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Perceptions of Ninth-Grade Students toward Webtoon in Vocabulary Learning at SMPN 17 Bekasi

Ardadali Aulia Putri
English Education Program, FKIP, Universitas Islam As-Syafi'iyah, Jakarta, Indonesia
Ardadaliaulia22@gmail.com

Agus Gunawan
English Education Program, FKIP, Universitas Islam As-Syafi'iyah, Jakarta, Indonesia
gungunawan563@gmail.com

Muhammad Rizky Fadhil
English Education Program, FKIP, Universitas Islam As-Syafi'iyah, Jakarta, Indonesia
Rizky.fkip@uia.ac.id

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Abstract: This study explored students' perceptions of using Webtoon for learning English vocabulary and investigated how Webtoon supports vocabulary learning. A qualitative descriptive case study design was employed and eight ninth-grade students of SMPN 17 Bekasi who selected through purposive sampling were involved. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, observations, and documentation, and analyzed using Miles and Huberman's (1984) model of qualitative data analysis. The findings revealed five main perceptions: (1) Webtoon is an enjoyable learning medium; (2) its visuals and storylines increase students' interest; (3) visual context helps students understand unfamiliar vocabulary; (4) Webtoon is easier to use than traditional textbooks; and (5) visual elements support vocabulary retention. The study also identified four vocabulary learning strategies used by students: (1) guessing word meanings from context; (2) using online dictionaries and translation tools; (3) saving new vocabulary through notes and screenshots; and (4) practicing newly learned words in daily activities. Overall, the findings indicate that Webtoon can serve as an effective alternative medium for vocabulary learning by promoting vocabulary acquisition, retention, and independent learning.

Keywords: *digital comic; learning vocabulary; students' perceptions; Webtoon platform*

INTRODUCTION

In the digital era, technological development has significantly influenced various aspects of human life, including education and reading habits. The rapid growth of internet access and smartphone usage has changed the way students obtain information and learning materials. Nowadays, students tend to access digital media more frequently than printed media because digital platforms are considered more practical, interactive, and engaging. According to Hidayah et al. (2024), technological advancements have led to the replacement of printed media with electronic media, enabling people to access and explore various information and resources on the

internet more easily through smartphones. As a result, various digital platforms have become increasingly popular among students and teenagers. One of the digital media platforms is Webtoon, a digital comic platform that offers a variety of comic genres that can be accessed through smartphones anytime and anywhere.

According to Nam and Jung (2021), Webtoon is a form of popular digital content produced and published online through internet or mobile-based platforms, making it easily accessible to users anytime and anywhere. Unlike conventional printed comics, Webtoon offers colorful visuals and an interactive reading experience that attracts young readers. In the educational context, Webtoon has the potential to become an innovative learning medium because it presents language in a contextual and enjoyable way. Through dialogues and illustrated narratives, students can understand the meaning of words more easily and learn language naturally while following the storyline. According to Prihatiningtyas and Seinsiani (2025), digital comics can support vocabulary comprehension through visual aids and engaging narratives. In addition, Efendi (2021) found that English learners enjoy learning vocabulary through digital comics because illustrations help them understand the storyline without constantly opening a dictionary.

Vocabulary is one of the most important components in language learning. Adequate vocabulary mastery enables students to understand texts, express ideas, and communicate effectively. Hidayah et al. (2024) state that vocabulary is the core of language skills, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Without sufficient vocabulary mastery, students will experience difficulties in understanding Englissh learning materials. Wen and Naim (2023) also emphasize that vocabulary is an essential element in second language acquisition that greatly determines students' proficiency levels.

However, vocabulary mastery remains one of the main challenges in English learning, especially at the junior high school level. Based on preliminary observations at SMPN 17 Bekasi, ninth-grade students showed limited English vocabulary, which affected their understanding of the material and their confidence in using English. Many students considered vocabulary learning difficult and boring. This finding is in line with Korompot et al. (2022), who state that vocabulary is one of the most difficult aspects of English learning because of the large and varied number of words.

In addition to linguistic difficulties, students' low interest and motivation are also influenced by the use of learning media that are less engaging and still conventional. Therefore, innovative learning media that suit students' characteristics in the digital era are needed. Fatimah and Seriwati (2024) argue that the use of attractive learning media can increase students' interest and engagement in learning English vocabulary.

One possible solution is the use of digital comic applications, one of which is Webtoon. Several previous studies have reported the positive impact of using digital comics or Webtoon in English learning. For instance, Afandi et al. (2025) found that EFL learners had positive perceptions toward the use of Webtoon as a vocabulary learning medium. Similarly, Hidayah et al. (2024) reported that students showed positive perceptions toward the use of digital comics in learning vocabulary, suggesting that digital comics can be an effective and enjoyable learning medium. Erya and Pustika (2021) also reported that digital comics can increase students' interest and motivation in reading activities, while Efendi (2021) emphasized that digital comics such as Webtoon can increase student engagement and facilitate English vocabulary learning. These findings collectively suggest that Webtoon and digital comics are beneficial in improving students' learning experiences, particularly in terms of motivation, engagement, and vocabulary development. Nevertheless, most of these studies have focused more on the effectiveness of learning media or students' learning outcomes, while studies specifically examining students' perceptions of the use of Webtoon, particularly at the junior high school level, are still limited. In fact, students' perceptions are very important because positive perceptions can influence students' motivation, engagement, and learning experiences.

Therefore, this study focuses on ninth-grade students' perceptions at SMPN 17 Bekasi regarding the use of Webtoon in vocabulary learning. The research questions of this study are: how do ninth-grade students perceive the use of Webtoon in vocabulary learning, and how is Webtoon used to learn vocabulary? Therefore, the objective of this study is to explore ninth-grade students' perceptions of the use of Webtoon in vocabulary learning and to explain how Webtoon is used to learn English vocabulary. The findings of this study are expected to provide insights into students' perspectives and contribute to the development of more engaging and student-centered vocabulary learning strategies.

METHOD

In this study, the researcher employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive case study design to obtain rich and in-depth data regarding students' experiences and perceptions in using Webtoon for independent English vocabulary learning. A qualitative approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore participants' experiences, perspectives, and meanings constructed from their own points of view (Creswell, 2018). A case study design was selected because this research focuses on a specific phenomenon in a real-life context, namely the use of Webtoon by ninth-grade students at SMPN 17 Bekasi. According to Coombs (2022), a case study enables researchers to examine a phenomenon deeply within its real context, resulting in rich and comprehensive descriptions. Through this approach, the researcher was able to explore in depth how students perceive and utilize Webtoon as a medium for independent vocabulary learning.

The participants in this study were ninth-grade students at SMPN 17 Bekassi. The researcher used purposive sampling in selecting the participants. According to Etikan et al. (2016), purposive sampling is a sampling technique in which participants are selected based on specific characteristics relevant to the research objectives. In this study, participants were selected based on several criteria. First, they had to be active ninth-grade students at SMPN 17 Bekasi. Second, they had experience reading English-language Webtoons rather than Indonesian-language Webtoons. Third, they used Webtoon outside the classroom. Finally, they were willing to participate voluntarily in this study. The researcher selected eight participants who met these criteria because the study focused more on obtaining in-depth information and understanding of the participants' experiences rather than on the number of participants. Therefore, the researcher prioritized the richness and relevance of the data obtained from the participants.

In collecting the data, the researcher used semi-structured interviews as the main research instrument. Semi-structured interviews were considered appropriate because they allow researchers to explore participants' thoughts, experiences, feelings, and opinions more deeply. In addition to interviews, the researcher also used observation and documentation to support the data collection process. Observations were conducted to examine students' activities during the reading process, such as students' engagement in reading, the use of translation tools, and students' responses to unfamiliar vocabulary. Meanwhile, the documentation included screenshots of the Webtoons read by the participants, vocabulary notes, interview recordings, and other supporting documents related to the research process. The use of multiple data collection techniques aimed to strengthen the credibility and validity of the data through triangulation. The researcher used the theory proposed by Miles and Huberman (1984) in analyzing the data. According to Miles and Huberman, qualitative data analysis consists of three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification.

The analysis began with data reduction, in which the researcher selected, simplified, and organized the collected data. Interview recordings were first transcribed into written form, after which the researcher identified and reduced data relevant to the research questions, while data unrelated to the focus of the study were excluded. The next stage was data display. According to Miles and Huberman (1984), data display refers to systematically organized information that enables researchers to draw conclusions. In this study, the researcher presented the data in the form of narrative descriptions to explain students' perceptions, experiences, and strategies in using

Webtoon for vocabulary learning. The final stage was conclusion drawing and verification. After conducting data reduction and data display, the researcher drew conclusions based on the findings obtained from the participants. These conclusions were continuously verified throughout the research process to ensure that the findings were supported by valid and consistent evidence. Through this process, the researcher was able to answer the research questions regarding students' perceptions of the use of Webtoon and how they utilized Webtoon to support independent English vocabulary learning.

RESULTS

This study explored students' perceptions of using Webtoon for vocabulary learning and how students use Webtoon to learn English vocabulary. The data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's (1984) framework consisting of data reduction, coding, categorizing, and theme development. The analysis generated nine major themes that address the two research questions.

Research Question 1: Students' Perceptions toward the Use of Webtoon in Vocabulary Learning

The first research question focuses on students' perceptions of using Webtoon as a medium for learning English vocabulary. The findings from the interview data are presented in the following tables, which illustrate the emerging themes from participants' responses.

Table 1. Students perceive Webtoon as an enjoyable learning medium

Raw Data	Codes	Categories	Themes
"It is enjoyable, relaxing, and easier to understand." (P1)	Enjoyable, Relaxed Learning	Positive Learning Experience	Students perceive Webtoon as an enjoyable learning medium
"Learning vocabulary becomes less boring." (P2)	Fun Learning	Positive Learning Experience	Students perceive Webtoon as an enjoyable learning medium
"It feels like entertainment, but I still learn something." (P3)	Entertainment-based Learning	Positive Learning Experience	Students perceive Webtoon as an enjoyable learning medium
"It feels more like entertainment than studying." (P4)	Learning as Entertainment	Positive Learning Experience	Students perceive Webtoon as an enjoyable learning medium
"It is more exciting than learning from textbooks." (P5)	Exciting Learning	Positive Learning Experience	Students perceive Webtoon as an enjoyable learning medium
"Learning becomes more enjoyable." (P6)	Enjoyment	Positive Learning Experience	Students perceive Webtoon as an enjoyable learning medium

Based on the Table 1, the findings indicate that all participants held positive perceptions toward the use of Webtoon. They considered Webtoon to make vocabulary learning more relaxed, enjoyable, and less boring than conventional learning methods.

Table 2. Attractive visuals and storylines increase students' interest

Raw Data	Codes	Categories	Themes
"The colorful pictures and interesting story make it enjoyable to read." (P1)	Colorful Visuals, Interesting Story	Attractive Features	Attractive visuals and storylines increase students' interest
"The visuals are not boring." (P2)	Attractive Visuals	Attractive Features	Attractive visuals and storylines increase students' interest
"The story is interesting and easy to read on a smartphone." (P3)	Interesting Storyline	Attractive Features	Attractive visuals and storylines increase students' interest
"The visuals are attractive and make me curious." (P7)	Curiosity, Visual Attraction	Attractive Features	Attractive visuals and storylines increase students' interest
"The stories are diverse and make me want to keep reading." (P8)	Reading Motivation	Attractive Features	Attractive visuals and storylines increase students' interest

As illustrated in Table 2, the findings suggest that attractive visuals and engaging storylines motivate students to continue reading. Their interest in following the story encourages them to understand the vocabulary encountered in Webtoon.

Table 3. Visual context helps students understand vocabulary meaning

Raw Data	Codes	Categories	Themes
"By looking at the pictures and facial expressions, I can immediately understand the meaning of a word." (P1)	Visual Clues	Contextual Understanding	Visual context helps students understand vocabulary meaning
"Words like shy and nervous can be understood through the characters' expressions." (P2)	Facial Expression	Contextual Understanding	Visual context helps students understand vocabulary meaning
"Pictures and expressions help me guess the meaning of words." (P3)	Context Support	Contextual Understanding	Visual context helps students understand vocabulary meaning
"I look at the characters' expressions and the situation in the picture." (P4)	Situational Context	Contextual Understanding	Visual context helps students understand vocabulary meaning
"The characters' emotions and actions help me understand vocabulary." (P6)	Emotional Context	Contextual Understanding	Visual context helps students understand vocabulary meaning

As described in Table 3, visual context helps students understand the meaning of unfamiliar vocabulary. The findings reveal that students use visual cues such as facial

expressions, character actions, emotions, and situational contexts to understand unfamiliar vocabulary. These visual supports enable students to comprehend vocabulary without immediately depending on dictionaries or translation tools.

Table 4. Webtoon is considered easier to use than textbooks

Raw Data	Codes	Categories	Themes
“It is easier than textbooks." (P1)	Easier than Textbook	Learning Convenience	Webtoon is easier than traditional textbooks
“Textbooks mostly contain formal sentences." (P2)	Formal Language Limitation	Learning Convenience	Webtoon is easier than traditional textbooks
“There is context and visual support." (P3)	Contextual Learning	Learning Convenience	Webtoon is easier than traditional textbooks
“Vocabulary is used directly in conversations." (P4)	Authentic Usage	Learning Convenience	Webtoon is easier than traditional textbooks
“Words are used in real-life situations." (P8)	Real-life Context	Learning Convenience	Webtoon is easier than traditional textbooks

Table 4 presents students’ perceptions regarding the ease of using Webtoon compared to traditional textbooks. The findings indicate that Webtoon is perceived as easier to understand because vocabulary is presented in authentic contexts, whereas textbooks are often viewed as formal and less contextualized. Unlike textbooks, which are often perceived as containing formal and isolated language, Webtoon provides visual and conversational support that helps students understand vocabulary more effectively.

Table 5. Visual help students retain new vocabulary.

Raw Data	Codes	Categories	Themes
“When I remember the scene, I immediately remember the meaning." (P1)	Scene Association	Vocabulary Retention	Visual memory supports vocabulary retention
“I remember the character's facial expression." (P2)	Visual Recall	Vocabulary Retention	Visual memory supports vocabulary retention
“Pictures serve as memory cues." (P3)	Memory Cue	Vocabulary Retention	Visual memory supports vocabulary retention
“When I remember the scene, I remember the word." (P4)	Scene Memory	Vocabulary Retention	Visual memory supports vocabulary retention
“I remember the pictures and the words together." (P8)	Dual Coding	Vocabulary Retention	Visual memory supports vocabulary retention

Based on Table 5, visual elements contribute significantly to vocabulary retention. The findings show that students often associate newly learned words with specific scenes, characters, and images. These visual memories serve as cues that help students recall vocabulary more easily, suggesting that Webtoon supports long-term vocabulary retention through visual associations.

Research Question 2: How Students Use Webtoon in Vocabulary Learning

The second research question explores the strategies used by students when learning vocabulary through Webtoon. The following tables present the findings related to students' learning strategies.

Table 6. Students use context-based guessing strategies

Raw Data	Codes	Categories	Themes
"I guess the meaning of a word through the pictures." (P1)	Guessing Meaning	Vocabulary Learning Strategy	Students use contextual guessing to infer word meanings
"I guess the meaning from the context of the story." (P5)	Contextual Guessing	Vocabulary Learning Strategy	Students use contextual guessing to infer word meanings
"I look at the storyline and the pictures." (P3)	Context Inference	Vocabulary Learning Strategy	Students use contextual guessing to infer word meanings
"I guess the meaning from the characters' emotions." (P6)	Emotion-based Guessing	Vocabulary Learning Strategy	Students use contextual guessing to infer word meanings

As illustrated in Table 6, students commonly use contextual guessing strategies when encountering unfamiliar vocabulary. The findings reveal that participants infer word meanings through pictures, storylines, and characters' emotions before seeking external assistance. This strategy demonstrates students' active engagement in constructing meaning from the context provided by Webtoon.

Table 7. Students use dictionaries and translation tools applications to confirm word meanings

Raw Data	Codes	Categories	Themes
"I look up the meaning using Google Translate." (P2)	Translation Tool	Meaning Verification	Students use dictionaries and translation tools
"I look up the meaning in a dictionary." (P4)	Dictionary Use	Meaning Verification	Students use dictionaries and translation tools
"I use an online dictionary." (P5)	Online Dictionary	Meaning Verification	Students use dictionaries and translation tools
"I use Google Translate or a dictionary." (P8)	Digital Dictionary	Meaning Verification	Students use dictionaries and translation tools

Table 7 presents students' use of dictionaries and translation tools to verify vocabulary meanings. The findings indicate that after making initial guesses, students frequently consult online dictionaries or translation applications such as Google Translate to confirm their understanding. This verification process helps students ensure the accuracy of the meanings they infer from context.

Table 8. Students' store and review new vocabulary

Raw Data	Codes	Categories	Themes
"I write down new words together with the sentences." (P1)	Note Taking	Vocabulary Maintenance	Students save and review new vocabulary
"I take a screenshot and then translate it." (P2)	Screenshot Strategy	Vocabulary Maintenance	Students save and review new vocabulary
"I make a list of new vocabulary." (P4)	Vocabulary List	Vocabulary Maintenance	Students save and review new vocabulary
"I keep a special notebook for vocabulary." (P8)	Vocabulary Notebook	Vocabulary Maintenance	Students save and review new vocabulary

As shown in Table 8, students employ various strategies to store and review newly learned vocabulary. The findings reveal that participants write vocabulary notes, create vocabulary lists, and take screenshots of unfamiliar words. These strategies help students maintain and review vocabulary knowledge beyond the reading activity itself.

Table 9. Students use dictionaries and translation tools applications to confirm word meanings

Raw Data	Codes	Categories	Themes
"I use it when talking with others." (P1)	Speaking Practice	Vocabulary Application	Students practice vocabulary in daily communication
"I use it on social media." (P2)	Social Media Use	Vocabulary Application	Students practice vocabulary in daily communication
"I use it for school assignments." (P6)	Academic Application	Vocabulary Application	Students practice vocabulary in daily communication
"I use it when chatting." (P7)	Daily Communication	Vocabulary Application	Students practice vocabulary in daily communication

Table 9 presents the ways students apply vocabulary learned from Webtoon in their daily lives. The findings indicate that students actively use newly acquired vocabulary in daily communication, social media interactions, and academic activities. This suggests that vocabulary learned through Webtoon is not only understood receptively but is also transferred into productive language use.

Table 10. Summary of themes identified in the study

Research Question	Themes
Students' Perceptions toward the Use of Webtoon in Vocabulary Learning	1. Students perceive Webtoon as an enjoyable learning medium. 2. Attractive visuals and storylines increase students' interest. 3. Visual context helps students understand vocabulary meaning. 4. Webtoon is considered easier to use than textbooks. 5. Visual help students retain new vocabulary.

Research Question	Themes
How Students Use Webtoon in Vocabulary Learning	6. Students use context-based guessing strategies. 7. Students use dictionaries and translation tools applications to confirm word meanings. 8. Students store and review new vocabulary. 9. Students practice vocabulary in daily activities.

Based on Table 10, nine major themes emerged from the analysis. Five themes address students' perceptions toward the use of Webtoon in vocabulary learning, while four themes describe how students utilize Webtoon as a tool for vocabulary development. These themes collectively demonstrate that Webtoon serves not only as an enjoyable learning medium but also as a resource that supports various vocabulary learning strategies.

DISCUSSION

This study aims to address two research questions, namely students' perceptions of the use of Webtoon in learning English vocabulary and how students utilize Webtoon as a medium for vocabulary learning. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews with eight participants and analyzed using the Miles and Huberman (1984) model, which consists of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. The results of the analysis reveal several key findings that are interrelated and illustrate students' experiences and strategies in learning vocabulary through Webtoon.

Regarding the first research question, the findings show that students have a positive perception of the use of Webtoon in learning English vocabulary. The participants viewed Webtoon as an enjoyable medium that does not create pressure like conventional learning methods. They felt that reading Webtoon is more similar to an entertainment activity, while still providing opportunities to acquire new vocabulary indirectly. This condition creates a more comfortable learning atmosphere and increases students' motivation to continue reading. These findings are in line with Swandi et al. (2020), who stated that comic-based media are generally favored because they provide an entertaining reading experience, thereby increasing student engagement in learning.

In addition, students also considered that the main appeal of Webtoon lies in the combination of visual elements and an engaging storyline. Colorful illustrations, character expressions, and engaging narratives encourage students to continue following the story until the end. This not only increases reading interest but also expands students' exposure to new vocabulary in a continuous context. This finding is supported by Erya and Pustika (2021), who emphasize that visually based digital media can enhance students' attention and learning motivation. Thus, the visual and narrative aspects of Webtoon play an important role in creating higher learning engagement.

Consistent with these perceptions, students also reported that Webtoon helps them understand the meaning of vocabulary through the visual context provided. Images, facial expressions, and situations in the story serve as contextual clues that help students interpret the meaning of unfamiliar words. Before using dictionaries or translation applications, students tend to rely on visual context to guess the meaning of words. This indicates that Webtoon supports a natural process of meaning inference through the integration of text and images. Efendi (2021) also states that illustrations in digital comics help readers understand textual meaning through visual context, thereby strengthening vocabulary comprehension more effectively.

Another finding shows that students consider Webtoon easier to use compared to textbooks in vocabulary learning. Unlike textbooks that often present vocabulary in isolation, Webtoon presents vocabulary within authentic conversations and meaningful situations. This makes it easier for students to understand how words are used in real contexts. The language used in Webtoon is also considered closer to everyday communication, making it easier for students to understand. Prihatiningtyas and Seinsiani (2025)state that digital comic media provide a more contextual vocabulary learning experience compared to traditional methods, thus supporting better comprehension.

In addition to improving understanding, the use of Webtoon also contributes to students' vocabulary retention. Many participants stated that they remember vocabulary more easily when the words are associated with specific scenes, characters, or situations in the story. The association between text and visuals helps create stronger and more meaningful memory traces. Thus, contextual reading experiences support the storage of vocabulary in long-term memory. This is consistent with the findings of Insam and Sadji Evenddy (2022), who state that the integration of visual and narrative elements in digital comics can significantly enhance vocabulary retention.

Regarding the second research question, the findings show that students use several strategies in learning vocabulary through Webtoon. The most dominant strategy is guessing word meanings based on context. Students utilize images, character expressions, and storylines to infer the meaning of unfamiliar words without immediately consulting a dictionary. This strategy allows them to continue reading without frequent interruptions. Li and Gan (2022) explain that contextual inference is one of the effective strategies for overcoming vocabulary limitations in foreign language reading.

However, students still use online dictionaries and translation applications such as Google Translate to ensure the accuracy of the vocabulary meanings they encounter. The use of these digital tools helps students obtain more accurate understanding, including pronunciation and contextual usage. Alharbi (2016) emphasizes that digital dictionaries play an important role in vocabulary learning by providing quick access to linguistic information needed by language learners.

In addition, students also demonstrate independent learning strategies by recording or saving new vocabulary found in Webtoon. Some students write new words in notebooks, while others save screenshots of Webtoon panels. These activities allow them to review and revisit previously learned vocabulary. This strategy shows that students are not only dependent on reading activities but also actively manage their vocabulary learning outside reading sessions, as also noted by Prihatiningtyas and Seinsiani (2025).

The final finding shows that vocabulary acquired from Webtoon is not only understood but also used in daily communication. Students reported using the vocabulary in conversations with friends, social media, online messaging, and school assignments. This indicates a transfer of knowledge from the learning context to real-life usage. Insam and Sadji Evenddy (2022) also emphasize that learning through digital comics not only improves vocabulary acquisition but also encourages active language use in communication. Thus, Webtoon functions not only as a passive learning medium but also as a tool that supports productive vocabulary use in everyday life.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study indicate that students have highly positive perceptions of using Webtoon as a medium for learning English vocabulary. Webtoon is perceived as enjoyable, engaging, easy to understand, and capable of increasing students' learning motivation. In addition, the visual elements and storylines presented in Webtoon help students understand and retain new vocabulary more effectively. In the process of learning vocabulary, students employ various strategies, such as guessing word meanings from context, using online dictionaries,

recording new vocabulary, reviewing previously learned words, and practicing them in daily communication. These findings suggest that Webtoon can serve as an effective alternative medium for supporting English vocabulary learning. Overall, the findings reveal that Webtoon is not only positively perceived by students as a vocabulary learning medium but is also utilized as a tool for learning, understanding, storing, and using English vocabulary through various self-directed learning strategies.

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