

## English from My Feed: Exploring Health Influencers as Informal ESP Input for Indonesian Learners

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### ABSTRACT

ABSTRACT In the age of social media, English is increasingly encountered outside formal education, particularly through digital platforms like Instagram, TikTok, X (Twitter), and YouTube. This study investigates how Indonesian students enrolled in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses engage with English-language content from health influencers and how such exposure may function as informal ESP input. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, this research explores students' perceptions of learning English through health-related content on their social media feeds. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and reflective journal entries from a purposive sample of ESP learners of vocational school from some majors. The findings reveal that many learners are exposed to medical, fitness, and wellness vocabulary through short videos, captions, and infographics, which they perceive as more relatable and easier to understand than conventional ESP materials. Participants also reported increased motivation and contextual understanding when engaging with real-life content from influencers. This study suggests that social media, when critically integrated, may serve as a valuable supplementary resource for ESP learning, especially in promoting incidental vocabulary acquisition and raising learner autonomy.

**Keywords:** English for Specific Purposes, Social Media, Health Influencers, Vocabulary Development

## 84 Introduction

In recent years, social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, X (Twitter), and YouTube have become pervasive in the daily lives of young adults, including students. These platforms are no longer limited to entertainment or communication purposes but also have a function as a media for informal learning, especially in language learning [1]. Through frequent exposure to user-generated content, learners encounter authentic English in real-world contexts. Among the various domains present in digital media, health and wellness content has gained significant popularity with influencers, including fitness coaches, medical practitioners, and health advocates [2]. They actively sharing advice, routines, and information related to health in English.

This type of content often contains field-specific vocabulary and discourse relevant to English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Learners are exposed to terms such as “caloric intake,” “burnout,” “pace,” “moisturizer,” “work-life balance,” and “mental health awareness,” which can contribute to vocabulary development in meaningful, contextualized ways. The informal and multimodal nature of this input from social media combining visual, auditory, and textual modes offers rich learning opportunities outside of the classroom [1].

However, existing studies on ESP largely focus on formal, classroom-based approaches, and few have investigated the role of informal digital environments such as social media in shaping

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ESP learning, particularly through the lens of influencer content. Secondly, in the Indonesian context, research remains limited regarding how students engage with English-language health content on social media and how they perceive its value in enhancing domain-specific vocabulary acquisition.

This study addresses this gap by exploring how Indonesian vocational school students interact with health-related content from influencers on social media and how this experience may serve as an informal source of ESP learning. By adopting a descriptive qualitative approach, the study aims to provide insight into learners' digital habits, the types of input they receive, and their perceptions of vocabulary learning through social media platforms. The findings are expected to contribute to the growing discourse on digital media as an informal learning resource and offer practical implications for ESP curriculum development. Based on this background, there are some research questions for this study, such as:

1. How do vocational school students engage with English-language health content on social media platforms?
2. What types of vocabulary do students acquire through these informal sources?
3. How do students perceive the relevance of this content for their ESP learning?

## **85 Literature Review**

The integration of social media into language learning has opened new avenues for English for Specific Purposes (ESP), especially among vocational school students who are frequently exposed to online content. As informal learning becomes increasingly recognized, the role of digital platforms, especially related to the health influencers, has gained attention as a potential source of authentic language input. This chapter reviews existing literature on ESP learning, the use of social media as an educational tool, the influence of health-related content, and vocabulary development in informal settings. By examining these themes, this chapter aims to establish a theoretical foundation for exploring how health influencer content on social media contributes to vocabulary acquisition and language engagement among Indonesian vocational students.

### **English for Specific Purposes (ESP)**

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) refers to language instruction designed to meet the specific needs of learners in particular disciplines, professions, or academic contexts [3]. ESP instruction often focuses on developing vocabulary, discourse styles, and communication strategies relevant to specialized fields such as medicine, law, engineering, finance, or business. In recent years, ESP has also expanded to include fewer formal sources of input, particularly as digital tools and platforms evolve [4].

ESP learning is typically structured, yet the growing presence of English in students' digital lives has blurred the lines between formal and informal learning. This shift raises important questions about how incidental or self-directed engagement with specialized English, especially through social media that can support the goals of ESP instruction [5].

### **Informal Digital Learning of English (IDLE)**

The concept of Informal Digital Learning of English (IDLE) refers to unstructured, learner-driven engagement with English through digital platforms [6]. Learners may watch YouTube videos, follow English-language influencers, scrolling Twitter, or read English captions and comments on Instagram and TikTok. These activities, while not part of a formal curriculum, offer repeated and meaningful exposure to real-life English use, including specialized vocabulary.

Recent studies suggest that IDLE contributes positively to vocabulary acquisition and learner motivation [7]. In the context of ESP, digital input from social media may expose learners to domain-specific terminology that enhances their lexical competence, especially if learners engage with content creators or influencers from their field of interest.

### **Social Media as Language Input**

Social media platforms serve as a major source of English input among today's learners [1]. Unlike textbooks, social media content is dynamic, visual, and often accompanied by audio or captions. This multimodal format helps reinforce vocabulary acquisition through context and repetition. For ESP learners, this presents a valuable opportunity: they are not only exposed to general English but also to specialized terminology used authentically in professional fields. Moreover, social media allows learners to choose content that aligns with their personal interests and future professional fields.

Studies such as Gómez-Ortiz et al. (2023) show that Instagram can enhance ESP vocabulary retention among Sports Science students. Similarly, research by Safitri and Tari (2025) revealed that Indonesian learners who actively follow English-speaking influencers report increased familiarity with English expressions and vocabulary. This suggests that the role of informal, self-directed learning through social media deserves more attention within ESP learning.

### **Health Influencers as Informal ESP Sources**

Health influencers, such as doctors, nutritionists, and mental health advocates, have become powerful voices on social media. Not only shaping health behavior but also introducing audiences to English vocabulary in meaningful, real-world contexts. Their content often blends English with field-specific terminology, using phrases like “balanced diet,” “cognitive fatigue,” or “intermittent fasting” in natural, engaging ways [8], [9]. For language learners, this creates a rich source of authentic input that mirrors how English is used in global health communication [10]. In Indonesia, popular figures like Dr. Tirta, Dr. Richard Lee, and Cinta Laura actively share content that mixes Bahasa Indonesia with English, make the medical and wellness terms more accessible while subtly supporting vocabulary development for ESP learners. Interestingly, although millions of students consume this type of content daily, its educational potential, especially in developing technical vocabulary that it remains largely untapped [11]. It's essential to seek the uncover whether these digital interactions can be reimagined as informal, yet effective, input for vocational students in ESP classrooms.

### **Vocabulary Development in ESP**

Vocabulary development is central to ESP learning, as mastery of technical and semi-technical vocabulary enables learners to comprehend and produce discipline-specific texts [12]. Social media input that contains authentic usage of such vocabulary can act as a meaningful supplement to classroom materials. Students may not only learn new terms but also understand how they are used in real-world communication.

When learners encounter vocabulary in informal contexts, especially through repeated and visually supported input (e.g., video, infographics, captions), they are more likely to retain and use the terms productively [7]. This makes social media a potentially powerful platform for incidental vocabulary growth, especially in the health domain.

## 86 Research Methods

### Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive qualitative research design to explore how vocational school students in Indonesia engage with English-language content shared by health influencers on social media and how this informal exposure contributes to their vocabulary development in an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) context. The qualitative approach was suitable for capturing students' authentic experiences and perceptions in a real-world, digital learning environment [13].

### Participants

The participants in this study were students from a Vocational High School (SMK) in Indonesia. These students were enrolled in an ESP program tailored to their respective vocational majors. A total of 6 to 11 participants were selected using purposive sampling. The criteria included students who actively use social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, X (Twitter), or YouTube and regularly follow content from health-related influencers. Their regular exposure to English content outside the classroom positioned them as relevant sources of insight into the role of informal learning in ESP vocabulary acquisition.

### Data Collection Instruments

The primary instruments used to collect data were semi-structured interviews and an online questionnaire. The interviews provided rich, detailed narratives about the students' habits, motivations, and experiences in learning English from social media content [14]. Meanwhile, the questionnaire helped to capture broader patterns regarding how often they consumed health-related English content and how they responded to it in terms of language learning, especially vocabulary recognition and retention.

### Interview and Questionnaire Procedure

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a set of 10 open-ended questions that encouraged students to describe their interaction with health-related content, their favorite influencers, and the new vocabulary they encountered. The online questionnaire included both close-ended and open-ended items to collect background information and to quantify certain aspects such as the frequency of content engagement and perceived vocabulary improvement.

### Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Interview transcripts and questionnaire responses were coded to identify common patterns and themes. These included types of vocabulary acquired, contexts of learning (e.g., through captions, reels, or comments), and students' attitudes toward learning English through social media. The analysis emphasized how informal learning environments support ESP goals, particularly in enhancing vocabulary that is relevant to health and lifestyle topics.

## 87 Result and Discussion

### Overview of Participant Engagement

The participants in this study were students from a vocational school in Indonesia who reported regular use of social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. All par-

ticipants followed at least one health-related content creator, including Indonesian influencers like dr. Tirta, dr. Boyke, and content creators in fitness and nutrition domains. They interacted with this content in both Bahasa Indonesia and English.

When asked about their habits, most participants shared that they watched short videos or read captions and infographics about diet tips, healthy habits, and mental well-being. Several students mentioned that they had first encountered specific English health terms, such as “workout”, “pace”, “calorie deficit”, “hydration”, “mental health”, or “immune system”—from these influencers before hearing them in their English classes. Several participants noted that they learned new terminology without formal instruction, often because they were curious to understand what their favorite influencers were saying or posting.

### **Vocabulary Gained from Social Media Content**

Participants identified a range of technical vocabulary they encountered through social media. These words were often health-related and used in practical contexts, which made them easier to remember. Some of the common vocabulary items mentioned include:

- Symptoms, diagnosis, anxiety, hydration, metabolism, workout, nutrition, and immune system.
- Phrases like “boost your energy”, “reduce sugar intake”, “work-life balance” and “stay hydrated” were also commonly recalled.

Students reported that they could understand and sometimes reuse these terms in class discussions, especially in ESP classes that involved topics related to health, body systems, or personal well-being. One participant stated: “I didn’t know what ‘workout’ really means until I saw a video by a doctor explaining it. Now I hear it a lot in English class too.”

### **Perception of Relevance for ESP Learning**

Many students viewed the influencer content as useful and relatable, especially because it often connects to real-life issues they face, such as stress, food choices, and physical activity. Compared to textbooks, this content was seen as “less boring” and “more updated.”

The informality of social media made the content feel more accessible. As one student said: “When I see health tips in English from someone I follow, it feels like they are talking to me. I don’t even realize I’m learning.”

Another student shared: “Sometimes I replay the videos not because I want to learn, but because the topic is interesting. But after a while, I start understanding the words without translating.”

Others noted the appeal of learning from familiar personalities: “I like watching Dr. Tirta, he mix English, Javanese, and Indonesian, so it helps me understand new words without getting confused.”

This natural exposure to vocabulary supports the idea that social media can act as informal input in ESP, especially for developing vocabulary that is relevant to students’ fields and lifestyles. It also shows that digital environments can motivate learners to pay attention to language in context, even when not in the classroom.

Firstly, the findings suggest that content from health influencers from social media can play a significant role in ESP vocabulary development. The vocabulary acquired is often contextual, frequently repeated, and connected to personal interest, making it more memorable. This aligns with existing literature that emphasizes the importance of authentic materials and incidental vocabulary learning (Gómez-Ortiz et al., 2023; Safitri & Tari, 2025). It also highlights the role of multimodal input, where students see, hear, and read English in ways that match their preferences. When students perceive the content as personally meaningful, they are more likely

to notice and retain new vocabulary and expressions, ultimately supporting their ESP development.

Secondly, the study shows that students are not just passive consumers; they are active in selecting, sharing, and even mimicking the language used by influencers. This aligns with findings by Safitri and Tari (2025)[10], who observed that learners often emulate expressions from social media influencers in their everyday conversations, reinforcing vocabulary use through authentic repetition. Similarly, Gómez-Ortiz et al. (2023)[11] highlight that when learners engage with content that matches their personal interests, they are more likely to interact with and internalize field-specific terminology.

This creates opportunities for teachers to bring informal input into the classroom through curated social media content, discussions, or vocabulary-focused tasks based on popular influencer posts. As noted by [15] input that is meaningful and repeated in context can greatly enhance vocabulary acquisition in second language learning. These findings suggest that while social media cannot replace structured ESP instruction, it can complement it by providing rich, relatable, and repeated input. Teachers might consider integrating selected influencer content into classroom activities to bridge informal exposure with formal academic learning [16].

## 88 Conclusion

This study explored how Indonesian vocational school students engage with health-related content from social media influencers as a form of informal input in learning English for Specific Purposes (ESP). The findings suggest that students are frequently exposed to English vocabulary and expressions through platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok, particularly when following health influencers who discuss wellness, fitness, healthy food, and mental health awareness.

Such exposure not only builds students' technical vocabulary in a real-world context but also increases their interest and motivation in learning English. The content is often presented in short, engaging formats, which aligns well with students' preferences for visual and bite-sized information. The study reveals that informal digital input can support ESP vocabulary development, especially when the topics are relevant to students' personal interests and vocational fields (e.g., health, nutrition, or body mechanics).

Based on the findings, it is recommended that ESP teachers incorporate relevant social media content, such as health influencers' posts or videos into the classroom to make lessons more engaging and authentic. Students should be encouraged to actively use their digital exposure to English by noting new vocabulary and applying it in context. Curriculum developers are also advised to align learning materials with students' digital habits, especially by integrating real-world content from platforms they already use. Finally, future researchers may explore how different influencer types or platforms contribute to ESP learning across various vocational disciplines.

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