

## Social media for vocabulary learning: Exploring YouTube's effectiveness in EFL contexts – A study of video-based language learning

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### Abstract

In the digital era, online platforms like YouTube have transformed how language learners acquire vocabulary outside traditional classrooms. This study investigates the role of YouTube as a supportive tool for learning English vocabulary among EFL students at Moulay Ismail University. Using a mixed-methods approach, the study combines quantitative data from an online questionnaire with qualitative insights drawn from open-ended responses. The study involved 193 EFL students selected through purposive sampling. The findings reveal that a significant number of students frequently use YouTube to enhance their vocabulary, favoring informal and context-rich content such as vlogs, entertainment clips, and subtitled videos. Learners engage actively with the platform by pausing, taking notes, interacting with comment sections, demonstrating strategic and autonomous learning behaviors. Students also report high levels of motivation and ease in accessing suitable content, underscoring YouTube's potential as an engaging and learner-centered resource. While the study highlights the educational value of YouTube in vocabulary learning, it also identifies notable challenges. These include distractions, unreliable subtitles, and a lack of structured guidance, which may hinder consistent progress. Furthermore, the research is limited by its reliance on self-reported data and the narrow focus on EFL students from a single institution, which may affect the generalizability of the results. The study offers several implications for educators and curriculum designers, suggesting the integration of well-selected YouTube content into language instruction to support learner autonomy and engagement. Future research should explore broader populations and assess the long-term impact of video-based learning on vocabulary development. Overall, the findings affirm YouTube's relevance as a dynamic and accessible platform for enhancing vocabulary learning in EFL contexts.

**Keywords:** EFL Students; Language Learning; Social Media; Vocabulary Learning; YouTube

### 1. Introduction

The rapid integration of digital technology into higher education has transformed traditional learning approaches, particularly in language instruction. Language educators increasingly incorporate digital platforms and tools to maintain the continuity and quality of teaching and learning. Among these, YouTube has emerged as a widely used and accessible resource that not only serves entertainment purposes but also offers a wealth of educational content for learners at all proficiency levels [1]. Many students begin and end their day engaging with YouTube, using it for music, tutorials, documentaries, and relaxation—demonstrating its ubiquity in their daily routines and its potential as an informal learning tool.

Vocabulary knowledge plays a vital role in second language acquisition, as it underpins a learner's ability to communicate, comprehend, evaluate, and express ideas with clarity. A broad vocabulary allows language learners to engage in meaningful discourse and apply the target language with fluency and confidence [2]. However, the limited exposure offered by classroom instruction alone often restricts opportunities for sufficient vocabulary development. To address this issue, learners are encouraged to seek extended input outside the classroom through digital tools. YouTube,

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in particular, has shown promise in supporting vocabulary acquisition, offering rich, authentic, and engaging content that aligns with real-life language use [3,4].

Despite its widespread use, the potential of YouTube to support vocabulary learning among EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students remains insufficiently explored. Traditional vocabulary instruction may lack authenticity and learner engagement, while YouTube provides contextualized exposure that could enhance language acquisition. However, little is known about how learners interact with this content, what types of videos are most beneficial, and how they perceive the platform's educational value. This study addresses these gaps by focusing on EFL students at Moulay Ismail University and examining their engagement with YouTube as a tool for acquiring English vocabulary. Specifically, it aims to explore students' usage patterns, identify the most effective content types, and analyze their perceptions of YouTube's impact on their vocabulary development.

This research is significant in that it contributes to a deeper understanding of how informal digital platforms can complement formal language instruction. By highlighting learners' experiences and preferences, the study provides valuable insights for educators seeking to integrate YouTube more meaningfully into vocabulary teaching strategies.

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## 2. Review of Literature

This review of literature explores theoretical and empirical perspectives that inform the integration of YouTube into language learning, with a particular focus on vocabulary development. It begins by outlining the foundations of Multimedia Learning Theory, which supports the idea that learning is enhanced through the use of combined verbal and visual content. The discussion then shifts to how YouTube, as a digital platform, can contribute to the expansion of learners' linguistic competence through authentic and engaging exposure. Empirical studies are examined to highlight YouTube's role in second language acquisition, particularly its impact on vocabulary learning. Further, the review addresses how vocabulary knowledge is conceptualized within the context of digital media, and concludes by analyzing how real-world language embedded in YouTube content facilitates meaningful vocabulary acquisition.

### 2.1. Multimedia Learning Theory

Mayer's Multimedia Learning Theory suggests that the use of multimedia in teaching can enhance cognitive processing and support more effective learning. The theory emphasizes that meaningful learning occurs when both verbal and visual elements are used together [5]. Multimedia, in this context, refers to instructional materials that combine words and pictures, including text, images, audio, or other visual and auditory formats [6]. One of the central goals of multimedia instruction is to help learners actively construct coherent mental representations from the material presented, rather than passively receiving information. Learners engage in building knowledge by making sense of content through active cognitive engagement [7].

Meaningful learning from words and images involves five cognitive processes: selecting important verbal information for processing in verbal working memory, selecting relevant visual content for visual working memory, organizing verbal input into a coherent verbal model, organizing visual input into a visual model, and integrating both models with each other and with the learner's existing knowledge base [8].

### 2.2. Expanding Linguistics Competence through YouTube Exposure

YouTube has proven to be a valuable educational resource, offering learners access to a wealth of knowledge both within and beyond the confines of the classroom [9, 10]. One of its notable advantages is the interactive environment it fosters; students are able to share their thoughts and ask questions related to the content they view. This, in turn, facilitates deeper discussion and encourages peer-to-peer exchange, which can significantly enhance learners' understanding of the material [11].

In addition to promoting interaction, YouTube serves as an open-access tool for language learning, offering far more flexibility than many other educational platforms [12]. Through this medium, learners are exposed to a wide range of spoken language styles—including formal, neutral, and informal registers—and various genres such as music, parodies, debates, political speeches, talk shows, and academic lectures. This exposure not only enriches vocabulary acquisition but also aids retention through contextualized and repeated listening. Supporting this view, YouTube offers learners increased opportunities to engage with native speakers and observe diverse forms of English, including everyday usage, accents, idioms, and colloquial expressions, thereby bridging the gap between academic language and real-world communication [13].

### 2.3. Empirical Studies on YouTube's Roles in Language Acquisition

YouTube has demonstrated a range of positive effects on learners, such as increasing their enthusiasm for classroom participation, enhancing their engagement in social and academic activities, stimulating critical thinking, improving comprehension, and fostering autonomous learning habits. The interactive and multimedia nature of YouTube makes it a powerful educational tool that can address diverse learning needs and preferences [14].

Sakkir, Dollah, and Ahmad [15] explored the perceptions of students at Universities Negeri Makassar regarding the use of YouTube to improve their English proficiency. Their findings revealed that students considered YouTube useful in helping them prepare academic assignments. The study also emphasized its motivational role for introverted learners who may struggle to participate in traditional class settings. By watching videos of peers engaged in group studies or discussions, these students may gradually feel encouraged to participate more actively over time.

A number of studies have supported the view that YouTube is a highly effective tool for language learning. For example, Balbay and Kilis [16] confirmed the significant benefits of YouTube videos for language learners. Medoukali [17] similarly found that regular exposure to YouTube content contributed to the development of learners' comprehension abilities. Putri, Wijayanto, and Supriyadi [18] reported that EFL students in Indonesia had a favorable attitude toward using YouTube across cognitive, emotional, and behavioral domains. The students also demonstrated the ability to manage their own learning effectively through the platform, benefiting from its enjoyable, flexible, and authentic content.

In addition to comprehension and self-regulation, YouTube also supports language production skills. Sianna, Ramlah, and Salasiah [19] found that using authentic videos in writing instruction positively influenced learners' writing performance. Furthermore, Kristiani and Pradnyadewi [20] demonstrated the effectiveness of YouTube in enhancing students' speaking skills, reinforcing its value as a multifaceted learning medium.

### 2.4. Conceptualizing Vocabulary Knowledge in the Digital Age

Vocabulary knowledge is a cornerstone of second language (L2) comprehension and production. It significantly impacts a learner's ability to understand spoken or written texts and to express ideas clearly and accurately. Language ability is largely determined by the size of an individual's vocabulary, suggesting that vocabulary plays a foundational role in overall language proficiency. This relationship indicates that learners who possess a more extensive vocabulary are generally better equipped to perform a range of linguistic tasks. However, acquiring vocabulary is often a major challenge for L2 learners, especially in classroom-based or instructed learning environments [21]. These settings typically offer limited exposure to natural language use, which can hinder learners' vocabulary development and restrict their opportunities to encounter new words in varied contexts. Therefore, vocabulary learning in such environments requires deliberate strategies and the integration of engaging tools to make up for the lack of authentic input [22].

YouTube appears to offer considerable potential as a tool for enhancing vocabulary knowledge, especially in language learning environments where exposure to authentic input is limited. As vocabulary knowledge encompasses both the breadth and depth of words learners can understand and use appropriately, platforms like YouTube can play a valuable role in enriching this knowledge through contextualized and engaging content. Particularly noteworthy is the platform's ability to simulate real-life communication by presenting learners with naturally occurring language, varied accents, informal expressions, and culturally embedded usage. Unlike traditional textbooks that often present vocabulary in isolated forms, YouTube exposes learners to language in use, allowing for a deeper understanding of meaning, register, and context. This kind of authentic exposure has the potential to promote not only vocabulary expansion but also more confident and accurate language use in real-world situations.

### 2.5. Vocabulary Acquisition through Real-World Language in YouTube Content

YouTube has become a widely utilized platform that serves dual purposes in both education and entertainment, making it particularly valuable for language learners. As a free video-sharing application, it offers abundant exposure to authentic language through a variety of real-life videos. This access allows learners to develop their language skills by engaging with content that reflects genuine communication and cultural context, which can enhance comprehension, listening, and vocabulary retention. The authentic nature of the materials available—such as interviews, tutorials, and storytelling videos—presents learners with practical language in meaningful situations, encouraging the development of functional vocabulary and usage patterns that are difficult to gain through traditional, textbook-based instruction [23].

Beyond formal educational use, YouTube also provides language learning opportunities through entertainment-oriented content. Students often watch videos aligned with their personal interests—such as music, gaming, or lifestyle content—without the intention to study, yet this incidental exposure to language still contributes meaningfully to vocabulary growth. As Neuman and Koskinen [24] emphasize, video materials are effective sources of input for incidental vocabulary acquisition and may even result in greater gains in certain receptive and productive vocabulary aspects compared to reading. Furthermore, YouTube has been shown to support vocabulary learning explicitly, as learners can recognize, understand, and retain target words more effectively through the platform's visual and contextual cues. Kabooaha and Elyas [25] affirm that YouTube can serve as an effective tool in vocabulary instruction, enhancing learners' engagement with new terms and supporting long-term retention through repeated and meaningful exposure.

### 3. Research Methodology

This section outlines the methodological framework adopted to investigate the role of YouTube in vocabulary acquisition among language learners. It begins by presenting the research problem that motivates the study, followed by clearly stated objectives and research questions that guide the inquiry. The section also details the overall research design and approach used to collect and analyze data, ensuring that the methods align with the study's aims. Together, these elements provide a coherent foundation for examining how YouTube contributes to second language vocabulary development in a structured and systematic manner.

#### 3.1. Research Problem

Despite the growing popularity of YouTube as an informal learning tool, its potential role in supporting vocabulary acquisition among EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students remains underexplored. Traditional vocabulary learning methods often fail to engage learners or provide authentic language exposure. While YouTube offers a wide range of video content that can expose learners to real-life language use, there is limited empirical evidence on how EFL students actually use these videos for vocabulary learning, what types of content are most effective, and how learners perceive its usefulness. Without a deeper understanding of these dynamics, educators may miss opportunities to integrate video-based platforms like YouTube into language instruction more effectively. Therefore, this study seeks to investigate how EFL learners engage with YouTube for vocabulary acquisition, what content types best support this process, and what learners believe about its impact on their language development.

#### 3.2. Research Objectives

Based on the purpose of this study, the main objectives are outlined as follows:

- O1: To explore how EFL students use YouTube to acquire new English vocabulary.
- O2: To examine the types of YouTube content most effective for vocabulary learning.
- O3: To analyze learners' perceptions of the effectiveness of YouTube as a vocabulary-learning tool.

#### 3.3. Research Questions

In line with the objectives of the study, this study seeks to answer the following questions:

- Q1: How do EFL students utilize YouTube for vocabulary acquisition?
- Q2: What types of YouTube videos (e.g., vlogs, tutorials, educational channels) are most helpful for learning vocabulary?
- Q3: What are the perceived benefits and challenges of using YouTube to improve vocabulary among EFL learners?

#### 3.4. Research Design

The study employs a convergent parallel research design within a mixed-methods approach to comprehensively investigate how EFL students use YouTube for vocabulary acquisition. Both quantitative and qualitative data are collected simultaneously through a single online questionnaire that includes closed-ended and open-ended items. The quantitative component consists of Likert-scale and multiple-choice questions designed to capture patterns in students' YouTube usage, preferred video content types, and perceived effectiveness of the platform for vocabulary learning.

Complementing this, the qualitative component includes open-ended questions aimed at exploring learners' personal experiences, perceived benefits, and challenges associated with using YouTube as a vocabulary-learning tool. The two

data sets are analyzed independently—descriptive statistics for quantitative data and thematic analysis for qualitative responses—and are then integrated during interpretation to provide a richer, more nuanced understanding of the findings. This design allows for the triangulation of data, enhancing the validity of the results by examining the convergence and divergence between numerical trends and learner perspectives.

### 3.5. Research Approach

The study adopts a mixed-methods research approach to provide a comprehensive understanding of how EFL students use YouTube to enhance their vocabulary acquisition. By integrating both quantitative and qualitative data, the study captures not only measurable patterns in YouTube usage and content preferences but also learners' personal experiences and perceptions regarding the platform's effectiveness. Data are collected simultaneously through a single online questionnaire that includes both closed-ended items, such as Likert-scale and multiple-choice questions, and open-ended questions to gather in-depth insights. This approach allows for the triangulation of findings, where quantitative results highlight general trends and qualitative responses enrich the interpretation by revealing learners' perspectives, benefits, and challenges. Overall, the mixed-methods approach enables a more nuanced and holistic exploration of YouTube's role in vocabulary learning among EFL students.

## 4. Data Analysis and Interpretation

The section presents a detailed analysis and interpretation of the data collected through an online questionnaire designed to explore the research objectives. The questionnaire comprised both quantitative and qualitative questions, enabling a comprehensive examination of the participants' responses. Quantitative data will be analyzed to identify patterns, trends, and statistical relationships, while qualitative responses will be interpreted to gain deeper insights into participants' perspectives and experiences. The analysis specifically focuses on understanding the relationship between YouTube use and vocabulary acquisition among EFL students at Moulay Ismail University.

### 4.1. Quantitative Data Analysis

This subsection presents the analysis of the quantitative data obtained from the online questionnaire. The data are examined using descriptive statistics to identify patterns and trends related to the use of YouTube for vocabulary acquisition among EFL students.

#### 4.1.1. Gender Distribution of Participants

**Table 1** reveals that the majority of participants identify as male. Out of the total respondents, 104 students (53.9%) reported being male, while 77 students (39.9%) identified as female. Additionally, 12 students (6.2%) chose the option "Prefer not to say." This data provides an overview of the gender distribution among the participants involved in the study.

**Table 1** Participants Categorized by Gender

Gender	Number of Participants	Percentage
Male	104	53.9
Female	77	39.9
Prefer not to say	12	6.2

Table 1 shows a noticeable imbalance, with male students comprising a larger portion of the sample. This disparity may have implications for the overall findings, particularly if gender plays a role in how students engage with YouTube as an educational tool for vocabulary acquisition. For instance, previous research has indicated that male and female students may differ in their media consumption habits, digital preferences, or learning strategies. As such, the predominance of male participants could influence the trends observed in the data, possibly skewing the results toward behaviors and attitudes more typical of male learners. Moreover, the small percentage of respondents who preferred not to disclose their gender, while not statistically significant, reflects a degree of sensitivity around gender identity that researchers should remain aware of, especially in studies involving self-reporting and digital engagement. Overall, the gender distribution highlights the importance of considering demographic factors in the interpretation of findings related to educational technology use.

#### 4.1.2. Age Distribution of Participants

Table 2 presents the age distribution of the participants involved in the study. The majority of the students (111 students or 57.5%) fall within the age group of 20 to 30 years. This is followed by students under the age of 20, who make up 29.5% of the total participants (57 students). The smallest age group comprises students aged 30 and above, representing 13% of the sample (25 students). These figures indicate a predominantly young participant population, with more than half of the respondents in their twenties.

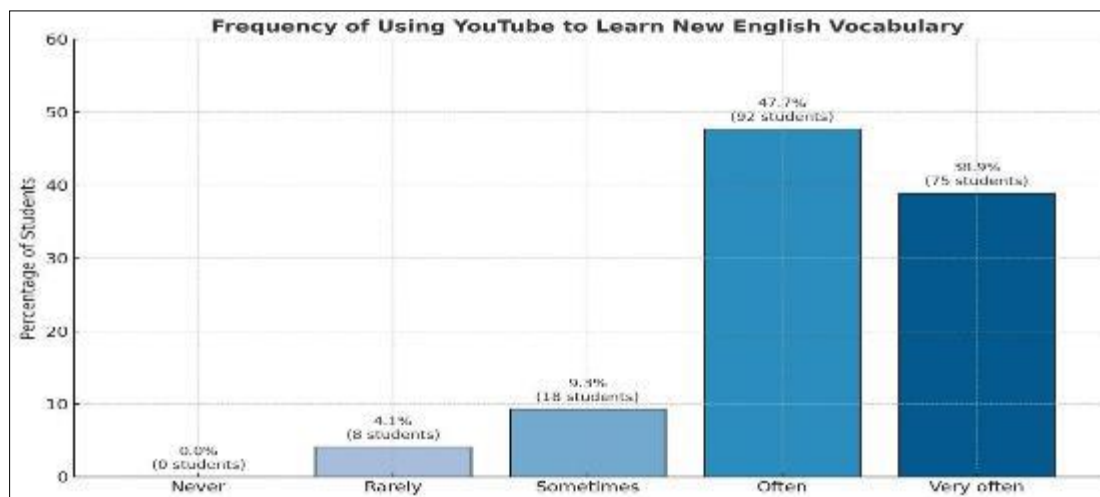
**Table 2** Participants Categorized by Age

Age Group	Number of Participants	Percentage
Under 20	57	29.5
Between 20-30	111	57.5
30 and above	25	13.0

The data suggest that most of the participants are in the early stages of adulthood, likely enrolled in undergraduate or graduate programs. The high percentage of students aged 20–30 implies that the study’s findings are primarily reflective of this demographic’s learning behaviors and social media engagement. The relatively lower representation of students under 20 and those aged 30 and above suggests limited variability in age, which may influence the generalizability of the results across different age groups. Nonetheless, the presence of students across various age ranges contributes to a broader understanding of age-related patterns in educational contexts.

#### 4.1.3. Frequency of YouTube Usage for English Vocabulary Learning

Figure 1 illustrates how frequently students use YouTube as a resource for learning new English vocabulary. Notably, none of the respondents reported that they never use YouTube for this purpose. A small proportion of students indicated using it rarely (8 students or 4.1%) and sometimes (18 students or 9.3%). A significant number of students (92 students or 47.7%) stated that they often use YouTube to improve their vocabulary, while a substantial portion (75 students or 38.9%) reported using it very often. This distribution reveals that a vast majority of students engage with YouTube regularly as part of their vocabulary acquisition practices.

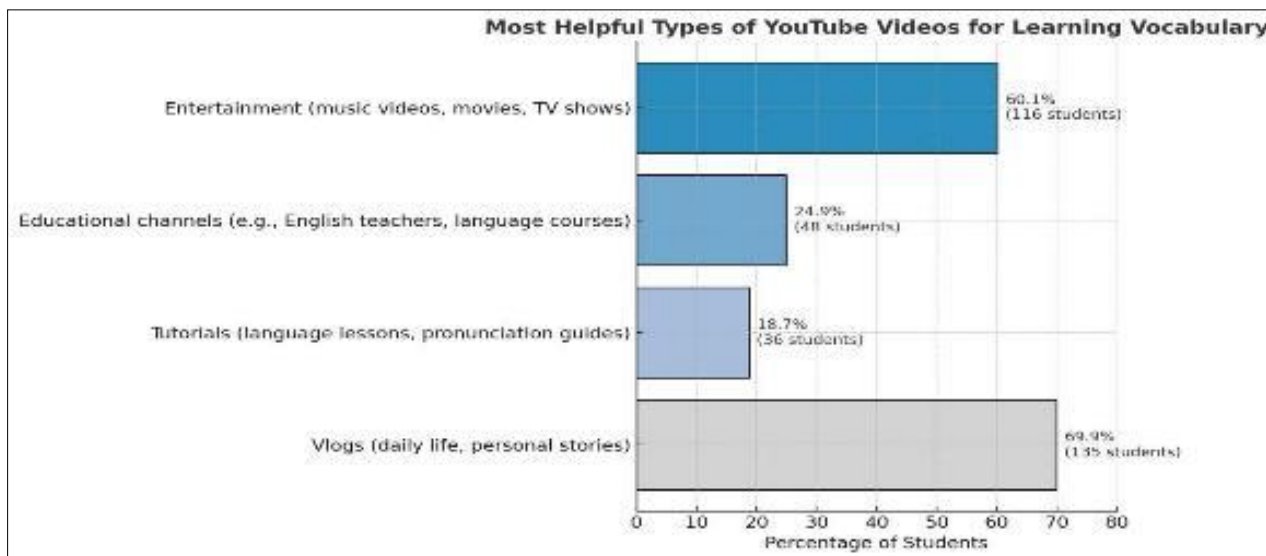


**Figure 1** Students’ Frequency of Using YouTube to Learn New Vocabulary

The data in **Figure 1** highlight YouTube’s pivotal role in students’ vocabulary learning, particularly among EFL learners. The fact that 86.6% of students (combining “often” and “very often”) use YouTube frequently suggests that this platform is perceived as an effective and accessible tool for language development. This heavy reliance on YouTube may be attributed to its rich multimedia content, context-driven vocabulary exposure, and engaging formats, which traditional classroom settings may lack. Furthermore, the complete absence of students selecting “never” implies that YouTube is nearly universally recognized among participants as a useful educational supplement. These findings underscore the potential of integrating YouTube into formal language learning curricula and support the argument for leveraging social media platforms to enhance vocabulary acquisition and learner autonomy in EFL contexts.

#### 4.1.4. Preferred Types of YouTube Videos for Vocabulary Learning

Figure 2 presents the types of YouTube videos students find most helpful for learning English vocabulary, with multiple responses allowed. The most popular category is vlogs (daily life, personal stories), selected by 135 students or 69.9%. This is followed by entertainment content such as music videos, movies, and TV shows, chosen by 116 students (60.1%). Educational channels focused on English teaching and language courses were identified as helpful by 48 students (24.9%), while tutorials such as language lessons and pronunciation guides were selected by 36 students (18.7%). The data reveal a clear preference for informal, real-life, and entertainment-based content over structured educational videos.



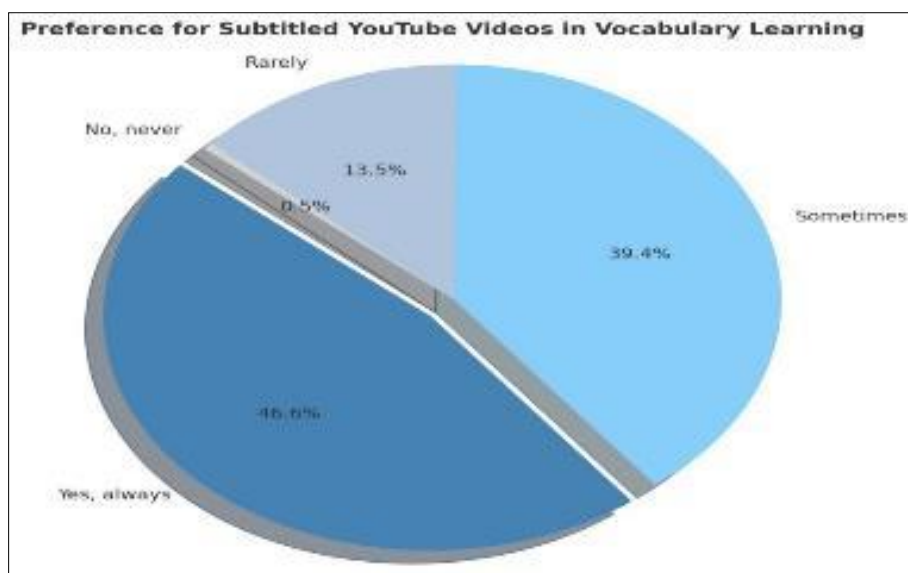
**Figure 2** Types of YouTube Videos Students Find Most Helpful for Vocabulary Learning

The findings from **Figure 2** suggest that students are more inclined to engage with vocabulary learning through informal, immersive content rather than formal instructional material. Vlogs and entertainment videos—both rich in contextual language use and authentic communication—appear to resonate most with learners, likely because they simulate real-life interactions and make language acquisition more relatable and enjoyable. This preference indicates a shift in learners' attitudes toward more experiential and interest-driven methods of language learning. While educational channels and tutorials offer structured and targeted vocabulary instruction, their lower selection rates imply that students might find them less engaging or less accessible. These insights highlight the importance of incorporating diverse content types into language learning strategies, particularly those that blend education with entertainment, to foster greater motivation and vocabulary retention among EFL students.

#### 4.1.5. Students' Preferences for Subtitles in YouTube Vocabulary Learning

Figure 3 illustrates students' preferences regarding the use of subtitles while watching YouTube videos for vocabulary learning. Nearly half of the participants (90 students or 46.6%) reported that they always prefer videos with subtitles. Another 76 students (39.4%) indicated that they sometimes prefer using subtitles. A smaller portion, 26 students (13.5%), rarely use subtitles, and only 1 student (0.5%) reported never using them. The data reveal that subtitles are generally well-regarded among the majority of students as a useful tool for enhancing vocabulary Learning.



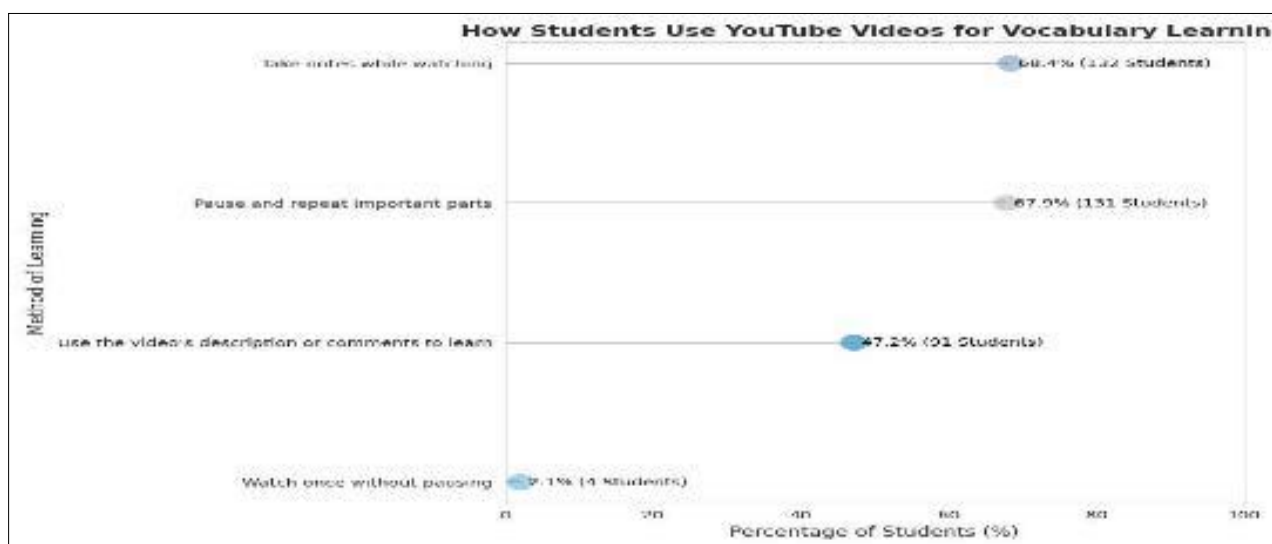


**Figure 3** Preferences for Subtitled Videos when Learning Vocabulary on YouTube

The preferences shown in **Figure 3** suggest that subtitles are an important aid in the vocabulary learning process for most students. A combined total of 86% of participants (those who answered “always” or “sometimes”) value subtitles as a supportive feature, indicating that reading text while listening enhances their comprehension and vocabulary retention. Subtitles allow learners to make connections between spoken and written language, facilitate the understanding of pronunciation and context, and help in identifying new words. The minimal number of students who do not use subtitles suggests that this feature is widely recognized as beneficial, especially for EFL learners who may rely on visual and textual cues to support their listening comprehension. These insights underline the potential for educators to encourage the use of subtitled content as a pedagogical strategy to reinforce vocabulary learning in multimedia environments.

#### 4.1.6. Students' Strategies for Learning Vocabulary through YouTube

**Figure 4** presents the various strategies students use when engaging with YouTube videos for vocabulary learning, allowing for multiple responses. The most common strategies include taking notes while watching (132 students or 68.4%) and pausing and repeating important parts (131 students or 67.9%). Additionally, 91 students (47.2%) reported using the video's description or comments to aid their learning. Only a small number of students (four students or 2.1%) indicated that they watch videos once without pausing. These responses indicate a strong tendency among learners to engage actively and interactively with video content.



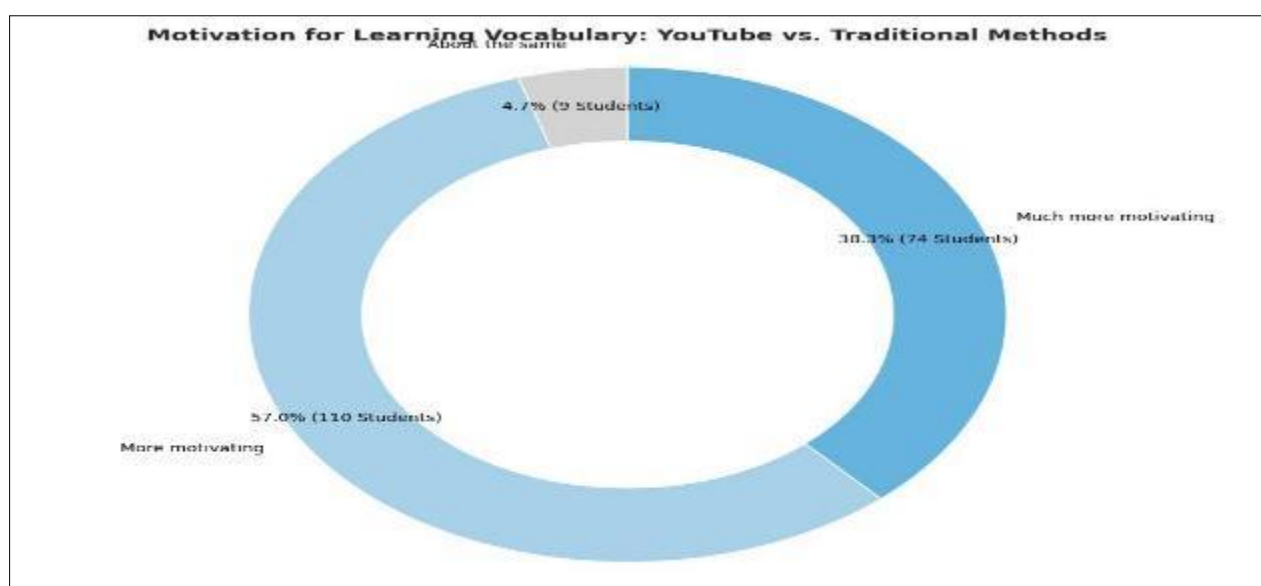
**Figure 4** Common Strategies Students Use to Learn Vocabulary from YouTube Videos



The results shown in **Figure 4** reflect that students tend to use YouTube videos in an intentional and focused manner when learning vocabulary. The high percentage of learners who pause, repeat, and take notes suggests that they are not passive viewers but rather active participants in the learning process. These strategies promote deeper processing of language input, aiding memory retention and contextual understanding. Additionally, the use of video descriptions and comment sections, selected by nearly half the participants, highlights learners' willingness to explore supplementary sources of vocabulary within the YouTube platform. Conversely, the minimal number of students who simply watch videos without pausing (2.1%) suggests that passive viewing is not a popular or effective approach for vocabulary learning among EFL students. These findings underscore the value of teaching learners how to utilize digital content strategically, transforming entertainment platforms like YouTube into powerful educational tools.

#### 4.1.7. Students' Motivation to Learn Vocabulary via YouTube Compared to Traditional Methods

**Figure 5** displays students' perceptions of how motivating YouTube is for vocabulary learning compared to traditional methods such as textbooks. A majority of students find YouTube more stimulating: 110 students (57%) reported that it is more motivating, while 74 students (38.3%) stated it is much more motivating. Only nine students (4.7%) felt YouTube is about the same as traditional methods. Notably, no students found YouTube to be less or much less motivating. These results indicate a strong preference for YouTube as a more engaging tool for vocabulary acquisition.

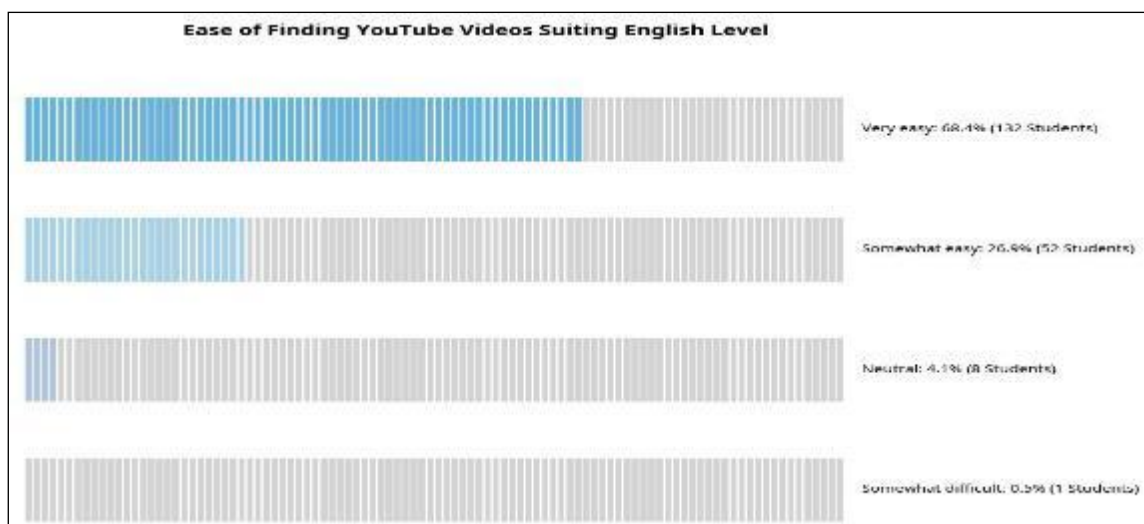


**Figure 5** Students' Perceived Motivation when Using YouTube vs. Traditional Vocabulary Learning Methods

The data in **Figure 5** clearly demonstrate that YouTube significantly enhances students' motivation to learn vocabulary compared to traditional methods. With 95.3% of participants perceiving YouTube as either more or much more motivating, it is evident that multimedia-based learning resonates more effectively with modern learners. The dynamic nature of video content—featuring visuals, audio, context-rich examples, and real-life communication—likely contributes to this increased motivation. Unlike textbooks, which often present vocabulary in isolated or static formats, YouTube offers engaging, authentic contexts that can better capture and sustain learners' interest. The absence of any students selecting the "less motivating" options further reinforces the platform's appeal. These findings highlight the importance of integrating digital media like YouTube into language learning programs to boost student motivation and participation, particularly among EFL learners who benefit from immersive and interactive environments.

#### 4.1.8. Perceived Ease of Accessing Level-Appropriate Vocabulary Content on YouTube

**Figure 6** illustrates students' perceptions regarding how easy it is to find YouTube videos that match their English proficiency level. The majority of students (132 students or 68.4%) reported that it is very easy to find suitable videos, while 52 students (26.9%) indicated it is somewhat easy. A small number of participants (eight students or 4.1%) chose the neutral option, and only one student (0.5%) found it somewhat difficult. Notably, no students found it very difficult, indicating a generally positive experience in accessing level-appropriate content on YouTube.

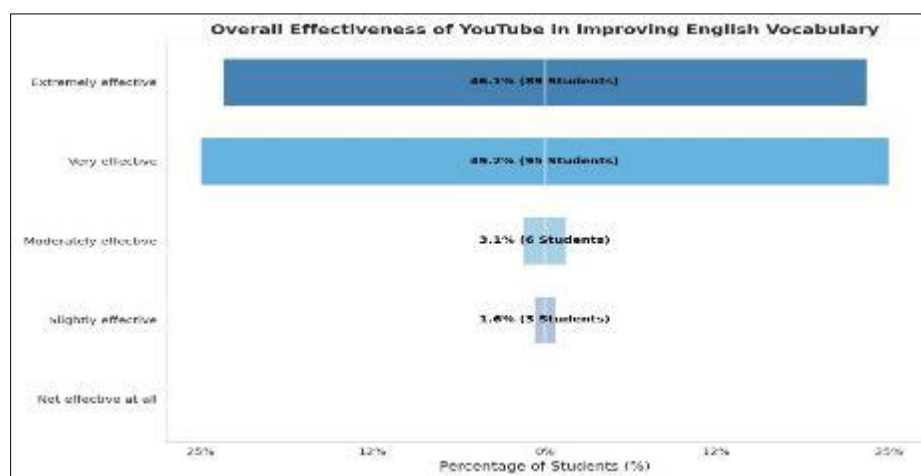


**Figure 6** Ease of Finding YouTube Videos that Match Students' English Proficiency Level

The responses in **Figure 6** suggest that YouTube is widely regarded as a highly accessible platform for EFL learners seeking vocabulary content appropriate to their language level. With 95.3% of students indicating it is either somewhat or very easy to find suitable videos, the platform appears to meet learners' needs in terms of content variety and searchability. YouTube's recommendation algorithms, filtering features, and the vast diversity of creators likely contribute to this ease of access. Additionally, the negligible number of students who faced difficulty reinforces the platform's inclusiveness and adaptability for different proficiency levels. These findings point to YouTube's effectiveness not only as a learning tool but also as a user-friendly resource that empowers students to tailor their learning experiences independently, promoting both motivation and autonomy in vocabulary learning.

#### 4.1.9. Students' Perceptions of YouTube Effectiveness in Vocabulary Development

**Figure 7** displays students' overall perceptions of how effective YouTube is in helping them improve their English vocabulary. A majority of the participants view YouTube positively, with 95 students (49.2%) considering it very effective and 89 students (46.1%) rating it as extremely effective. A small number of students found it moderately effective (6 students or 3.1%) or slightly effective (3 students or 1.6%). Importantly, none of the students rated YouTube as not effective at all, indicating an overwhelmingly favorable assessment of the platform's educational impact.



**Figure 7** Perceived Effectiveness of YouTube in Enhancing English Vocabulary

The results presented in **Figure 7** clearly demonstrate that students overwhelmingly perceive YouTube as an effective tool for vocabulary acquisition. Nearly all participants rated it as either very or extremely effective, suggesting that YouTube not only supports vocabulary learning but does so in a highly impactful way. This positive perception may stem from the platform's ability to present vocabulary in authentic, engaging, and visually supported contexts, which

can enhance understanding, retention, and practical usage. The near absence of negative responses further reinforces YouTube's role as a trusted and valued learning resource among EFL students. These findings support the growing recognition of digital media, particularly video-based platforms, as powerful supplements or alternatives to traditional vocabulary instruction.

## 4.2. Qualitative Data Analysis

This subsection presents the analysis of qualitative responses gathered from students to gain deeper insights into their perceptions and experiences regarding the use of YouTube for English vocabulary learning. Two open-ended questions are used to explore students' opinions, allowing them to express their thoughts freely. The analysis focuses on personal reflections that complement the quantitative findings and provide a more comprehensive understanding of learners' perspectives.

### 4.2.1. Students' Strategies for Using YouTube to Learn English Vocabulary

The responses to the first question revealed that students use YouTube in a variety of strategic and intentional ways to enhance their English vocabulary. A recurring theme is the use of subtitled videos to associate spoken and written forms of words. One student noted, "Watching English subtitles on videos helps me understand the meaning and pronunciation of new words." Many students also mentioned the pause-and-repeat technique, emphasizing their active role in the learning process. As one respondent explained, "I pause and replay videos to focus on unfamiliar words and expressions." Students frequently engage with educational content, such as vocabulary-specific playlists and channels like "BBC Learning English" or "English Addict with Mr Steve," which provide structured and goal-oriented learning. Additionally, some students create personal learning routines by writing new words in a notebook while watching, showing a conscious effort to retain and review vocabulary.

In addition to formal educational approaches, students also benefit from real-life and immersive content. Watching vlogs, movie clips, and music videos was commonly mentioned as a way to see vocabulary used in context. One learner shared, "Watching movie clips and vlogs helps me learn how words are used in real-life situations." Others expand their learning beyond passive viewing by engaging with the YouTube platform itself, using features like the comment section to read and write in English. One student explained, "Using the comment section helps reinforce new vocabulary." More advanced strategies include searching for topic-specific vocabulary, such as "business English vocabulary" or "IELTS academic words," and interacting with quiz-style or challenge-based videos. YouTube Shorts were also noted as a modern and effective tool for picking up casual expressions quickly. Overall, students' responses reflect a blend of structured, interactive, and informal strategies, showcasing YouTube's flexibility as a vocabulary-learning tool tailored to individual preferences and goals.

### 4.2.2. Perceived Benefits and challenges of Using YouTube for Vocabulary Learning

Students identified a wide range of benefits in using YouTube for vocabulary development, highlighting its accessibility, versatility, and motivational appeal. A common advantage mentioned was the exposure to authentic language use by native speakers, which helps learners grasp how vocabulary is applied in real-life contexts. One student noted, "It helps me learn from native speakers in daily situations, not just from textbooks." The visual and auditory elements of YouTube videos were also praised for enhancing memory retention. As one learner put it, "Visuals and sound make it easier to remember new words." Another frequently cited benefit was the freedom to learn at one's own pace, with one student stating, "I can pause or replay whenever I need, so I never feel rushed." Additionally, students appreciated the wide variety of content, including videos tailored to specific proficiency levels or interests, which made the learning experience more engaging and personal. The availability of subtitles and translation features was also seen as a major aid to comprehension. Several students emphasized that the entertaining and flexible nature of YouTube keeps them motivated: "It's fun, so I actually want to keep learning every day."

Despite these benefits, students also pointed out several challenges that can interfere with effective learning on YouTube. A major concern was distraction, with one student commenting, "There are too many unrelated videos and ads that take my focus away." Another issue was the inaccuracy of subtitles or auto-translations, which sometimes led to misunderstandings: "Sometimes subtitles are wrong, and that confuses me." Learners also struggled with fast-paced speech and slang, especially in informal videos, making it difficult to follow or absorb new vocabulary. One respondent explained, "When they speak too fast or use slang, I get lost." The lack of structure in some content was another challenge, as not all videos are designed for educational purposes. As one student observed, "It's easy to waste time on videos that aren't actually helpful." Finally, a few learners mentioned the difficulty of tracking their vocabulary progress without guided lessons or assessments. These responses highlight the need for a more mindful and selective approach

when using YouTube as a vocabulary learning tool, as well as the potential value of combining it with more structured learning methods.

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## 5. Key Findings

- YouTube is a primary tool for EFL learners to acquire vocabulary, as students frequently turn to it due to its accessibility, multimedia content, and ability to offer real-world language exposure beyond the classroom.
  - EFL learners favor informal content such as vlogs and entertainment videos because these provide authentic, contextual language use that mirrors everyday communication, making vocabulary learning more relatable and engaging.
  - Subtitles are a vital support tool, helping EFL students connect spoken and written forms, improve pronunciation, and better understand the meaning of new words while watching videos.
  - EFL students engage actively with YouTube videos by pausing, repeating segments, taking notes, and exploring comment sections, showing that they use the platform strategically rather than passively.
  - YouTube significantly boosts learner motivation compared to textbooks, as its visual, interactive, and flexible content keeps learners interested and encourages regular vocabulary practice.
  - EFL students find it easy to access vocabulary-level-appropriate videos on YouTube thanks to the platform's vast content variety, effective search features, and personalized recommendations.
  - YouTube is viewed as a highly effective tool for vocabulary acquisition, with learners benefiting from exposure to words in visual, contextual, and meaningful formats that aid understanding and long-term retention.
  - EFL students employ a variety of strategies—such as using educational playlists, searching for topic-based vocabulary, and watching interactive content—to personalize their learning and make vocabulary practice more efficient.
  - The main advantages of using YouTube include exposure to authentic native-speaker input, audiovisual reinforcement, subtitles, and the ability to learn at one's own pace, all of which enhance comprehension and memory.
  - Students face challenges like distractions from unrelated content, inaccurate subtitles, fast speech or slang, and the lack of structured lessons, which can affect focus, understanding, and progress tracking.
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## 6. Discussion

The discussion section aims to interpret the findings of this study in light of their broader educational relevance, particularly regarding the integration of YouTube as a tool for vocabulary learning among EFL students. It begins by outlining the practical implications of the research for language educators, learners, and curriculum designers. This is followed by a reflection on the study's limitations, including contextual and methodological constraints that may affect the generalizability of the results. Finally, the section concludes with future recommendations that highlight directions for further research and pedagogical development in the field of technology-assisted language learning.

### 6.1. Research Implications

The findings of this study have important implications for both language educators and curriculum designers, emphasizing the potential of integrating digital platforms like YouTube into formal language learning environments. As the data reveal, YouTube serves as a highly motivating and accessible resource that facilitates vocabulary acquisition through authentic, context-rich, and multimedia content. Educators should therefore consider incorporating YouTube-based activities that promote active engagement, such as watching subtitled videos, pausing and repeating, or using vocabulary-focused playlists, to complement traditional instruction. This integration can help bridge the gap between classroom learning and real-world language use, fostering learner autonomy and providing diverse, learner-centered pathways for vocabulary development.

Moreover, the study highlights the need to harness the motivational power of social media to sustain students' interest and encourage continuous practice outside the classroom. Language programs could develop guidelines and training to help students select high-quality, level-appropriate videos and employ effective learning strategies, mitigating common challenges such as distractions and inaccurate subtitles. By acknowledging YouTube as more than just entertainment, but as a valuable educational tool, institutions can enhance their digital literacy initiatives and support learners in navigating online resources more critically and purposefully. Ultimately, these implications suggest a shift towards blended learning models where technology and traditional methods coexist, maximizing vocabulary acquisition outcomes for diverse EFL learners.

## 6.2. Research Limitations

One of the primary limitations of this study is its limited scope, as data were collected exclusively from students at a single institution—Moulay Ismail University. While the findings offer valuable insights into the role of YouTube in vocabulary acquisition among EFL learners, they may not fully reflect the experiences and perceptions of students in other universities, regions, or educational systems. Different institutions may offer varying levels of access to technology, different teaching methodologies, or diverse student demographics, all of which could influence how learners engage with digital platforms like YouTube. As such, the generalizability of the study's results is constrained, and further research involving a more diverse sample across multiple institutions is necessary to validate and expand upon these findings.

Another limitation lies in the study's reliance on self-reported data, which can introduce biases such as social desirability or inaccurate self-assessment. Participants may have overestimated their use of effective strategies or the benefits they derive from YouTube due to a desire to present themselves positively. In addition, memory limitations or subjective interpretations of survey questions may have influenced the accuracy of their responses. While self-reported data are useful for gathering large-scale insights into learners' habits and preferences, they may not fully capture the depth of students' engagement or the actual outcomes of their vocabulary learning. Future studies could benefit from including direct observations, vocabulary tests, or longitudinal data to triangulate the results and provide a more comprehensive understanding of YouTube's impact on language acquisition.

## 6.3. Future Recommendations

Based on the findings and limitations of this study, future research should aim to expand the participant pool beyond a single institution to include EFL learners from diverse educational, cultural, and geographic backgrounds. This would help enhance the generalizability of the results and provide a broader understanding of how YouTube is used across different learning environments. Additionally, incorporating students at varying levels of English proficiency—from beginners to advanced learners—could offer more nuanced insights into how learners with different language skills engage with video content. Comparative studies between institutions, countries, or learning contexts could further enrich the current understanding of social media's role in vocabulary acquisition.

It is also recommended that future research employ a mixed-methods approach that includes both qualitative and quantitative measures, along with observational or performance-based data. While self-reported responses offer useful subjective insights, they should be complemented with objective data such as vocabulary assessments, classroom observations, or tracking learners' engagement with specific YouTube content over time. Moreover, studies could explore the integration of selected YouTube content into structured curricula and measure its impact compared to traditional methods. Investigating teacher involvement in guiding students' YouTube usage for language learning could also provide valuable pedagogical perspectives. Overall, future research should strive for a more comprehensive and evidence-based exploration of YouTube's potential in EFL education.

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## 7. Conclusion

The study explored the role of YouTube in supporting vocabulary learning among EFL students at Moulay Ismail University. The findings revealed that YouTube is widely used and highly valued by students as a supplementary tool for learning English vocabulary. Learners not only engage frequently with the platform but also adopt intentional strategies—such as pausing, taking notes, using subtitles, and exploring educational and immersive content—to support their vocabulary learning. These behaviors indicate that YouTube serves as more than just an entertainment platform; it has become an informal, yet effective, space for language learning.

The research further highlighted students' preferences for authentic, engaging video content such as vlogs, music, and movie clips, which offer real-world language exposure. Subtitles, personalization features, and video diversity were seen as critical elements contributing to learning success and motivation. At the same time, students demonstrated awareness of their own learning processes by identifying specific benefits—like flexibility and contextual understanding—as well as challenges such as distractions, fast speech, and inaccurate subtitles. These insights affirm that students are not passive consumers but active participants in their vocabulary learning journey.

From a pedagogical perspective, the implications of these findings are significant. Educators are encouraged to integrate selected YouTube materials into language instruction to increase student engagement, motivation, and vocabulary learning outcomes. YouTube's accessibility, combined with learners' autonomy in selecting content, supports differentiated and student-centered learning approaches. Furthermore, instructional design should include guidance

on how to effectively navigate and utilize YouTube as a learning tool, ensuring that students maximize its educational potential while minimizing distractions.

Despite the study's contributions, its scope was limited to one institution and relied solely on self-reported data. Future research should address these limitations by expanding to a wider range of educational settings and incorporating empirical performance measures. Nonetheless, the study clearly demonstrates the promise of YouTube as a powerful supplementary resource in EFL education. By blending informal digital media with formal language instruction, educators can foster more dynamic, personalized, and effective vocabulary learning experiences for 21st-century learners.

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## Compliance with ethical standards

### *Statement of informed consent*

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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