (H1) stated that the majority of junior high school students perceive English vocabulary learning as difficult. The questionnaire results support this hypothesis. As shown in Figure 1, 50% of the students strongly agreed and 27.3% agreed that they experienced difficulties in learning vocabulary. Meanwhile, 22.7% of the students selected the neutral response, and none selected disagree or strongly disagree. Thus, 77.3% of the students expressed positive agreement that vocabulary learning was difficult.

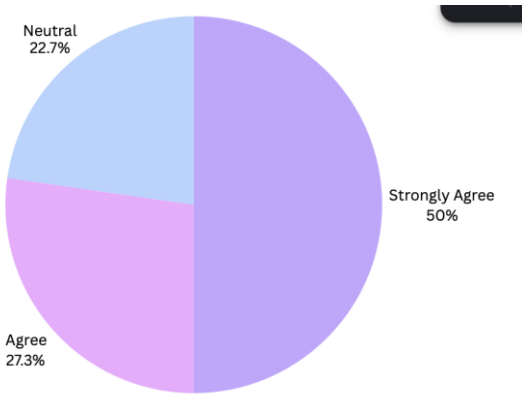


Figure 1
Students' Perceived Vocabulary Learning Difficulties

The high proportion of positive responses indicates that vocabulary learning remains a considerable challenge for the students. The difficulties reported by students include remembering newly learned words, recalling vocabulary during tests, and applying vocabulary appropriately in speaking and writing activities. Students also reported difficulties related to pronunciation, spelling, and grammatical use of vocabulary. These responses suggest that students' difficulties extend beyond recognizing word meanings and involve several aspects of vocabulary knowledge.

The findings may be related to the way vocabulary is introduced and practiced in classroom learning. When vocabulary is mainly presented through translation, isolated word lists, or memorization, students may have limited opportunities to encounter and use new words in meaningful contexts. Such learning conditions may make it difficult for students to retain vocabulary and transfer it to communicative situations (Black & Wright, 2024). Vocabulary knowledge involves the development of knowledge about word form, meaning, and use, and limited exposure to meaningful language may constrain the development of deeper lexical knowledge (González-Fernández et al., 2021).

This finding is consistent with previous research indicating that students may experience difficulties with vocabulary retention and productive vocabulary use when instruction relies heavily on memorization rather than contextualized practice (Arslan, 2024). Similarly, traditional vocabulary instruction that presents words in isolation may limit students' opportunities to apply vocabulary in meaningful communication (Elmahdi & Hezam, 2020). Therefore, the result supporting H1 indicates the need for vocabulary instruction that goes beyond memorization. Teachers may provide more contextualized input, repeated exposure, and opportunities for students to use new vocabulary in meaningful speaking and writing activities. Such practices may help students develop vocabulary knowledge that can be retained and applied in communicative contexts.

Students' Vocabulary Learning Preferences and Needs

The second hypothesis (H2) stated that the majority of junior high school students demonstrate positive vocabulary learning preferences and needs. The results support this hypothesis. As presented in Figure 2, 48.2% of the students strongly agreed and 23.7% agreed that they had specific preferences and needs in learning vocabulary. Meanwhile, 28.1% selected the neutral response, and none selected disagree or strongly disagree. Therefore, 71.9% of the students demonstrated positive responses regarding their vocabulary learning preferences and needs.

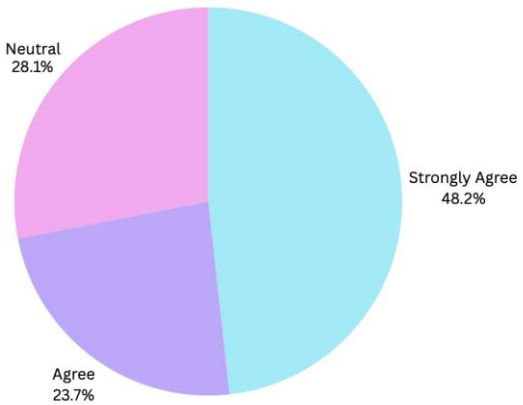


Figure 2
Students' Vocabulary Learning Preferences and Needs

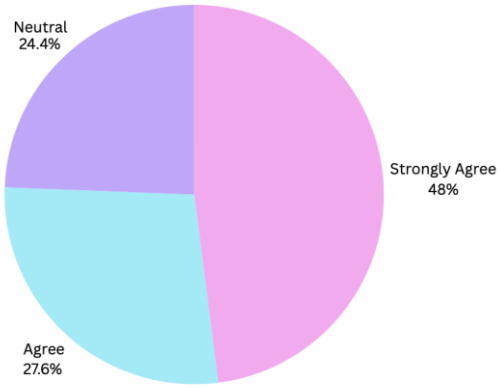


Figure 3
Students' Perceptions of Digital Media in Supporting Vocabulary Learning

Further responses indicate that students showed stronger preferences for vocabulary related to familiar and practical topics, including daily activities, school life, technology, and health. These responses suggest that relevance and contextualization are important considerations in vocabulary instruction. Vocabulary connected to students' experiences may be easier to understand and remember because students can relate new words to familiar situations (Chen & Hsu, 2020).

Students also expressed preferences for learning activities involving visual support, example sentences, repetition, and interactive practice. Pictures, videos, and contextualized exercises were perceived as useful in supporting vocabulary comprehension and recall. These findings indicate that students may benefit from instructional activities that combine different forms of input and provide opportunities for active participation (Hameed, 2020).

The findings can be understood from a learner-centered perspective, which emphasizes the importance of considering students' needs, interests, and prior experiences in instructional design. Connecting vocabulary learning with familiar contexts may encourage students to participate more actively and construct meaningful understanding (Yang et al., 2025). The students' preference for visual and interactive activities is also consistent with research highlighting the potential benefits of contextualized and multimodal vocabulary learning for student engagement and learning (Chen et al., 2022; Bavishi et al., 2022). The support for H2 therefore suggests that vocabulary instruction should be designed around students' learning preferences and perceived needs. Teachers may incorporate familiar topics, visual materials, contextualized examples, repetition, and interactive activities to make vocabulary learning more relevant and engaging. These instructional choices can provide students with greater opportunities to understand and practice vocabulary in meaningful contexts.

Students' Perceptions of Digital Media in Vocabulary Learning

The third hypothesis (H3) stated that the majority of junior high school students have positive perceptions of the use of digital media in vocabulary learning. The findings support this hypothesis. As shown in Figure 3, 48% of the students strongly agreed and 27.6% agreed that digital media supports their vocabulary learning. Meanwhile, 24.4% selected the neutral response, and none selected disagree or strongly disagree. Overall, 75.6% of the students expressed positive perceptions toward the use of digital media in vocabulary learning.

The positive responses indicate that students perceive digital media as a useful resource for making vocabulary learning more enjoyable, engaging, and motivating. Game-based platforms and interactive applications were perceived as particularly useful for encouraging participation and

repeated practice (Putra & Putri, 2025). These findings are consistent with previous research suggesting that digital tools can support student engagement and provide opportunities for repeated vocabulary practice (Yang et al., 2024; Zou et al., 2021).

However, the findings also reveal an important limitation in the use of digital media. The available data indicate that digital tools are often used primarily for drills and quizzes, with an emphasis on repetition rather than contextualized vocabulary use. Although repetitive activities can support reinforcement, they may not fully address students' needs for meaningful and communicative vocabulary learning. Therefore, the positive perception of digital media should not be interpreted as evidence that digital media automatically improves vocabulary learning outcomes.

The findings can also be considered in relation to the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), which emphasizes perceived usefulness and ease of use as important factors in technology acceptance (Cohen et al., 2022). The positive perceptions reported by the students suggest that digital media is viewed as useful and engaging in the vocabulary learning process. At the same time, the pedagogical value of digital media depends on how it is integrated into classroom instruction. Digital tools can provide opportunities for repeated practice, immediate feedback, and active participation, but their use should remain connected to clear learning objectives (Nkomo et al., 2021).

Previous research similarly indicates that digital game-based tools can contribute to vocabulary learning and student engagement when they are appropriately integrated into instruction (Rafique, 2023; Zou et al., 2021). The present findings extend this discussion by showing that students themselves report positive perceptions of digital media while also highlighting the need for more meaningful applications of these tools.

Thus, the support for H3 suggests that digital media has potential as a resource for vocabulary instruction from the students' perspective. However, teachers should move beyond using digital tools solely for drills and quizzes. Digital media can be integrated with contextualized tasks, authentic language input, collaborative activities, and opportunities for students to use vocabulary in meaningful communication.

Taken together, the three findings show a consistent pattern. First, a large proportion of students perceive vocabulary learning as difficult (77.3%). Second, most students demonstrate positive preferences and needs regarding how vocabulary should be learned (71.9%). Third, most students also have positive perceptions of digital media as a support for vocabulary learning (75.6%). These findings suggest a potential alignment between students' learning challenges, their preferred learning conditions, and the perceived usefulness of digital media.

Nevertheless, the findings should be interpreted within the descriptive nature of the study. The results demonstrate patterns in students' perceptions but do not establish a causal relationship between digital media use and vocabulary learning outcomes. The positive perception of digital media therefore should be understood as evidence of students' attitudes toward its usefulness rather than evidence of its effectiveness in improving vocabulary achievement.

CONCLUSION

This study explored junior high school students' perceived vocabulary learning difficulties, learning needs, and their perceptions of digital media use in English language learning based on questionnaire data. The findings reveal that students continue to face significant challenges in vocabulary acquisition, particularly in understanding word meanings, pronunciation, spelling, and applying vocabulary appropriately in sentence contexts. These challenges indicate that vocabulary learning often remains at a surface level, with limited opportunities for meaningful practice and long-term retention. Furthermore, this study highlights the importance of implementing needs-

based vocabulary instruction that is aligned with students' learning preferences and difficulties. The integration of digital media, when used purposefully, can support more engaging and effective vocabulary learning. Therefore, the findings offer important pedagogical implications for teachers and curriculum developers to design vocabulary learning activities that are contextualized, interactive, and responsive to students' actual needs, particularly in junior high school settings.

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