



The Impact of Social Media on English Language Learning: A Mixed-Methods Study

Putri Kusuma Ningrum^{1*}, Tri Wintolo Apoko²

¹² Universitas Muhammadiyah Prof. Dr. Hamka, Jakarta, Indonesia

*Corresponding author's email: putriningrum124@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the impact of social media usage on English language learning among high school students, employing a mixed-methods approach. The research focuses on popular social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Twitter, and YouTube, involving 64 tenth-grade students from a high school in Jakarta. In collecting quantitative data, a questionnaire was employed to measure the students' perceptions of social media. To collect qualitative data, semi-structured interview was used, then analyzed with a thematic analysis. The findings indicate that social media positively contributes to the enhancement of vocabulary, speaking skills, and students' motivation to learn. However, challenges remain, including distractions from non-educational content and a lack of structured learning. The findings emphasize the importance of thoughtfully and specifically incorporating social media into the English language curriculum.

Introduction

In the ever-evolving digital era, social media has become an essential part of daily life. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok are not only used for entertainment but also serve as tools for education, particularly in English language learning (Van Den Beemt et al., 2020). The accessibility of diverse English-language content, including articles, videos, and online discussions, allows learners to enhance their language skills independently. However, the effectiveness of social media as a learning tool is often hindered by factors such as the varying quality of content, distractions from non-educational material, and a lack of structured learning processes (Yang, 2020).

The urgency to explore the impact of social media on English language learning is underscored by the increasing reliance on these platforms for educational purposes (Malik & Qureshi, 2024). Previous research has yielded mixed results regarding the influence of social media on language acquisition, with some studies indicating enhanced student

motivation and engagement (Apoko & Waluyo, 2025), while others suggest that these benefits are contingent upon specific conditions. This highlights the necessity for a comprehensive understanding of how social media can be effectively utilized to support English language learning, particularly among upper secondary school students (Pranawengtias, 2022). Through this research, it is anticipated that key factors and strategies are identified to enhance the use of social media in language education, ultimately improving learning outcomes and fostering a more engaging and interactive learning experience for students (Abhi Rama et al., 2023). While this study does not propose a specific hypothesis, it seeks to uncover the nuanced ways in which social media influences language acquisition, focusing on both the positive and negative aspects as experienced by learners (Jabbari et al., n.d.).

Recent studies show that online platforms significantly improve English speaking and comprehension skills, particularly in vocabulary, understanding, and listening. Research indicates that using internet resources effectively enhances English proficiency by boosting vocabulary and grammar while engaging learners with English content. However, ensuring high language quality in informal communication remains a challenge (Malik & Qureshi, 2024). Investigations into Instagram and Snapchat for English instruction found that Instagram is more effective in promoting participation and language learning, as well as enhancing cultural awareness (Abdulaziz Al Fadda, 2020). Another research emphasizes the positive impact of social media on English learning, improving skills in speaking, reading, and writing. Teachers are encouraged to keep up with technological advancements and integrate online platforms into their teaching (Samuel & Pulizala, 2020). Further findings reveal that online platforms boost English proficiency through user interaction and access to digital materials, increasing student enthusiasm and communication skills (Muftah, 2023). YouTube, in particular, is recognized for its extensive instructional videos for learning English and other subjects (Ande et al., 2022). The use of social media by teachers has been shown to enhance students' academic performance, transforming traditional teaching methods (Shaikh et al., 2023). These studies suggest that social media is highly effective in enhancing English language skills by providing digital resources, fostering interaction, and increasing student motivation, although maintaining language quality in informal contexts remains a challenge.

This current study seeks to fill that gap by examining how the use of social media can function as a collaborative and interactive tools that supports both vocabulary acquisition and the development of students' productive skills, particularly writing and speaking in upper secondary school through a mixed-methods design. The primary objective of this study is to investigate the efficacy of social media use on English language learning, focusing on various factors such as platform type, frequency of use, and user characteristics. Thus, the research questions are addressed in the following:

1. How does the use of social media platforms influence the acquisition of new English vocabulary among students?
 2. In what ways do social media platforms facilitate the improvement of speaking skills in English among learners?
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3. How do students perceive the ease of learning and retaining new vocabulary through social media compared to other learning methods?
4. How do students apply new vocabulary learned from social media in their speaking and writing tasks?

Research Methods

Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods design with a sequential explanatory design. This study employed a mixed-methods design using a sequential explanatory approach, which consists of collecting and analyzing quantitative data followed by qualitative data (Toyon, 2021). The rationale behind choosing this design lies in its ability to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research problem. By first gathering quantitative data through surveys, the study captures the percentages of students' perceptions on vocabulary acquisition, speaking improvement, ease of learning new vocabulary, and the application of writing and speaking through the use of social media, including the statistical analyses to gain the mean and standard deviations. Following the quantitative data was the qualitative phase, conducted through semi-structured interviews to explain and elaborate on the quantitative findings. This explanatory sequence enhances the interpretation of the data by validating and enriching the numerical results with context and meaning derived from students' voices on the use of social media in English language learning.

Additionally, the use of a mixed-methods approach aligns with the complex nature of language learning, which involved both observable behaviors and subjective experiences. It enabled the researchers to triangulate data from different sources, thereby increasing the validity and reliability of the findings. This design was particularly suitable for this current research where both measurable outcomes and individual perspectives were critical to understanding the full impact of an instructional phenomenon in this case and the integration of social media into English learning among senior high school students (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Context and the Participants

This study was conducted at an upper secondary school in Indonesia, involving a total of 64 students aged between 16 to 18 years old, who were actively enrolled in English language classes. The participants were selected using purposive sampling based on their regular use of social media platforms in daily life and their willingness to participate in both quantitative and qualitative phases of the research. The demographic information of the participants is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic information of the participants

Categories	Sub-categories	Number of participants N=64	Percent (%)
Gender	Female	36	56
	Male	28	44
Age	15 years old	15	23
	16 years old	46	72
	17 years old	2	3
	18 years old	1	2

Frequency of using social media	< 1 hour	26	41
	1 – 2 hours	29	45
	3 – 5 hours	6	9
	> 5 hours	3	5
Social media platforms	Instagram	15	23
	YouTube	9	14
	TikTok	21	33
	Twitter / X	11	17
	Duolingo	2	3
	Game	5	8
	Google	1	2

As shown in Table 1, this study involved a total of 64 participants. In terms of gender distribution, 56% of the participants were female and 44% were male. The majority of participants, accounting for 72%, were 16 years old, followed by 23% who were 15 years old, 3% who were 17 years old, and 2% who were 18 years old. Regarding the frequency of social media usage, 45% of the participants reported using social media for 1 to 2 hours per day, 41% used it for less than 1 hour, 9% for 3 to 5 hours, and 5% for more than 5 hours daily. Instagram was identified as the most commonly used platform for learning English (23%), followed by TikTok (33%), Twitter/X (17%), YouTube (14%), gaming platforms (8%), Duolingo (3%), and Google (2%).

Data Collection and Analysis

To collect the quantitative data, the researcher developed a questionnaire adapted from Abhi Rama et al. (2023) and Aithal & Aithal (2020).. The questionnaire consisted of 15 closed-ended items categorized into five sections which included students' demography, their usage patterns, preferences, the impact of social media on their English language learning particularly vocabulary acquisition and speaking skills, and platform-specific impact.

Table 2. Description of the structure of the questionnaire:

Section	Description	Example Items
A. Demographic Information	Captures participants' age, gender, and frequency of social media usage in English learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Age, gender ➤ Social media use: Less than 1 hour, 1-2 hours, etc.
B. Usage Patterns	Identifies platform usage frequency and type	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ "I use multiple social media platforms for learning English." ➤ Platform check: Instagram, YouTube...
C. Preferences & Experiences	Explores preferences and perceived engagement using social media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ "I find learning English on social media enjoyable." ➤ "I prefer using social media over traditional methods."
D. Impact on Language Skills	Measures self-perceived vocabulary improvement and usage in speaking/writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ "Using social media has improved my English vocabulary."

		➤ “I use vocabulary from social media in writing.”
E. Platform-Specific Impact	Focuses on following content creators, exposure, and ease of learning vocabulary	➤ “I follow many English content creators.” ➤ “Social media makes English learning more relaxed and stress-free.”

Each item used a 5-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. The reliability of the questionnaire with an Alpha Cronbach formula yielded 0.954, indicating a high internal consistency among the items.

For the qualitative component, semi-structured interviews were conducted to gain deeper insights into the experiences and challenges faced by students (Dengel et al., 2023). with a representative group of nine students, balanced in terms of gender, with five females and four males. These participants were selected to provide diverse perspectives based on their age and frequency of social media use. Each participant has a 10–15-minute interview to explore their perspectives on the use of social media in their English learning.

The data analysis in this study employed both quantitative and qualitative methods to comprehensively assess the impact of social media on English language learning. Quantitative data from questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics to gain the mean, standard deviation and the percentages of social media usage (Sen & Yildirim, 2022). Qualitative data from semi-structured interviews underwent a thematic analysis, starting with transcription, coding significant features, and developing broader themes that will be refined for coherence (Naeem et al., 2023). To enhance validity and reliability, data triangulation compared findings from both data types, culminating in a final report that synthesizes quantitative trends and qualitative insights into a cohesive narrative, supported by detailed explanations and narrative examples (Taherdoost, 2021).

Findings

The research findings indicate that social media usage positively impacts students' vocabulary enhancement and speaking skills. Most students reported that social media helped them to acquire new vocabulary and improve their speaking abilities. However, some students acknowledged that face-to-face interactions remained crucial for the comprehensive development of speaking skills. These findings suggest that while social media can serve as an effective tool in English language learning, it should be complemented with traditional teaching methods to achieve optimal results.

Vocabulary Enhancement through Social Media

The quantitative findings revealed generally positive perceptions of social media's role in enhancing English vocabulary. As presented in Table 3, mean scores for vocabulary-related items ranged from 3.41 to 3.89 on a five-point Likert scale. A majority of participants

agreed or strongly agreed that using social media helped them acquire new English vocabulary. The item “Using social media has improved my English vocabulary” received particularly strong endorsement, with 76% of respondents selecting “Agree” or “Strongly Agree.”

These findings suggest that students not only recognize but actively engage with vocabulary content on platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. Students indicated that they were frequently exposed to new words and phrases while scrolling through educational content, short video lessons, or infographics, which helped them expand their lexicon.

Table 3. Vocabulary enhancement

No	Statements	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	SD
1	I use multiple social media platforms for learning English.	5	3	42	33	17	3.55	.97
2	Using social media has improved my English vocabulary	5	3	16	51	25	3.89	.97
3	I follow many English content creators on social media to enhance my vocabulary.	3	11	45	23	18	3.41	1.00

This quantitative analysis is corroborated by qualitative interview responses. Some students reflected a deliberate effort to use digital platforms as learning tools. However, it is found that a student preferred one social media containing a short movie when she had to, indicating selective engagement depending on perceived usefulness and accessibility. Overall, these responses indicate that the visual and bite-sized nature of content on platforms like TikTok makes vocabulary learning less intimidating and more accessible to students at varying proficiency levels. Below are the excerpts from the participants.

“I often use Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, and ROBLOX to learn English. On Instagram, I follow accounts that share new vocabulary and study tips.” (Respondent 1)

“I rarely use social media to learn English. When I do, I prefer using TikTok to watch short videos that explain new vocabulary,” (Respondent 4)

Social Media for Improvement of Speaking Ability

Speaking skills also showed notable improvements through the use of social media platforms. Table 4 presents the statistical summary, with mean scores ranging from 3.62 to 4.11. The highest-rated item in this category was “I find learning English on social media enjoyable,” suggesting that the informal and entertaining nature of digital content supports the development of oral communication skills.

Table 4. Improved speaking ability

No	Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	SD
1	I find learning English on social media enjoyable	5	2	19	28	46	4.11	1.07

2	Compared to traditional methods, I prefer using social media for learning English	6	5	25	30	34	3.81	1.15
3	Social media platforms have helped I to improve my speaking skills in English.	8	3	25	47	17	3.62	1.06
4	Social media gave me the opportunity to improve my speaking skills in English.	0	5	27	48	20	3.84	.80

Qualitatively, a significant number of students also stated that they often imitated the pronunciation, accent, and intonation of native speakers featured in videos, which helped them practice speaking skills independently. In addition, students' insights emphasize the value of interactive features such as comments, discussions, and user-generated content in providing low-pressure environments to practice speaking. However, some students acknowledged limitations. This suggests that while social media enhances exposure and motivation, structured classroom interaction remains essential for holistic skill development. Below are the excerpts from the participants.

"Social media helps me improve my listening and speaking skills. I can listen to the correct pronunciation from videos and try to imitate it." (Respondent 3)

"I feel that social media helps me with my speaking and writing skills. By participating in discussions, I can practice expressing my opinions in English." (Respondent 5)

"Social media helps me improve my listening skills. However, I feel that other aspects like speaking and writing are still better learned in person." (Respondent 6)

Students' Perceived Ease of Learning and Remembering New Vocabulary through Social Media

The ease with which students could learn and retain new vocabulary through social media was another strongly supported theme. Table 5 shows that mean scores in this category ranged between 3.75 and 3.88. The highest-rated item stated that social media platforms often display English-language content, making new vocabulary more accessible and contextualized within everyday usage.

Table 5. Ease of learning and remembering new words

No	Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	SD
1	On my social media feeds, English content producers frequently appear	2	5	34	36	23	3.88	.951
2	Social media makes it easier for me to learn new words and remember their usage.	3	5	21	48	23	3.84	.946
3	Social media platforms provide more engaging content for learning English compared to other methods.	3	3	23	44	27	3.75	.926

4	Using social media made it easier for me to access new words and the sentences.	2	6	22	51	19	3.80	.876
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Regarding the ease of learning and remembering new vocabulary, qualitative analysis provided further depth to this theme. Students benefit most from content that combines visual elements with concise explanations. In addition, students are not just passive consumers but are selectively engaging with content that aligns with their academic or career goals. Students also expressed that content found on social media helped them remember vocabulary due to the relaxed and engaging atmosphere. The informal tone and repetition within these digital environments create a space where incidental learning can take place naturally and repeatedly. Below are the excerpts from the participants.

"The most useful content for me is learning videos and infographics about grammar. I follow accounts like @EnglishWithLucy and English learning groups on TikTok." (Respondent 2)

"The most beneficial content for me includes videos that explain the use of English in professional contexts." (Respondent 3)

Application of Vocabulary through Social Media in Speaking and Writing

The final theme examined how students transferred their vocabulary acquisition into productive language skills. As seen in Table 6, the mean scores in this area ranged from 3.72 to 3.88, showing moderate to strong agreement that students actively used new vocabulary from social media in speaking and writing tasks.

Table 6. Use of new vocabulary in writing and speaking

No	Statements	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	SD
1	I often use new English vocabulary learned from social media in my writing and speaking.	3	3	36	34	24	3.72	.96
2	Using social media makes me excited to get new English vocabulary.	2	8	30	39	21	3.72	.95
3	Social media creates relaxed and stress-free English learning.	5	5	16	48	26	3.88	1.01

In qualitative analysis dealing with how students apply new vocabulary in the writing and speaking activities, many participants mentioned that social media motivated them to experiment with new expressions and phrases, particularly in creative writing or informal speaking settings. These reflections highlight how motivation is deeply linked with relevance when students see real-life application, they are more likely to integrate what they learn. Nevertheless, few students preferred conventional classroom instruction. This contrast reveals the need to balance modern digital tools with time-tested pedagogical practices.

"Using social media makes me more motivated to learn. I feel more engaged compared to traditional methods, which can sometimes be boring." (Respondent 9)

“Social media motivates me more because I can see how English is used in everyday life. I feel more connected to learning compared to conventional methods.” (Respondent 6)

“Social media doesn’t significantly increase my motivation. I prefer traditional learning methods, like listening to teachers in class.” (Respondent 4)

Discussion

The results of this study underscore the growing pedagogical relevance of social media in enhancing EFL students’ vocabulary acquisition and speaking proficiency. These findings resonate with broader shifts in language education that increasingly embrace technology-mediated, learner-centered, and informal modes of instruction (Heitmayer & Schimmelpfennig, 2024). Students’ strong agreement that social media improves vocabulary (mean = 3.89) is consistent with the theory of incidental vocabulary acquisition, which suggests that learners can absorb new words when exposed to authentic language input in meaningful contexts (Leung et al., 2024). Platforms like TikTok and Instagram create such environments by providing multimodal, engaging, and repetitive content that facilitates natural language intake (Habibah et al., 2021). This combining verbal and visual input optimizes cognitive processing and retention. Visual platforms like YouTube and Instagram integrate imagery, captions, and speech to reinforce semantic networks, thereby improving long-term vocabulary retention (Zhang & Zhang, 2023). Moreover, students’ intentional following of English content creators supports the concept of self-regulated learning (SRL), wherein learners actively curate their digital learning environments to suit individual needs and proficiency levels (Skulmowski & Xu, 2022).

Social media also contributed to students’ speaking abilities (mean = 4.11 for enjoyment and 3.84 for perceived improvement). These results reinforce previous research showing that students engage in “shadowing” or mimicry of native speakers’ pronunciation and intonation in short-form videos (Wei, 2023). This role of imitation and interaction in second language development. Furthermore, students’ participation in online discussions and comment sections reflects the rise of participatory cultures in digital learning (Terceiro, 2024). These micro-interactions offer safe, asynchronous spaces for practice, lowering affective filters and promoting fluency (Kaliisa & Dolonen, 2023).

However, the recognition by some participants that social media cannot fully replace face-to-face instruction aligns with recent concerns about digital-only approaches lacking systematic scaffolding and corrective feedback (Hongsa et al., 2023). This confirms the value of blended learning frameworks where social media complements, rather than replaces, structured classroom instruction. High mean scores for the ease of learning and remembering vocabulary (mean = 3.88) suggest that social media supports retention by embedding new words within familiar, engaging contexts. This outcome aligns with contextualized vocabulary instruction models and cognitive load theory, which emphasizes the importance of reducing extraneous cognitive processing to support learning (Eyland & Leung, 2024). The use of infographics, meme-based learning, and real-world examples on platforms like TikTok or YouTube Shorts reflects the “microlearning” paradigm, where brief, targeted content enhances focus and memory (Abdullah et al., 2022). Such content also enables spaced repetition a key mechanism in durable vocabulary retention (Ismail et al.,

2022). Interestingly, students' preference for professional or academic English content (e.g., videos simulating interviews or formal conversations) highlights a growing trend toward purpose-driven digital language learning (Lutfiyah et al., 2022). This reinforces the notion of instrumental motivation in language acquisition (Dörnyei et al., 2014).

The data on vocabulary application in speaking and writing (mean = 3.88) indicate that social media acts as a bridge between passive exposure and active production. This emphasizes the importance of producing language as a means of consolidating and deepening understanding. The motivational aspect reported by students also echoes the L2 Motivational Self System framework, which asserts that learners are more likely to engage and persist in language tasks when they see relevance to their ideal L2 self (Henry & Liu, 2023). Seeing real-life applications of English on social media may thus serve as a motivational amplifier. However, divergent responses some students still preferring traditional methods point to individual differences in learning preferences. As previous studies have shown, while social media appeals to autonomy-driven learners, others benefit more from the structure, feedback, and predictability of formal instruction (Purwanto et al., 2023).

Conclusion

This study concludes that social media platforms are effective tools for enhancing vocabulary acquisition and speaking proficiency among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. The findings reveal that platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube promote incidental learning, motivation, and real-world language application in informal and engaging settings. These tools are particularly advantageous for vocabulary development and speaking fluency through multimodal exposure and interaction. From an educational standpoint, the study suggests that educators should strategically integrate social media into language curricula to complement formal instruction. When aligned with learning objectives and supported by teacher guidance, social media can encourage self-directed learning and sustained language use, prompting curriculum designers to consider hybrid models that combine traditional classroom practices with digital and social media activities.

Additionally, while social media enhances learner engagement, it may not fully replace structured environments that provide corrective feedback, consistent practice, and assessment. Therefore, the integration of social media in language learning should be approached carefully to maintain academic rigor while harnessing student interest and autonomy. The study offers several recommendations. First, EFL teachers should assist students in selecting meaningful and credible content from social media to ensure quality language input. Secondly, teachers can create interactive tasks that connect informal language exposure with formal classroom outputs, such as speaking presentations or vocabulary journals. Lastly, future research should investigate the long-term effects of social media use on language accuracy, as well as conduct comparative studies across different platforms or content types.

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