

The EFL Students' Perception on the Use of Social Media as the Tools of Learning English at UNIKA Santu Paulus Ruteng

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Abstract. This study explores English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students' perceptions of using social media as a tool for learning English at UNIKA Santu Paulus Ruteng. The research focuses on the perceived benefits, challenges, and the most frequently used platforms among learners. Utilizing a quantitative descriptive method, the study involved a sample of 50 participants selected from a population of 94 fifth-semester EFL students. Data were collected using an online closed-ended questionnaire distributed via Google Forms. The findings reveal that students generally hold a significantly positive attitude toward social media for language learning, reporting improvements in listening, speaking, reading, vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. YouTube was the most frequently used platform (60%), followed by Instagram (40%), based on a platform usage analysis. While these tools enhance engagement and reduce learning anxiety, students identified technical limitations—specifically poor internet connectivity and device constraints—as primary challenges to effective usage. The study suggests that integrating multimedia platforms into formal educational strategies can optimize language learning outcomes while necessitating digital literacy initiatives to address existing barriers.

Keywords: English Learning, Perception, Social Media

1 Introduction

In today's world, social media has become a crucial aspect of our daily lives. People of all ages regularly engage with this technology. Social media has emerged as a crucial communication platform in the modern internet age. Various types of social media platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, and YouTube, are readily available and free to join. As a result, nearly all students are familiar with and have used these platforms. For students at Universitas Katolik Indonesia (UNIKA) Santu Paulus Ruteng, located in a region with geographically limited access to native English speakers and authentic immersion environments, social media serves as a vital bridge to the global Anglophone world. In the digital age, social media has become an integral part of everyday life, influencing not only communication and entertainment but also education. With the rise of platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, and YouTube, students have begun to utilize these tools for academic purposes. Initial observations at UNIKA Santu Paulus Ruteng reveal that while students are digitally active, they face unique "technology impediments," including inconsistent

internet connectivity and limited device specifications. This study is specifically conducted here to justify how students navigate these local constraints to utilize social media for independent and informal learning.

Social media is an online platform that allows the creation and sharing of information through text, videos, and images [1]. Yuniar and Purnamaningsih [2] identified four primary reasons for using social media applications: entertainment, social interaction, information sharing, and academic purposes. As a result, beyond communication and entertainment, many students today also use social media as a learning tool. In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), social media offers numerous opportunities for students to improve their English skills, as it provides a wide range of resources for learning the language [3]. YouTube was developed to allow users to discover and share content, such as videos and photos [4]. By utilizing social media, students can access a variety of English content, such as videos and posts, which enables them to learn new aspects of the language. This not only creates a fresh learning environment but also boosts their motivation to study English [5]. Given that English is an international language and the most commonly used for social media interactions, students benefit from the opportunity to exchange information and knowledge [6]. Social media has evolved into a multimedia platform that delivers diverse content, which textbooks alone cannot provide [7]. Perception is a biological process involving receiving messages through the five senses: sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch [8]. Learning English is a process of getting knowledge about English skills [9]. Recently, research by Aryanti et al. [10] showed positive perceptions regarding social media helpfulness in learning English.

While previous research has established a general positive perception of digital tools, a significant research gap remains regarding the specific interplay between students' emotional resilience (such as reduced anxiety) and the technical limitations inherent in a rural Indonesian university context. This study aims to investigate the attitudes of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students concerning the incorporation of social media as a teaching instrument. The principal motive is the growing ubiquity of digital platforms in daily life, necessitating that instructors comprehend the influence of these technologies on language acquisition and academic involvement. This study is especially important for university students as it underscores the transition from conventional textbooks to multimedia tools that help elevate motivation, diminish learning anxiety, and cultivate a more relaxed, stress-free atmosphere. The study offers specialized insights into the particular educational requirements and technology impediments, including connectivity challenges and device limits, encountered by students at Universitas Katolik Indonesia (UNIKA) Santu Paulus Ruteng. This research provides significant information for campus administrators and educators to enhance teaching methodologies and effectively incorporate digital literacy into the curriculum, hence improving language learning outcomes.

2 Literature Review

Social Media

Social media consists of information and communication technology tools used for constant communication. It has become an influential tool in language learning, providing interactive

and authentic ways for learners to engage with the target language. Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, and YouTube allow access to content like videos and articles that expose learners to real-world language use and cultural contexts. These platforms facilitate collaboration, enabling learners to practice speaking and writing with peers and native speakers through comments and messages. [1]

Its foundation is rooted in the concepts of Web 2.0 and User-Generated Content. Web 2.0 allows material to be continuously updated in a collaborative manner by all users. Social media enables students to interact at their own pace, adjust conversation flows, and practice interaction by posting comments. Furthermore, incorporating these tools into classrooms enhances students' digital media and information technology skills [12]. Teachers should select materials that engage learners effectively and cognitively to support the development of communicative competence.

Kaplan and Haenlein [11] identified several social media types:

- Social networking sites: Applications like Facebook and Twitter allow users to connect, share personal information, and join interest groups.
- Content-sharing sites: Platforms like YouTube and Instagram allow users to share videos and photos, often allowing others to rate or comment on the content.
- Blogs: Platforms like Tumblr or Medium present information in reverse chronological order and feature comment sections for interaction.
- Ratings and review sites: Sites like eBay and Amazon provide insights into products based on customer experiences.
- Social bookmarking sites: Platforms like Reddit enable users to save and rank bookmarks of web documents.
- Collaborative projects: Joint content creation databases like Wikipedia facilitate the simultaneous creation of content by many users.

Social media facilitates communication and serves as a tool for staying informed about global events. In education, it serves as a platform for social interaction where students exchange ideas and learn from various sources. It is an effective tool for increasing student engagement and motivation, particularly for introverted students.[1]

However, challenges include privacy concerns regarding how individual information is used [13]. Digital friendships may lack real quality, and data on social media is not always reliable. Misinformation is another challenge, as students may find it difficult to express thoughts in writing compared to oral expression. Social media can also be a distraction; students admit to wasting time and neglecting studies for social networking [14]. Other negative aspects include cyberbullying and adverse effects such as social isolation [15].

Social media aligns with language teaching theories such as constructivism and social-cultural theory [16]. In constructivism, learning occurs when meaningful social interaction includes community sharing of perspectives [17]. It provides a vast resource of authentic language in written and video forms. Using social media maximizes student exposure to language through socialization and contextualization. For example, Facebook and WhatsApp permit students to create learning groups for discussing materials. YouTube provides English videos for students to practice listening skills.

Integrating social media requires knowledge of both technology and pedagogy. Facebook features like private messages and groups facilitate reading and writing [18]. Instagram enables a collaborative atmosphere where students comment on photos and videos using English [19]. Twitter can engage students in English activities, allowing participants to share information in foreign languages [20]. YouTube helps develop listening skills and improves knowledge of grammar and vocabulary [21]. WhatsApp supports the English classroom due to its ease of access and ability to facilitate real-time communication [22]

Perception

Perception refers to someone's experience in making an interpretation about something. It depends on the stimuli's relation to surrounding conditions and is the gathering of information through hearing, seeing, and sensing [23]. Perception is the ability to organize observations, including discrimination and grouping [24]. It is a biological process in the brain involving the reception of information through the five senses [8]. Once an object is sensed, the brain processes the input to derive meaning. Life experiences shape unique impressions that vary from person to person.

The process consists of three stages [25]:

1. Selection: Initial phase of interpreting environmental stimuli.
2. Organization: Structuring selected information by identifying patterns.
3. Interpretation: Assigning meaning to structured stimuli.

Factors affecting perception include strong stimuli, physiological health, and psychological aspects like motivation and thinking ability [26]. Environment and social background also influence perception. Selective attention helps individuals filter out unnecessary information. Values, needs, and past experiences further shape how people understand new information.

Perception indicators include acceptance (physiological stage of capturing stimuli) and understanding (assessment and evaluation) [27]. Understanding involves classifying and interpreting images in the brain unique to the individual. Assessment emerges after the individual compares new understanding with subjective criteria.

Perception is shaped by five characteristics: modality, spatial dimensions, temporal dimensions, contextual structure, and meaningfulness [28]. Modality requires stimuli to match specific sensory organs, while spatial and temporal dimensions distinguish position and time. Three factors influence a person's perception: the perceiving individual, the target of perception, and the situation. Both internal and external factors trigger unique interpretations of the same object.

3 Research Methodology

This research is categorized as a quantitative descriptive study designed to understand the perceptions of fifth-semester EFL students at UNIKA Santu Paulus Ruteng regarding social media as an English learning tool. The descriptive nature of this research focuses specifically on exploring and explaining the views, experiences, and attitudes of the students without the manipulation of any variables [29]. This quantitative approach allows the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of how these students perceive the role of platforms like Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram in improving their language skills.

3.1. Population and Sampling

The research population consisted of 94 fifth-semester EFL students divided into three classes. From this population, a sample of 50 participants was selected using a random sampling technique to ensure the data remained statistically representative and free from selection bias. This sample size was deemed sufficient to capture the diverse attitudes and experiences of the student body.

3.2. Research Instrument

To collect the necessary data, the researcher developed an online closed-ended questionnaire. The instrument comprised 20 items categorized into three sub-indicators: student feelings, language skill improvements, and the challenges of using social media. The questionnaire utilized a four-point Likert scale—ranging from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree"—to eliminate neutral responses and force a clear attitudinal stance. To ensure clarity and avoid linguistic misunderstandings, the items were written in Bahasa Indonesia. The instrument's reliability was confirmed through the comparison of R-count values against an R-table value of 0.279, ensuring that the data collected were valid for hypothesis testing.

3.3. Data Collection Procedure

The data collection was conducted entirely online via Google Forms. This technical approach allowed for efficient distribution and reduced the risk of manual data entry errors. Link distribution was managed through digital channels, ensuring that students could respond at their convenience, thereby minimizing pressure or time-based bias.

3.4. Data Analysis Method

Once the data were gathered, the results were processed using Microsoft Excel to perform descriptive statistical analysis. The analysis included the calculation of frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations to summarize student perceptions. To test the research hypothesis, the researcher performed a comparative analysis between the R-count and the R-table value, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis in favor of the alternative hypothesis.

4 Findings and Discussion

The results are categorized into several key areas: students' emotional feelings toward the tools, the perceived impact on specific language skills, and the practical challenges encountered during usage.

Regarding students' feelings, the data indicates a predominantly positive attitude toward social media as a tool for learning English. A significant majority of students, totaling 88%, find that learning through social media is fun and pleasing. Additionally, 88% of respondents agree that these platforms boost their confidence in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, which suggests that digital spaces offer a more encouraging environment than traditional settings. Furthermore, 84% of students feel that social media reinforces self-independent learning, indicating that these tools enhance student autonomy. The research also highlights that 76% of students find that social media reduces their anxiety, while an impressive 92% believe it creates a more relaxed and stress-free learning environment. Accessibility remains a primary advantage, with 90% of students finding the platforms easy to use and 86% reporting that they can be accessed anytime and anywhere. Communication is also facilitated, as 92% of students agree that it is easy to interact with others through these digital tools.

In terms of language skills and components, students perceive social media as a highly valuable resource for linguistic improvement. The highest positive responses were recorded for vocabulary development, where 94% of students reported significant enhancement. Pronunciation also saw a strong perceived improvement from 90% of students, likely due to the audiovisual nature of modern platforms. Receptive and productive skills were equally represented, with listening and speaking both receiving positive feedback from 90% and 92% of students, respectively. Reading skills were perceived to improve by 88% of respondents, while grammar knowledge saw an improvement for 90% of the participants. These findings suggest that exposure to authentic digital content provides a wealth of learning resources that textbooks alone may lack.

The study also identified several challenges associated with social media use, though they did not outweigh the benefits. While 50% of students disagree that they are exposed to inappropriate content, a notable 40% acknowledge this as a concern, suggesting that exposure levels vary by individual usage. Interestingly, the majority of students do not find these platforms to be a hindrance to their focus; 78% of respondents disagree that they feel distracted while using social media specifically for learning purposes. Mental health concerns were also addressed, with 62% of students disagreeing that social media negatively affects their well-being. However, technical limitations remain the most significant hurdle, as 64% of respondents report recurring problems related to internet signals, gadget quality, or mobile data constraints.

Analysis of platform usage shows that YouTube is the most frequently used social media for improving English language skills, utilized by 60% of students. Instagram ranks as the second most popular platform at 40%, while Facebook is used by 12%. Notably, WhatsApp and Twitter were not reported as primary tools for English learning in this study, likely because they are viewed more as communication tools rather than content-sharing educational platforms. WhatsApp and Twitter were reported as having zero usage for learning purposes. In the specific context of Ruteng, WhatsApp is perceived strictly through the "situation" factor of perception as a private communication tool for social coordination, rather than an educational content-

sharing site. Twitter's lack of usage likely stems from its text-heavy nature, which offers fewer audiovisual "stimuli" compared to the high-engagement multimedia features of YouTube and Instagram.

The findings reveal that social media creates a supportive environment that enhances engagement, motivation, and autonomy in language learning. The results align with previous research indicating that platforms like YouTube are effective due to their multimedia nature, which combines audio and visual elements to support pronunciation and comprehension. Based on the statistical analysis conducted in this study, the R-count values were consistently higher than the R-table value of 0.279. Therefore, the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected and the alternative hypothesis (H_a) is accepted, confirming that there is a significantly positive student perception regarding the use of social media as a tool for learning English at UNIKA Santu Paulus Ruteng.

5 Conclusion and Suggestion

The findings of this study demonstrate that students at UNIKA Santu Paulus Ruteng possess a predominantly positive perception of using social media as a tool for learning English. Most students find the integration of these platforms into their studies to be an engaging, accessible, and beneficial experience that specifically aids in developing skills such as listening, speaking, and vocabulary acquisition. Furthermore, social media is perceived to promote self-independent learning, reduce learner anxiety, and create a stress-free environment that builds overall confidence.

Regarding platform preferences, YouTube emerged as the most popular choice for language learning, utilized by 60% of the participants, followed by Instagram at 40%. This preference is largely attributed to the rich audiovisual resources these platforms provide, which are particularly effective for practicing pronunciation and listening. Conversely, platforms like WhatsApp and Twitter were not utilized at all for English learning purposes in this study.

Despite these positive outcomes, students encounter significant challenges, most notably technical issues such as poor internet connectivity and device limitations. Additionally, concerns regarding exposure to inappropriate content and potential mental health impacts were noted. However, the majority of students demonstrated an ability to manage their focus, reporting that they do not feel distracted by social media when using it for educational purposes. Ultimately, the statistical analysis supports the alternative hypothesis, confirming that social media is viewed as a valuable and important tool in the modern EFL learning context.

To maximize the educational potential of these digital tools, it is suggested that educators formally integrate platforms like YouTube and Instagram into their teaching strategies by recommending high-quality content and designing interactive assignments. Such an approach can provide students with diverse learning materials and foster a sense of community through online discussion forums and peer-to-peer activities.

To address the challenges identified, schools should prioritize digital literacy training to help students critically evaluate online information and select credible resources. Institutions should also work to mitigate technical barriers by providing alternative offline resources where internet

connectivity is a recurring issue. Finally, future research should be conducted to examine the long-term impact of social media on specific language proficiency levels and to explore the most effective ways to integrate these digital methods into formal curricula.

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