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# Social media for English language acquisition in Indonesian higher education: Constructivism and connectivism frameworks

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A B S T R A C T

The integration of social media into English language education in Indonesian higher education, though underexplored, holds significant potential to enhance learning experiences within constructivist and connectivist frameworks. This study examined the experiences of 108 EFL undergraduates from both English and non-English departments at a private university in Jakarta, Indonesia. A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews. We analysed the data using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis to assess the influence of social media on language learning. The results revealed that undergraduates widely regarded social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and WhatsApp as interactive tools that facilitated authentic communication, enhanced both written and spoken English skills, and improved learning strategies, engagement, teaching activities, and academic performance. Despite certain challenges, these platforms offered authentic learning tasks and access to diverse information networks, aligning with constructivist and connectivist principles. The findings highlighted the transformative role of social media as both a supplementary and core educational resource, advocating for its integration into curricula to promote greater student engagement and proficiency in English.

## 1. Introduction

The integration of social media into educational contexts has attracted growing interest, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning environment. Social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, YouTube, and X have evolved beyond their initial function as communication tools, transforming into interactive channels for academic engagement and language learning resources (Zachos et al., 2018). Grounded in constructivist and connectivist frameworks, social media supports language acquisition by enabling experiential learning and collaborative knowledge-building through digital interaction (Pikhart & Botezat, 2021). Constructivism emphasizes the active role of learners in constructing knowledge through authentic tasks and social interaction, while connectivism emphasizes the importance of accessing and synthesizing diverse sources of information within digital networks. The educational potential of social media lies in its capacity to enhance language skills, foster student participation, and provide authentic linguistic exposure. Nevertheless, its dual-edged nature also presents challenges, including distractions and variability in content quality, which require careful management (Adhani et al., 2023;

Anderson, 2019). Understanding how these platforms can be effectively integrated into formal educational settings remains a critical area of inquiry.

Despite the documented potential of social media to enrich language learning environments (Al Arif, 2019; Alshenqeeti, 2018; Wang et al., 2022), significant research gaps remain. Previous studies have shown that social media fosters collaborative learning, boosts student motivation, and facilitates meaningful communication in the target language (Bilandzic & Foth, 2013; Wong et al., 2021). YouTube, for example, has been beneficial for listening practice, while Instagram aids in vocabulary development. Social media also plays a crucial role in enabling peer feedback and creating communities of practice. Nonetheless, there is a scarcity of research specifically examining how EFL students perceive the impact of social media on their learning strategies and its formal integration into teaching activities. Moreover, comprehensive analyses of students' assessments of social media's role in learning engagement and its overall effectiveness in enhancing learning outcomes are lacking. It indicates an urgent need for targeted research to optimize the role of social media in advancing English language proficiency among students in higher education. Thus, the present study investigates Indonesian EFL

students' perceptions of social media's influence on learning strategies, its use in teaching activities, and its contribution to engagement and academic outcomes. The research addresses critical questions, including:

1. How do EFL students in higher education perceive the impact of social media on their learning strategies?
2. What are their views on the use of social media for English language practice within teaching and learning activities?
3. How do they assess social media's role in learning engagement?
4. What is the students' perspective on the impact of social media on their learning outcomes?

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Study's frameworks: constructivism and connectivism in language learning

Constructivism, rooted in the theories of Piaget and Vygotsky, asserts that learners build knowledge through active experiences and interactions within their environments (Fosnot & Perry, 1996). The theory, when applied to language learning, emphasizes the importance of social interaction, authentic tasks, and collaborative learning (Oxford, 1997). Learners engage with language through meaningful activities that mimic real-life situations, which enhances understanding and retention (Vygotsky, 1978). Waluyo (2019) found that task-based language teaching, aligning with constructivist principles, significantly boosts language proficiency by engaging learners in authentic communicative tasks. Furthermore, Oyarzun and Martin (2023) highlighted that collaborative online platforms facilitate the construction of meaning and the development of language skills through social interaction and peer feedback, reinforcing the effectiveness of constructivist approaches in modern educational contexts.

Connectivism, a modern learning theory, points out the significance of networks in the learning process. In the digital age, networks distribute knowledge, and effective learning requires the ability to navigate, connect, and synthesize information from various sources (Downes, 2023). The framework is particularly pertinent to contemporary language learning, where social media and digital tools provide vast resources for interaction and collaboration. Yeh and Mitric (2023) highlighted how social media facilitates the creation of personal learning environments, enabling learners to connect with peers, access diverse linguistic resources, and engage in meaningful language practice. Sabah (2023) examined the impact of social media on higher education, revealing that its usage positively influences perceived satisfaction, academic performance, and learning outcomes. Using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to analyze data from 95 undergraduates in Palestine, the study confirmed that social media enhances learning and student performance perceptions, offering critical insights into the effectiveness of digital tools in educational settings.

Integrating constructivist and connectivist principles offers a robust framework for optimizing the use of social media in language learning. Constructivism emphasizes the creation of engaging, authentic, and socially interactive learning experiences by promoting meaningful interactions and real-life tasks (Mattar, 2018). Such an approach facilitates deeper knowledge construction through active participation. Conversely, connectivism highlights the role of digital networks in learning, emphasizing the ability to navigate, connect, and synthesize information from diverse sources (Jung, 2019, pp. 47–55). Social media platforms, such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and X, exemplify how these theories intersect by providing environments that support both collaborative interactions and networked learning. Social media enables learners to engage in authentic tasks, receive peer feedback, and access a wide range of resources, thereby enhancing student engagement and language skills. The integrated approach reflects the potential of social media to significantly improve English language acquisition in higher education by leveraging both interactive and networked learning methodologies. Fig. 1 visually represents how constructivism and connectivism interplay with social media to create a dynamic and effective language learning environment.

### 2.2. Social media in constructivist and connectivist learning environments

Social media platforms, as defined by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), enable the creation and exchange of user-generated content, facilitating both real-time and asynchronous interactions while fostering self-presentation and connections with diverse audiences. Carr and Hayes (2015) emphasize their value in enhancing social presence through interactive and collaborative engagement. Research highlights the effectiveness of platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, and Wikipedia in supporting academic communication, with Facebook and WhatsApp emerging as the most widely utilized tools in higher education (Manca, 2020; Klein et al., 2018; Waluyo & Tuan, 2021). Moreover, the growing popularity of TikTok and Instagram among university students reflects the evolving role of social media in educational contexts. Empirical studies by Wang et al. (2022) and Elverıcı (2020) demonstrate significant improvements in student engagement and social presence, particularly in EFL environments where interaction is essential for language acquisition. Correspondingly, Malik et al. (2019) and Chugh and Ruhi (2018) report that platforms like Twitter and Facebook enhance learning outcomes by fostering dynamic and immersive learning experiences. The cumulative evidence displays the critical role of social media in promoting student participation, improving academic performance, and aligning educational strategies with modern pedagogical needs.

Social media use in education varies globally, reflecting diverse opportunities and challenges shaped by regional contexts. In developed nations such as the United States, platforms like Twitter (now X) support supplementary education and professional development (Greenhalgh et al., 2021), whereas in developing countries like India and Indonesia, social media reduces educational disparities by providing access to remote learning resources and addressing systemic barriers (Ansari & Khan, 2020; Inayati, 2015). Despite its well-documented potential to enhance engagement and collaboration, concerns persist in distractions, privacy issues, and the erosion of interpersonal communication skills. Excessive use can diminish peer feedback engagement and hinder direct interaction (Latif et al., 2019), compounded by challenges such as information overload, context collapse, and difficulties in navigating online cultures (Apridayani & Waluyo, 2024; Yeh & Swinehart, 2020). Hungarian university students in a TEFL course have observed platforms like Instagram and TikTok contributing to anxiety and reduced academic performance due to uncensored content and structural issues (Spissich, 2024; Shu, 2023). Strategic integration and careful management, however, can mitigate such issues, demonstrating that social media's value in education depends on deliberate oversight and alignment with pedagogical objectives.

### 2.3. Impact of social media on English language acquisition

Research on social media's impact on English language acquisition in higher education reveals its multifaceted role, highlighting extensive benefits and pinpointing notable challenges. The selection of studies for this review is grounded in their empirical focus, geographical diversity, and examination of key social media platforms, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. Jointly, the studies emphasize social media's role in developing core language skills—writing, speaking, listening, and vocabulary—while highlighting differences in platform preferences, implementation methods, and associated outcomes. First, several studies consistently demonstrate that social media enhances writing skills and learner engagement through collaborative and interactive learning environments. Azlan and Yunus
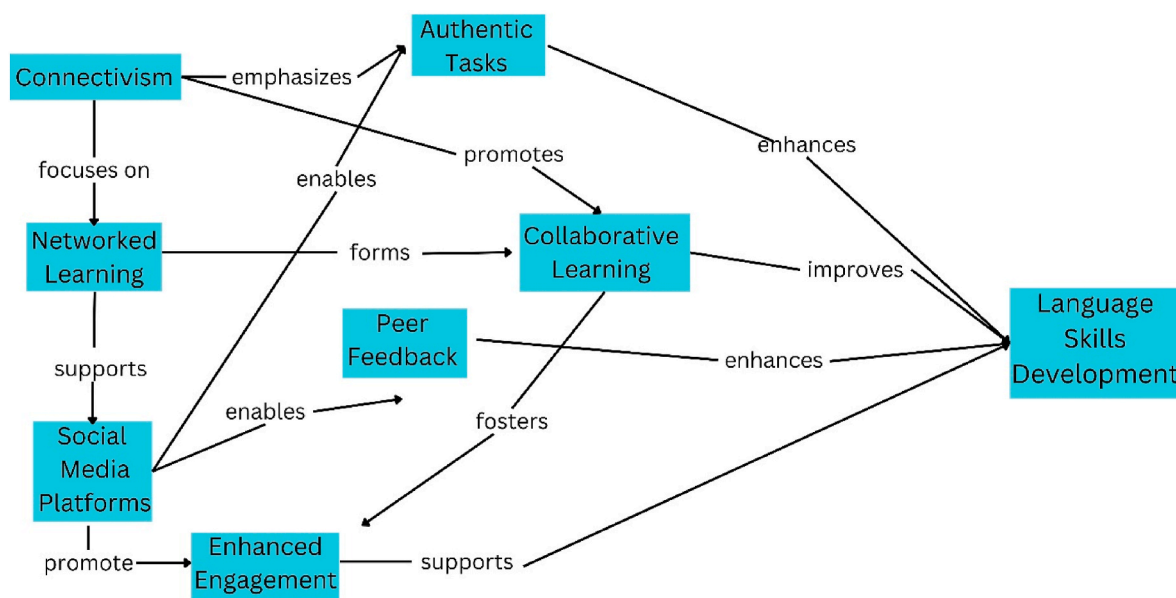
**Fig. 1.** Interplay of constructivism, connectivism, and social media in language learning.

(2020), for instance, conducted research among Malaysian undergraduates and found that social media significantly improved motivation, engagement, and written communication skills through task-based activities and peer collaboration. Correspondingly, Muftah (2024) reported notable improvements in writing styles among Saudi students using social media, affirming its effectiveness in supporting written fluency. Although research highlights positive outcomes for vocabulary acquisition and speaking practice through authentic interactions using social media platforms for learning in Australia and China (Tong et al., 2024; Huang, 2019), challenges persist, including declining motivation over time (Huang, 2019) and potential limitations in improving lexical proficiency during large-scale transitions to online learning (Li et al., 2021). In a Korean setting, Ko (2019) broadened the perspective, reporting that feedback-driven interactions on social media improved vocabulary usage, learner cooperation, and overall satisfaction, despite minor disruptions.

Then, platform preferences and their specific roles in language development further reveal regional differences and trends. Altam (2020) reported that Indian university students predominantly used YouTube for listening practice and vocabulary acquisition, valuing its multimedia format for learner engagement. In Thailand, Facebook has been found to significantly enhance writing skills and teaching efficacy among English teachers (Sirivedin et al., 2018), reduce perceived power distance between students and teachers (Suwinyattichaiporn et al., 2019), and improve speaking skills when combined with drama-based activities (Wongsa & Son, 2022). Platforms such as WhatsApp, Twitter, and Snapchat further contribute by providing real-time, accessible opportunities for communication and interaction, accentuating their importance in both formal and informal learning contexts (Aloraini & Cardoso, 2020). Recent literature has identified social media's ability to bridge classroom instruction with informal, autonomous learning environments, a dual function accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has driven a shift toward flexible, student-centered approaches (Al-Shammari, 2020). For instance, platforms such as WhatsApp and Instagram offer personalized learning experiences, fostering confidence in spoken English through interactive, low-stakes communication (John & Yunus, 2021).

Although social media offers significant educational benefits, its unregulated use presents challenges such as distractions from entertainment content, inconsistent material quality, and poor time management, as highlighted in previous studies (Ko, 2019). These issues accentuate the necessity of structured integration into pedagogical practices, with educators playing a crucial role in curating quality content and fostering meaningful learner engagement (Chik, 2020; Waluyo, 2024). The reviewed literature complements this study's exploration of social media's impact on EFL students' learning strategies, engagement, and outcomes, contributing to the broader discourse on its potential as a transformative educational tool. By examining the advantages and limitations through constructivist and connectivist lenses, the study emphasizes task-based, social interaction-driven learning (Vygotsky, 1978; Waluyo, 2019) alongside digital networks' role in knowledge synthesis and collaboration (Downes, 2023). This approach strategically addresses comprehension gaps and identifies emerging trends, positioning social media as a valuable tool for enhancing English language acquisition in higher education.

## 3. Method

### 3.1. Research design and participants

The study employed a mixed-methods design, combining quantitative and qualitative data to comprehensively analyze participants' perceptions of social media in university learning. Quantitative data revealed engagement patterns, while qualitative insights captured the complexities of participants' experiences, providing a nuanced interpretation of the findings (Creswell, 2018). It employed a convenience sampling method at a prestigious private university in Eastern Jakarta, Indonesia, selected for its strong emphasis on English language instruction and its diverse cohort. It involved 108 EFL students, with a majority being female (84%, or 91 participants) and a smaller proportion male (16%, or 17 participants). The age distribution skewed younger, with 46% under 20 years old (50 participants), 26% exactly 20 years old (28 participants), 14% at 21 years old (15 participants), 6% at 22 years old (6 participants), and 8% older than 22 years old (9 participants). The participants were almost evenly divided between those studying English education (48%, or 52 participants) and those in non-English education programs (52%, or 56 participants). Especially, 98% (106 participants) reported daily social media use, while 2% (2 participants) used it weekly.

## 3.2. Data collection

The data collection process, informed by constructivist and connectivist frameworks, utilized both quantitative and qualitative methods. Constructivism, focusing on active learning through meaningful tasks and social interactions (Vygotsky, 1978), guided the exploration of students' use of social media for English acquisition. Connectivism, emphasizing digital networks for knowledge construction (Downes, 2023), directed the study's investigation into students' interactions with linguistic communities and native speakers via social media. A questionnaire, adapted from Alsaied (2017), Namaziandost and Nasri (2019), and Sobaih et al. (2020), was distributed through WhatsApp groups using Google Forms, yielding 108 valid responses. The instrument included demographic data and 18 items across four scales: learning strategies, teaching and learning activities, learning engagement, and learning outcomes. The learning strategy scale combined Likert and open-ended questions to explore social media use, interactions with native speakers, and task-based activities, while the other scales used a 5-point Likert format to assess engagement and outcomes.

Qualitative data collection involved semi-structured interviews with 16 purposively selected EFL students to gain deeper insights into their experiences, in line with constructivist and connectivist approaches that emphasize understanding learner perspectives through real-world contexts and networked interactions. Participants were selected based on active engagement in English learning, study program diversity, and gender balance. The 15- to 20-min interviews, conducted over one week in both face-to-face and online formats, accommodated participants' availability, ensuring flexibility in accordance with connectivist principles. Ethical considerations were upheld through informed consent, confidentiality via pseudonyms (S1 to S16), and anonymization of identifying information during transcription and analysis. The interviews focused on participants' perceptions of social media's benefits, challenges, and its role in English language learning, with questions such as, "How do you use social media in your English learning?", "What benefits does social media provide for your English learning?", and "What challenges do you encounter when using social media in your English learning?" Probing strategies were employed to elicit in-depth, reflective responses, capturing authentic learning experiences in line with constructivist goals and connectivist principles that explore the impact of digital networks on language acquisition.

## 3.3. Data analysis

The scale's reliability was confirmed with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.896, reflecting strong internal consistency and indicating that the survey items measured the intended constructs consistently. The validity of the survey constructs was supported by a high Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value of 0.869, suggesting that the sample was adequate for factor analysis and that the variables were sufficiently interrelated. Moreover, Bartlett's test of sphericity produced a highly significant chi-square value ($\chi^2$ (120) = 944.174, p < 0.001), demonstrating that the correlation matrix was not an identity matrix and affirming the appropriateness of the instruments for further statistical analysis.

Each research question was addressed through a combination of descriptive statistics and qualitative content analysis, employing a systematic approach to identify patterns and themes. The interview transcripts were carefully reviewed, followed by coding meaningful text segments with relevant labels (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). For example, the statement, "Usually, I watch western YouTube channels and listen to them without subtitles," was coded as "Learning strategies for English language acquisition." Data categorization was guided by criteria such as the frequency of mentions and alignment with the research questions, ensuring a rigorous and structured analysis process.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Learning strategies for English language acquisition

The survey data in Fig. 2 reveals significant insights into the use of social media for English learning among EFL students. A majority, 63.89% (69 out of 108 participants), reported using social media "a lot" for learning purposes, demonstrating its prominent role as an educational tool. In contrast, 36.11% (39 participants) indicated using it "a little," while no participants reported abstaining from its use or expressing uncertainty. Such unanimous engagement highlights the acceptance of social media as a valuable resource for enhancing English skills and aligns with constructivist principles that emphasize active interaction with real-world tools to construct knowledge (Vygotsky, 1978). By providing authentic content, including videos and interactive communities, social media fosters experiential and task-based learning, enabling learners to develop language skills through meaningful and contextually relevant activities (Yeh & Mitric 2023).

Qualitative analysis further pointed out that one of learning strategies in increasing EFL students' English practice is by using any popular social media used by students in higher education. Students considered that social media could help them practice English skills better, especially in listening and speaking skills. Teachers also showed their interests in using social media as it was interesting and easy to use. Nevertheless, there are some limitations of using social media for English learning purposes, such as inconsistency in learning English as quoted from one student "There are times when I am lazy and do not want to bother too much when opening social media." In addition to inconsistency, there are many ads and some locked features as one student (S11) said, "The challenge I face when using social media in learning English is that there are many advertisements and other features that are locked because the account is not premium."

> "Usually, I watch western YouTube channels and listen to them without subtitles, and this can train me in learning English because I can understand and interpret it little by little. So, I really enjoy listening to teachers or lecturers when they speak English because I can slowly understand what is being said." (S4)

> "I use X or Twitter and join English communities. There we can share things related to English and even the meaning of slang words that are currently widely used. On social media X there are also teachers and even lecturers who help explain grammar or even other things related to English in an interesting and easy to understand way." (S5)

Fig. 3 reveals participants' preferences for social media platforms in English language learning, with YouTube (37.36%) and TikTok (34.26%) dominating, followed by Instagram and X/Twitter (11.11% each), while WhatsApp and Facebook were selected by 1.85%. Only 0.93% of participants reported not using social media, highlighting its pervasive role in language acquisition. The popularity of video-based platforms aligns with constructivist principles, offering authentic, multimodal content that supports real-world tasks and enhances listening comprehension and pronunciation through experiential learning. From a connectivist perspective, YouTube and TikTok connect learners to global networks, enabling personalized learning and access to diverse linguistic resources. Meanwhile, Instagram and X/Twitter foster community-based interactions, and WhatsApp and Facebook facilitate material sharing and group discussions, albeit less prominently. These findings point out the effectiveness of video-driven, interactive platforms in fostering engagement and skill development, reflecting the synergy of constructivist and connectivist approaches in enhancing English language learning.

Qualitative data analysis further shed light on the preferences of social media among EFL students regarding English language practice. More students preferred to use YouTube channels as their main interests to practice English. YouTube is believed to be the most effective social
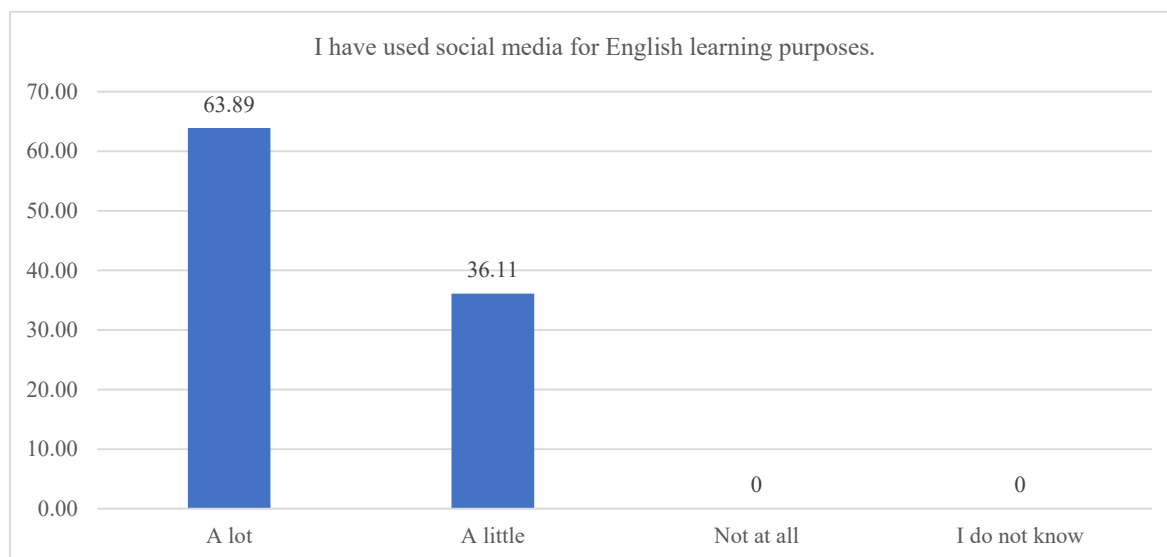
**I have used social media for English learning purposes.**



Fig. 2. Using social media for English learning purposes.

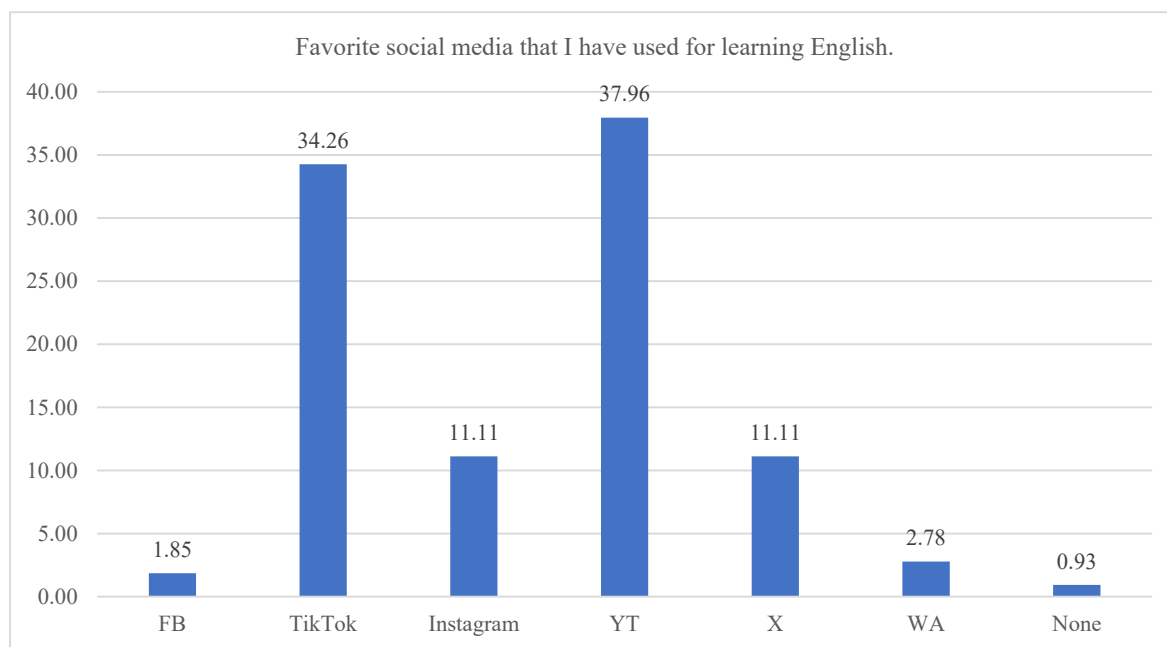**Favorite social media that I have used for learning English.**



Fig. 3. Students' favorite social media.

media as it contained many videos of English native speakers for anyone to learn English better. In addition, YouTube might fulfill the students' needs to improve their English skills, including the vocabulary. Nonetheless, there are obstacles faced by the students in relation to the most favorite social media. It was disclosed that some contents were irrelevant to what is needed and suggested by the lecturers. One student (S14) said, "Often I find content that is not the same as that taught by the lecturers, and this makes me confused."

"My experience regarding the use of social media in learning English is through videos on YouTube and TikTok, where I often visit accounts related to English language videos so that I can improve the skills needed in English, namely reading, listening, writing, and speaking and also increasing English vocabulary." (S12)

"My experience learning to use English is very positive and varied. I use several social media to learn English such as YouTube,

Instagram, TikTok. I took one of my experiences using the social media application YouTube. YouTube really helped me in finding explanations of material by watching videos explaining English material by native speakers and indeed there were several lecturers who recommended videos on YouTube to students to study and gain additional insight. This really helped me because YouTube has made the English learning process easy and fun and makes it possible for us to learn anytime and anywhere." (S14)

As displayed in Fig. 4, the results of the survey on the frequency of English use in social media showed that there are a range of usage patterns among EFL students. Most (51.85%) reported using "sometimes" English when engaging in social media, indicating that they sometimes rely on English language in digital interactions. The next largest group, 25.93%, stated that they "often" use English, suggesting a regular, but not permanent, use. The smaller segment, 11.11%, declared
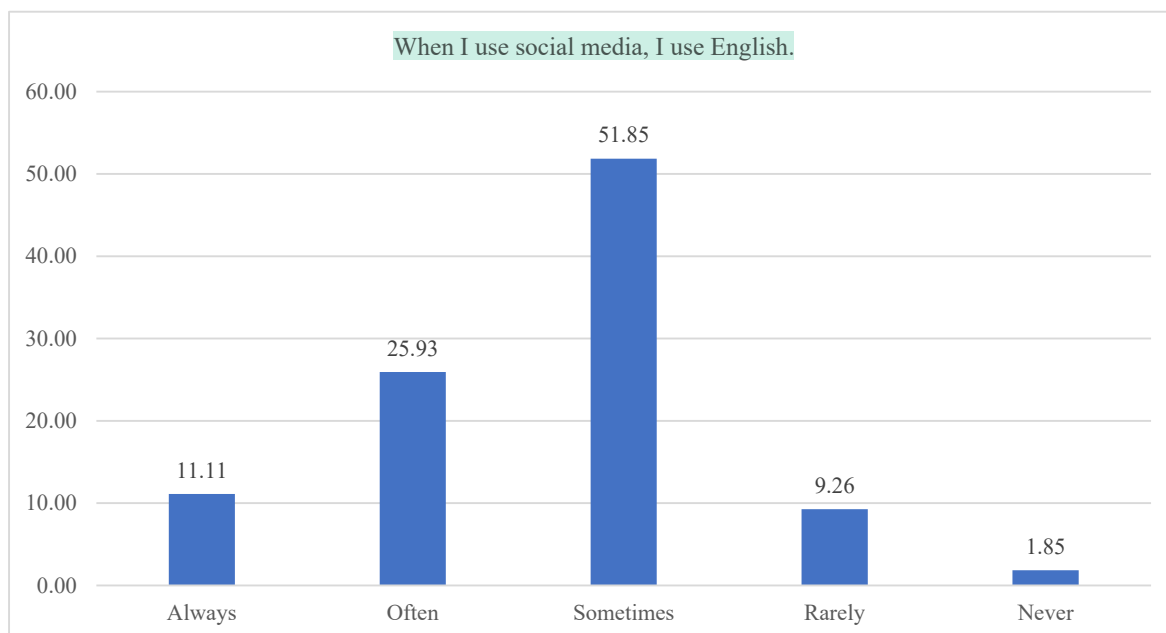
**Fig. 4.** Language used in social media.

that they were "always" using English in social media, reflecting a consistent preference for English in digital communication. Conversely, 9.26% of respondents "rarely" use English, and a minimum of 1.85% of participants reported "never" using English while using social media. These results show that although a large number of users are interested in English to various degrees, it is less common to rely entirely on English.

Qualitative feedback from EFL students regarding the frequency on the language they use in social media indicated the eagerness to practice English better. Some students shared their motivation to use English as they needed to communicate or interact with English native speakers in certain social media such as X (previously Twitter). In addition, by using

English, they could gain more new vocabulary as well as English idioms. They found that using English with others in social media means having English practice. Nonetheless, challenges were also found ranging from inappropriate pronunciation to inaccurate information and limited use of English language as quoted from one student (S12), "The challenges that I face in using social media in learning English include the quality of the English language learning content itself, such as inaccurate information, the possibility of inappropriate pronunciation, and limited use of language. So, sometimes it doesn't add to my vocabulary."

"I learned English by being an international fanbase admin for a K-Pop girl group on Twitter from 2017 until now. When I became an
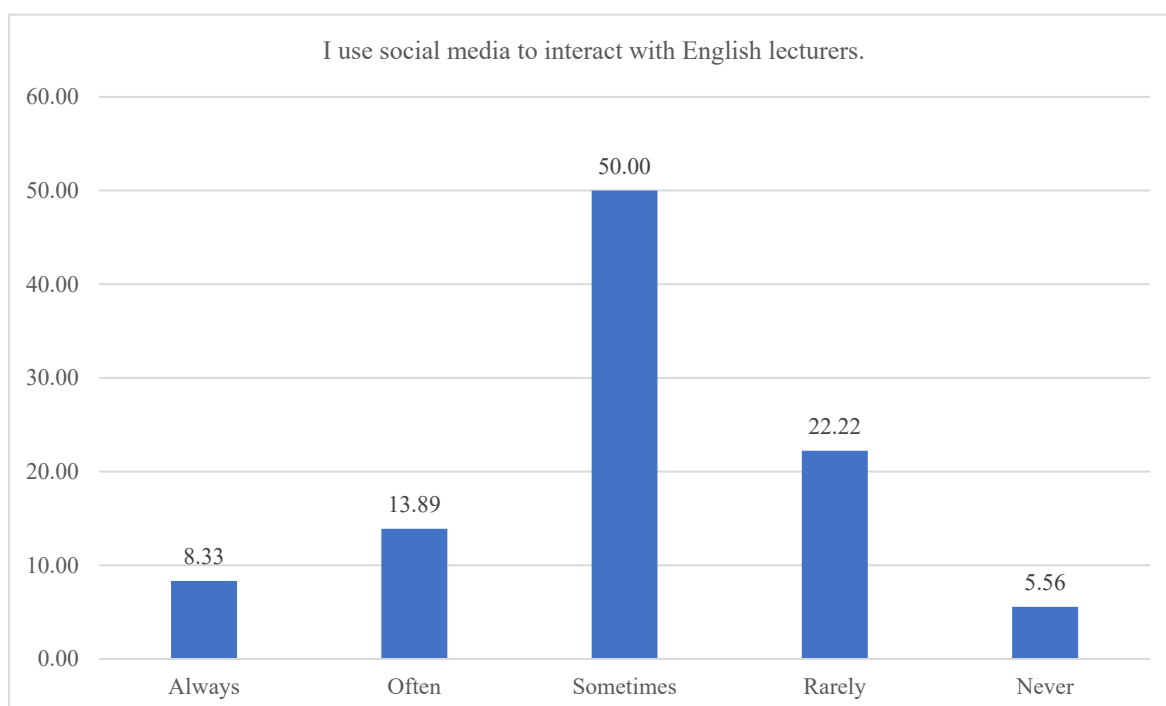


**Fig. 5.** Using social media for interactions with lecturers.

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admin, I gained international relations with fellow fandoms, as well as lots of new vocabulary in English. I also learned a lot of idioms and slang in English from K-pop fandom circles." (S7)

"I can talk to native English people using English, so I can practice my conversation skills with native people." (S8)

As shown in Fig. 5, the results of the survey on the use of social media for the interaction with English lecturers demonstrate a range of involvement among EFL students. 50% of participants occasionally used social media for this purpose, indicating its role as an additional means of communication. About 22.22% rarely used social media to communicate with lecturers, while 13.89% of respondents often communicated with lecturers via these platforms, suggesting a more frequent use. The smaller group (8.33%) always used social media to communicate with English lecturers, which emphasizes their important role in academic communication. On the contrary, 5.56% of participants never used social media to communicate with the lecturers, preferring alternative ways of communication. These insights indicate that social media are widely used by students in educational interactions, but do not provide uniform support for these purposes.

Qualitative data from EFL students dealing with the frequency of using social media for interaction with English lecturers revealed that not many of them used social media to discuss materials with their lecturers. One social media which was most used to have some talks with lecturers was WhatsApp which was created for discussion groups. Each course offered to students usually provides WhatsApp Group comprising students and one lecturer for sharing the materials and announcements and for discussing any relevant topics. In English course, a lecturer posted in English in the WhatsApp Group, and students could join in the conversation in English. Nevertheless, few students found obstacles in using social media when interacting with English lecturers such as boring materials shared, the materials which were difficult to understand when conducted online as one student (S3) said, "Sometimes boring content and wrong information make me misunderstand when learning English."

"We create discussion groups on platforms such as WhatsApp where students can participate in conversations in English with other students and lecturers. This makes it possible to actively practice speaking, writing and understanding English." (S15)

As illustrated in Fig. 6, the survey data on the use of social media to obtain all the information needed from English lecturers show that EFL students have a high degree of dependency. More than 30.56% of participants reported using social media "always" for this purpose, which suggests that social media are the main source of academic information for these students. In addition, 36.11% of respondents use social media "often" to collect information from their lecturers, further underlining their importance as a reliable communication channel. Together, these groups constitute more than two thirds of the participants, highlighting a strong preference for the use of social media in learning interactions. On the other hand, 28.70% of participants stated that they "sometimes" rely only on social media for this purpose, which indicated a more occasional use. A small percentage of respondents, 4.63%, "rarely" use social media to get information from their lecturers, and especially none of them have reported "never" using social media for this purpose. Overall, these findings indicate that social media are a key tool for most students to access academic content from English lecturers.

Qualitative data analysis further demonstrated on the frequency of EFL students in using social media to gain all the information needed from English lecturers. It was found that more students used the social media, mainly WhatsApp to receive some English materials from lecturers. Meanwhile some other applications such as TikTok and X (Twitter) were used by students to gain some relevant information for their own English practice. Nonetheless, some students had difficulty in having good and relevant content when using social media for English practice. It is said by a student (S9), "The challenge I face is the difficulty of choosing quality, relevant and good quality content. Using social media also makes me spend my time ineffectively."

"I usually use WhatsApp social media to receive materials given by lecturers. Apart from that, I use TikTok to watch short videos that use
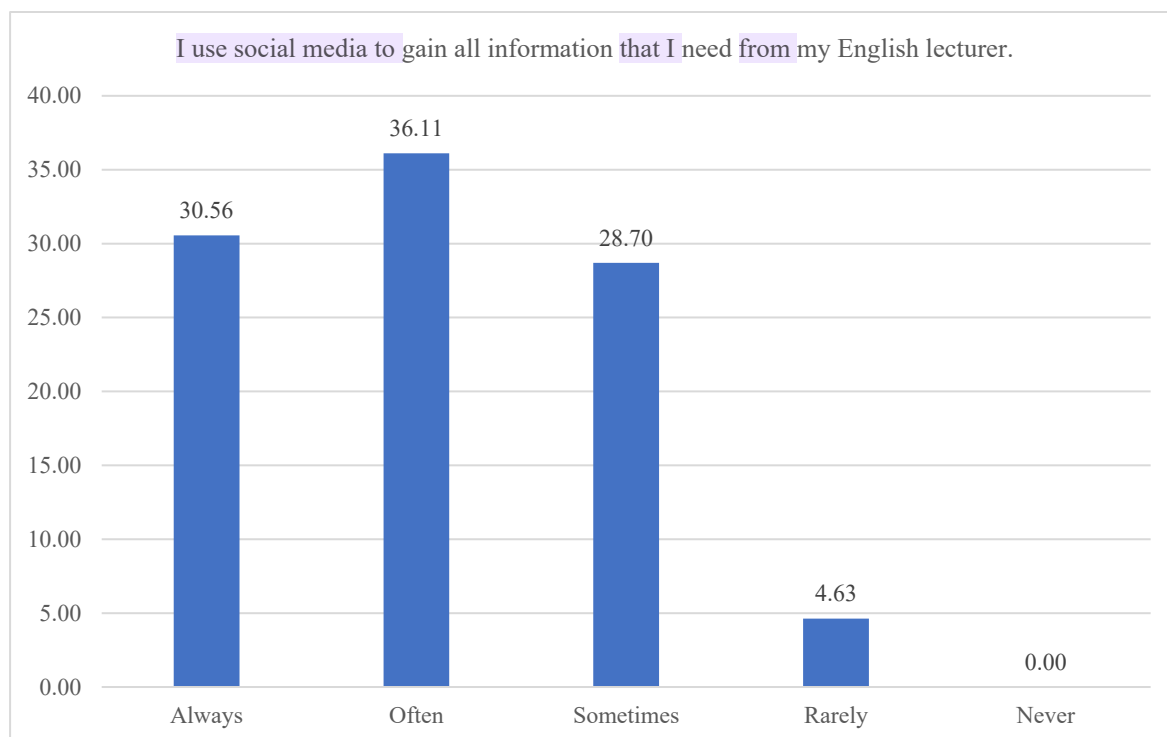


**Fig. 6.** Using social media for having necessary information from lecturers.

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English voice overs to practice listening and Twitter to increase vocabulary through the tweets I read." (S9)

According to the survey results as illustrated in Fig. 7, the majority of respondents (68.52%) used social media to communicate with English-speaking native speakers. It shows that social media platforms are largely used as a means of engaged linguistic exchange and can practice or improve English skills in different communication contexts. On the contrary, 31.48% of respondents did not use social media to achieve the purpose, indicating that a significant minority did not see the need or preferred other methods of language practice with non-native speakers. Overall, these results highlight the importance of social media as an important tool for the informal learning of languages and the exchange of cultural experiences among most EFL students.

Qualitative responses on how EFL students interacted with English native speakers through social media such as X (Twitter) exhibited that most of the students had used social media to interact with native speakers of English to practice English skills by interacting with the native speaker, and this improved their vocabulary. They shared their interests and hobbies which were considered interesting discussions or talks. Nevertheless, challenges were noted by having fear and nerves for English practice with native speakers of English as one student (S10) said, "I have quite a hard time continuing to practice my English pronunciation because I am afraid of making mistakes or nervous considering the large number of native speakers or people who are experts in this field of English."

"Social media has helped me improve my English vocabulary. I search for content related to my hobbies and interact using English with native English speakers, as well as with fellow foreign language speakers like me who share the same interests through social media platforms." (S6)

"I use X (Twitter) to communicate with my mutuals (native speakers and non-native speakers) in English. I use the Space feature on X (Twitter) to talk to my mutuals in English. I feel this feature helps me to practice my English skills." (S10)

## 5. Teaching and learning activities

The use of social media in teaching and learning activities among EFL students received strong endorsement, with a mean score of 3.24 (STD = 0.69), reflecting its practical utility in instructional settings. Table 1 shows that 72.23% of participants agreed that lecturers effectively utilized social media to enhance communication, emphasizing its role in facilitating instructional interactions. Furthermore, 79.63% acknowledged its use for managing course logistics, including assignment submissions, feedback, and lecture announcements. The findings align with constructivist principles, as social media fosters interactive and task-based learning environments that promote active participation and engagement. Simultaneously, the connectivist perspective is reflected in the use of digital platforms to create seamless networks between educators and students, enabling efficient knowledge dissemination and resource management. Social media's dual function as a communication medium and logistical tool highlights its value in supporting both instructional delivery and collaborative learning.

Further emphasizing the educational utility of social media, 87.03% of participants (33.33% strongly agree and 53.7% agree) confirmed that lecturers used these platforms to send learning videos, links, and other English learning materials. The high level of agreement featured the efficacy of social media in providing supplementary learning resources that promote the learning experiences. Moreover, 82.41% (26.85% strongly agree and 55.56% agree) of the responses indicated that social media was employed to facilitate online discussions related to course assignments or lecture materials. This points to the role of social media as an interactive space where students could engage in academic discussions, thereby extended the classroom into the digital domain.

Qualitative data analysis deepens the understanding of the challenges EFL students encounter when using social media for learning, complementing the quantitative findings. While students noted advantages such as easy access to assignments, participation in discussion forums, and exposure to diverse English learning materials through videos, images, and texts, several obstacles surfaced. Students occasionally struggled with understanding the content, as one participant (S1) remarked, "I often study online, but I also often don't understand it … I have many questions to address." This accentuates a critical issue of comprehension, suggesting that while social media offers accessible resources, it does not always ensure clarity or adequate support. Further analysis indicates that the lack of immediate clarification for complex concepts or examples contributes to confusion and frustration. Though students could seek lecturer assistance, the asynchronous nature of social media-based learning often delays the feedback they need, exacerbating these challenges. The disconnect between social media's potential to enhance learning and the difficulties students face underlines the need for more structured, responsive strategies to effectively support language learning on these platforms.

"For me, the benefit of social media is to make it easier to do and collect assignments. Then, social media provides a discussion space that everyone in the class can use. Apart from that, social media also provides easy assessments to view shared content such as videos, images and text in English. Lastly, social media can allow me to interact directly with lecturers." (S2)

## 6. Learning engagement in the use of social media

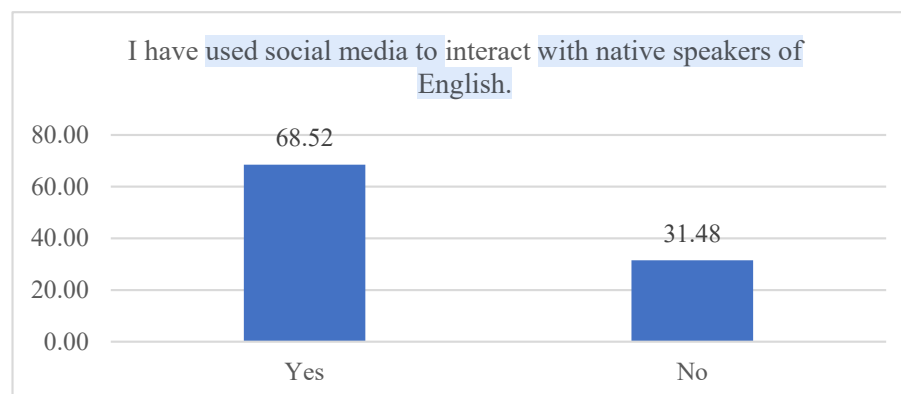The survey reflects EFL students' perceptions of engagement and



**Fig. 7.** Using social media for interacting with English native speakers.

**Table 1**

Teaching and learning activities in the use of social media.

| No | Statements | SA | A | N | D | SD | Mean | STD |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Social media sites are used by lecturers to communicate with students in English courses. | 25.93 | 46.3 | 27.78 | 0 | 0 | 3.98 | 0.74 |
| 2 | Social media sites are used by lecturers to send/check assignments and receive/send lecture announcements. | 30.56 | 49.07 | 20.37 | 0 | 0 | 4.10 | 0.71 |
| 3 | Social media sites are used by lecturers to send learning videos, links and other English learning materials. | 33.33 | 53.7 | 12.96 | 0 | 0 | 4.20 | 0.65 |
| 4 | Social media sites are used by lecturers to facilitate online discussions related to course assignments or lecture materials. | 26.85 | 55.56 | 17.59 | 0 | 0 | 4.09 | 0.66 |

satisfaction with social media as a tool for learning English, yielding a mean score of 4.23 ($STD = 0.71$), which indicates a high level of approval. Table 2 shows that 87.04% of participants agreed that social media makes learning English more interesting, suggesting it adds a dynamic element through varied and interactive content. Furthermore, 64.81% reported feeling engaged when using social media for learning, though 33.33% remained neutral, indicating individual differences in its perceived effectiveness. The findings align with constructivist principles, as the interactive nature of social media fosters active, meaningful engagement with language tasks, while the connectivist perspective emphasizes the role of digital platforms in creating personalized and networked learning experiences. The results demonstrate social media's potential to enhance learner motivation and engagement, albeit with variability based on individual preferences and learning styles.

Further illustrating the broader impacts of social media, 62.96% of the participants (18.52% strongly agree and 44.44% agree) believe that their use of social media has positively improved their personal relationships with other students. It indicates that social media not only facilitates academic engagement but also enhances social connections among peers, which can be crucial for collaborative learning environments. Furthermore, 75% (21.3% strongly agree and 53.7% agree) of respondents feel satisfied with their experience using social media to learn English, reflecting a generally positive reception towards integrating social media into educational contexts. This satisfaction might stem from the convenience and accessibility of learning materials, coupled with the interactive opportunities that social media platforms provide. The overall data from Table 3 points to a favorable view of social media as an effective and engaging educational tool in English language learning.

In the interviews, EFL students reported substantial engagement with social media, attributing its appeal to interactive and enjoyable features that foster language practice in an informal yet effective setting. Social media enabled students to share achievements, connect globally, and enhance their English skills, particularly in preparation for professional goals, such as becoming English teachers. Its collaborative nature supported peer interaction, experience sharing, and language practice in a pressure-free environment. Platforms like TikTok were highlighted for their user-friendly interfaces and engaging content, which facilitated vocabulary acquisition, pronunciation, and listening comprehension. Nevertheless, engagement was hindered by technological barriers, with unreliable internet access cited as a major challenge by some students. One participant (S10) noted, "Limited internet access hinders the use of English language learning content applications, which can occasionally cause issues." Such challenges stress the need for improved digital infrastructure to ensure equitable access to educational technologies and maximize the potential of social media as a learning tool.

"I think my experience in using social media in learning English is very enjoyable. Social media, which generally has a stereotype of increasing fame, showing off achievements, making new connections, or just for fun, can also be used as a learning tool for students majoring in English education like me. So sometimes while playing and having fun using social media, I can also set aside my time to seek deeper knowledge of English so that I can become a good teacher in the future." (S13)

## 7. Learning outcomes of social media use

The evaluation of EFL students' learning outcomes from using social media revealed a mean score of 4.15 ($STD = 0.69$), indicating a high level of perceived effectiveness. Table 3 shows that 86.12% of participants agreed that social media enhances their understanding of English, while 87.96% reported improvements in vocabulary acquisition. The findings accentuate social media's role in expanding lexical knowledge and comprehension through exposure to authentic content and interactive formats. Aligned with constructivist principles, the use of task-based, real-world materials fosters active and experiential learning. From a connectivist perspective, social media connects learners to diverse linguistic resources and global networks, enabling continuous knowledge synthesis and skill development. The results affirm its potential as an effective supplementary tool for improving language outcomes in EFL contexts.

Moreover, a considerable portion of the participants also see positive effects on their speaking skills, with 86.11% (28.7% strongly agree and 57.41% agree) stating that social media has helped improve their English-speaking abilities. The outcome may be attributed to the opportunity social media provides for engaging in real-time conversations with native and non-native speakers. On the subject of formal academic performance, 74.08% (23.15% strongly agree and 50.93% agree) believe that their ability in English exams has improved through the use of social media. While there is a larger neutral response (25%) on this particular point, indicating some reservations about the direct impact on exam performance, the overall sentiment remains positive. These findings suggest that social media is not only a supplementary educational resource but also a significant enhancer of practical language skills and academic performance in English.

Social media use led to significant improvements in language skills and increased motivation, as revealed by qualitative data. Platforms enhanced active participation with English-language materials, allowing students to practice skills in real-world contexts using multimodal resources like videos, images, and written content, which expanded vocabulary, improved pronunciation, and refined language abilities. For instance, short-form videos on TikTok and YouTube helped students acquire conversational English and common expressions. Yet,

**Table 2**

Learning engagement in using social media.

| No | Statements | SA | A | N | D | SD | Mean | STD |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5 | The use of social media makes learning English more interesting. | 36.11 | 50.93 | 12.96 | 0 | 0 | 4.23 | 0.66 |
| 6 | I feel engaged in learning English when I use social media. | 15.74 | 49.07 | 33.33 | 1.85 | 0 | 3.79 | 0.72 |
| 7 | The use of social media has improved my personal relationships with other students in a positive way. | 18.52 | 44.44 | 35.19 | 1.85 | 0 | 3.80 | 0.76 |
| 8 | I feel satisfied with my experience using social media in learning English. | 21.30 | 53.70 | 25.0 | 0 | 0 | 3.06 | 0.68 |

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**Table 3**
Learning outcomes of using social media.

| No | Statements | SA | A | N | D | SD | Mean | STD |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 9 | Using social media can help my understanding of English better. | 35.19 | 50.93 | 12.04 | 1.85 | 0 | 4.19 | 0.72 |
| 10 | Using social media can help me improve my English vocabulary. | 40.74 | 47.22 | 12.04 | 0 | 0 | 4.29 | 0.67 |
| 11 | Using social media can help me improve my English speaking skills. | 28.7 | 57.41 | 13.89 | 0 | 0 | 4.15 | 0.64 |
| 12 | Using social media can help me improve my ability in English exams. | 23.15 | 50.93 | 25.00 | 0.93 | 0 | 3.96 | 0.72 |

distractions from entertainment content posed challenges, with students struggling to maintain focus on learning. One student (S16) noted, "The biggest challenge is the inability to focus due to distractions from other entertainment content." This highlights the dual-purpose nature of social media, where educational and entertainment content compete for attention. To mitigate this, strategies promoting self-regulation, such as goal setting, curating relevant content, and time management, are essential. Educators can guide students in effectively navigating social media for educational purposes, ensuring learning remains the primary focus.

"The benefits of using social media in learning English for me include increasing vocabulary mastery, knowing how to pronounce correctly, being able to improve the required English language skills, such as reading, listening, writing and speaking, making it possible to find a lot of learning material, increasing interests in learning English, and making it possible to meet native speakers who will make us easier to improve our English skills." (S12)

## 8. Discussion and implications

### 8.1. Leveraging social media for EFL learning strategies

The findings indicated that 63.89% of Indonesian EFL students extensively used social media to enhance their English learning strategies, while 36.11% engaged with it occasionally, highlighting its widespread role in language education. This aligns with studies by Zachos et al. (2018) and Wang et al. (2022), which emphasize the potential of digital platforms to provide authentic, multimodal language learning experiences. Platforms such as YouTube, favored by students in this study, provide immersive exposure to real-life language use, supporting the development of listening and speaking skills, as similarly observed by Tong et al. (2024) and Huang (2019) in their research on WeChat. Nevertheless, qualitative responses revealed significant challenges, including inconsistent usage patterns, distractions from advertisements, irrelevant content, and economic barriers posed by premium content restrictions, which were particularly pronounced in developing countries with uneven infrastructure and access (Ansari & Khan, 2020).

Such challenges resonate with Spissich's (2024) observation that the unregulated nature of platforms, e.g., TikTok and Instagram, could undermine educational objectives, and with Latif et al.'s (2019) caution that excessive reliance on social media might detract from meaningful peer interactions. Despite these limitations, social media was recognized for fostering engagement and enhancing language skills when used strategically. Yeh and Mitric (2023) argue that its integration into personal learning environments needed to be guided by clear learning goals, while Chugh and Ruhi (2018) stress the importance of educator involvement to ensure alignment with curricular objectives. The findings accentuate the need for task-oriented, structured use of social media, adhering to constructivist principles that prioritized authentic, socially interactive tasks to maximize its educational potential (Vygotsky, 1978; Waluyo, 2019).

### 8.2. Social media as a tool for teaching and learning

The study revealed that 87.03% of participants acknowledged social media as an effective tool for teaching and learning, particularly for

distributing materials, facilitating discussions, and managing assignments, which aligns with the constructivist emphasis on socially interactive and collaborative learning environments (Oyarzun & Martin, 2023; Vygotsky, 1978). Platforms such as WhatsApp played a role in creating virtual classrooms, enabling students to share resources, participate in group discussions, and receive feedback, reflecting Waluyo's (2019) findings that task-based and collaborative learning enhance language proficiency. From a connectivist perspective, social media exemplifies the decentralized distribution of knowledge across networks, as platforms, e.g., YouTube and WhatsApp, provide real-time access to diverse resources, enabling students to integrate formal instruction with self-directed exploration (Downes, 2023; Maretha & Waluyo, 2022). Yeh and Mitric (2023) further emphasize that social media fosters personalized learning environments where students can interact with native speakers, engage in cultural exchanges, and refine linguistic competencies. For example, participants in this study reported using lecturer-recommended YouTube videos, demonstrating how structured academic learning can seamlessly bridge with informal, autonomous engagement, ultimately enriching the overall learning experience.

Qualitative data, nonetheless, disclosed significant challenges, including difficulties in understanding online materials and a lack of alignment between social media content and course objectives, which often hinder its educational potential. Anderson (2019) emphasized that although social media can enhance learning, its effectiveness is frequently compromised by poorly curated or irrelevant content, a concern echoed by students who reported confusion when encountering materials inconsistent with their curriculum. These limitations feature the necessity for educators to employ constructivist scaffolding techniques, guiding students to engage social media in ways that are purposeful, academically aligned, and cognitively stimulating (Mattar, 2018). Furthermore, the integration of connectivist digital literacy training can equip students with the skills to critically evaluate and synthesize information within networked environments, thereby enhancing their ability to navigate and benefit from the vast resources available on social media platforms.

### 8.3. Enhancing learning engagement through social media

Social media significantly enhanced learning engagement, with 87.04% of participants reporting that it made English learning more interesting, supporting findings by Wang et al. (2022) and Elverıcı (2020) on platforms such as TikTok and Instagram, which boosted motivation and social presence through interactive content. The dynamic, networked nature of such platforms aligned with connectivist principles, enabling access to diverse linguistic resources and communities (Jung, 2019, pp. 47–55). Variability in engagement levels, as indicated by some neutral responses, suggested that effectiveness depended on individual preferences and digital literacy. Challenges such as distractions and unstable internet connectivity, consistent with concerns raised by Latif et al. (2019) and Spissich (2024), highlighted the need for improved infrastructure and targeted digital literacy training, particularly in resource-constrained contexts (Ansari & Khan, 2020). Although social media fosters collaboration and interaction, Anderson (2019) cautions that it often supports surface-level engagement rather than higher-order cognitive processes essential for advanced language learning. The findings accentuate the importance of complementing

social media use with scaffolded traditional methods to ensure comprehensive language skill development.

### 8.4. Social media and language learning outcomes

The results demonstrated that social media significantly enhanced language learning outcomes, with 87.96% of participants reporting improved vocabulary and 86.11% noting enhanced speaking abilities, aligning with findings by Azlan and Yunus (2020) and Ko (2019), who highlighted the role of social media in fostering skill development through interactive feedback and authentic language exposure. Participants also reported gains in motivation, pronunciation accuracy, and vocabulary expansion, reflecting the platforms' ability to bridge formal and informal learning environments (Malik et al., 2019). Nevertheless, challenges such as distractions from entertainment content and difficulties maintaining focus, as noted by students, highlighted the dual-edged nature of social media, echoing Spissich's (2024) concerns about the unregulated structure of platforms like Instagram undermining educational value. Furthermore, while students experienced improvements in specific language skills, social media's impact on formal academic performance, such as exam preparation, appeared limited, supporting Bilandzic and Foth's (2013) view of social media as a supplementary rather than primary educational tool. Critically, its effectiveness depends on structured integration within pedagogical frameworks, as emphasized by Downes (2023) and Yeh and Mitric (2023), who advocate for networked learning environments that balance flexibility with intentionality. Without clear learning objectives and educator guidance, social media risks being misused as an entertainment platform rather than a resource for meaningful learning.

### 8.5. Contributions and practical implications

This study advances the global understanding of social media's role in language learning, using constructivist and connectivist frameworks to demonstrate how platforms create interactive, networked environments for language practice (Downes, 2023; Vygotsky, 1978). Addressing a gap in prior research, it examines students' perceptions of social media within formalized teaching, emphasizing the need for structured integration to optimize its dual role as a formal and informal learning tool. The findings offer scalable strategies for overcoming educational barriers, particularly in resource-limited regions (Ansari & Khan, 2020; Inayati, 2015) and provide practical recommendations for integrating social media into EFL curricula while addressing challenges like content quality, distractions, and digital literacy. This research offers a balanced approach to leveraging social media for meaningful language learning outcomes.

### 9. Conclusion

The study demonstrated that social media is a powerful tool for enhancing English language acquisition among EFL students in higher education, effectively supporting both constructivist and connectivist educational theories. Platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp provide engaging and authentic learning experiences that mirror real-life interactions, improving both written and spoken English skills through dynamic and interactive activities. By integrating constructivist principles, which emphasize authentic tasks and social interactions, with connectivist approaches that highlight the importance of digital networks and resource synthesis, social media significantly contributes to language learning. The findings underline the value of leveraging social media for engaging with authentic language materials and participating in interactive communities, while also highlighting the need for educators to incorporate these platforms into pedagogical strategies to promote collaborative learning. A more comprehensive integration of social media into educational curricula can enhance student engagement, facilitate language development, and improve overall educational satisfaction.

Despite promising results, the study has limitations. Self-reported data may introduce bias, and the focus on a specific educational context limits generalizability. The absence of objective academic performance metrics, such as exam scores, weakens the assessment of social media's impact. Additionally, non-academic social media use was not controlled, potentially affecting learning outcomes. Future research should expand into diverse contexts, incorporate performance-based measures, and explore controlled experiments to validate findings. Investigating negative effects, e.g., distractions and misinformation, would further enhance understanding and support the effective integration of social media in language learning.

### CRediT authorship contribution statement

**Tri Wintolo Apoko:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis. **Budi Waluyo:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Supervision, Resources, Formal analysis, Conceptualization.

### Ethics declaration

Informed consent was obtained from all parties involved. The study was approved by the Research and Community Service Institute of Universitas Muhammadiyah Prof. Dr. Hamka, Indonesia on February 1, 2024 (Approval Number: 30/F.03.07/2024).

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### Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest related to this study. This research was conducted independently, and no financial or personal relationships influenced the findings or interpretations presented in this manuscript.

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