A Journal of Culture, English Language Teaching, Literature and Linguistics

p-ISSN 2356-0401, e-ISSN 2621-9158
Vol. 12 No. 2 December 2025, pp. 754-773

Exploring EFL students' perspectives on vocabulary learning through SkELL: A case study

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History:
Submitted: 20 July 2025
Revised: 1 August 2025
Accepted: 15 August 2025
Published: 23 August 2025

Keywords:
Corpus-based Tools, Data-Driven Learning, EFL Learner Perception, Vocabulary Learning

ABSTRACT

This study investigates Indonesian EFL students' perspectives on using Sketch Engine for Language Learning (SkELL) for vocabulary acquisition. Employing a qualitative descriptive case study approach, data were gathered through an online questionnaire completed by twelve undergraduate EFL students and semi-structured interviews with five selected participants. The research aimed to explore students' general attitudes, perceived benefits, and challenges when utilizing SkELL as a corpus-based tool for independent learning. The findings indicate a largely positive preliminary perception, with a significant majority of students finding SkELL easy to navigate and effective in improving contextual understanding of words. Participants reported enhanced independence and motivation in vocabulary learning, and a preference for SkELL over traditional dictionaries due to its provision of real-world sentence examples. While initial challenges related to interface unfamiliarity and feature comprehension were noted, students proactively overcame these through self-directed learning. These experiences fundamentally reshaped their attitudes towards vocabulary acquisition, shifting their focus from rote memorization to a more contextual and evidence-based approach, ultimately fostering enhanced independence and motivation in their language. Students expressed strong recommendations for SkELL to peers and a commitment to continued use of corpus-based tools, highlighting the tool's potential to significantly enhance vocabulary teaching and empower learners with practical, contextually rich language skills for academic and professional communication.

How to cite:
Khairunnisa, K. & Daulay, S.H. (2025). Exploring EFL students' perspectives on vocabulary learning through SkELL: A case study. *Celtic: A Journal of Culture, English Language Teaching, Literature and Linguistics, 12* (2), 754-773. https://doi.org/10.22219/celtic.v12i2.41838

INTRODUCTION

The EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learning environment today has witnessed a revolutionary evolution towards the adoption of corpus-based and data-driven learning processes, fundamentally recasting the ways learners globally engage with vocabulary acquisition (Sun & Park, 2023; Liu & Gablasova, 2023). This evolution is part of the broader integration of educational technology and digital literacy, which fosters contextually appropriate language immersion and learner-centered processes. Vocabulary is widely recognized as a core component of language competence, foundational for communication across all four skills (Alenizi & Adawi, 2024). Without sufficient vocabulary, even basic grammatical competence becomes ineffective (Sahnan & Daulay, 2025).

As recitation-based patterns of historical memorization are routinely replaced with newer exploratory and discovery-based modes of language learning, research spotlights the rising significance of corpus linguistics in equipping EFL learners with analysis-based competencies to engage with language in more contextually oriented and evidence-based ways (Harahap et al., 2025; Staples & Anthony, 2023). Consequently, as traditional memorization-based methods—such as rote learning and dictionary reliance—lose relevance in the digital era, learners increasingly adopt diverse and contextualized strategies, including part-of-speech analysis, contextual guessing, verbal repetition, and engagement with media (Utami & Daulay, 2024). These trends underscore a paradigm shift in vocabulary pedagogy.

Recent studies have highlighted that technology-driven approaches—such as Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) and tools like Quizlet—can significantly enhance vocabulary retention and acquisition through techniques like spaced repetition and contextual visualization (Chaikovska & Zbaravska, 2020). This effectiveness is further supported by student perceptions, with research indicating that applications like Quizlet are often viewed as comfortable, interesting, and easy to understand for vocabulary learning, despite some occasional challenges related to technical issues or user familiarity (Tanjung & Daulay, 2022). Moreover, the use of virtual reality (VR) in language learning has been shown to boost students' motivation and enrich their contextual learning experiences (Cai, 2022). In addition, corpus-based learning approaches are gaining traction for offering authentic exposure to the target language, supporting learners' understanding of collocations, and deepening vocabulary knowledge (Youssef, 2020). These findings suggest that integrating technology, especially corpus-based methods, can address the limitations of traditional strategies and create a more meaningful and engaging learning environment for EFL learners.

In the preceding decade, Indonesia especially lagged behind adopting corpus-based technologies as part of EFL vocabulary instruction, often reverting to traditional modalities such as rote memorization, bilingual dictionaries, and teacher-centered

drilling (Crosthwaite et al., 2021; Aswad et al., 2022). Despite the mountains of research tracking how informed use of corpora yields deeper contextualized learning, the practice persists. For instance, the case study on Safriyani (2020) reveals how independent work with corpora among Indonesian EFL learners—building up glossaries from original materials—yields gain in vocabulary depth and critical thinking but presents practical challenges of data classification and time intensiveness. Again, an examination of Indonesian EFL materials developed by Wardani (2020) concluded that textbook materials frequently are not exposed to target collocations and global culture input, underscoring the sparing use of corpus-based pedagogies. These instances illustrate the national-level gap corpora-based resources have the potential to substantially boost vocabulary instruction but continue to have limited use within formal schooling, with Indonesian language learners then left with old-style, less effective traditional modalities.

Data-Driven Learning (DDL) is an approach to language learning that involves analyzing patterns and usage trends in authentic language data through the use of technology and statistics. One of the key advantages of DDL is its ability to help learners focus on language input that is both relevant and practical for their specific needs (Arslanbay & Ersanli, 2023). Students generally have positive perceptions of using DDL for vocabulary acquisition. İtik & Uysal Gürdal (2024) found that learners believe DDL enhances speaking skills and strengthens vocabulary, though some suggested adding audio features to corpus tools. Similarly, research by Idrizi (2024) showed that learners were motivated and engaged when using mobile DDL platforms, which also promoted learner autonomy. Despite some challenges, such as technical difficulties and cognitive load, students reported overall satisfaction due to the practical benefits for vocabulary improvement.

Among the tools widely recognized in this approach is SkELL, which enables learners to explore real-world language data and develop their metalinguistic awareness. Software such as SkELL have been leading harbingers of this evolution of teaching, providing learners globally with an unprecedented level of access to corpora of realistic, unscripted language use and user-friendly interfaces to independently investigate word use, collocational behavior, and grammatical patterns on the basis of native-level linguistic corpora (Labrador, 2024). SkELL offers three main features—Example/concordance lines, Word Sketch, and Similar Words—that work together to support vocabulary development. The Example feature presents real sentence contexts for word usage, helping learners grasp nuances in meaning and grammatical function (Boontam, 2022). Word Sketch provides collocational and syntactic insights based on frequency data from corpora, such as common verb or preposition partners, which are especially valuable for building lexical and syntactic competence (Cyfeku & Noli, 2022). Meanwhile, Similar Words suggests vocabulary that appears in comparable contexts, functioning like a usage-based thesaurus and encouraging learners to expand their semantic networks (Idrizi, 2023).

Recent studies further support SkELL's effectiveness in language education. Miura & Satake (2024), for example, found that consistent use of SkELL features significantly improved Japanese students' academic reading and writing performance in English courses. Similarly, Arslanbay & Ersanli (2023) highlighted the role of SkELL in facilitating multimodal learning in Turkish preparatory English classes, accelerating vocabulary acquisition at both beginner and advanced levels. Additional findings by Topal (2025) emphasized that the Word Sketch feature in particular strengthened learners' mastery of collocations—an area often difficult to develop through explicit instruction alone. Therefore, SkELL has proven to be a user-friendly and effective DDL platform that supports contextualized and authentic vocabulary acquisition (Tosun & Sofu, 2023).

Several studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of Data-Driven Learning (DDL) and corpus-based tools in enhancing vocabulary and grammar acquisition among EFL learners. Tosun and Sofu (2023), through a quasi-experimental study in Turkey, found that DDL using pedagogical corpora significantly improved vocabulary and collocation awareness, with learners expressing positive attitudes in post-interviews. Similarly, Khemkullanat & Khongput (2023) in Thailand reported that corpus-assisted DDL led to notable gains in grammatical collocation accuracy and increased awareness of word usage. In China, Li et al. (2024) observed that high school students using DDL tools developed stronger collocation skills and writing performance over time, while Li et al. (2025) and Yang et al. (2025) emphasized the instructional value of corpus-based learning despite challenges like tool complexity and varied learner proficiency levels. Although these findings underscore the growing relevance of DDL in EFL contexts, research specifically examining Indonesian EFL students' perceptions of SkELL—a corpus tool designed to provide clear, contextualized examples—remains limited. Most existing studies focus on other tools and rely heavily on quantitative designs, leaving a gap in qualitative insights into learners' experiences, challenges, and attitudes when using SkELL for independent vocabulary learning. This highlights the need for a more learner-centered exploration, particularly within the underrepresented Indonesian EFL context, as addressed in this study.

Therefore, this study aims to explore how Indonesian EFL students perceive the use of SkELL in learning English vocabulary. It seeks to understand not only their general attitudes but also the benefits and challenges they encounter when using SkELL as a corpus-based tool for independent learning. By adopting a qualitative case study approach, this research intends to provide in-depth insights into students' real experiences with SkELL, offering a perspective that has been largely overlooked in previous corpus-based vocabulary studies.

To guide this inquiry, the following research questions are addressed:

1. What are Indonesian EFL students' perspectives on using SkELL for vocabulary learning?
2. What benefits and challenges do they experience while using SkELL?

3. How do their experiences shape their attitudes toward corpus-based vocabulary learning?

The significance of this study lies in its potential to inform language educators about learners' needs and preferences regarding corpus tools. It also contributes to the growing body of literature on technology-assisted language learning by highlighting the role of learner perception and experience in the effective integration of SkELL into EFL instruction, particularly in Indonesian classrooms.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative descriptive case study approach to explore EFL students' perspectives on vocabulary learning using SkELL. The primary goal was to gain in-depth insights into students' experiences, opinions, and perceived benefits and challenges associated with the tool. This design was selected to provide a rich, contextualized understanding of learners' experiences without aiming for generalization (Creswell, 2013). The qualitative descriptive approach allowed for straightforward presentation of participant views with minimal theoretical interpretation (Sandelowski, 2000).

Participants

The research was conducted at the English Department of an Islamic University in North Sumatera. The questionnaire was distributed, and 12 undergraduate EFL students participated in the study, all of whom had basic knowledge of corpus. Five participants were chosen through purposive sampling, specifically targeting those with foundational knowledge of corpus-based tools and SkELL. This ensured that participants could meaningfully reflect on SkELL's effectiveness and limitations. The research sample is described using pseudonyms (P1-P5).

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Participants

Category	Sub-category	Percentage (%)
Academic Level	Final-semester students	100%
English Proficiency	Intermediate	75.0%
	Upper Intermediate	16.7%
	Advanced	8.3%

Corpus Knowledge	Yes	66.7%
	No	33.3%
SkELL Usage	Never	41.7%
	1–3 Times	58.3%

Instruments and Data Collection

Data were gathered using two main instruments:

Online Questionnaire

An online questionnaire was used to collect demographic data and preliminary perceptions of SkELL; it consisted of 10 close-ended (Likert scale) items. This tool also served as a screening method to select participants for interviews.

Semi-Structured Interviews

In-depth interviews were conducted with five selected participants. A semi-structured format allowed flexibility while ensuring that key themes were addressed. Interview questions explored students' perceptions of SkELL, the benefits and challenges they experienced, and how these shaped their views on corpus-based learning. Interviews were conducted via WhatsApp voice notes, in either Indonesian or English based on participant preference. All interviews were recorded with consent and later transcribed for analysis.

Data Analysis Procedures

Interview transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun & Clarke (2006) framework. The steps included:

1. Familiarizing with the data through repeated readings
2. Generating initial codes to identify relevant patterns
3. Developing themes across participant responses
4. Reviewing and refining themes in relation to research questions
5. Writing up narrative findings supported by participant quotations

RESULTS

This section integrates the findings from both the online questionnaire (n=12) and the semi-structured interviews (n=5), providing a comprehensive and in-depth exploration of Indonesian EFL students' perceptions of using SkELL for vocabulary learning. The discussion links these findings to existing literature, offering a nuanced understanding of the observed phenomena.

Preliminary Perceptions: Online Questionnaire (n=12)

An online questionnaire was administered to twelve undergraduate EFL students, serving as an initial assessment of their perceptions after a brief introduction to SkELL. The questionnaire consisted of 10 close-ended (Likert scale) items. The results, summarized in Table 2, indicate a largely positive preliminary perception among participants and the acronyms used in the tables stand for strongly agree (SA), agree (A), disagree (D), strongly disagree (SD), and neutral (N):

Table 2. Preliminary Perceptions (n=12)

No	Questions	SD	D	N	A	SA
1.	I find SkELL easy to navigate and use	-	-	16,7%	83,3%	-
2.	SkELL helps me learn the meaning of English words more effectively.	-	-	25%	50%	25%
3.	SkELL improves my understanding of how words are used in context.	-	-	16,7%	50%	33,3%
4.	Using SkELL makes me more independent in learning vocabulary.	-	-	16,7%	66,7%	16,7%
5.	I feel more motivated to learn new vocabulary using SkELL.	-	-	33,3%	41,7 %	25%
6.	I prefer using SkELL over traditional dictionaries or vocabulary apps.	-	8,3%	25%	41,7%	25%
7.	I understand how to use features like "Word Sketch" and "Examples in Context."	-	-	25%	41,7%	33,3%
8.	I have used SkELL to help me complete academic assignments.	16,7%	33,3%	33,3%	8,3%	8,3%
9	I think SkELL could be helpful if integrated into classroom activities.	-	-	8,3%	58,3%	33,3%
10.	I am interested in continuing to use SkELL to support my vocabulary learning.	-	-	16,7%	41,7%	41,7%

The initial assessment via an online questionnaire (n=12) revealed a predominantly positive outlook among students regarding SkELL's utility. A significant majority (83.3%) found SkELL easy to navigate, indicating a user-friendly interface that aligns

with the design principles of tools like SkELL, which aim for accessible exploration of real-world language data. This ease of use is crucial for learner adoption and continued engagement.

Furthermore, a substantial percentage of participants agreed or strongly agreed that SkELL effectively aided in learning word meanings (75%) and improved contextual understanding (83.3%). This strongly supports the core premise of corpus-based learning, where exposure to authentic language data helps learners grasp nuances in meaning grammatical function. The data also suggested that SkELL fostered independence in vocabulary learning (83.4% agree/strongly agree) and enhanced motivation (66.7% agree/strongly agree).

While a considerable number preferred SkELL over traditional tools (66.7% agree/strongly agree), a notable portion (25%) remained neutral. This neutrality might suggest that while SkELL offers clear advantages, some students may still see value in a multi-pronged approach to vocabulary acquisition, or perhaps require more exposure to fully appreciate SkELL's benefits over established methods. Interestingly, its direct application to academic assignments showed a more mixed response, with 50% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. This indicates a potential gap between perceived utility for general vocabulary learning and its direct integration into formal academic tasks, suggesting a need for more explicit pedagogical guidance on how to leverage SkELL for academic purposes. However, the potential for SkELL's integration into classroom activities was highly supported (91.6% agree/strongly agree), and an overwhelming majority expressed interest in continued usage (83.4% agree/strongly agree). These figures underscore a strong desire among students for corpus-based tools to be formally incorporated into their learning environment, recognizing their potential to enrich traditional instruction.

In-Depth Insights from Semi-Structured Interviews

The semi-structured interviews with five selected participants provided rich, qualitative data that delved deeper into the students' experiences, opinions, and perceived benefits and challenges associated with SkELL. The thematic analysis revealed consistent themes, offering valuable insights into their perspectives on corpus-based vocabulary learning.

Students' Perceptions of Using SkELL for Vocabulary Learning

This section delves into the rich perspectives of EFL students regarding their experiences with SkELL for vocabulary acquisition. The findings reveal overwhelmingly positive impressions, primarily driven by SkELL's unique ability to provide authentic, contextualized language examples.

a) Positive Views on Real-World Examples

EFL students largely hold a very positive view of SkELL, primarily valuing its ability to offer real-world examples and showcase words in authentic contexts. This feature consistently stood out as more beneficial than typical dictionary definitions. A

substantial percentage of participants (75%) agreed or strongly agreed that SkELL effectively aided in learning word meanings, and even more (83.3%) reported improved contextual understanding.

As P4 expressed,

> *"My overall impression of SkELL is very positive. I find this tool very helpful because it provides real sentence examples from English corpora, not just brief definitions like ordinary dictionaries." (P4)*

This directly supports the effectiveness of SkELL's "Example" feature, which uses actual sentence contexts to help learners grasp nuanced meanings and grammatical functions. Similarly, P5 highlighted this contextual understanding:

> *"Helps me understand how words are used in different contexts, so I can learn vocabulary more effectively."(P5)*

This aligns with the broader advantages of Data-Driven Learning (DDL), where analyzing authentic language data helps learners focus on practical and relevant language input. P1 concisely captured SkELL's transformative nature when compared to traditional translation tools:

> *"My whole impression is that this app is so amazing, it's really helping me figure out the meaning of a new word, that is still unclear or vague after searching through Google translate."(P1)*

This quote emphasizes the limitations of simple translation and the significant value SkELL's contextual examples add in clarifying ambiguous word meanings.

b) SkELL's Edge Over Other Tools

When comparing SkELL to other vocabulary learning tools, students consistently found it more effective because of its strong emphasis on contextual examples. While a considerable number (66.7%) preferred SkELL over traditional tools, a notable portion (25%) remained neutral. This neutrality might suggest that while SkELL offers clear advantages, some students may still see value in a multi-pronged approach to vocabulary acquisition, or perhaps require more exposure to fully appreciate SkELL's benefits over established methods. P4 elaborated on this, stating,

> *"This is because SkELL doesn't just provide word meanings but also shows how the word is used in real sentences from authentic sources."(P4)*

This reinforces the primary advantage of corpus-based tools over conventional dictionaries, which often lack the depth of authentic usage examples. P3 echoed this sentiment, highlighting the practical application of the acquired knowledge:

> *"Really tells you how to use 'the word' in the correct way, not just translate and give definitions."(P3)*

This suggests a shift from passive memorization to the active application of vocabulary, a crucial aim of effective language learning. P2 further emphasized this practical distinction:

> *"Doesn't just give definitions it shows how the word is actually used in real sentences."(P2)*

This consistent feedback from participants strongly supports the existing literature on DDL, which advocates for exposing learners to authentic language to foster a deeper understanding of word usage.

c) Initial Confusion, Growing Comfort

While students reported some initial confusion with SkELL's advanced features, they generally became more comfortable and proficient with consistent practice. This aligns with the questionnaire results where 25% of participants felt neutral about understanding features like "Word Sketch" and "Examples in Context," while 75% agreed or strongly agreed they understood them. P4 admitted,

> *"At first, I felt a bit confused with features like concordance lines and word sketch because I wasn't familiar with them."(P4)*

However, P4 quickly added, indicating progress:

> *"Now I can use concordance lines to see usage patterns, and the word sketch feature really helps me understand words that commonly appear together with the word I'm learning."(P4)*

This demonstrates successful integration of advanced features through sustained engagement. P2 shared a similar experience:

> *"At first, I was confused, especially by the terms like 'word sketch' and 'concordance'. But after using it a few times, I started to get used to it."(P2)*

These experiences underscore the importance of repeated exposure and practice in overcoming initial cognitive load and technical difficulties, as suggested by research on DDL challenges.

EFL students overwhelmingly view SkELL as a highly effective tool for vocabulary learning, primarily due to its ability to provide real-world examples and contextual usage, which surpasses the limitations of traditional dictionaries. While some initial confusion with features like *"concordance lines/example"* and *"word sketch"* was reported, consistent practice and self-directed learning led to increased comfort and proficiency, demonstrating the value of SkELL in fostering a deeper, context-based understanding of vocabulary.

The Benefits and Challenges While Using SkELL

This section critically examines the benefits and challenges EFL students encountered when integrating SkELL into their vocabulary learning routines. The analysis reveals that while SkELL offers significant advantages in enhancing contextual understanding and practical word usage, its adoption also presents initial hurdles related to interface familiarity.

a) Enhanced Contextual Understanding and Word Usage

EFL students identified enhanced contextual understanding and improved word usage as the primary benefits of using SkELL, which are direct outcomes of its corpus-based approach. This is strongly supported by the questionnaire data, where 75% of

participants agreed or strongly agreed that SkELL helps them learn the meaning of English words more effectively, and 83.3% agreed or strongly agreed that SkELL improves their understanding of how words are used in context. P4 specifically highlighted a practical advantage:

> *"One specific benefit I've experienced is that I find it easier to understand how a word is actually used in context. For example, I can now distinguish when to use 'strong' and when 'powerful' is more appropriate."(P4)*

This illustrates how SkELL helps learners grasp the subtle differences between synonyms and their appropriate usage based on authentic contexts, a skill often challenging to acquire through traditional methods. P1 valued the real-world applicability SkELL provided:

> *"Context of a word and how people especially native speakers use a word in a sentence, in the examples that actually give knowledge needed in daily communication."(P1)*

This strongly aligns with the concept of contextually appropriate language immersion, a key aspect of modern EFL learning environments. P5 also observed:

> *"Increased vocabulary understanding in various contexts and the ability to use words more accurately in sentences."(P5)*

These statements collectively underscore SkELL's effectiveness in promoting deeper lexical proficiency, which is crucial for improved reading comprehension, writing ability, and overall communicative competence, as suggested by the broader impact of data-driven EFL teaching.

b) *Support for Specific Learning Tasks*

SkELL was also found to be particularly helpful for specific learning tasks, such as academic assignments, effectively bridging the gap between general vocabulary acquisition and practical application. However, its direct application to academic assignments showed a more mixed response in the questionnaire, with 50% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. This indicates a potential gap between perceived utility for general vocabulary learning and its direct integration into formal academic tasks, suggesting a need for more explicit pedagogical guidance on how to leverage SkELL for academic purposes. P4 recalled its utility in academic writing:

> *"I used SkELL to look up examples of words like 'implement,' 'evaluate,' and 'significant.' By seeing how these words were used in sentences on SkELL, I felt more confident constructing my own sentences."(P4)*

This demonstrates how SkELL can directly support academic literacy by providing authentic models for incorporating sophisticated vocabulary. P2 found it beneficial for understanding verb usage:

> *"When I was learning new verbs, I used SkELL to see how they were used in different sentences. It helped me see the difference between similar words and how to use them correctly."(P2)*

c) *Initial Interface and Feature Familiarity Challenges*

While largely positive, students did encounter some challenges, primarily related to initial unfamiliarity with SkELL's interface and specialized features. As noted in the questionnaire, 25% of participants felt neutral about understanding how to use features like "Word Sketch" and "Examples in Context". P4 noted this initial hurdle:

> *"I did face some challenges when I first used SkELL because its interface was a bit different from regular online dictionaries, and I didn't immediately understand how to read the concordance lines."(P4)*

This confirms the initial learning curve associated with corpus tools that require a shift from traditional dictionary lookups to the analytical interpretation of linguistic data. P5 also mentioned:

> *"Initially, I had a little difficulty understanding how to use SkELL's features."(P5)*

d) Overcoming Challenges Through Self-Directed Learning

To overcome the challenges, participants typically resorted to self-directed learning, such as watching tutorials or seeking explanations, highlighting their adaptability and autonomy. Despite interface-related difficulties, students relied on self-directed learning strategies to adapt, consistent with the survey's 83.4% who indicated they were interested in continuing to use SkELL. P4 proactively addressed the difficulty:

> *"To overcome this, I watched several tutorial videos on YouTube and read a brief guide from the SkELL website."(P4)*

This highlights learner autonomy, a key aspect of data-driven learning where students take an active role in their learning process. P2 also mentioned a multi-faceted approach to complex sentences:

> *"Reading slowly, using a dictionary for hard words, and asking my friends or teacher when I didn't understand."(P2)*

This demonstrates a blend of independent learning strategies and seeking support when necessary. Interestingly, P3 reported no significant challenges, stating:

> *"I don't think so. because I like to tinker."(P3)*

This response points to the role of individual learning styles and a natural inclination towards exploratory learning, which aligns well with the discovery-based modes of language learning promoted by corpus linguistics.

Students reported significant benefits from using SkELL, primarily gaining enhanced contextual understanding and improved word usage, which proved valuable for both general vocabulary acquisition and specific academic tasks. While initial challenges related to interface unfamiliarity and feature comprehension were noted, students proactively overcame these through self-directed learning, demonstrating their adaptability and willingness to engage with new tools.

Students' Experiences and Attitudes Toward Corpus-Based Vocabulary Learning

The students' experiences with SkELL significantly transformed their attitudes toward vocabulary learning, moving them beyond rote memorization of definitions to a more

contextual and evidence-based approach. This transformation is evident in the questionnaire results, where 83.4% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that using SkELL makes them more independent in learning vocabulary. Furthermore, 66.7% agreed or strongly agreed that they feel more motivated to learn new vocabulary using SkELL. P4 articulated this profound shift:

> *"I used to think that learning vocabulary was just about memorizing definitions from a dictionary. But after using SkELL, I realized that understanding the context and how a word is used in sentences is much more important so I can communicate more naturally and accurately."(P4)*

This sentiment reflects a fundamental recast of vocabulary learning, emphasizing contextual understanding over isolated word meanings, a core tenet of data-driven learning. P2 echoed this transformation:

> *"It made me realize that learning vocabulary is not just about memorizing meanings, but also about understanding how words are used in context."(P2)*

This shift in perspective is crucial for developing analysis-based competencies to engage with language in more contextually-oriented ways, P5 also shared how their experience broadened their understanding of effective vocabulary learning:

> *"Has opened my mind about how learning vocabulary can be more effective by seeing examples of word usage in real contexts."(P5)*

This further solidifies the positive impact of authentic language exposure on learning efficacy.

All interviewed participants expressed a strong willingness to recommend SkELL to other students, reflecting their positive and transformative experiences. This aligns with the questionnaire findings, where a highly supported 91.6% agreed or strongly agreed that SkELL could be helpful if integrated into classroom activities, and an overwhelming 83.4% expressed interest in continuing to use SkELL. P4 enthusiastically stated:

> *"I would definitely recommend SkELL to other students, especially those who are learning English in depth. This tool is very helpful in improving vocabulary and grammar understanding in a contextual way."(P4)*

This strong endorsement highlights the perceived value of SkELL for serious language learners seeking a deeper understanding. P1 recommended it due to its user-friendliness:

> *"Others can enjoy the experience too because how easy it is to use SkELL."(P1)*

This emphasizes the importance of ease of use for broader adoption and sustained engagement, aligning with the "user-friendly interfaces" characteristic of tools like SkELL. P3 stressed the importance of accurate word usage:

> *"YES. So, you don't just use a word carelessly. it must be according to the context."(P3)*

This sentiment underscores the practical benefit of SkELL in promoting precise and contextually appropriate language use, which is essential for effective communication. Furthermore, all participants envisioned themselves continuing to use SkELL or other corpus-based tools in the future, demonstrating a sustained commitment to this learning approach. This directly supports the questionnaire result that 83.4% of students are interested in continuing to use SkELL to support their vocabulary learningP4 expressed interest in exploring more tools for academic purposes:

> *"I see myself continuing to use SkELL or other corpus tools in the future, especially when writing essays or preparing presentations in English."(P4)*

This indicates a clear understanding of the long-term utility of corpus tools beyond basic vocabulary acquisition, extending to academic and professional contexts. P1 hoped for continuous improvement:

> *"Use it more to have more and more vocabulary, so I can speak more fluently and write better."(P1)*

This desire for continuous lexical growth and improved communicative skills through SkELL reinforces its perceived effectiveness. P5 also planned for continued usage:

> *"To continue using SkELL and perhaps other corpus tools to improve language skills and better understand vocabulary."(P5)*

This strong inclination for future use underscores the positive impact SkELL has had on their vocabulary learning strategies and aligns with the global trend towards learner-centered, data-driven EFL teaching of vocabulary, which fosters deeper, longer-term lexical proficiency.

Students' experiences with SkELL fundamentally reshaped their attitudes towards vocabulary learning, moving them away from rote memorization to an appreciation for contextual understanding and authentic language use. This positive shift is reflected in their strong recommendations for SkELL to peers and their commitment to continued use of corpus-based tools for ongoing language development.

DISCUSSION

This section presents a comprehensive interpretation of the findings by addressing the three research questions that guided this study. Drawing on both data from the questionnaire and from in-depth interviews, the discussion explores Indonesian EFL students' perceptions, the benefits and challenges they encountered, and how their experiences shaped their attitudes toward corpus-based vocabulary learning using SkELL. These findings are contextualized within existing literature to highlight their broader significance for EFL pedagogy and corpus-based language instruction.

Students' Perceptions of Using SkELL for Vocabulary Learning

The results revealed that Indonesian EFL students held overwhelmingly positive perceptions toward using SkELL. Most notably, 83.3% of questionnaire respondents

agreed that SkELL was easy to navigate, and 75% believed it effectively helped them understand English word meanings. These findings align with P4's interview comment, where they emphasized the value of SkELL in offering authentic sentence examples over basic dictionary definitions. This reinforces what Boontam (2022) described as the strength of SkELL's "Example" feature in enhancing learners' metalinguistic awareness through contextual learning.

Such perceptions confirm the global trend highlighted by Labrador (2024), who pointed out that corpus tools like SkELL are transforming language learning by enabling direct access to real-world language use. Students' appreciation for SkELL's authentic input also aligns with Harahap et al. (2025), who stressed the importance of contextually appropriate immersion in building deeper lexical understanding. These results suggest that students see SkELL not just as another dictionary, but as a tool that actively changes how they engage with vocabulary.

While enthusiasm was high, some reservations existed. For example, 25% of participants were neutral regarding their preference for SkELL over traditional tools. This reflects Miura & Satake's (2024) findings, where learners needed time and guidance before fully recognizing the benefits of corpus tools. Overall, the students' generally favorable perceptions of SkELL reflect both its user-friendliness and its potential to promote context-rich, independent vocabulary learning.

Benefits and Challenges of Using SkELL

Students identified multiple benefits, especially in understanding how vocabulary is used in context. The interviews highlighted how SkELL helped learners differentiate between near-synonyms, grasp natural collocations, and improve sentence construction. These qualitative insights resonate with questionnaire data, where 83.3% of students said SkELL improved their contextual understanding and 66.7% reported increased motivation.

These outcomes support earlier studies, such as Firat and Sofu (2023), who found that DDL tools increase learners' awareness of vocabulary patterns and collocations. Similarly, Khemkullanat & Khongput (2023) showed that DDL boosts grammatical accuracy and word usage. P5's experience—improving vocabulary use through varied examples—illustrates how learners can transfer knowledge from corpus data into accurate sentence production, a skill also emphasized by Topal (2025).

Despite the benefits, challenges persisted. Students initially struggled with features like "example" and "word sketch," confirming the cognitive load concerns noted by Yang et al. (2025). This was especially evident as 25% of students remained neutral on their understanding of SkELL's interface. However, participants' ability to overcome these difficulties through self-directed learning—such as watching tutorials or seeking help—demonstrates learner autonomy, a quality encouraged by Idrizi (2024) in mobile DDL platforms.

Additionally, while some students used SkELL to support academic tasks, only 16.6% reported doing so frequently. This gap mirrors Citra Wardani's (2020) findings that Indonesian learners lack pedagogical guidance on integrating corpora into formal writing. These insights point to a need for structured classroom integration, aligning with Tosun & Sofu's (2023) recommendation to bridge corpus learning with formal instruction for greater academic impact.

Students' Experiences and Attitudes Toward Corpus-Based Vocabulary Learning

One of the most transformative outcomes of this study was the evident shift in learners' attitudes. Students moved away from rote memorization toward a more analytical, evidence-based understanding of vocabulary. This shift, voiced clearly in P4's and P2's reflections, underscores Harahap et al.'s (2025) argument that data-driven learning equips learners with analysis-based competencies needed for deeper language engagement.

The majority (83.4%) of students expressed an interest in continuing to use SkELL, indicating its impact not just as a tool, but as a strategy for long-term learning. This growing preference for corpus-based learning reflects findings by Arslanbay & Ersanli (2023), who reported that students benefit from multimodal input and repeated interaction with authentic language data. Moreover, students' willingness to recommend SkELL and integrate it into their routines demonstrates a broader mindset change—a critical outcome given Indonesia's historical reliance on memorization and teacher-centered instruction (Safriyani, 2020).

The strong positive attitudes observed also relate to the usability of the tool. As P1 put it, SkELL's ease of use made it enjoyable and accessible. This highlights the value of intuitive design in corpus tools, a factor cited by Labrador (2024) as essential for widespread adoption in EFL environments. The blend of personal empowerment, perceived effectiveness, and sustained interest confirms that SkELL is not just perceived as useful—it reshapes how learners view vocabulary learning entirely.

These findings offer meaningful implications for EFL educators, curriculum developers, and language learning policymakers. The strong student preference for SkELL's authentic, context-based examples suggests that corpus tools should be more intentionally embedded into classroom practices, not as supplementary resources but as core instruments for vocabulary instruction. Doing so can shift learners away from passive memorization and foster deeper lexical awareness and learner autonomy, aligning with the principles of learner-centered, data-driven instruction highlighted in prior studies (Labrador, 2024; Harahap et al., 2025). However, the study also reveals that successful implementation of corpus-based tools like SkELL requires pedagogical scaffolding—especially in helping learners navigate technical features like Word Sketch and concordance lines/example—underscoring the need for educator training and user-friendly interface design in future corpus innovations.

Nonetheless, several limitations should be acknowledged. This research involved a relatively small sample size, particularly in the interview phase, which may not fully capture the diversity of learner experiences across Indonesian EFL contexts. Additionally, the study primarily explored learner perceptions and self-reported experiences rather than measurable language outcomes. Future research could expand the scope by employing longitudinal or experimental designs to assess how regular corpus tool usage affects vocabulary retention, writing performance, or academic success. It may also be valuable to investigate teacher perspectives on integrating SkELL in the classroom or to compare learner outcomes across different corpus platforms. In conclusion, while the present study confirms the pedagogical potential of SkELL and similar DDL tools, it also calls for thoughtful integration strategies and broader investigations to fully harness their impact in EFL learning.

CONCLUSION

EFL students demonstrated a remarkably positive shift in their approach to vocabulary learning after engaging with SkELL. Initially, some found its advanced features a bit daunting, but through hands-on exploration and a genuine desire to learn, they quickly adapted. This journey led them to appreciate SkELL's unique ability to provide real-world, contextual examples, moving beyond the limitations of traditional dictionaries and fostering a deeper, more accurate understanding of word usage. The experience not only boosted their independence and motivation but also highlighted SkELL's potential to significantly enhance both general vocabulary acquisition and specific academic tasks. Ultimately, these findings strongly suggest that integrating user-friendly corpus-based tools like SkELL into EFL instruction could revolutionize vocabulary teaching, empowering learners with practical, contextually rich language skills crucial for effective communication in academic and professional settings.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

AUTHOR (S) CONTRIBUTION

Khairunnisa served as the primary researcher, taking the lead in shaping the study's concept and design, developing the research instruments, collecting and analyzing the data, and writing the manuscript. Throughout the research journey, Sholihatul Hamidah Daulay, as the advising lecturer, provided ongoing methodological guidance, academic supervision, and thoughtful critique and revisions to ensure the work met high intellectual and scholarly standards. Both authors reviewed and approved the final draft of the paper and share full responsibility for the integrity and quality of the work.

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A Journal of Culture, English Language Teaching, Literature and Linguistics

p-ISSN 2356-0401, e-ISSN 2621-9158
Vol. 12 No. 1 June 2025, pp. 1-12