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DISCUSSIONS IN THE BLACKPINK (BLINK) FAN COMMUNITY AS A MEDIUM FOR ENGLISH VOCABULARY LEARNING AMONG EFL LEARNERS

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Abstract
This study is motivated by the increasing use of online communities or fandoms as interactive spaces for young people, particularly in learning English as a foreign language (EFL). The BLINK fandom is one such community that actively uses English in discussions on social media, thus offering the potential to become an informal vocabulary learning medium. This study aims to explore the role of discussions within the BLINK fandom on English vocabulary learning for EFL learners. This study uses a qualitative case study approach involving four Indonesian university students who are learning English as a foreign language and who actively participate in discussions within the BLINK fandom community. Data were obtained through unstructured interviews, non-participant observation, and documentation of BLINK fandom members who actively interact in English. The results show that discussions within the fandom help learners acquire new vocabulary incidentally through reading, writing, and communicating on social media such as WhatsApp, Twitter, Discord, and Weverse. Furthermore, interactions between members support collaborative learning. However, challenges exist such as the use of slang, abbreviations, fandom terms, mixed language, and rapid-fire conversations. Nevertheless, the BLINK fandom can be a communicative and contextual English learning medium for EFL learners.

Keywords: BLACKPINK, Communication, Discussion, English, Vocabulary.

Introduction

In today's digital era, online fan communities or "fandoms" have become highly active spaces for interaction, especially among the younger generation. A prime example is the BLINK fandom the community of fans of the music group BLACKPINK whose members interact intensely across various platforms, including social media, online forums, and group chats (Anggorosuryo, Berto, and Sri eko 2024). In this community, discussion is the most prominent form of interaction, with members regularly exchanging opinions, expressing emotions, and discussing various topics related to music, pop culture, and the lives of their favorite idols (Henry, Sam, and Joshua. 2013). Interestingly, most of these interactions take place in English, indirectly creating an immersive language environment for learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL).

Through these discussion activities, EFL learners are not only exposed to new vocabulary but are also encouraged to use it actively in authentic communication contexts (Vygotsky 1978a). The vocabulary learned is not limited to general words but also includes specific terms related to pop culture, emotional expressions, and social interactions. Engagement driven by personal interests and emotional investment makes the learning process more meaningful, thereby helping to improve vocabulary retention and comprehension. Thus, discussions within fandoms can serve as a natural and contextual means of language learning.

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This phenomenon aligns with perspectives on second language acquisition that emphasize the importance of meaningful language exposure and use in authentic contexts. Vocabulary acquisition is no longer considered effective when it relies solely on rote memorization but rather through incidental learning that occurs as learners actively engage with the language. Furthermore, sociocultural theory emphasizes that social interaction plays a crucial role in the development of linguistic competence, as learners construct their understanding of language through the negotiation of meaning and participation in social practices.

Nevertheless, despite the considerable potential of informal digital spaces, such as fandoms, to support vocabulary acquisition, their use in language learning contexts remains underexplored in academic research. In this regard, the researcher will review previous studies, such as the study by Nguyen and Yang (2022) which showed that Informal English language learning through online fandom forums can help EFL learners acquire new vocabulary more naturally through interest-based interactions that provide authentic and meaningful contexts. This finding is consistent with Dewi (2021) study of the ARMY community, which examined how social media interactions, such as uploading content, posting comments, and engaging in informal conversations, positively contributed to learners' English vocabulary development. Both studies share similarities with the present study in their focus on vocabulary development, the use of digital platforms as spaces for informal learning, and participation in fandom communities that encourage natural language use. Furthermore, Rusdiansyah and Fajarina (2022) examined the communication behavior of the Blinkeu community, focusing on verbal and nonverbal communication through a phenomenological approach based on the concepts of "Because of Motive" and "In Order to Motive." Nur Sholekah et al. (2023), on the other hand, investigated conflicts within the BLACKPINK community. However, the present study differs from these previous studies by specifically focusing on discussion activities within the BLINK fandom as a primary medium for vocabulary development, rather than examining social media use in general.

Based on this background, it can be understood that discussion activities within the BLINK fandom serve not only as a means of entertainment and social interaction but also have the potential to provide an authentic English language learning environment for EFL learners. The frequent use of English in fandom communication enables members to acquire new vocabulary contextually through interactions driven by personal interests and emotional engagement. However, to date, few studies have specifically examined how discussion activities within the BLINK fandom contribute to the English vocabulary development of EFL learners. Therefore, this study seeks to answer the following questions: what forms of discussion activities occur within the BLINK fandom, how does English vocabulary acquisition take place through these interactions, and what role does the BLINK fandom play in promoting English vocabulary acquisition among EFL learners

Literature Review

Vocabulary is one of the key components of language learning, as it plays an important role in helping individuals understand and convey messages. Nation (2001) explains that vocabulary knowledge encompasses several aspects, including word form, meaning, and use.[5] Therefore, knowing a word involves more than simply being able to provide its translation; it also requires understanding its form, associating it with its meaning, and knowing how to use it in a particular context. In this study, Nation's theory is used to explain how members of the BLINK community recognize, understand, and use English vocabulary encountered in discussions about BLACKPINK.

Nation (2001) also distinguishes between receptive and productive vocabulary knowledge. Receptive knowledge refers to the ability to recognize and understand words when reading or listening, whereas productive knowledge involves the ability to recall and use words when writing or speaking. For example, when BLINK members read a comment containing the word *incredible* and understand its meaning, this activity demonstrates receptive vocabulary knowledge. When members subsequently use the word *incredible* in a comment to describe

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BLACKPINK's performance, this demonstrates productive vocabulary use. This distinction is important in the present study because the presence of English words in comments does not necessarily indicate that members understand them or are able to use them appropriately.

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning takes place when English is studied in an environment where it is not the primary language used for everyday communication. In this context, learners can gain language exposure through both formal classroom activities and informal activities outside the classroom. Nation (2001) discusses out-of-class vocabulary learning as one aspect of vocabulary knowledge development. Within the BLINK community, learning may occur when members read English-language discussions to obtain information about BLACKPINK and encounter new vocabulary that they understand through context or with the help of other resources. Thus, fandom discussions can serve as a source of language exposure that complements formal learning.

Meanwhile, Vygotsky (1978), through sociocultural theory, explains that the development of an individual's cognitive abilities is closely related to social interaction and the cultural environment. In *Mind in Society*, Vygotsky (1978) describes how higher mental functions develop through social activities before becoming part of an individual's abilities. This theory is relevant to vocabulary learning because interactions with others can help learners receive explanations, understand word meanings, and learn how words are used in communication. Within the BLINK community, members who do not understand certain words may receive assistance from other members who are more familiar with their meanings or contexts of use.

One of the key concepts in Vygotsky's theory is the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which refers to the gap between what an individual can accomplish independently and what they can achieve with the assistance of a more knowledgeable person. In discussions within the BLINK community, this concept can be used to explain situations in which a member understands new vocabulary through explanations or examples provided by other members. For example, a member who does not understand the term *stage presence* may gain an understanding of its meaning through discussions about stage performances. Such interactions have the potential to help members develop vocabulary knowledge that they did not previously possess. Therefore, Vygotsky's theory can be used to analyze the role of social interaction in vocabulary learning within fan communities.

Research Method

This study employs a qualitative approach using a case study design, as this approach enables the researcher to conduct an in-depth analysis of naturally occurring sociolinguistic processes and dynamics (Naruwu 2023), particularly in digital interactions within fandom communities. The primary data sources consist of four learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) who actively participate in online discussions within the BLINK fandom community. The participants were selected based on the following criteria: (1) they are Indonesian university students learning English as a Foreign Language; (2) they actively participate in discussions within the BLINK fandom community; and (3) they use or are exposed to English in their fandom activities, although not exclusively. Meanwhile, the secondary data sources comprise supporting documents related to the primary data, such as documents, screenshots of group discussions, and other relevant materials that support the primary sources (Hamdani and Sa'diyah 2025).

Data collection in this study was conducted through unstructured interviews (Lexy 2022). Unstructured interviews were employed to allow the researcher to explore information freely and in depth based on the participants' responses. In addition, the researcher employed non-participant observation to directly observe interactions without becoming involved in them (Sugiyono 2016), thereby allowing the data to be collected in a more natural setting. Furthermore, documentation was used to complement the data through notes, archives, and other relevant documents related to the three data collection techniques, ensuring that the collected data were more comprehensive and clearly documented.

The data analysis process consisted of four stages. First, the researcher collected data

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using a Google Form distributed to members of the BLINK fandom through a WhatsApp group. The participants were then asked to answer the questions provided in the form (Lexy 2022). Second, the researcher screened and selected the data based on the needs and objectives of the study. Third, the researcher presented the data in accordance with the writing guidelines specified in the journal template. Fourth, the researcher drew the final conclusions based on the findings.

To ensure data validity, the researcher employed source and method triangulation. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information provided by different participants regarding interactions within the fandom community. Meanwhile, method triangulation was carried out by comparing data obtained from different methods, namely the participants' statements, the researcher's observations, and the available documents.

Results and Discussion

A Portrait of BLINK Fandom Discussions in Supporting Vocabulary Learning Among EFL Learners

The BLINK fandom is a social media community where fans discuss various aspects of BLACKPINK, including their songs, concerts, and activities. Through these discussions, fans share information and use English in their everyday conversations. This exposure provides EFL learners with opportunities to acquire new vocabulary indirectly. By participating in these discussions, they can understand word meanings from context, imitate language use, and expand their vocabulary. According to Yul Yanti, K-pop fans commonly exchange information and knowledge about their favorite artists. They also help new fans gain a better understanding of the K-pop world by providing advice and recommendations. These interactions help foster a sense of community and mutual support among fans (Yanti, Ginting, and Farid 2024). Therefore, to explore how fans experience these interactions, the researcher conducted interviews with several members of the BLINK fandom. The interviews aimed to investigate how they utilize fandom discussions as a medium for expanding their vocabulary and improving their understanding of English.

Yunita Shoviatul M. (21) stated that she frequently uses a mixture of English and Indonesian (code-mixing) when participating in fandom discussions. She also tries to write entirely in English when discussing comebacks or music video (MV) theories as a form of practice, although she still uses simple sentences and occasionally makes spelling errors. Meanwhile, Fany (35) explained that she does not use English very often in everyday discussions, but she still acquires additional vocabulary, particularly from BLACKPINK's song lyrics, which contain a considerable amount of slang. She also practices her speaking skills by performing the rap parts of their songs. On the other hand, Melisa (22) explained that she uses English when interacting with international fans through platforms such as WhatsApp. She further added that since BLACKPINK members frequently use English in their content, fandom discussions often involve a mixture of languages. As a result, she has become accustomed to using English to ask questions about comeback theories, express opinions about stage performances, and reply to posts from international fans.

According to Nation's theory of vocabulary acquisition, vocabulary knowledge can develop through repeated exposure to language in real-life communicative contexts (Nation 2001). In the BLINK fandom, members learn not merely through memorization but also through direct engagement in conversations, reading comments, understanding posts, and writing responses to fellow fans. This process helps learners understand word meanings based on their contexts of use, making vocabulary easier to remember and apply. Furthermore, Vygotsky's theory of social constructivism is also relevant to explaining this phenomenon. Vygotsky emphasized that learning occurs through social interaction with more knowledgeable individuals (Vygotsky 1978). In the context of the BLINK fandom, fans with stronger English proficiency often help other members understand specific terms, translate information, or explain the meanings of English-language posts. Such interactions create a collaborative learning process that supports the development of language skills among fandom members.

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The use of social media platforms such as WhatsApp contributes significantly to vocabulary learning among EFL learners. These platforms enable fans to interact directly with international communities, encouraging them to use English as a primary means of communication. This condition aligns with the theory of Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC), which explains that technology-mediated communication can enhance language skills by engaging users in continuous and authentic communicative practices (Thorne and Black 2007). Through online interactions, learners not only acquire new vocabulary but also develop an understanding of how language is used in social and cultural contexts. Furthermore, the participants' experiences indicate that language learning within the fandom occurs unconsciously through incidental learning. Hulstijn explains that incidental vocabulary learning occurs when individuals acquire new vocabulary without the primary intention of learning a language, but rather as a by-product of other activities, such as reading, watching, or communicating (Hulstijn 2000). Within the BLINK fandom, members initially engage in activities to keep up with information about BLACKPINK, but they also indirectly acquire English vocabulary and language structures through these interactions.

Thus, the BLINK fandom can be viewed as a digital community that plays an important role in supporting vocabulary learning among EFL learners. Active, relaxed, and communicative interactions make the learning process more engaging and enjoyable. In addition to improving vocabulary acquisition, discussions within the fan community also help learners build confidence in using English, particularly in informal communication on social media.

Challenges Faced by EFL Learners in Learning Vocabulary Through Fandom Discussions

Although digital fan communities can serve as alternative spaces that support English language learning, vocabulary acquisition in online communities also presents various challenges for EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners. Fast-paced interactions, the use of informal language, abbreviations, fandom-specific terminology, and the blending of languages from different cultures often make it difficult for learners to fully understand the meanings of utterances. In the BLINK fandom community, for example, members encounter not only general English vocabulary but also fandom-specific terms, internet slang, and expressions associated with Korean popular culture, all of which are used simultaneously in everyday communication. This situation indicates that language learning through fan communities is not always straightforward but requires considerable linguistic and social adaptability.

Furthermore, communication on social media is spontaneous and unstructured, which often makes it difficult for learners to understand the contexts in which particular words are used. Nation explains that vocabulary knowledge involves not only knowing the meanings of words but also understanding their forms, functions, collocations, and contexts of use (Nation 2001). Therefore, although fandom communities provide extensive exposure to language, EFL learners may still experience confusion when encountering unfamiliar vocabulary used in informal and highly dynamic contexts.

Based on the interviews, several participants revealed that they often struggled to understand fandom-specific terms encountered on social media. Melisa (22) stated, "Sometimes I get confused when I encounter abbreviations or slang on WhatsApp that I have never seen before. For example, words such as 'biased,' 'comeback,' or 'ship.' At first, I thought they had the same meanings as those found in ordinary dictionaries, but their meanings turned out to be different within the fan community." This statement illustrates the challenges EFL learners face in understanding the contextual meanings of vocabulary. Within fandom communities, many words undergo semantic extensions shaped by digital community culture. For example, the word *comeback* generally means "a return," but in K-pop culture, it refers to an idol's release of a new song or album. This phenomenon can be explained through Nation's theory of contextual vocabulary learning, which emphasizes that word meanings are strongly influenced by the social contexts in which they are used (Nation 2001). Therefore, learners must not only understand the literal meanings of words but also develop an understanding of the fandom communication culture in which those words are used.

Meanwhile, Fany (35) stated, "Discussions on Discord or WhatsApp move very

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quickly. Sometimes, before I even finish translating a single sentence, there are already so many new replies. As a result, I often fall behind in the conversation." These findings indicate that digital communication can create linguistic pressure for EFL learners. According to Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) theory, online interactions provide opportunities for authentic communication practice; however, they can also increase cognitive demands because users must quickly process and understand language in real-time communication environments (Herring 1996). EFL learners often have to translate unfamiliar vocabulary while simultaneously keeping up with the flow of conversations within the community. This situation may cause some learners to feel less confident about actively participating in fandom discussions.

These challenges encourage learners to develop independent learning strategies. Most participants acknowledged that they were accustomed to looking up word meanings independently using Google Translate, online dictionaries, or by asking fellow fandom members Two accounts illustrate these strategies. Fany (35) described translating the messages in fast-moving discussions sentence by sentence before she could respond, which shows that she actively works out the meaning of unfamiliar language herself. Melisa (22), who initially assumed that 'biased,' 'comeback,' and 'ship' carried their dictionary meanings, later found that these words mean something different within the fan community, which suggests that she learned them through interaction with other fandom members. Learners thus combine independent translation with help from fellow members to understand unfamiliar vocabulary. Melisa's experience of learning community-specific meanings through the fandom, in particular, indicates the presence of collaborative learning, as explained by Vygotsky, who argued that language development occurs through social support from more knowledgeable individuals. Within the BLINK fandom, members with stronger language proficiency act as more knowledgeable others, helping learners understand new vocabulary and its contexts of use.

In addition to difficulties in understanding fandom-specific terminology, Yunita Shoviatul M. (21) reported challenges in understanding the variations of English used by fans from different countries. Written representations of accents, international abbreviations, and mixtures of Korean and English often caused confusion. This demonstrates that interactions within the fandom are transnational in nature, meaning that learners encounter not only standard English but also English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), which refers to the use of English as a means of communication among speakers from different cultural backgrounds (Jenkins 2014). In this context, English is used flexibly and does not always strictly follow formal grammatical rules. Such conditions may pose difficulties for EFL learners who are more accustomed to academic language patterns or formal English taught in schools.

Another challenge that emerged was the fear of making mistakes when interacting in digital fandom spaces. Several participants admitted that they feltSome participants admitted that they felt less confident about joining discussions because they were afraid of using incorrect grammar or failing to understand the terms being discussed. This feeling is related to the concept of language anxiety in second language learning, which refers to the anxiety individuals experience when using a foreign language in particular social situations (Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope 1986). On social media, this pressure can become more intense because conversations take place in public spaces and can be viewed by many other community members. As a result, some learners choose to become silent readers rather than actively participate in fandom discussions.

Nevertheless, these challenges also encourage the development of various linguistic adaptation strategies. Fandom members gradually develop their ability to infer meaning from conversational contexts, images, emojis, videos, and repeated interactions with other members. They learn to understand word meanings not only through literal translations but also through the situations in which words are used and the social responses that emerge during digital conversations. This process is consistent with Vygotsky's social learning theory, which emphasizes that language development occurs through meaningful social interaction (Vygotsky 1978). Within the BLINK community, learning takes place indirectly through observation, imitation, and participation in everyday fandom activities.

Furthermore, digital technology plays an important role in helping learners overcome vocabulary-related barriers. Participants reported frequently using automated features and digital resources, such as video subtitles, automatic translation tools, online dictionaries, and

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searches for fandom-specific terminology on social media. This habit demonstrates the integration of digital literacy and language learning. Learners no longer rely solely on teachers or formal learning materials but also actively use technology as a tool to understand language in authentic contexts. Thus, digital fandom can be understood as an informal learning environment that enables language learning to take place independently, collaboratively, and through real-life experiences.

Nevertheless, language learning within fandom communities has certain limitations. The language encountered in digital communities tends to be dominated by informal expressions, internet slang, and popular phrases that may not be appropriate for academic or professional contexts. Consequently, learners may become more familiar with fandom-related vocabulary than with formal language structures. This condition indicates that extensive language exposure does not necessarily guarantee balanced language proficiency (Nation 2001). Therefore, language learning through fandom should be regarded as a supplement to, rather than a replacement for, formal language instruction.

Conclusion

Based on the discussion presented above, the researcher draws the following conclusions. First, the BLINK fandom supports EFL learners in learning English vocabulary. Through social media platforms such as WhatsApp, fans frequently read, write, and use English when discussing BLACKPINK. Through these activities, they indirectly acquire new vocabulary. Furthermore, fandom members help one another understand the meanings of particular words and expressions, making the learning process easier. Second, the challenges experienced by BLINK fans include the use of slang, abbreviations, fandom-specific terminology, and the fast-paced nature of social media conversations, which often make it difficult for learners to understand word meanings. Some fans are also afraid of making mistakes when using English. Nevertheless, they continue to make efforts to learn by looking up unfamiliar words in dictionaries, using Google Translate, or asking fellow fans for assistance. Therefore, the BLINK fandom serves not only as a source of entertainment but also as an informal learning resource for EFL learners, providing opportunities to develop English vocabulary through everyday digital interactions.

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting its findings. First, the study involved only four EFL learners, all of whom were Indonesian university students and active members of the BLINK fandom. The findings therefore cannot be generalized to other fandoms or learner populations, although they may be transferable to similar contexts. Second, the findings rely mainly on the participants' self-reported experiences, which reflect their own perceptions and may not fully represent their actual language use. Third, the study provides limited evidence of measurable vocabulary development, as it did not test or track the specific words that learners acquired over time. Future studies could address these limitations by involving a larger and more diverse group of participants, conducting longitudinal observation of fandom interactions, systematically documenting learners' vocabulary use in discussions, and administering vocabulary assessments, such as pre- and post-tests, to examine learning outcomes more directly.

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of the overall research manuscript, including data processing, discussion development, and the identification of the study's main findings.

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