

Utilising YouTube-Based Traditional Culinary Content to Enhance Indonesian EFL Students' English Vocabulary Acquisition

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ABSTRACT

Vocabulary acquisition remains a central yet persistent challenge for Indonesian learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Conventional instruction often isolates words from meaningful contexts, limiting engagement and long-term retention. This study responds to that pedagogical limitation by exploring the role of YouTube-based traditional culinary content as a culturally grounded and authentic medium to enrich English vocabulary learning. Anchored in a descriptive qualitative insight within open-ended questionnaire, the research involved Indonesian EFL students who engaged with curated culinary videos featuring local dishes and narratives. The findings reveal that the integration of audiovisual culinary materials not only facilitates contextual understanding of verbs and adjectives but also enhances learners' motivation through familiarity and cultural resonance. Students reported that visual demonstrations, coupled with descriptive narration, transform vocabulary learning from a mechanical task into an experiential, meaningful activity. The study underscores that YouTube-based traditional culinary resources can bridge language and culture, fostering deeper lexical competence and sustained engagement within EFL classrooms.

Keywords: *Cultural Pedagogy, English Vocabulary Acquisition, Indonesian EFL Students, Traditional Culinary Content, YouTube.*

1) INTRODUCTION

Language learning, especially vocabulary acquisition, stands at the heart of communicative competence in English as a Foreign Language (EFL). For many Indonesian learners, however, vocabulary learning remains a demanding journey one that requires both pedagogical innovation and cultural sensitivity. As Nation (2013) notes, vocabulary serves as the foundation upon which all other language skills rest. Yet, in many Indonesian classrooms, learners still depend on conventional methods such as memorization and translation. These practices often separate language from meaning, making vocabulary knowledge mechanical rather than experiential (Alqahtani, 2015). The challenge, therefore, is not only about what students learn but how they engage with language in ways that connect to their lived realities.

Amid the growing integration of digital technology into education, YouTube emerges as a relevant and transformative learning platform. It provides multimodal access to authentic communication

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Faculty of Teacher Training and Education
Universitas Islam Negeri Alauddin Makassar
South Sulawesi-Indonesia

where learners can observe, listen, and interpret language in meaningful contexts (Cheng, 2019). For EFL learners, these visual and auditory stimuli support not only comprehension but also emotional engagement and motivation (Berk, 2009; Mayer, 2014). Yet, the pedagogical potential of YouTube remains underexplored when it comes to incorporating local cultural content that resonates with students' identities and experiences.

In Indonesia, food and culinary traditions are deeply rooted in everyday life and collective memory. Culinary narratives are not merely about cooking—they carry values, habits, and language that reflect local wisdom. Integrating traditional culinary content into YouTube-based vocabulary learning offers a culturally grounded entry point for students to learn English in an authentic way. As Kramsch (2013) reminds us, culture is not a background to language but its living dimension. When learners encounter culturally familiar materials in English, they process language through emotion, cognition, and identity simultaneously. This sense of familiarity can foster deeper attention and retention of new vocabulary.

From a theoretical standpoint, the learning process can be interpreted through Paivio's (1991) Dual Coding Theory, which posits that information presented through both verbal and visual channels strengthens memory. In parallel, Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory highlights how cultural tools such as culinary artifacts mediate cognitive development through social meaning. In this view, YouTube-based traditional culinary content becomes more than just a digital medium; it serves as a cultural scaffold that connects learners' prior experiences with new linguistic input.

Empirical studies further reinforce this pedagogical direction. Webb and Rodgers (2009) found that audiovisual input supports incidental vocabulary learning, while Peters and Webb (2018) emphasized the importance of contextualized exposure for long-term retention. Mayer (2014) also argues that multimodal learning materials enhance understanding by engaging both cognitive and affective dimensions of learning. Taken together, these findings indicate that incorporating YouTube-based traditional culinary videos into EFL learning could help bridge local culture with global language acquisition.

In light of these perspectives, the present study explores how YouTube-based traditional Indonesian culinary content can enhance English vocabulary acquisition among Indonesian EFL students. It aims to examine not only the degree of improvement in learners' vocabulary knowledge but also their perceptions and attitudes toward using culturally relevant digital media. The study

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further seeks to contribute to ongoing discussions about contextual, authentic, and culturally sustaining approaches in foreign language education in Indonesia. Therefore, this research addresses the following questions: What are Indonesian EFL students' perceptions, attitudes, and frequency of use regarding YouTube-based traditional culinary content as a vocabulary learning tool?

2) METHODS

2.1 Rationalisation

The use of digital media in language education has transformed how learners encounter and internalize new vocabulary. Yet, within the Indonesian EFL context, vocabulary instruction remains largely dominated by memorization-based practices that isolate language from meaning. This study emerges from the recognition that vocabulary development can be more effective when situated within authentic, culturally grounded experiences. YouTube-based traditional culinary content presents such an opportunity by integrating linguistic learning with visual and cultural engagement. Culinary videos provide an authentic medium through which learners can encounter verbs, adjectives, and nouns embedded in natural discourse and everyday action. Anchored in Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory and Paivio's (1991) Dual Coding Theory, this research assumes that learning occurs most effectively when it connects cultural tools, sensory input, and cognitive processes. Therefore, this study rationalizes the integration of YouTube-based traditional culinary content as an innovative, contextually meaningful approach to enhance Indonesian EFL students' vocabulary acquisition.

2.2 Research Design

This research employed a descriptive qualitative design complemented by survey-based insight through open-ended questionnaires. The design was chosen to capture participants' perceptions, experiences, and attitudes toward the use of YouTube-based traditional culinary content as a vocabulary learning medium. Rather than measuring statistical gain, this approach prioritizes a rich understanding of how learners perceive the relevance, motivation, and contextual impact of culturally

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embedded digital materials. The qualitative orientation enables the researcher to explore how visual, auditory, and cultural dimensions interact in the students' meaning-making processes during vocabulary learning.

2.3 Procedures of Collecting Data

The research procedures followed three main stages:

a. Preparation Stage:

Relevant YouTube videos featuring traditional Indonesian dishes such as rendang, soto, and sate were selected based on clarity of English narration, authenticity of culinary representation, and relevance to EFL learners' proficiency. The selected videos were previewed to identify target vocabulary items and contextual expressions that would form the focus of the study.

b. Implementation Stage:

Participants were invited to watch the curated videos during class and were encouraged to note new or unfamiliar words while observing how they were used contextually. Discussions were facilitated to elicit learners' reflections on the meaning, pronunciation, and application of the vocabulary in real-life scenarios.

c. Data Collection Stage:

After the viewing sessions, participants completed open-ended questionnaires designed to capture their perceptions of the learning experience covering motivation, cultural relevance, and perceived vocabulary gains. Some follow-up discussions were held to clarify and deepen responses when necessary.

2.4 Participants

The participants were Indonesian EFL students enrolled in an English Education program at the Institut Agama Islam Negeri (IAIN) Bone, South Sulawesi. They were selected purposively to represent learners who possess intermediate English proficiency and sufficient familiarity with digital learning environments. A total of 30 students participated in the study. All participants volunteered

after being informed of the research's purpose, confidentiality measures, and their right to withdraw at any stage. This ethical stance aligns with qualitative research principles emphasizing respect and voluntary participation.

2.5 Research Instruments

Two instruments were employed in this study:

a. Open-ended Questionnaire:

The questionnaire consisted of prompts inviting students to express their experiences, perceptions, and challenges in learning vocabulary through YouTube-based traditional culinary content. The questions were structured to explore three dimensions: (a) affective responses (interest, motivation), (b) cognitive perception (understanding of new vocabulary), and (c) cultural engagement (connection to local identity).

b. Observation Checklist:

During the video-viewing sessions, the researcher used an observation checklist to record learners' engagement indicators—such as note-taking behavior, peer discussion, and nonverbal attentiveness. This served as supporting qualitative evidence to complement the questionnaire data. Both instruments were validated through expert review by two senior lecturers in English education to ensure clarity, cultural sensitivity, and content relevance.

2.6 Data Collection Method

Data collection was conducted through online and classroom-based observation, followed by open-ended questionnaire distribution. The process was carried out over two weeks. Student's first participated in the YouTube-based learning activity, during which they engaged in vocabulary identification and contextual discussion. Immediately after the activity, they responded to the questionnaire to capture their immediate impressions and reflections. The collected responses were then compiled, anonymized, and coded for thematic analysis. This combination of observation and

open-ended survey methods allowed for a comprehensive understanding of both behavioral and attitudinal aspects of learners' interaction with the digital cultural content.

2.7 Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using thematic content analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step model: (1) familiarization with data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the report. Responses were coded into emerging categories such as motivation and engagement, contextual understanding, and cultural connection. These themes were interpreted to reveal patterns of learners' perceptions regarding the integration of YouTube-based traditional culinary content in vocabulary learning. To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, data triangulation was achieved through comparing observation notes with questionnaire responses. The researcher maintained reflexive notes throughout the process to ensure transparency and minimize interpretative bias.

3) RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The purpose of this study was to explore how YouTube-based traditional culinary content supports English vocabulary acquisition among Indonesian EFL students. Through a descriptive qualitative approach using open-ended questionnaires and observation, the findings reveal three interrelated thematic dimensions:

- (a) motivation and engagement through cultural familiarity,
- (b) contextual understanding of vocabulary through multimodal input, and
- (c) intercultural and identity-based reflection through language learning.

These themes illuminate not only how learners respond to audiovisual materials cognitively but also how they experience emotional and cultural connection while learning English.

The data analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic framework, identifying recurring expressions, metaphors, and reflections that represented collective learner perspectives. Rather than seeking statistical validation, the findings provide a narrative understanding of how

students perceive meaning, relevance, and enjoyment in learning vocabulary through culturally embedded digital media.

Motivation and Engagement through Cultural Familiarity

A dominant pattern emerging from the data was the increase in motivation and affective engagement when students interacted with culturally familiar YouTube culinary content.

Almost all participants expressed that learning vocabulary through videos about rendang, soto, or nasi goreng was “interesting,” “relaxing,” and “meaningful,” compared to traditional textbook vocabulary lists. One student noted:

“I felt connected because the video shows something I know very well. It’s easier to remember the words because I can imagine the smell and taste.”

This statement captures the affective link between memory and sensory experience, supporting Paivio’s (1991) Dual Coding Theory. Students not only processed vocabulary verbally but also visually and emotionally, forming multiple mental associations that enhanced retention.

Observation notes corroborated these responses: students demonstrated increased attentiveness and spontaneous discussions during video sessions. Many were eager to repeat pronunciation, ask for clarifications, and relate the English vocabulary to their own cooking experiences at home.

These findings align with Dörnyei and Ushioda’s (2011) perspective that motivation thrives when learning is emotionally relevant and personally meaningful. The learners’ intrinsic engagement was not derived from extrinsic rewards but from the sense of cultural pride and curiosity evoked by seeing their national identity represented in English. In this sense, motivation became internalized through cultural resonance.

Furthermore, the visual and auditory richness of YouTube content created an immersive environment that sustained learners’ attention. The dual-modality nature of the videos facilitated vocabulary recall, confirming Mayer’s (2014) assertion that multimedia learning strengthens comprehension by engaging both cognitive and affective pathways. The students’ enthusiasm reflected a shift from passive memorization to active participation, a hallmark of effective contextual learning (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989).

Contextual Understanding through Multimodal Input

The second theme focuses on how multimodal audiovisual input contributed to learners’ contextual understanding of new vocabulary. Students reported that the combination of image, sound,

and motion enabled them to infer meaning from actions, expressions, and visual cues, even when they did not understand every word in the narration. One participant reflected:

“I didn’t have to translate every word. I could see what it means when the chef says ‘slice,’ ‘boil,’ or ‘stir.’ It was like learning directly from experience.”

This finding reflects Krashen’s (1989) input hypothesis, suggesting that comprehensible input in a meaningful context allows vocabulary acquisition to occur naturally. Instead of focusing on isolated definitions, learners developed situational understanding associating words with gestures, ingredients, and real-world cooking processes.

Such experiences enhance semantic depth, which Webb (2007) describes as learners’ ability to connect lexical meaning with conceptual and pragmatic dimensions.

The observation checklist revealed that students were especially responsive to action verbs and adjectives describing texture or taste (e.g., chop, sprinkle, tender, spicy, creamy). These lexical items were repeatedly mentioned in their questionnaire responses, often accompanied by explanations of how the words appeared in context. The findings demonstrate that situated learning environments, such as YouTube culinary demonstrations, effectively reinforce form–meaning connections.

Moreover, students emphasized that video-based learning allowed them to hear natural pronunciation and intonation patterns, thereby developing aural familiarity with English rhythm and tone. This finding resonates with Kelsen’s (2009) argument that YouTube materials provide authentic language input that mirrors everyday speech, offering learners both linguistic and paralinguistic exposure. Through visual reinforcement, learners became less reliant on translation and more confident in deducing meaning from context a key shift toward autonomous learning.

Cultural Connection and Identity in Language Learning

The third emergent theme centers on how cultural content influences learners’ sense of identity and belonging in the EFL learning process. Participants consistently noted that studying English through Indonesian culinary traditions made them feel “proud,” “connected,” and “respected.” One student explained:

“Usually, English lessons talk about foreign food or culture. But this time, I learned English through our food. It made me feel proud that I can talk about my culture in another language.”

This reflection illustrates the transformative role of culturally sustaining pedagogy, where language learning becomes a bridge between local identity and global communication (Paris & Alim, 2017). By presenting local cultural elements in English, learners do not merely acquire words; they negotiate identity and assert voice in global discourse. In this process, culture operates as a mediating tool for cognition and emotion, echoing Vygotsky's (1978) principle that cultural artifacts shape higher-order thinking.

Cultural familiarity also reduced anxiety and cognitive load, creating what Krashen (1982) calls a low affective filter conducive to language acquisition. Learners expressed that the content felt natural, relatable, and emotionally safe — conditions essential for effective learning.

This outcome underscores Kramsch's (2013) assertion that language and culture are inseparable; when learners engage with language through culturally meaningful narratives, they internalize not only vocabulary but also cultural confidence.

Beyond individual identity, the inclusion of local culinary media fostered intercultural awareness. Students began to discuss how Indonesian dishes could be described to foreigners using appropriate English expressions. In doing so, they performed intercultural mediation — connecting local traditions to global communicative contexts. Such experiences reflect Cope and Kalantzis's (2015) concept of multiliteracies, in which learners navigate multiple symbolic systems — linguistic, visual, and cultural — as part of communicative competence.

Integration of Theoretical Insights and Empirical Patterns

The findings of this study resonate strongly with existing theories of language learning and educational psychology:

- Dual Coding Theory (Paivio, 1991): The learners' enhanced memory retention stemmed from simultaneous verbal and visual processing. Culinary videos engaged both hemispheres of cognitive functioning — the linguistic and the sensory — enabling durable encoding of vocabulary.
- Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978): Learning occurred through social and cultural mediation. YouTube-based culinary content acted as a cultural artifact connecting students' lived experiences with new linguistic input, reinforcing the collaborative nature of meaning-making.

- Incidental Learning (Krashen, 1989; Webb & Rodgers, 2009): Students absorbed vocabulary implicitly through repeated exposure in authentic contexts, rather than through deliberate memorization.
- Motivational Psychology (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011): The integration of familiar cultural themes enhanced intrinsic motivation and sustained engagement, leading to deeper cognitive investment.
- Contextual Learning Theory (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989): The learning environment replicated real-life scenarios, allowing vocabulary to be embedded in authentic social practice rather than abstract drills.

By aligning empirical observation with these frameworks, the study substantiates that cultural authenticity and multimodal engagement are crucial in fostering long-term lexical competence. The results collectively reveal that vocabulary learning is not merely a linguistic process but a socio-cognitive experience shaped by identity, culture, and emotion.

The Role of YouTube as a Learning Ecosystem

A notable insight from this study is that YouTube functions not only as a content platform but also as a learning ecosystem where interaction, accessibility, and personalization converge. Students appreciated that the videos could be replayed, paused, or reviewed at their own pace, granting them a sense of autonomy. This flexibility contributed to self-directed learning habits, aligning with Benson's (2013) concept of learner autonomy in digital contexts.

Furthermore, the comment sections and recommended video lists exposed learners to additional vocabulary and cultural expressions, extending learning beyond the classroom. As one participant wrote:

"After watching the video, I continued to explore other cooking channels. I found many new words about ingredients, tools, and cooking styles."

This statement indicates transfer of learning — a core indicator of successful vocabulary development. Students began to apply learned strategies (observation, inference, repetition) independently, transforming passive exposure into active exploration.

In this sense, YouTube acts as a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991), where learners engage in situated learning through participation in authentic discourse communities — even virtually.

Discussion: Pedagogical Implications

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Faculty of Teacher Training and Education
Universitas Islam Negeri Alauddin Makassar
South Sulawesi-Indonesia

The findings of this study carry important implications for EFL pedagogy, particularly in contexts such as Indonesia where cultural and linguistic diversity intersect with the rise of digital learning. Several pedagogical insights emerge:

1. **Recontextualizing Vocabulary Instruction:**

Vocabulary should not be taught as isolated items but as contextualized linguistic resources embedded in meaningful activities. Culinary videos provide natural contexts for verbs, adjectives, and nouns, allowing learners to experience how words function dynamically in discourse.

2. **Promoting Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy:**

Integrating local content validates learners' cultural identities and encourages positive attitudes toward language learning. When students see their traditions represented in English, they perceive English not as a foreign imposition but as a bridge language for sharing their culture globally.

3. **Harnessing Multimedia Learning:**

Teachers should strategically employ multimodal materials that combine audio, visual, and textual elements to optimize engagement and retention. This approach caters to diverse learning styles and reflects the realities of 21st-century communication.

4. **Encouraging Learner Autonomy:**

Digital platforms like YouTube empower students to explore beyond classroom boundaries. Teachers can guide learners in developing self-monitoring and reflection strategies, transforming informal online exposure into structured learning.

5. **Cultivating Intercultural Communication Skills:**

By discussing local cultural content in English, students practice articulating identity, comparison, and cultural narrative — essential competencies in global communication.

These implications highlight that effective vocabulary learning requires pedagogical innovation grounded in cultural relevance and technological adaptability. Rather than replacing traditional methods entirely, YouTube-based learning should complement formal instruction, bridging academic learning with experiential engagement.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

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Faculty of Teacher Training and Education
Universitas Islam Negeri Alauddin Makassar
South Sulawesi-Indonesia

While the findings of this study are robust within its qualitative scope, several limitations are acknowledged. First, the participant group was limited to a single institution, which may not fully represent the diversity of Indonesian EFL learners. Second, the study focused primarily on students' perceptions and self-reported experiences rather than objective vocabulary test scores. Future research could adopt a mixed-method design, combining experimental pre-test–post-test measures with qualitative reflection to capture both cognitive and affective dimensions comprehensively.

Further exploration could also investigate how different types of YouTube content—such as travel vlogs, cultural documentaries, or local storytelling—affect other aspects of language learning (e.g., listening comprehension, intercultural communication). Longitudinal studies may reveal how sustained engagement with culturally relevant digital media shapes learners' motivation and identity over time.

Synthesis and Reflective Conclusion

This study contributes to the evolving conversation on contextualized EFL pedagogy by showing that vocabulary acquisition is most powerful when embedded within cultural and sensory experience. The integration of YouTube-based traditional culinary content transforms vocabulary learning from rote memorization into a process of seeing, feeling, and belonging.

Through the lens of Sociocultural and Dual Coding theories, it becomes evident that learning vocabulary is not merely about linguistic form but about how language connects with memory, identity, and community.

Indonesian EFL learners demonstrated that when language instruction honors their cultural background, it cultivates both linguistic confidence and cultural pride. The familiar images of local cuisine, narrated in English, served as mirrors reflecting their identity and as windows opening to global dialogue. In the words of one participant:

“Now I can explain my favorite dish in English. It makes me feel that English is not only a subject, but a part of my story.”

Such reflections embody the pedagogical vision this research advances — a vision where learning English does not distance students from their culture but brings it to the world stage. YouTube, in this context, becomes more than a digital platform: it becomes a pedagogical space of cultural encounter where language, technology, and identity meet harmoniously.

Ultimately, the findings affirm that contextual, multimodal, and culturally rooted instruction can revitalize EFL learning in Indonesia. By aligning global language acquisition with local heritage, teachers and learners together can reimagine vocabulary learning as a holistic journey one that nourishes not only the mind but also the cultural and emotional self.

4) CONCLUSIONS

This study examined how YouTube-based traditional culinary content can enhance English vocabulary acquisition among Indonesian EFL students by connecting linguistic learning with cultural familiarity and multimodal experience. The findings reveal that vocabulary learning becomes more engaging, meaningful, and sustainable when integrated with audiovisual materials that represent learners' own cultural contexts. Through the use of descriptive qualitative methods, the study found that learners experienced higher motivation and stronger contextual understanding as they interacted with English vocabulary embedded in familiar Indonesian culinary practices such as rendang, soto, and nasi goreng. The cultural proximity of the materials encouraged emotional engagement, allowing learners to relate words not only to their meanings but also to sensory and cultural associations. In this way, vocabulary acquisition evolved from mechanical memorization into an experiential and identity-driven process, aligning with both Paivio's (1991) Dual Coding Theory and Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory.

The findings of this study carry significant pedagogical and theoretical implications. Pedagogically, they suggest that language instruction should embrace culturally sustaining and multimodal learning environments where learners see their identities reflected in the content they study. YouTube, as a flexible and accessible platform, offers a powerful medium for contextual learning by combining visual, auditory, and linguistic elements that enhance both comprehension and motivation. When learners encounter English through culturally familiar content, they experience language not as an abstract system to be memorized but as a living medium of expression connected to their everyday experiences. This engagement also fosters learner autonomy, as students can revisit videos, explore related materials, and develop their own strategies for independent vocabulary learning. Theoretically, the study contributes to the evolving understanding of vocabulary acquisition as a socio-cognitive

process that intertwines language, culture, and emotion, emphasizing that authentic digital media can serve as cultural tools that mediate meaning and promote deeper cognitive processing.

Beyond its classroom applications, this research contributes conceptually, empirically, and practically to the field of English language education in Indonesia. Conceptually, it demonstrates that effective language pedagogy emerges from the intersection of global technological innovation and local cultural authenticity. Empirically, it enriches the body of qualitative research on vocabulary acquisition by highlighting the affective and cultural dimensions of digital learning. Practically, it offers educators a replicable framework for integrating local heritage into global language instruction, enabling learners to express their culture in English with confidence and pride. Ultimately, the study underscores that learning English is not merely about mastering words but about participating in a dialogue between language and identity. When EFL instruction honors local culture through platforms like YouTube, it empowers students to see English as a bridge connecting their cultural roots to the wider world a process that cultivates not only linguistic competence but also cultural awareness, creativity, and global citizenship.

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Faculty of Teacher Training and Education
Universitas Islam Negeri Alauddin Makassar
South Sulawesi-Indonesia

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Paper presented at The 2nd ICONETT, 2025
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Universitas Islam Negeri Alauddin Makassar
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