The Impact of Social Media on English as a Foreign Language learning

Adam Yousif Mostafa Adam
Assistant Professor, Language Dept, College of Education, Merowe University of Technology, Sudan **adamamlas2022@gmail.com**

Received: 17/08/ 2025 Accepted: 26 /12/ 2025 published: 30 /12/ 2025

Abstract:
This study examines how social media affects English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning among students at Merowe University of Technology. Surveying 93 learners, the research found that platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp significantly improve listening comprehension, vocabulary, and communication confidence. While education is the primary driver for use, students face challenges including informal language exposure, high data costs, and a lack of formal training. The findings suggest that while social media is a powerful tool for language acquisition, it requires strategic integration and structured guidance to overcome its limitations and maximize educational benefits.
Keywords: *Impact, Social Media, English as a Foreign Language, learning*

1. INTRODUCTION

The coming of social media has changed the way we communicate, interact, and express ourselves. Platforms like Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, TikTok, Instagram, …. etc. have become complementarily to our daily lives, influencing not only our social interactions but also our language use. The English language, in particular, has been shaped by social media deeply, from the rapid increase of new words and expressions to the progress of informal language norms. The rapid evolution of language on social media reflects the dynamic nature of human communication, new words, phrases, and abbreviations emerge regularly, and their usage can spread quickly through online communities. Hasan et al., (2020), stated that social media platforms have become ubiquitous in daily life, profoundly influencing English language learning. These platforms serve as powerful motivational tools for language learners. They transform passive learners into active and autonomous participants, fostering engagement and enthusiasm in learning process. Social media facilitates the sharing of ideas and improves various language skills. For instance, Facebook has been identified as a motivational tool that enhances writing skills through expressing thoughts and enables telecollaboration among L2 learners. Similarly, micro-blogs on Facebook have been shown to motivate students.

Social media platforms have given rise to new linguistic forms such as hashtags, emojis, and internet slang, these forms of communication are concise, expressive, and often used to convey

emotions or reactions. In area of vocabulary social media has introduced many new words and expressions, often used reflect the dynamic nature of online communication and the rapid progress of language. Social media platforms encourage a conversational tone, blurring the lines between spoken and written language. this has led to the widespread use of contractions, colloquialisms, and relaxed approaches to grammar and punctuation. The informal nature of social media has relaxed traditional language norms, allowing for more creative and expressive communication. However, this can also lead to confusion or miscommunication in certain contexts. Ekayati et al. (2024) argue that social media has led to language degradation, citing the use of abbreviations, slang, and informal language. However, others see this as a natural evolution of language, reflecting the changing needs and preferences of communicators. Social media has democratized language, making it more accessible and inclusive. This has led to more diverse and dynamic language landscape, with opportunities for creative expression and innovation. Social media has made rise to the phenomenon of code-switching to the head, users come across different linguistic and cultural aspects. Code-switching is a mutual phenomenon in multilingual communities, where individuals switch between languages or dialects to communicate effectively, social media has expanded this phenomenon, enabling users to connect with diverse linguistic and cultural groups.

This study aims to explore the role of social media in English as foreign language (EFL) learning, through answering the following questions:

1. Do social media improved learner's English language efficacy?
2. What skills are widely influenced by social media?
3. What are the most utilized platforms among EFL learners?
4. What is learners' purpose of using social Media and how many hours do learners browse per day?
5. To what extent do accessibility, cost, and training are matter in utilizing social media tools?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

In the digital age, social media has emerged as a powerful tool for English language acquisition, offering learners interactive, engaging, and accessible platforms for practice. With the rise of AI-driven language apps, short-form video content, and global online communities, learners now have unprecedented opportunities to enhance their English skills. Social media has revolutionized English language learning by providing dynamic, interactive, and personalized opportunities for skill development. Recent studies confirm its effectiveness in vocabulary building, speaking practice, and learner motivation. According to Chen and Zhang (2022), platforms like Instagram and Twitter facilitate incidental learning, where users

absorb vocabulary and grammar naturally through exposure rather than formal study. Similarly, Lee (2021) found that microlearning through bite-sized content (e.g., Instagram Reels, YouTube Shorts) helps learners retain new words and phrases more effectively than traditional methods.

Social media has become an integral part of modern communication, significantly influencing English language learning and acquisition. Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and language-learning apps like Duolingo provide learners with interactive and immersive environments to practice English. This literature review examines the impact of social media on English language improvement, focusing on vocabulary acquisition, communication skills, motivation, and challenges faced by learners. Social media facilitates informal and autonomous learning by exposing users to authentic language use. According to Blattner and Fiori (2011), social networking sites (SNS) enhance learners' sociolinguistic competence by allowing them to engage in real-time interactions with native and non-native speakers. Similarly, Thorne and Reinhardt (2008) argue that platforms like Facebook and Twitter encourage meaningful language practice through comments, posts, and multimedia content.

2.2 Enhancing Vocabulary and Writing Skills

Social media promotes vocabulary expansion through exposure to diverse linguistic inputs. Kabilan et al. (2010) found that students improved their English vocabulary by engaging with Facebook, as they encountered new words in context. Additionally, microblogging platforms like Twitter encourage concise writing, helping learners practice grammar and sentence structure (Antenos-Conforti, 2009). Short-form video platforms, particularly TikTok, have gained attention for their role in vocabulary acquisition. A study by Alghonaim (2023) revealed that ESL learners who engaged with English-language TikTok videos showed significant improvement in idiomatic expressions and colloquial speech. Additionally, AI-powered language apps like Duolingo and Memrise incorporate gamification, which enhances retention through spaced repetition and interactive exercises Vesselinov & Grego (2022).

2.3 Improving Speaking and Listening Skills

Video-based platforms like YouTube and TikTok provide opportunities for improving listening and pronunciation. According to Sun (2020), watching English videos with subtitles helps learners associate spoken words with their written forms, enhancing comprehension. Voice-based social media, such as podcasts and Clubhouse, also allow learners to practice listening to different accents and speaking styles. Warschauer (2010). Wang and Chen (2023) demonstrated that learners who participated in language exchange apps improved their pronunciation and fluency through real-time

conversations with native speakers. Khan & Abdullah (2021), believed that YouTube and podcast-based learning has been shown to enhance listening comprehension and accent reduction

2.4 Motivation and Collaborative Learning

One of the strongest advantages of social media is its ability to sustain learner motivation through community interaction. Martínez and Li (2023) found that participation in Facebook and Reddit language groups increased learners' confidence and willingness to communicate in English. Furthermore, gamified elements in apps like Duolingo and Babbel—such as streaks, leaderboards, and rewards—have been linked to higher engagement and long-term retention Vazquez-Calvo et al. (2020). Harrison and Thomas (2009) shows that language learners on platforms like Duolingo and HelloTalk remain engaged due to instant feedback and peer interactions. Lamy & Zourou (2013), online communities provide collaborative spaces where learners exchange knowledge and correct each other's mistakes

2.5 Challenges and Limitations

Despite its benefits, social media poses challenges such as exposure to informal language, slang, and grammatical errors. As noted by Crystal (2011), excessive use of abbreviations (e.g., "u" for "you") may hinder formal writing skills. Warschauer & Grimes (2007), distractions and misinformation on social media can reduce learning efficiency. Alm (2020). The prevalence of informal language,

slang, and grammatical inaccuracies can reinforce incorrect usage. Pegrum (2021), digital distractions and algorithmic biases may lead learners toward passive consumption rather than active practice (Sundqvist, 2022). Some studies suggest that without structured guidance, learners may develop fragmented language skills.

3.Methodology & Data Analysis

3.1 Instrument & Procedures:

The study applied in Merowe University of Technology – College of Medicine and Health Sciences department of medicine, nursing and laboratory. The sample size was (93) students (male and female) responded to the questionnaire as a means of data collection. The questionnaire prepared by the researcher and consist of (14) statements and multiple choices options for variable of preference of platforms, time spend peer day, and the purpose of using social media beside the demographic data.

3.2 First question answer: What are the most utilized platforms among EFL learners?

Items	Responses		Percent of Cases
	N	Percent	
Facebook	47	26.7%	50.5%

Twitter	2	1.1%	2.2%
Instagram	10	5.7%	10.8%
TikTok	18	10.2%	19.4%
YouTube	24	13.6%	25.8%
Telegram	24	13.6%	25.8%
Snapchat	8	4.5%	8.6%
WhatsApp	43	24.4%	46.2%
Total	176	100.0%	189.2%

Table (1) First question answer Source: (Researcher 2025)

The table displays the frequencies of different social media platforms, the total number of responses is 176. Facebook and WhatsApp are the most utilized platforms, with 47 and 43 responses respectively. They also account for the highest percentages of total responses (26.7% and 24.4%) and percentages of cases (50.5% and 46.2%). This indicates their strong dominance among the surveyed users. YouTube and Telegram are moderately utilized, each receiving 24 responses, representing 13.6% of total responses and 25.8% of cases. This suggests a significant user base for video content and messaging. TikTok has 18 responses, making up

10.2% of total responses and 19.4% of cases, showing its growing popularity. Instagram is used by 10 respondents (5.7% of responses, 10.8% of cases). Snapchat has 8 responses (4.5% of responses, 8.6% of cases). Twitter is the least utilized platform among those listed, with only 2 responses, accounting for 1.1% of total responses and 2.2% of cases. Analyzing the data reveals Facebook and WhatsApp as the top platforms, with the highest response counts and percentages. YouTube and Telegram are also significant, indicating popular content and messaging use. TikTok shows growth, while Twitter is the least used among the listed platforms.

3.3 Second question answer: What is learners' purpose of using social Media and how many hours do learners browse per day?

A. Purpose Frequencies for Social Media Use:

Items	**Responses**		**Percent of Cases**
	N	**Percent**	
Socializing	23	19.3%	25.3%
Entertainment	23	19.3%	25.3%
Education	57	47.9%	62.6%

News	16	13.4%	17.6%
Total	119	100.0%	130.8%

Table (2) part a of second question answer Source: (Researcher 2025)

The table illustrates the frequencies of different purposes for using social media. A total of 119 responses were recorded. Education is the primary purpose for social media use, with 57 responses, accounting for 47.9% of total responses and 62.6% of cases. This highlights the significant role social media plays in educational activities for the surveyed group. Socializing and Entertainment are equally important, each receiving 23 responses. Both purposes represent 19.3% of total responses and 25.3% of cases. This indicates that social media is widely used for connecting with others and for leisure. News is the least frequent purpose, with 16 responses, making up 13.4% of total responses and 17.6% of cases. While still a notable use, it is less prevalent compared to education, socializing, and entertainment.

Analysis revealed that education is the most common use, followed by socializing and entertainment equally. News is the least frequent. I generated several bar charts to visualize these insights, focusing on response counts, percentages, and case percentages to support the key findings. Next, I will deliver the detailed analysis and attach the charts.

B. How many hours do learners browse per day?

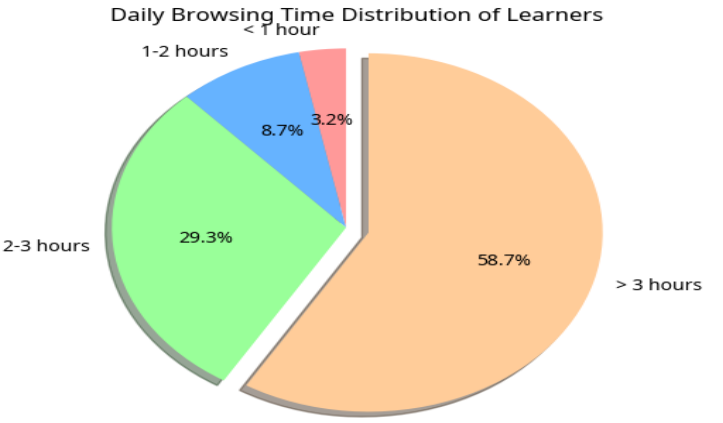


Chart (1) part b of second question answer Source: (Researcher 2025)

Table (3) displayed varieties of time spent in hours per day, (58.1%) of the participant spend more than 3 hours a day browsing on social media for different purposes. The data shows a strong correlation between the significant amount of time learners spend browsing social media (87.1% spend 2+ hours daily) and perceived improvements in their English language skills. This extensive exposure primarily benefits receptive skills like listening comprehension, vocabulary expansion, and overall confidence in

communication, these skills show the highest rates of agreement for improvement. In contrast, writing skills and reading comprehension show less consistent improvement, despite high browsing time. This suggests that passive consumption through social media is highly effective for receptive language acquisition, but less so for active, productive skills which may require more deliberate practice.

3.4 Third question answer: Do social media improved learner's English language efficacy?

Items	N	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Mean	Std. D	t	Sig.
Social media platforms have increased my confidence in using English for communication.	93	63	22	8	2.91	3.21	8.73	.000
My ability to understand spoken English has improved through listening to content on social media (e.g., videos, audio	93	68	20	5	3.00	3.19	9.05	.000

clips).								
My reading comprehension in English has improved as a result of reading posts, articles, and comments on social media.	93	60	23	10	2.53	.68	35.74	.000
I am more comfortable expressing myself in written English due to frequent practice on social media (e.g., typing posts, comments, messages).	93	39	36	18	2.22	.75	28.50	.000
Social media has helped me expand my English vocabulary.	93	64	17	12	2.56	.71	34.55	.000
I believe social media has positively impacted my overall English language proficiency.	93	54	29	10	2.48	.70	34.81	.000

Table (3) third question answer Source: (Researcher 2025)

Table (4) presents survey findings from participants on whether social media improves their English language efficacy. The most significant impact is on understanding spoken English, with (68) respondents agreeing that listening to content like videos and audio clips on social media has improved their ability. This is the highest level of agreement across all categories. large majority also feel that social media has increased their confidence in using English for communication (63) and helped expand their vocabulary (64). The area with the least consensus is comfort with written English. Only 39 participants agreed that frequent practice on social media made them more comfortable with writing, while 36 were neutral and 18 disagreed. This suggests that while users are writing, it doesn't translate to comfort for many. Despite the weaker sentiment on writing, a clear majority (54 agree) believe that social media has positively impacted their overall English language proficiency. As with the previous table, the "Sig." column value of .000 for all items indicates that these findings are statistically significant and not likely due to random chance. This suggests that learners feel social media is a powerful tool for improving their listening skills, vocabulary, and overall confidence in using English. However, its effectiveness in enhancing comfort with written expression is much less pronounced.

3.5 Fourth question answer: What skills are widely influenced by social media?

Items	**N**	**Agree**	**Neutral**	**Disagree**	**Mean**	**Std. D**	**T**	**Sig.**
Social media has significantly improved my English-speaking skills.	93	61	23	9	2.60	.70	37.00	.000
My listening comprehension in English has improved due to consuming audio and video content on social media	93	65	21	6	2.96	3.20	8.93	.000
Social media has enhanced my English reading skills by	93	48	34	48	2.39	.70	33.33	.000

providing access to diverse written content (e.g., news articles, blogs, captions).								
My English writing skills have benefited from regularly composing posts, comments, and messages on social media.	93	44	32	17	2.30	.80	29.05	.000
Social media has helped me develop a better understanding of English slang, idioms, and informal	93	55	31	7	2.51	.63	38.14	.000

language.								

Table (4) forth question answer. Source: (Researcher 2025)

Table (5) presents the results of learners' opinions about the influence of social media on their English language skills. The majority of respondents agreed that social media has a positive effect on all the listed English skills. Listening comprehension is most impacted skill which shows the highest level of agreement, with (65) participants feeling it has improved due to consuming audio and video content. Writing skills saw scored (44) agreement, although it's still the most common response for that category. Reading skills show a notable split in opinion. While 48 people agree that social media enhanced their reading, an equal number (48) disagree, making it the most contentious point.

The "Sig." column, with a value of .000 for all items, indicates that the results are statistically significant. The data strongly suggests that users perceive social media as a beneficial tool for improving their English, especially for listening, speaking, and understanding informal language. However, its impact on reading and writing skills is viewed as less certain or beneficial by a larger portion of the respondents.

3.6 Fifth question answer: To what extent do accessibility, cost, and training are matter in utilizing social media tools?

Items	N	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Mean	Std. D	T	Sig.
I'm able to access to social media any time anywhere.	91	45	30	16	2.31	.76	29.16	.000
I've received training in how to use social media for educational purpose.	93	38	23	38	2.06	.86	22.88	.000
Daily use of social media is costly	93	53	20	20	2.35	.81	27.82	.000

Table (6) fifth question answer Source: (Researcher 2025)

The p-value for three items is reported as .000, this consistently indicates that the results for each statement are statistically significant

at a conventional alpha level (0.050. Based on the statistical results, accessibility, cost, and training all matter to a statistically significant extent in the utilization of social media tools, though their impact and perception vary. Cost is perceived as a significant factor, the majority of learners (53) agreed that daily use of social media is costly, making it the most widely perceived concern among the three factors. This suggests that the financial aspect of social media usage is a notable consideration for learners. Accessibility is generally positive but among the participant, (45) agreed they can access social media anytime anywhere, a considerable number are neutral or disagree. This indicates that while accessibility is largely present, there are still limitations or perceived barriers for some learners. (38) learners have not received training in using social media for educational purposes, with an equal number agreeing they have. This highlights a clear gap in formal training, suggesting that while social media is widely used, its effective educational utilization might be hindered by a lack of structured guidance. All three factors: (accessibility, cost, and training) are statistically significant in influencing how learners utilize social media tools. Cost appears to be the most widely acknowledged barrier, followed by accessibility, and a clear need for more structured training for educational purposes, addressing these factors could potentially enhance the effective and equitable utilization of social media in learning environments.

4. Conclusion

This study comprehensively demonstrates the significant and evolving role of social media in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning. It unequivocally establishes that social media platforms are not merely supplementary tools but have become integral to the language acquisition process, profoundly influencing learners' efficacy and skill development. The findings highlight a clear positive impact on receptive language skills, particularly listening comprehension and vocabulary expansion, largely attributable to the extensive exposure to authentic English content and the interactive nature of these platforms. The observed increase in learners' confidence in English communication further underscores the motivational and engagement-fostering capabilities of social media. However, the study also brings to light the nuanced and sometimes contradictory effects of social media on productive language skills, such as writing and reading comprehension. While social media offers ample opportunities for written expression, the data suggests that this does not consistently translate into enhanced comfort or proficiency in formal writing. Similarly, the impact on reading skills appears more varied, indicating that the informal and often fragmented nature of online content may not always support the development of comprehensive reading abilities. This disparity emphasizes the need for more structured and deliberate practice to leverage social media effectively for these skills.

The study identifies critical practical considerations that shape the utilization of social media in EFL contexts. The overwhelming preference for platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp, coupled with

education being the primary purpose of use, signifies a clear learner-driven integration of social media into their academic pursuits. Yet, this integration is not without its hurdles. Concerns regarding the financial cost of daily social media use, along with persistent accessibility barriers for some learners, underscore socio-economic factors that can impede equitable access to these learning resources. Most notably, the identified gap in formal training for educational social media use points to a systemic challenge, suggesting that without pedagogical guidance, learners may not fully harness the educational potential of these platforms or may inadvertently reinforce incorrect language habits due to exposure to informal language and grammatical errors.

Eventually, social media presents a dual-edged sword in EFL learning: a powerful catalyst for engagement, exposure, and receptive skill development, yet one that necessitates strategic pedagogical integration and awareness of its inherent limitations and challenges. To maximize its benefits, educators and learners must navigate the informal linguistic landscape, address accessibility and cost concerns, and actively seek or provide structured guidance to foster holistic language proficiency.

This study revealed several significant findings regarding the impact of social media on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning:

- Social media significantly enhances receptive skills (listening, vocabulary) and communication confidence in EFL learners.
- Productive skills (writing, reading) show less consistent improvement, with varied comfort levels among learners.
- Facebook and WhatsApp are the most utilized platforms, with education being the primary purpose of use.
- Extensive social media browsing correlates with improved receptive language skills.
- Challenges include exposure to informal language, distractions, and barriers related to accessibility, cost, and lack of formal training.
- Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are proposed to optimize the use of social media in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning.
- Design curricula to leverage social media for enhancing receptive skills and communication confidence.
- Offer specific pedagogical interventions to improve writing and reading, including critical analysis and formal feedback.
- Teach learners to differentiate language styles and critically evaluate online information.
- Provide workshops for educators and learners on effective social media use for educational purposes.
- Work towards making social media more accessible and affordable, and incorporate educational features into platforms.

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