

The Effectiveness of Social Media in Learning English Autodidactically

Surgawie S

surgawiesgawie@gmail.com

Ibrahim Manda

ibrahimmanda84@gmail.com

Sitti Aisa

siti.aisa@gmail.com

Isumarni

isumarni89@gmail.com

Sam Hermansyah

sam.hermansyah82@gmail.com

Universitas Muhammadiyah Sidenreng Rappang

ABSTRACT

This study explores the effectiveness of social media as a tool for autonomous English learning. Employing a descriptive qualitative approach, data were gathered through interviews with five seventh-semester students from the Indonesian Language Education program at Muhammadiyah Sidenreng Rappang University. The research investigates whether social media facilitates self-directed English learning and contributes to skill enhancement. The findings reveal that students perceive social media as an effective platform for independent English learning when used strategically. Platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok provide diverse learning resources, including video-based lessons and interactive content, which support vocabulary development, pronunciation improvement, and overall language proficiency. However, challenges such as the lack of structured guidance, potential distractions, and difficulties in tracking progress were also noted. This study underscores the potential of social media as a supplementary tool for autonomous English learning, highlighting the need for strategic and disciplined use to maximize its benefits.

Keywords: Social Media; Autonomous Learning; English Proficiency

INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of digital technology has transformed various aspects of human life, including education. One of the most significant developments in this field is the integration of social media as a learning tool. Platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok provide accessible and interactive environments for acquiring knowledge, including language learning. English, as a global language, is a crucial skill for individuals seeking academic, professional, and social

opportunities. This shift in learning methods raises an essential question: How effective is social media as a platform for self-directed English learning?

Traditionally, language learning has been structured within formal education systems, where institutions provide guided instruction, structured curricula, and assessment-based evaluations. However, not all learners have access to such resources, leading many to seek alternative learning methods. Autonomous learning, or autodidactic learning, has emerged as a viable solution, allowing individuals to take control of their education. With the vast array of English learning content available on social media, students can now engage with diverse materials—such as instructional videos, language challenges, and interactive discussions—without direct teacher supervision.

The integration of social media in language learning aligns with modern pedagogical theories, particularly Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory and the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach. Vygotsky emphasizes the importance of social interaction in learning, suggesting that engaging with authentic language materials and native speakers enhances proficiency. Similarly, the CLT approach advocates for real-life communication as a means to develop language skills. Social media facilitates such exposure by providing real-world language use, enabling learners to practice listening, speaking, reading, and writing in meaningful contexts.

Despite its potential, using social media for autonomous language learning presents several challenges. Unlike traditional classroom settings, which offer structured guidance, self-directed learners may struggle with selecting appropriate content, maintaining consistency, and staying motivated. Additionally, the credibility of online educational content varies, making it difficult for learners to differentiate between reliable and misleading sources. Furthermore, the entertainment aspect of social media can be distracting, reducing the effectiveness of learning if not properly managed.

To address these concerns, this study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of social media as a tool for self-directed English learning. It examines how social media contributes to language skill development, analyzes students' perceptions and experiences, and identifies both the benefits and limitations of this learning approach. The research focuses on higher education students who actively use social media as part of their learning process, providing valuable insights into its impact on self-directed language acquisition.

By exploring this topic, the study contributes to the broader discussion on digital education and its role in shaping modern learning methodologies. It also offers practical recommendations for learners, educators, and content creators on optimizing social media for educational purposes. As technology continues to evolve, understanding the role of digital platforms in language learning is crucial

for developing effective strategies that maximize their benefits while minimizing potential drawbacks.

The emergence of social media as a learning platform presents both opportunities and challenges for autonomous English learners. While it offers flexibility, accessibility, and interactive learning experiences, it also demands self-discipline and critical evaluation of content. By investigating its effectiveness, this research seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how social media can support language acquisition and contribute to the future of digital education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The rapid advancement of digital technology has significantly influenced various aspects of education, including language learning. Social media, as one of the most widely utilized digital tools, has emerged as a platform for acquiring new skills, including English proficiency. Researchers have extensively examined its role in facilitating self-directed language learning, highlighting its potential to provide authentic language exposure, enhance learner engagement, and foster interactive learning experiences. However, the effectiveness of social media in supporting autonomous English learning remains a topic of debate among educators and linguists.

Social media platforms offer a diverse range of learning resources that cater to different language skills, such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing. YouTube, for instance, provides instructional videos, pronunciation guides, and real-life conversations, allowing learners to engage with native speakers. TikTok and Instagram feature short-form educational content that is easily accessible and convenient for learners with limited time. According to Blattner and Fiori (2009), social media fosters an interactive and collaborative learning environment, enabling learners to practice language skills in a more natural and engaging manner. Moreover, the flexibility of social media allows learners to study at their own pace, making it an attractive alternative to traditional classroom instruction.

The effectiveness of social media in language learning can be analyzed through various educational theories. Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory emphasizes the importance of social interaction in cognitive development, suggesting that learning occurs through communication, collaboration, and exposure to authentic language use—key features of social media platforms. Similarly, Bandura's Social Learning Theory posits that individuals acquire knowledge through observation, imitation, and interaction, all of which are fundamental aspects of digital learning. Furthermore, the concept of autodidactic learning aligns with constructivist theories, where learners actively seek and construct knowledge independently. In the context of self-directed language acquisition, social media serves as a medium for continuous exposure, practice, and engagement.

Several studies have demonstrated the positive impact of social media on language acquisition, particularly in enhancing real-world communication skills. Al-Mamun et al. (2018) found that students who used Facebook, YouTube, and WhatsApp for learning English reported improvements in listening and speaking skills due to increased exposure to native speakers. Mei (2020) also observed that the combination of visual and auditory input from social media aids vocabulary retention and pronunciation accuracy. Additionally, social media platforms facilitate immediate feedback through comments, direct messages, and interactive exercises, enabling learners to refine their language skills in real time.

Despite its advantages, social media also presents challenges for self-directed learners. One major concern is the lack of structured guidance, which can lead to ineffective learning strategies. Unlike formal education, where instructors provide structured lessons and assessments, social media requires learners to independently select and evaluate learning materials. Hapsari (2019) highlighted that the overwhelming abundance of information on social media makes it difficult for learners to distinguish between credible and unreliable sources. Moreover, distractions from entertainment content can reduce learners' focus and productivity, limiting the effectiveness of social media as a learning tool.

Research has shown that social media affects different aspects of language proficiency to varying degrees. Listening skills tend to improve significantly due to exposure to spoken English in videos and podcasts. However, speaking skills may require additional practice beyond social media interaction, as learners often consume content passively without actively engaging in verbal communication. Reading and writing skills can also benefit from social media engagement, particularly through participation in online discussions, blog posts, and interactive learning platforms. Chen and Bryer (2012) found that students who frequently write captions, tweets, or blog posts on social media demonstrate improved written communication skills over time.

While social media provides unique learning opportunities, it differs significantly from traditional classroom instruction. In formal education, learners follow a structured curriculum, receive direct feedback from teachers, and participate in peer discussions within an academic setting. In contrast, social media-based learning is more flexible but demands greater self-discipline and critical thinking to ensure meaningful progress. Studies suggest that a hybrid approach, combining formal education with digital learning tools, may yield the best results. Integrating social media into classroom instruction can enhance engagement and provide additional language practice beyond textbooks and lectures.

The literature on social media and autonomous English learning highlights both its benefits and limitations. While digital platforms offer accessibility, flexibility, and real-world language exposure, they also pose challenges related to content credibility, learner motivation, and structured guidance. The effectiveness of social media in language learning ultimately depends on the learner's ability to navigate

and utilize these resources effectively. Future research should focus on strategies to optimize social media for self-directed learning, ensuring that it serves as a valuable supplement to traditional language education.

METHOD

Design and Sample

This study employs a descriptive qualitative research design to examine the effectiveness of social media as a tool for self-directed English learning. According to Sugiyono (2015), qualitative research is appropriate for exploring phenomena in their natural settings, allowing researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences. The qualitative approach in this study enables the collection of detailed insights regarding students' perceptions, challenges, and learning outcomes when using social media for English learning. The study does not rely on numerical data but instead focuses on subjective experiences, making qualitative analysis the most suitable method.

The participants of this study consist of five seventh-semester students from the Indonesian Language Education program at Muhammadiyah Sidenreng Rappang University. These students were selected based on their active engagement with social media for learning English. Purposive sampling was used to ensure that participants had relevant experience with self-directed learning through digital platforms. The selection criteria included students who regularly use platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp for English learning, as well as those who have demonstrated an interest in improving their language proficiency independently.

Instrument and Procedures

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and questionnaire surveys. The interviews were conducted to gain in-depth information on participants' experiences, learning strategies, and challenges faced while using social media. Open-ended questions allowed participants to freely express their thoughts, providing richer qualitative data. Additionally, questionnaires were distributed to gather supplementary information regarding participants' social media usage patterns, preferred learning resources, and perceived effectiveness of digital learning. The combination of these methods ensured a comprehensive understanding of the research problem.

Ethical guidelines were strictly followed to ensure the confidentiality and voluntary participation of all respondents. Prior to data collection, participants were informed about the objectives of the study, and their written consent was obtained. Participants were assured that their responses would remain anonymous and be used solely for academic purposes. To maintain data integrity, all interviews were

recorded with participants' permission and transcribed for analysis. Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant academic authorities before conducting the study.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following the framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). This involved identifying common patterns, categorizing responses, and interpreting recurring themes related to the effectiveness of social media in self-directed English learning. The thematic analysis process included data coding, classification of themes, and interpretation to provide meaningful conclusions. The reliability of the findings was enhanced through triangulation, comparing responses from different participants and verifying consistency in their learning experiences.

While this study provides valuable insights, it is subject to certain limitations. The small sample size may not fully represent the broader student population, limiting the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the study focuses primarily on self-reported experiences, which may introduce subjective biases. Future research could expand the sample size and incorporate quantitative measures to further validate the impact of social media on self-directed English learning. Despite these limitations, this study contributes to the growing body of literature on digital language learning and offers practical implications for students, educators, and content creators.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Role of Social Media in Self-Directed English Learning

The findings of this study indicate that social media serves as a valuable tool for self-directed English learning when used strategically. Data from interviews and questionnaires show that participants frequently engage with platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp to access language learning materials. Most participants reported that social media enhances their vocabulary acquisition, listening comprehension, and pronunciation skills through video-based content, interactive discussions, and real-time feedback from online communities. However, challenges such as content selection, distractions, and the absence of structured guidance were also identified.

Flexibility and Engagement in Learning

Participants highlighted that social media provides an engaging and flexible learning environment. Unlike traditional classroom settings, which follow rigid structures, social media allows learners to access educational content at their convenience. Exposure to native speakers and language educators on platforms like YouTube and TikTok helps improve pronunciation and comprehension. Additionally, interactive features, such as comment sections and discussion forums,

offer learners opportunities to practice writing and receive feedback, further reinforcing their learning process.

Challenges in Self-Directed Learning

Despite these benefits, self-directed learning through social media also presents challenges. Many participants reported difficulty in selecting credible and relevant sources due to the overwhelming abundance of information. Some expressed concerns about the lack of structured guidance, as social media platforms do not provide systematic curricula like formal education. Furthermore, entertainment content often causes distractions, reducing learners' focus and discipline.

The Contribution of Different Platforms to Language Skills

Findings suggest that different social media platforms contribute to various aspects of language learning. Listening skills improve significantly through exposure to native speakers' content on YouTube and podcasts, while vocabulary acquisition is enhanced through short-form videos and infographics on TikTok and Instagram. However, speaking skills require additional practice, as most participants engage with content passively rather than actively producing language.

Comparison with Traditional Learning Methods

When compared to traditional learning methods, social media offers greater accessibility and engagement but lacks formal assessment mechanisms. While structured lessons and clear evaluation criteria in formal education provide guidance, social media learning is self-paced and autonomous. Some participants suggested that a hybrid approach—combining traditional instruction with digital learning—could maximize the benefits of both methods.

Optimizing Social Media for English Learning

Overall, these findings suggest that social media can effectively supplement traditional English learning when learners adopt strategic content selection, manage their time efficiently, and actively participate in discussions. Additionally, educators can support students by recommending reliable educational content and integrating social media-based activities into the curriculum. The integration of social media into self-directed English learning has garnered significant attention in recent years. This study's findings align with previous research, highlighting both the advantages and challenges associated with utilizing social media platforms for language acquisition.

Consistent with Malik and Qureshi's (2024) study, participants in this research reported that social media enhances vocabulary acquisition, listening comprehension, and pronunciation skills through engaging with video-based content and interactive discussions. The flexibility and accessibility of platforms

like YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp allow learners to access educational materials at their convenience, catering to diverse learning preferences. This flexibility is particularly beneficial for learners who may not have access to traditional classroom settings, as noted by Karim (2022).

However, the study also identified challenges that learners face when using social media for self-directed learning. The overwhelming abundance of information can make it difficult for learners to discern credible and relevant sources, leading to potential misinformation. This concern is echoed in the work of Hapsari (2019), who emphasized the importance of critical thinking in selecting appropriate learning materials. Additionally, the lack of structured guidance and the presence of distractions from non-educational content can impede learning progress, a challenge also highlighted by Malik and Qureshi (2024).

In terms of language skills development, the findings suggest that while receptive skills such as listening and reading benefit significantly from social media engagement, productive skills like speaking and writing may require more active participation and practice beyond passive content consumption. This observation aligns with Al-Mamun et al.'s (2018) study, which found that while social media enhances receptive skills, learners must seek interactive opportunities to develop productive skills. This study contributes to the existing body of literature by providing recent empirical evidence on the effectiveness of social media as a tool for self-directed English learning among university students. While previous studies have explored the role of social media in language learning, this research offers updated insights into how specific platforms are utilized by learners and the challenges they encounter. By focusing on a purposively selected group of active social media users, the study delves deeper into the nuanced experiences of learners, offering a more detailed understanding of the interplay between digital platforms and language acquisition.

The findings of this study have several practical implications for learners, educators, and content creators. For learners, it is essential to develop critical thinking skills to effectively select and evaluate learning materials on social media. Active engagement, such as participating in discussions and seeking feedback, can enhance the development of productive language skills. Educators can play a pivotal role by guiding students toward credible educational content and integrating social media-based activities into the curriculum to complement traditional instruction. This hybrid approach can leverage the strengths of both formal education and digital learning tools, maximizing learning outcomes.

Content creators should be mindful of the educational potential of their platforms and strive to produce high-quality, accurate, and engaging materials that cater to the needs of self-directed learners. By addressing the challenges identified in this study, stakeholders can work collaboratively to optimize the use of social media in English language education. In conclusion, while social media offers valuable opportunities for self-directed English learning, it is crucial to approach its use

strategically, with an awareness of its limitations. Future research should continue to explore effective strategies to mitigate the challenges identified and further enhance the integration of social media into language learning frameworks.

CONCLUSION

This study underscores the effectiveness of social media as a supplementary tool for self-directed English learning, highlighting its accessibility, engaging content, and diverse learning resources. Platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok provide learners with exposure to authentic language use, interactive materials, and opportunities for real-world communication. The findings indicate that social media enhances vocabulary acquisition, listening comprehension, and pronunciation skills, making it a valuable complement to traditional learning methods. However, despite its benefits, several challenges were identified in using social media for language learning. Learners often struggle with selecting credible content, maintaining consistency, and avoiding distractions. Additionally, while social media effectively improves receptive skills like listening and reading, productive skills such as speaking and writing require more structured practice. These findings emphasize the need for strategic learning approaches and educator guidance to optimize the benefits of social media in language acquisition.

Compared to traditional learning methods, social media offers greater flexibility and autonomy, allowing learners to study at their own pace. However, the absence of a structured curriculum and formal assessment necessitates self-discipline and critical content selection. A hybrid learning model that integrates traditional instruction with social media-based learning could provide a balanced approach, combining structured education with the advantages of independent learning. To maximize the potential of social media in English learning, learners should engage actively with interactive content, participate in discussions, and set clear learning goals. Educators can support this process by curating reliable educational resources and integrating social media into formal instruction. Future research should explore quantitative assessments of language improvement and examine the long-term impact of digital learning on English proficiency. Ultimately, social media serves as a powerful tool for self-directed English learning, offering flexibility, accessibility, and interactive engagement. However, its effectiveness depends on learners' ability to navigate content wisely, maintain discipline, and incorporate structured learning strategies. With proper guidance and responsible use, social media can significantly enhance language proficiency and contribute to the evolution of modern educational practices in a digital era.

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