

EFL Students' Perceptions of Autonomous English Learning through Social Media Platforms: A Descriptive Quantitative Study

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to explore the views of English Foreign Learners (EFL) on independent English learning via social media platforms, particularly Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. The research aims to comprehend how students regard these platforms as resources for self-directed learning and to determine elements that shape their viewpoints. A descriptive quantitative approach was utilized, involving 40 participants between the ages of 13 and 28 who filled out a Google Form survey comprising 23 valid items following validity testing. The data was analyzed using SPSS software to generate descriptive statistics reflecting the opinions and experiences of the students. The findings indicate that most students believe social media is an effective tool for learning English independently. They believe social media provides them with freedom and engaging content that enhances their language abilities. The most favoured content types are brief videos showcasing daily phrases and vocabulary-enhancing videos that include subtitles. Perceptions are shaped by various elements, including previous learning experiences, digital competence, individual motivation, and the credibility of content creators. Although social media is seen as a beneficial supplement, the majority of respondents concur that it cannot entirely substitute for traditional classroom education. These results suggest that to enhance autonomous English learning, educators and content creators need to offer resources that fulfil student needs and leverage the benefits of social media.

Key words: autonomous learning, social media platforms, perception, EFL students, English learning materials

INTRODUCTION

The manner that students learn English Foreign Learners (EFL) has changed dramatically in the current digital era. Language acquisition can now come from a variety of sources outside of the conventional classroom. Nowadays, a lot of students use social media sites like YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok as extra resources for self-directed English learning. In the context of EFL, social media has emerged as a promising tool for enhancing language skills (Dewi, 2025). These platforms offer various engaging and interactive content that allows students to access real-life English usage, pronunciation models, and authentic language input anytime and anywhere.

Social media creates an active English environment that offers learners abundant exposure to the language, which contributes significantly to their language development (Halawa, 2024). The nature of social media, which provides flexibility, informal settings, and user-friendly features, supports autonomous learning: a process where learners take responsibility for their own educational development outside the classroom. Students no longer rely totally on teachers or textbooks, but rather on short videos, captioned posts, language challenges, and native speaker content that are right away available online. Compared to books and other text materials, adult learners are using social media more frequently to obtain knowledge on English Language by (Yadav, 2020). However, in spite of the extensive use of social media by students, their perceptions toward learning English autonomously through these platforms be capricious. Social media can be beneficial and motivating for some individuals, while it might also be distracting or unreliable for others. These perceptions can significantly affect how students engage with their own language learning.

This indicates a comprehensive evaluation of the social media's worth as a tool for self-directed English study, making it crucial to understand students' viewpoints. By analyzing responses from their students, educators and content creators can develop more captivating materials and enhanced support frameworks that align with the needs and preferences of learners. Thus, this study aims to explore how EFL students perceive the role of social media platforms in their self-directed English learning, the types of content they engage with the most, and the factors influencing their views.

The increasing reliance on digital tools in everyday life has significantly influenced students' learning, particularly in the context of language acquisition. Many researchers in second and foreign language education have investigated the integration of social media as a teaching approach in formal learning environments (Lailiyah & Setiyaningsih, 2020). Social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube have emerged as popular tools for EFL learners seeking to improve their English, offering a wide range of content that enhances vocabulary, listening skills, pronunciation, and grammar. Students are utilizing these platforms more and more to learn autonomously beyond the classroom.

According to the results of her study, most students agreed or strongly agreed that social media affects their language acquisition from a variety of angles (Wirentake,

2023). However, their opinions on the value and efficacy of these teaching strategies, however, differ widely.

Some students perceive learning English via social media as engaging and effective, while others may find it distracting or insufficient without formal instruction. In addition, students show diverse preferences in the types of content they consume, some gravitate toward short reels or TikTok videos with everyday expressions, while others prefer more structured content such as grammar tutorials or subtitled English vlogs. These differences raise the question of which content types are most supportive for autonomous English learning.

Moreover, students' perceptions are shaped by several factors, including digital literacy, personal motivation, prior learning experience, and even the credibility of the content creators they follow. Without understanding these influencing factors, it is difficult to determine why certain students have more positive perceptions than others. The study's ultimate findings are consistent with some earlier research that has been done, verifying the favourable effect of social media use on pupils' enthusiasm for studying English by (Wirentake, 2023). In addition, although students spend a significant amount of time on social media, the extent to which they view it as an effective tool for improving their English skills independently is still unclear. These gaps highlight the need to investigate students' views more deeply, to ensure that autonomous digital learning can be optimized and effectively integrated as a complement to formal education.

To gain a clearer insight into how EFL students view the use of social media for self-directed English learning, especially among those in the digital-native age group, the following research questions are addressed in this study:

1. What are the perceptions of EFL students toward learning English autonomously through social media sites like YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok?
2. What factors influence students' positive or negative perceptions toward learning English autonomously via social media?
3. To what extent do students perceive social media platforms as effective tools for improving their English skills independently?

Based on the research questions above, in order to give the investigation a defined direction and scope, the goals of this study are described as follows:

1. To describe EFL students' perceptions of autonomous English learning through social media platforms.
2. To analyze the factors influencing students' perceptions of social media as a learning tool.
3. To examine the extent to which students consider social media effective for improving their English skills independently.

This study holds theoretical and practical significance in the field of English language education, particularly of understanding about the intersection between autonomous learning and social media use. From a theoretical perspective, it contributes to the growing body of literature on learner autonomy in EFL contexts by exploring how students engage with non-traditional learning platforms outside the classroom. The study also sheds light on how students' perceptions shaped by motivation, digital habits, and personal learning goals can influence their use of Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube for self-directed language development. These insights can enrich future research on digital learning environments and autonomous language acquisition, especially for Gen Z learners who are highly immersed in social media culture.

METHODS

This research uses quantitative descriptive as the research method in the preparation of this paper, by distributing questionnaires using the Google Form platform. For the first step, a research instrument was created based on the established variables, which consisted of 4 variables with a total of 23 questions to be answered by the sample. This instrument underwent a validity test using SPSS software before being distributed to respondents, resulting in 5 invalid questions and 23 valid questions. The research instrument chose to apply a 1-5 Likert scale for answer selection, spanning from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Except for question number 11, where the 1-5 Likert scale used is never, rarely, sometimes, often, very often.

The next step is the random selection of samples, with the main criteria being samples aged 13 – 28 years (Gen Z) and also English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. After that is to distribute the questionnaire, with the sampling being conducted randomly based on the main criteria established in the instrument. As many as 40

respondents were obtained from the completion of the Google Form, consisting of various age ranges, educational levels, and different educational backgrounds.

Tabel 1: Respondent Background Information

N = 40			
Item	Number of data	Frequency	Percent
Age	16	6	15%
	19	1	2,5%
	20	2	5%
	21	15	37,5%
	22	8	20%
	23	6	15%
	24	1	2,5%
	29	1	2,5%
Education Level	Junior High School	7	17,5%
	Bachelor's Degree	31	77,5%
	Master's Degree	2	5%
Frequently Used social media	Instagram	22	55%
	Tiktok	16	40%
	YouTube	2	5%

The instrument distributed to respondents is presented in Indonesian to help respondents understand and answer the given statements more easily. In addition, the table above displays the types of social media platforms most frequently accessed by respondents based on the last 3 months. The frequency of social media access used by respondents is certainly very necessary and supportive in this research. For the final step, the data obtained from the respondents is analyzed using the quantitative descriptive analysis feature in the SPSS software, and the results are then interpreted in the writing of this article.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Results

Based on the results of the instruments filled out by the 40 respondents, it can be seen that there are various outcomes from EFL perceptions of learning English independently through social media, especially through the platforms Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. Four important variables in this study consist of 1 independent variable and 3 dependent variables. "General Perception of Autonomous English Learning Through Social Media" as the independent variable, while the "Types of Social Media Content Most Frequently Used for Learning English", "Factors Influencing

Learner Perception”, and the “Effectiveness Level of Social Media as a Self-Study Tool” encompass the dependent variables.

In the first table, statements are presented that encompass the “General Perception of Autonomous English Learning Through Social Media” as the independent variable or main variable in this study. It can be seen that almost the majority of respondents feel comfortable or suitable using social media as a tool for learning English, as evidenced by an average score of 3.95 from a total of 40 respondents. However, this learning is not accompanied by learning targets that must be met by the respondents, as indicated by an average score of 3.40. Additionally, it can be said that the data results from this variable are uniform (homogeneous), supported by a standard deviation value of 0.791 from the statement "Social media inspires me to study English more frequently." Other results also show diversity (heterogeneous) in this variable, where the statement "I feel more confident learning independently through social media compared to learning in a formal classroom" displays a standard deviation value of 1.118.

Table 2: Dependent Variable Data Collection

General Perception of Autonomous English Learning through Social Media				
No.	Item	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	I find that learning English independently through social media is highly beneficial.	40	3.90	0.871
2	I believe that social media can serve as an effective learning tool without always relying on a teacher.	40	3.63	0.952
3	I feel comfortable using social media to learn English.	40	3.95	0.904
4	I feel more confident learning independently through social media compared to learning in a formal classroom.	40	3.32	1.118
5	Learning English through social media encourages me to be more active in exploring and deepening my understanding.	40	3.68	0.944
6	I feel more motivated to learn English when I use social media.	40	3.53	0.960
7	Social media inspires me to study English more frequently.	40	3.70	0.791
8	I set my own English learning goals when using social media.	40	3.40	0.900
Valid N (listwise)		40		

For the second table or the first dependent variable related to “Types of Social Media Content Most Often Used to Learn English”, it shows the highest result on the

statement “I often watch short videos (Reels, Shorts, TikTok) to learn daily English expressions”, which reached an average score of 3.45, also representing the homogeneity of the respondents' responses to that statement. In addition, there is diversity with a standard deviation value of 0.932, from respondents' opinions regarding “How often do you use social media platforms to learn English?”

Table 3: First Independen Variable Data Collection

Types of Social Media Content Most Often Used to Learn English				
No.	Item	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	I often watch short videos (Reels, Shorts, TikTok) to learn daily English expressions.	40	3.45	0.932
2	I enjoy watching videos with subtitles to enrich my English vocabulary.	40	3.05	1.131
3	How often do you use social media platforms to learn English?	40	3.07	1.228
Valid N (listwise)		40		

Furthermore, the respondents' scores from the third table show that statement no. 14 (no. 3), which is 4.07 and 0.730, is very interpretable and uniform, indicating that respondents have a personal motivation to gradually improve their English skills using various methods or learning tools. On the contrary, in item 8 (statement no. 19), it is shown that the respondents' trust in the learning tips and English information provided by content creators is relatively low, as evidenced by the average results in the table below.

Table 4: Second Independen Variable Data Collection

Factors Affecting Student Perception				
No.	Item	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	I am able to use social media effectively and do not feel confused when looking for learning content.	40	3.83	0.931
2	I know how to choose the right content for learning English.	40	3.80	0.791
3	I have personal motivation to improve my English skills.	40	4.07	0.730
4	I tend to learn English more when the content matches my personal interests.	40	4.03	0.947
5	I have previously tried learning English through social media.	40	3.78	0.920
6	I find it easier to learn because I have been used to studying independently.	40	3.57	0.958
7	I follow content creators whom I consider credible and high-quality.	40	3.80	1.224

8	I trust the English learning tips and information shared by educational influencers on social media.	40	3.77	0.947
Valid N (listwise)		40		

Not only that, in this last table, it presents that the majority of respondents believe that social media has the potential to complement the role of teachers in independent English language learning. This is followed by data shown in the table below with an average score of 3.90. Meanwhile, at the same time, respondents do not consistently study English through social media within a week. This is certainly consistent with the diversity of respondents based on the standard deviation value on statement no. 2 which reads, "I learn new vocabulary and pronunciation from social media every day." Additionally, with social media as a tool for independent learning, respondents uniformly (homogeneously) feel that their English skills continue to improve, as evidenced by a standard deviation value of 0.740.

Table 5: Third Independent Variable Data Collection

Effectiveness of Social Media as a Self-Learning Tool				
No.	Item	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	I feel that my English skills have improved, based on learning through social media.	40	3.62	0.740
2	I learn new vocabulary and pronunciation from social media every day.	40	3.40	0.982
3	I consistently study English through social media every week.	40	3.20	0.883
4	I believe social media complements the role of teachers in independent English learning.	40	3.90	0.810
Valid N (listwise)		40		

Discussion

Through the data presented above, it can be said that the majority of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners have a high frequency of social media use, especially on the Instagram platform. Moreover, in this modern era, it is inseparable from dependence on gadgets and social media. Social media has grown in importance in the era of the internet for social engagement (Handayani et al., 2021). Therefore, social media can be a safe and suitable learning tool for use in English language learning. The ease and freedom of access, as well as flexibility in usage time, provide additional benefits for English learners who are studying independently. In addition,

learners are able to adjust to their desired needs during the learning process without feeling insecure or embarrassed to ask questions. Social media can be utilized for daily practice to improve English skills, and it can help minimize shyness by facilitating verbal communication in English (Anwas et al., 2020). With the availability of limitless information and various interesting content or social media user backgrounds, learners are also able to freely adjust the content or topics they need, such as the content from the account *@zelynafah*, which features British accent-related material. Of course, this can attract social media users' interest to explore more about English, especially the British accent.

However, with the unlimited access to social media, it is still possible that learners still very much need teachers and formal classes to study English more deeply, social media here is only a supporting tool in the learning process. Online social networking is used by many EFL students and even native speakers to study more and improve their English (Fitriani & Iftanti, 2021). The explanations provided or direct discussions are important components needed in the learning process. These are the factors that can trigger various different perceptions from learners regarding independent English learning through social media.

Additionally, the support for independent English learning through social media is also influenced by the type of content that is frequently accessed or used. Not all English related content can attract the interest of independent learners. Some English learners are more interested in "Daily Expression" content found on "Instagram Reels, YouTube Shorts/Videos, TikTok Content." This topic has its own appeal because the discussions can be applied to both speaking and writing skills. Then, some learners utilize the subtitle feature to enrich their English vocabulary while watching movies. When they see or hear rarely used vocabulary, this naturally increases the learners' curiosity, prompting them to use social media to find out more. Students more easily relate English vocabulary words and meanings to those in their native tongue than they do to grammatical rules (Abdulaziz Al Fadda, 2020). There are also many content creators who provide vocabulary related content on various social media platforms.

Thereafter, with various social media users around the world, different types of learning-related content have emerged with their own distinctive characteristics. For example, there are content creators who focus solely on vocabulary discussions, there are also content creators who delve deeper into grammar, and there are those who

utilize social media for advanced discussions on answering questions and various other topics. People can improve their verbal communication, typing, listening, reading comprehension, and language abilities by using social media. elements include language itself, words, etc (Ekawati, 2022). These contents can adjust to the needs of learners with the focus or requirements they desire. They do not need to adhere to structured topics or discussions like the materials found in textbooks or other learning tools during the learning process. Learners are free to access various necessary content according to their desires and abilities.

However, social media is not entirely a learning tool that is fully used to learn English. With the high frequency of social media use, it does not mean that users are constantly learning English every time they access social media. It can be said that learners still utilize other methods or applications to study social media, so it is not solely focused on Instagram, TikTok, or YouTube. The time spent learning per week is still considered not very frequent, maybe a few times a week. Although with various aspects that have been mentioned, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners believe that social media is a very helpful supporting tool in independent English language learning. Various knowledge can be easily obtained to delve deeper into the desired topic. In addition, with the presence of video content, it almost gives the impression of an explanation or practice in person, enabling learners to understand the material more deeply.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study highlight that social media platforms, particularly Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, have become significant supplementary tools in autonomous English learning for EFL students. Most students view these platforms as engaging and beneficial, as they provide flexible access to authentic English input anytime and anywhere. According to the research, students feel more at ease learning English on social media because they can set their own pace and select content that is relevant to their personal interests. Nonetheless, not every student views social media as a completely effective tool; some maintain that formal training is necessary for gaining a more profound understanding. The frequently accessed materials, like daily phrases or movies with subtitles, greatly impact students' educational experiences. This diversity in subject choices indicates the different motivations and

learning objectives of students. Therefore, social media offers important support, yet it cannot entirely substitute for traditional learning environments.

Moreover, the study indicates that multiple factors influence students' perspectives on independent English learning through social media. Personal motivation, digital literacy, and prior learning experiences had a significant impact on student engagement with these platforms. Learners who are confident in selecting appropriate educational content and have strong digital skills typically benefit more from utilizing social media as a learning tool. On the other hand, students with restricted digital abilities or unclear learning goals may find it challenging to use social media effectively for language improvement. The reliability of content creators is an important factor, as learners often trust and interact with educational influencers they perceive as credible. Interestingly, despite students frequently using social media, this doesn't always result in consistent or focused English learning. Thus, it is vital to consider both internal and external elements to improve the efficiency of social media in supporting autonomous English learning.

In summary, this research offers important insights into the way EFL students view and use social media platforms for self-directed English learning. While social media serves as a flexible and accessible learning resource, its effectiveness greatly depends on students' ability to navigate digital content and maintain intrinsic motivation. As the primary educator in the classroom, the teacher must be extremely astute in balancing in person instruction with online learning through social media to ensure that learners can discover learning styles that work for them and meet their learning objectives by (Prayudha, 2022). The study suggests that educators and content creators should design learning materials that are not only engaging but also tailored to students' diverse needs and preferences. Social media can indeed complement formal education, but it should not be seen as a standalone solution for language acquisition. Future research could explore how specific types of content or platform features contribute to different language skills in more depth. Additionally, there is a need for strategies that help students use social media more purposefully and consistently in their language learning journey. Overall, social media holds great promise as a supportive tool, but its potential can only be maximized through thoughtful integration into broader educational frameworks.

Author Bibliography

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