



Exploring EFL Learners' Experiences in Self-Directed Learning Through Social Media Application

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Received: 2025-10-10 Accepted: 2025-11-16

DOI: 10.24256/ideas.v13i2.8414

Abstract

social media is inseparable from the daily lives of everyone, from young to old. At least one social media account is owned by everyone and many even have more than two social media platforms which is especially true for students who are trying to learn English independently outside of class. This study aims to explore how EFL students utilize social media to help them learn English responsibly through self-directed learning. This study uses a qualitative research design with narrative inquiry, and the data collection instruments used are in-depth interviews and documents. Three (3) students from Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta participated in this study through purposive sampling, where they actively use social media and learn English from there through SDL as a journey to develop their respective abilities and needs. Data analysis was conducted through thematic analysis, and the results showed that although social media was initially used for entertainment, it also became a supporting resource in helping individuals learn English according to their respective speeds, interests, and needs. They gain knowledge in terms of vocabulary, phrases, sentences, etc., which broadens their insights, increases their motivation and confidence, and provides them with easy access, space, and a supportive community. However, behind this flexibility, there is also an impact in the form of a lack of structured study, many distractions, inappropriate content, internet limitations causing dependency, and lack of direct feedback. This research highlights the important point that the success of SDL learning through social media greatly depends on students' critical thinking skills, self-control, initiative, and reflectiveness in managing social media throughout the English learning process.

Keywords: *English Language Learning; Social Media; Self-Directed Learning; EFL Students; Learning Autonomy.*

Introduction

Learning English is very important nowadays, for example in work, education, entertainment, communication, and politics. This global role requires people to survive by mastering this foreign language. Indonesia, as a country where English is not the native language, faces significant challenges in foreign language learning from elementary school to university, especially EFL students who frequently experience that they struggle to comprehend the language instruction in a classroom. Inadequately trained teachers, overly complicated explanations, excessive time and energy demands, and other distractions are just a few of the classroom-related variables that contribute to this problem.

Curiosity, initiative, and the freedom to establish their own objectives, choose their own materials, and select learning tools that accommodate their needs are ultimately prompting students to look for alternative methods to increase their knowledge from those issues. This condition explains the concept of Self-Directed Learning, which is a student approach to taking the initiative to choose, search for, plan, manage, and evaluate the learning process independently.

Students may make better decisions during the English learning process as a result of this learner autonomy, which also helps them overcome the difficulties they have during traditional classroom education. Faced with this challenge, students began to explore alternative methods that suited their individual needs in order to make the process more effective and not limited to the classroom. Social media, which is inseparable from the lives of students, became one of the solutions by utilizing this medium, which allowed them to organize, plan, and direct in a very flexible and interactive manner.

Social media gives students the freedom to explore any information that supports their English language learning. They can also learn independently through social media applications, which have many advantages and conveniences that make them popular and the reason why some EFL students are looking for information about the world or new knowledge about English that is not found in the classroom. Students who participate in self-directed learning are viewed as capable individuals who can think independently, weigh their options, make wise decisions, and take ownership of their education.

Self-Directed Learning (SDL) allows EFL students to direct their own learning rather than depending on instruction from instructors, they are able to manage their education, set goals, select appropriate resources, and assess their progress. Social media in this context facilitates SDL by providing a platform for cooperation, discovery, and personal growth in addition to communication and entertainment. (Elias & Merriam, 1995) & (Metz, 2016). Social media gives people the ability to connect with others, produce and share content, and establish online communities.

It encourages interaction, establishing connections, and taking part in conversations. Social media gives EFL learners the opportunity to assess their English proficiency and encourages self-directed learning (Safitri et al., 2022). Since new technologies are developing so quickly, modern education is gradually becoming more informal, accessible, and self-directed (Song & Bonk, 2016)(Bull et al., 2008)

Several previous studies have shown that social media can play a crucial role in supporting student independence. Dixit (2017) emphasized that self-directed learning and social media are essential for remaining current in a world that is changing quickly. Self-directed learning can be aided and expedited by social media, while Sitorus (2022) discovered that social media helps students learn on their own by offering flexible and easily available options. Through a variety of platforms, students can interact with English-language information outside of the classroom, managing and monitoring their progress while developing their independence.

Similarly, Bilger (2020) discovered that informal digital learning can nevertheless be advantageous for pupils who have little opportunity to utilize the target language. Even for amusement, interacting with English-language information on digital platforms can help with language development. In general, all of the studies show that social media provides EFL students with the opportunity to manage their own learning process flexibly, adjusting and choosing a wide range of authentic materials themselves, and adapting to their individual learning needs and pace. However, these studies are still not contextual in terms of describing the real experiences of how students actually manage their learning process.

These previous studies have predominantly focused on the function of media, media usage, and public opinion, and have yet to reveal in-depth experiences in terms of the real benefits and challenges they experience in the context of self-directed learning. These studies tend to use surveys, quantitative methods, and descriptive methods, and rarely use narrative inquiry, which is very suitable for exploring the personal experiences of learners in depth. Moreover, research on self-directed learning in Indonesia has been conducted, but it has been limited to descriptive studies and has not yet highlighted in depth the experiences of EFL students who actively use social media in SDL for the process of independent learning outside of formal classes. However, understanding this local context is very important for understanding the trends among EFL students today, how they interpret their experiences, and how they independently interpret and reflect on challenges, technology, culture, etc.

Therefore, this study aims to answer 1) Which social media platform is most frequently used by EFL students to learn English independently through SDL? 2) What are the learning benefits that EFL students gain from using social media in independent English language learning? 3) What challenges do EFL students face when using social media for self-directed English learning. This study explores how EFL learners use social media for self-directed learning, defines the benefits for independent learning, and examines potential challenges.

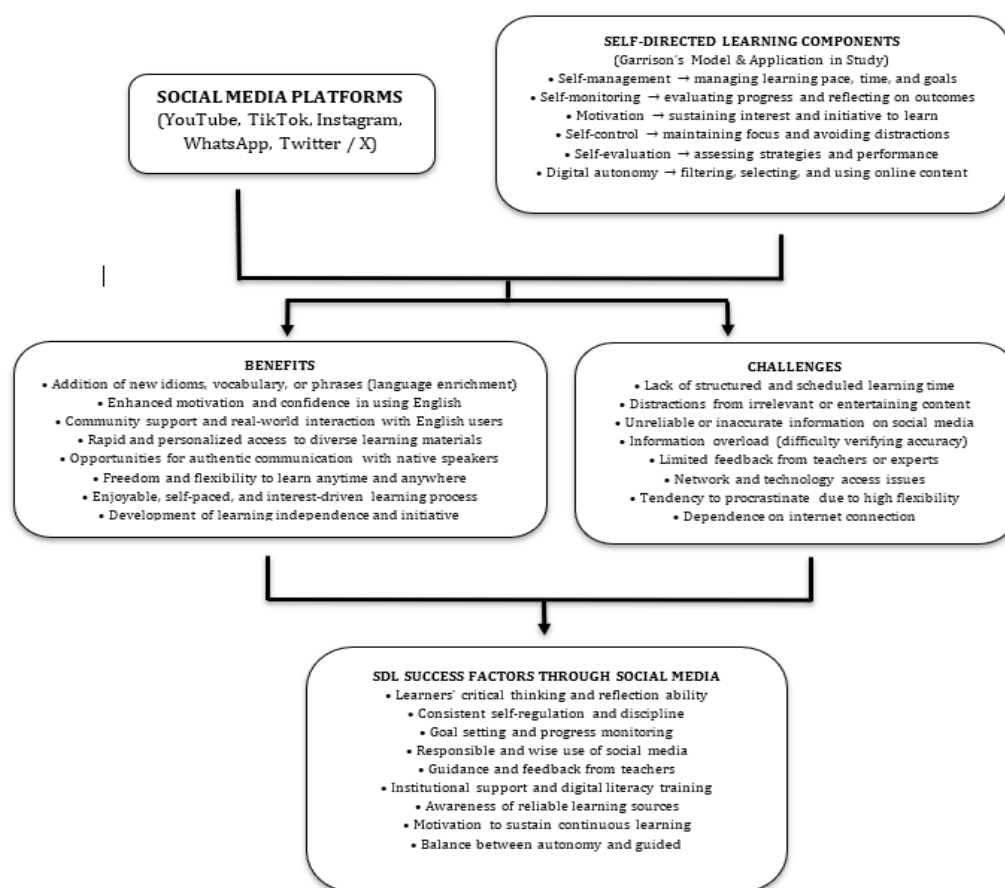


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of EFL Students' SDL through Social Media

Method

This study uses qualitative research with a narrative inquiry design. In narrative research, relational involvement between researchers and participants is an important aspect, where both build experiences collaboratively (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Haydon et al., 2018). Through the process of creating stories together, researchers can be present in the lives of participants and understand their experiences in depth. Interviews and conversations are the most frequently used methods in this approach (Joyce, 2015), interview guidelines and document analysis are needed as instruments of data collection. Because they allow for the emergence of personal narratives from participants.

The Study participants consisted of three (3) EFL students at Yogyakarta State University (UNY) studying English with an age range of around 22-24 years old, their English proficiency level is intermediate and on average they have been learning English for more than 6 years, the data was collected differently for each participant. Each participant was interviewed twice, and each interview lasted approximately 40-60 minutes. Two participants were interviewed in Indonesian to help them express themselves more naturally and extensively, while one participant chose to be interviewed in English according to her own preference.

Narrative inquiry is a type of qualitative research in which even a single participant can produce rich and highly meaningful data. Participants in this study were selected purposively based on certain criteria relevant to the focus of the study. Participants must be EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners who actively use social media platforms as a tool to support self-directed language learning. This is why these three participants are focused on the depth and richness of the stories that will be obtained, rather than on the large number that must be generalized. It is about quality, not quantity. With this number of participants, the study can conduct an in-depth and detailed exploration of each story, reflection, feeling, thought, and meaning that they created during the learning process.

Therefore, this qualitative approach, specifically narrative inquiry, is not always evaluated based on the number of respondents or generalization, but on personal life experiences along with the quality, meaning, and depth of the narratives within them. This approach ensures that the data collected will be directly aligned with the objectives of the study. The data collection here is an interview and the instrument is from the guideline interview supported by document analysis.

Narrative research methods are adaptable and not strictly sequential, emphasizing a flexible and evolving process rather than fixed steps. Guidance on data collection and analysis, along with practical techniques for conducting narrative studies, further support this approach. It was streamlined in light of the general structure of the study. The stages listed below were defined: 1). Determine the research problem. 2). Select three EFL students who actively use social media for self-directed learning. 3). Carrying out in-depth interviews and collect any supporting data/document related to their learning experiences. 4). Embed information about their use of social media for SDL in data collection, analysis, and writing. 5). Analyze the participants' stories using the process of thematic analysis 6). Embed a collaborative approach with the participant to review, validate, confirm, and clarify their stories (member checking) (.7). Present the narrative in written form.

Narrative inquiry typically takes the form of long stories, in-depth interviews, or personal reflections. In addition to interviews, documents included here may include journals/diaries, learning reflections, screenshots, and notes taken during the use of social media for SDL to provide additional and contextual support, verify participant statements, and verify findings. Since this storytelling data may contain many hidden meanings and patterns that need to be systematically extracted, thematic analysis plays a role in uncovering the meanings and patterns from the narratives.

In this study, thematic analysis organizes stories according to themes from the findings and interprets, assesses the stories, and how participants assess their experiences generated through the narrative inquiry process. Narrative inquiry here investigates personal stories with the help of thematic analysis in identifying codes/themes or recurring patterns among the stories, and similarities in the stories

told by various participants, ensuring that these codes are consistent with the participants' narratives and findings, and fulfil the research questions. This analysis was conducted in depth to capture the true value and meaning of the participants' experiences, ethical considerations are also taken in this process.

Ethical considerations were also taken into account during the data collection process. All participants voluntarily agreed to participate in the study after informed about an introduction and the objectives of the study, and in accordance with the participants' consent, their identities were concealed and data collection was carried out confidentially, participants were also given a participant consent letter. This research is part of a coursework research project under the supervision of the English Education Department at Yogyakarta State University. Therefore, institutional approval is implicitly granted as this research is part of the course requirements. The data analysis here is Thematic analysis, it organizes lengthy and complex narratives into clearer themes and identify patterns of meaning across stories. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin, 2013; Riessman, 2008).

The researcher is currently a second-year master's student in English education at a university in Indonesia. The researcher also has a background as an EFL student and a bachelor's degree in the same field, providing internal understanding of the local challenges of learning English through social media. By paying attention to potential biases, the researcher ensures and reflects on objective and credible findings. The researcher's reflection on this position as an insider helped in understanding the meaning of the experiences and perspectives of the participants in order to analyse them and identify codes and themes using thematic analysis.

A qualitative technique for methodically organizing and analyzing complex data is thematic analysis. Its goal is to identify and develop significant themes that embody the stories that surface, whether or not they are concealed. In order to identify patterns, concepts, or recurrent topic, thematic analysis is helpful in generating reliable and superior end outcomes. (Cavendish, 2011; Rice & Ezzy, 1999; King, 2004). Data saturation is also achieved when no new codes or themes emerge after several interviews or data collection sessions, and when the stories collected show the same or recurring patterns or codes, so that the addition of new data will not produce different data.

This confirms that the data in this study is sufficient and answers the researcher's questions. The following methods are available for use in thematic analysis: 1. Being acquainted with the information. 2. Producing first codes. 3. Identifying themes. 4. Going over the themes. 5. Giving topics names and definitions. 6. Report writing. the researcher finally creates a succinct, understandable, and logical narrative and adds quotes or instances of supporting evidence.

Result & Discussion

Dominant Types of Social Media Application Supporting Self-Directed Learning

Based on the findings of the interviews, all participants shared a common choice for the most popular social media app for EFL students' self-directed learning. Participants use the most popular social media platforms, such as YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp. These four platforms offer participants a simple experience and the greatest advantages while learning on their own. In essence, their first goal was to utilize social media for amusement, but as time went on, they discovered that they could unknowingly learn English there, which led them to take the initiative to use social media as a platform for their own independent study. 2 out of 3 participants repeatedly mentioned YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter as the most dominant social media platforms in terms of the benefits they provide.

They can watch videos, leave comments, have discussions, make subtitles, and communicate in English through community groups on WhatsApp and Twitter.

"... TikTok short videos, then opened the Instagram page just to read some idiom s... 'Break a leg', 'piece of cake' and 'break the ice' ... that I got before from social." P1 (Participant 1)

"I started using YouTube, tutorials, and vlogs. At first, I was just watching for fun but over time I know this. I was picking up new vocabulary. and it can improve my listening skill too." P2 (Participant 2)

"I saw the phrase 'spill the tea' on Twitter" P2

"I saw Instagram reels, explaining verb tenses using simple examples. so, it made everything clear better, and how it was explained in class by the teacher." (0:28) P2

"I opened it through the community group on WhatsApp... I learned new words there." (6:08–6:22). P3 (Participant 3)

Platform	Specific Functions in SDL for English
YouTube	Adding linguistic phrases, vocabulary, idioms, etc., and especially helping with listening skills in the form of videos, vlogs, tutorials, or specific English content.
Instagram	Helping to add new vocabulary or sentences, especially reading and writing skills, by commenting on each other's posts, writing captions and stories, viewing and reading other users' captions and stories in English, posts and reels Instagram content based on English language.
TikTok	Watching videos or short content that contains everyday expressions or other English content, commenting or asking questions to other users using English.
Twitter	Discovering new phrases or vocabulary that cannot be found in class, such as slang or popular expressions in social contexts
WhatsApp	learning English through interaction in an English learning community channel

Table 1. The use of Social Media Platforms for Learning English through Self-Directed Learning

As mentioned above, the findings revealed that social media applications are widely used by participants, such as YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, WhatsApp's, and TikTok. These social media platforms provide a smooth self-directed learning experience by giving participants opportunities that were initially for entertainment but gradually transform into learning experiences. This reflects how social media applications evolve into structured self-directed learning.

Social media is beneficial for EFL students' self-directed learning because it allows them to autonomously manage their learning processes, including social settings, learning environments (such as WhatsApp groups, online forums, communities, WhatsApp, for example), resources (such as YouTube videos, TikTok video clips, Instagram content, comments, and captions), and actions (such as watching videos, taking notes, writing or commenting in English, or saving content in collections).

According to Garrison, SDL has a significant influence on things like teaching students to recall facts at first, but it can also lead to deeper knowledge, particularly when social media is used. then enhance their e-learning abilities, where social media fosters the digital learning attitudes that are rarely present in the classroom and where interaction and teamwork become crucial components of education.

Features on social media that cannot be found in the classroom provide participants with the opportunity to manage themselves by choosing the time, material, content, etc. (self-management), assessing and controlling their learning process and understanding, which can be done through interactions such as comments, captions, communication in groups, etc. (self-monitoring), and, of course, intrinsic motivation, it is difficult for individuals to maintain interest and motivation throughout the learning process. Social media, which was originally intended for entertainment, will inevitably contain content that guides learning so that users develop, become aware, and take the initiative to learn independently from exposure to content, videos, captions, etc. about English there (intrinsic motivation) (Garrison, 1997).

This shows that although social media use initially leads to entertainment, participants unconsciously have the desire to learn from what they see on social media content, which leads to new modes of autonomous learning. This relationship makes SDL flexible for EFL students and can learn English directly on their own ways and needs.

Benefits of Social Media for EFL Students' Self-Directed Learning Addition of new idioms, vocabulary, or phrases

The participants initially used social media purely for amusement, but as time went on, they learned new things there and started to remember, practice, or simply think about how they discovered new learning opportunities there rather than in the classroom.

" I started looking at short TikTok videos, then opened the Instagram page just to read some idioms for example, "break a leg", "piece of cake", "break the eyes" from social media content or on the internet." P1

".... I was picking up new vocabulary and it can improve my listening skills too." P2

".... idioms, tenses, or any content related to English in TikTok, Instagram, or YouTube. I ended up remembering the idioms or the materials and I used it later in my daily life conversations". P2

".... because of social media I can understand it.... Twitter, "I'm feeling blue" like from class I never heard anyone say that, "Break a leg" or "Easy Peasy" so, mostly from social media anyway, idioms are very social media is very helpful for idioms, slang words or current words like that" P3

These findings identify that participants initially used social media for entertainment, but over time they picked up new knowledge there, so they began to take the initiative to remember, practice, or simply reflect on the new learning experiences they found on social media outside of the classroom. By providing a wide variety of features, types of applications, environments, interactions, etc., and flexibility that is very student-centered. Social media applications provide new learning opportunities that focus on their independence as students, taking initiative, managing their learning, setting personal learning goals, and engaging in continuous language practice without the limitations of the classroom, which are key elements of self-directed learning. This flexibility is also evident in subsequent findings that it provides alternative learning opportunities, especially in SDL, where participants develop independence, manage their own learning speed and goals, and continue practicing outside the classroom. These are all essential components of self-directed learning.

The flexibility and numerous features available on social media that EFL students can explore bring benefits, as they often acquire new vocabulary, idioms, or phrases that cannot be obtained from interactions or learning in the classroom. The participants initially used social media purely for amusement, but as time went on, they learned new things there and started to remember, practice, or simply think about how they discovered new learning opportunities. This opportunity also provides an open space for EFL students to become more motivated and confident in their abilities and to understand how far they need to hone their skills, which is closely tied to their ability to sustain self-directed learning. This opportunity also provides an open space for EFL students to become more motivated and confident in their abilities and to understand how far they need to hone their skills, which is closely tied to their ability to sustain self-directed learning.

Enhanced Motivation and Confidence

EFL students' effort to learn English on social media gives them a way to get over the challenges of traditional classroom training. When they use social media, they can see how English is used around the world from a different angle and learn new things that they wouldn't learn in the classroom.

".... I just found out the pronunciation of pronounce island, because if you read the writing, it should be 'ailend'., pronounce examine or "examin", There are many examples that I've been mispronouncing, and people don't revise or correct. I only found out when I listened to natives or people through social media." P2

The motivation and confidence here were also expressed by Participant 2 who pronounced "island" as "ailend," which is different from how it is written, and another example of 'examine' being pronounced as "examin." She said that when meeting people in reality, her mispronunciations were not corrected by them, but she was able to learn by listening to native speakers and people on social media.

"I am on Twitter, writing spontaneous English, in class when writing English I can be more confident, because I am used to writing things or responses from Twitter I am confident" P2

Participant 2 also revealed that she was more spontaneous and confident using English when using social media because she often wrote and responded on social media, especially on Twitter. This real example indicate that social media and SDL play a role in motivating EFL students, where both of these things build and lead to greater self-confidence, because motivation often provides learners with the opportunity to test their abilities by organizing and directing what skills they need to develop with the help and support of social media.

It is understandable that social media can provide EFL students with space for self-directed learning, which is also the same as self-confidence. As more and more participants indicated, by exploring many types of content and various social media features to support their English learning there, as well as social interaction on, most of whom are also international users can increase their confidence in using the English language.

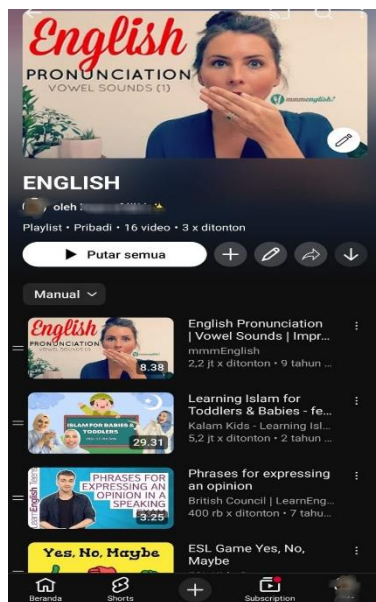


Figure 2. English content on social media (YouTube)'s saves feature (p3)



Figure 3. English content on social media (TikTok)'s saves feature (p1)

Social media gives students real-world examples of language use, which aids in their independent learning and helps them understand how to use the language in everyday contexts. The initiative of EFL students to learn English on social media provides them with a means of overcoming the difficulties of classroom instruction. Social media offers them a fresh perspective on how English is used globally, and when they use it, the context can provide new information that would not be available in the classroom. Social media provides authentic instances of language usage, which helps students learn on their own and comprehend how to apply it in real-world situations.

Particularly when writing or communicating online, participants said they felt more assured and inspired to use English. Self-realization and encouraging comments help them learn more. Social media-based self-directed English learning has been demonstrated to boost students' confidence and motivation, this informal learning activities conducted on content like YouTube and WhatsApp greatly boosted Indonesian students' willingness to learn and confidence in their ability to communicate in English. Without official pressure, they feel freer to express themselves and learn. (Lee & Drajati, 2019).

So, this means that in addition to meeting and interacting with other users, they can also learn English concepts indirectly by reading other people's posts, which allows them to encounter native English speakers, either through comments or other English-language content. This gives them more freedom to fulfil their learning needs and certainly boosts their confidence in the social media community. The people there also provide a comfortable community for EFL students to find what they need to learn English with this SDL way. These findings explain that social

media provides a learning space that can trigger intrinsic motivation, meaning that the process of independent learning can build motivation and self-confidence. The learning experience on social media, such as selecting content, materials, evaluating, and reflecting on the learning process, not only improves English language skills but also motivates them from within by controlling themselves to stay on track with their initial goals while still being in line with their respective needs and interests. (Garrison, 1997)

Community Support and Interaction

Participants mentioned the value of joining online groups or communities, which offer peer support, opportunities for practice, and real-world interaction in English. These networks enhance collaborative learning even in a self-directed context.

"On WhatsApp.... just swipe and channels for English will appear" P1

"Yes, I joined a WhatsApp group for English learners, the name of the group is 'learning English together' we practice by chatting and correcting each other's sentences or grammar and I find it very encouraging." P2

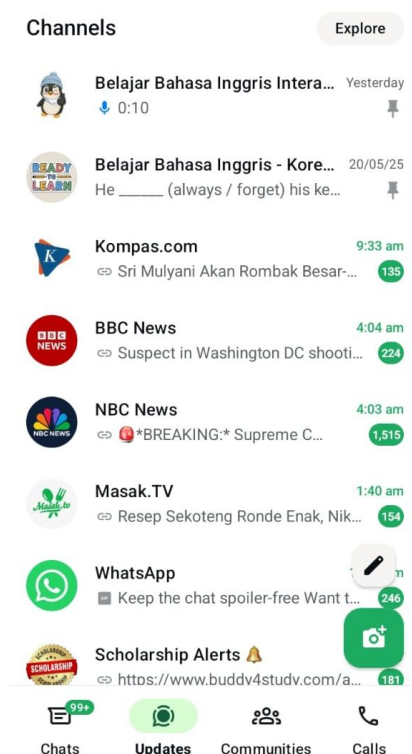


Figure 4. English content channel on social media app (WhatsApp) (p1)



Figure 5. English content channel on social media app (Twitter/X) (p3)



Figure 6. English content channel on social media app (Twitter/X) (p3)

"But if the community that I follow, which I still respond to very often, I follow, it's from Twitter, the English learning community." P3

This finding is also related to interactions between social media users. Participants mentioned the value of joining online groups or communities, which offer peer support, opportunities for practice, and real-world interaction in English. These networks enhance collaborative learning even in a self-directed context.

.... just swipe and channels for English will appear" P1

"...., I joined a WhatsApp group for English learners...." P2

"...., I follow, it's from Twitter, the English learning community...." P3

The participants stated that social media provides a supportive space and community for them to learn English there, it allows them to connect with people who share their interests which provide opportunity for practice, peer assistance, and authentic English communication. Participant 2 shared her learning experience in that community through practice by chatting, and some other users in the community also provided corrections to sentences and grammar, which she found very encouraging. Participant 3 joined also an English learning community called "The English Learning Community" on Twitter, and Participant 1 also joined channels about English content on WhatsApp. This shows that regardless of the type of social media application, they found various communities and social groups on social media as EFL students is very helpful where they were equally interested in learning English.

Even when used in a self-directed setting, these networks improve collaborative learning. Because they all come from the same community and want to learn English through social media, they can join specific communities or groups that support their English skills without worrying about criticism. As EFL students, they can look for content, groups, or communities where they can interact with one another in English and learn new things that promote the environment of self-directed learning.

This is one of the benefits of social media that cannot be found in the classroom. Sometimes EFL students find it difficult to find a supportive environment during the learning process. Such groups or communities can be easily found on social media. This means that social media can connect people from all over the world who share the same interest in learning English. It provides EFL students with a safe space to practice, interact, discuss, and support each other because every user in the community has the same goal, which is to improve their English skills. This is in line with SDL, which emphasizes initiative, independence, and responsibility in each individual's learning process. EFL students there definitely have a desire to improve their skills, which means they already have initiative, learning goals, and relevant and desirable learning resources. With social media, they can get unlimited access to various communities, content, , and real interactions in English there.

On social media such as WhatsApp or Twitter, students can independently search for content and study groups, discuss and interact with other users or members there. This means that the process encourages students to take responsibility based on their personal needs and interests without having to depend on and be determined by teachers as usual in class. In addition, this community provides a safe and supportive space for them without having to fear mistakes and anxiety when interacting in English, thereby also increasing their confidence and motivating their intrinsic motivation. One important aspect of SDL, as stated by Zhu (2025), is that social media provides a space for independent learning and a social environment that allows students to interact and support one another. This means that students have individual responsibility in choosing, directing, managing, and evaluating their learning process on an ongoing basis.

The most effective and beneficial interactions in the community for participants are collaborative & assessing each other by supporting each other, chatting, discussing, correcting each other is the easiest to find and is very helpful for fellow students in the community because it can build self-confidence and active participation even though in class they cannot have active opportunities. sometimes in class it is very visible hierarchy such as who is the smartest and who needs the most effort to understand English, but in the community, it is not like that, everyone is the same and no one is dominant, everyone has the opportunity to participate and contribute in their own way in the community but it can be seen that the character of the community on each platform is different. WhatsApp is more structured and intensive, while Twitter is very casual, uses slang more often, and is open. However,

this platform also provides EFL students with an environment that can be beneficial for SDL because it is through supportive, fellow learner, and reflective social interactions.

Rapid and Personalized Access to Learning Resources

Essentially, social media provides a variety of learning processing alternatives tailored to the requirements of EFL students. satisfies their own interests and learning demands in a rapid and easy way. Without needing to consult books or work through challenges in class, they can now just find lessons that they all find important and engaging.

"... TikTok ... but at that time, I didn't have time to watch it, so I probably saved it first or I liked it, or ... screenshot it ... then in my spare time, I will open this social media account".

P1



Figure 7. English content on social media (YouTube)'s saves feature (p1)

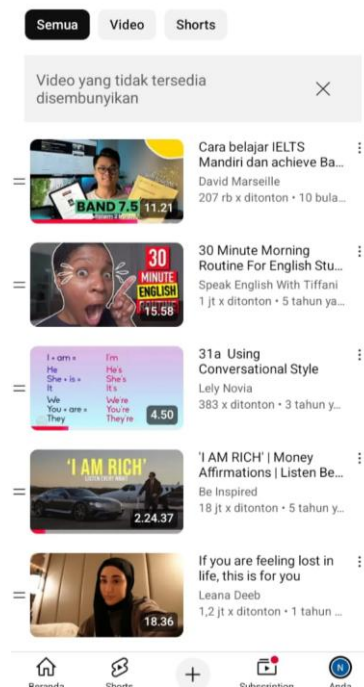


Figure 8. English content on social media (Instagram)'s saves feature (p1)



Figure 9. English content on social media (Twitter/X)'s Community feature (p1)

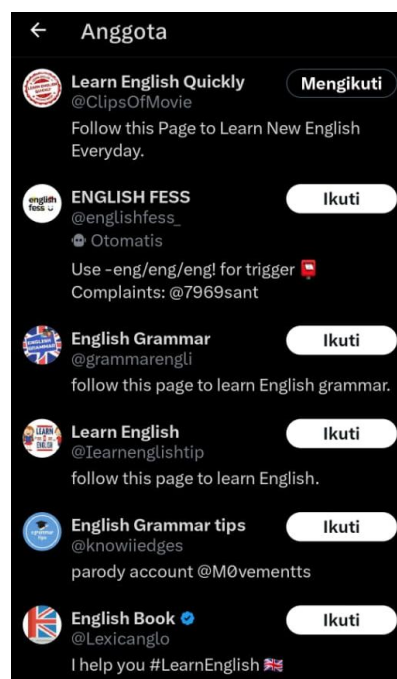


Figure 10. English content on social media (Twitter/X)'s Lists feature (p1)

"TikTok explains the difference and say in just 15 seconds, and you know what, it's clearer than my textbook." p2

"... I follow the account, subscribe to it, ... then I put the video into a YouTube playlist. ... my YouTube playlist says English, meaning I'm learning English from that playlist." p3

Social media also provides ways to save, such as collecting or subscribing to a number of posts, videos, channels, community, save or put in the playlist the lesson for later use and independent study etc. Social media learning can then immediately present the lesson's main ideas or highlights to give them brief and simple explanations. Within self-directed learning. The best way to give EFL students a range of tools to aid in their future English language learning is through social media. Social media not only facilitates contact but also provides a wealth of global knowledge and information, enabling students to select the resources that best meet their needs.

This finding is consistent with the importance of SDL, whereby the availability of a wide range of learning resources allows students to determine and manage their own learning needs in terms of learning speed, appropriate learning resources, and assessment of learning progress based on personal interests. By managing, choosing, reviewing, and evaluating, EFL students demonstrate awareness, initiative, and self-reflection, as well as self-management and learning autonomy. In general, social media is not only a place to have fun or receive information, but also a place to consciously demonstrate the learning process

through initiative, reflection, and independence, which are the main characteristics of Self-Directed Learning (SDL).

Challenges of Social Media for EFL Students' Self-Directed Learning

Lack of a planned and scheduled study period

EFL students may benefit from the flexibility of social media, but it can also have unintended consequences. Since the self-directed learning system relies on the initiative and independence of EFL students to learn English on social media, social media is perceived as a challenge for self-directed learning in the absence of a set and scheduled learning time, this flexibility could be abused by putting off work, hence a powerful incentive technique is required. Since this flexibility enables people to study English as they see fit without achieving their individual learning objectives, they, essentially SDL learners, lack an aim or a specific goal.

"To be honest, I never set out to learn English or assigned myself a specific time window. Therefore, I was not required to learn at a specific time. P1

"It was like learning it all of a sudden, by accident, because it was usually unplanned, but sometimes it was planned." P3

The majority of EFL students here are motivated to use SDL on social media because of internal factors like their own learning needs, interests, active participation in learning interactions, and management of their own time, place, and learning speed. SDL is essentially a manner in which someone independently determines the needs, goals, strategies, and evaluation of learning. However, SDL goes beyond learning control and environment; it also calls for self-reflection on the part of EFL students, how they can assess themselves and what they have learned, their awareness of learning options, and their high level of willingness and motivation (since they are self-sufficient, they need to be very proactive to stay motivated), as well as social media learning, where everything is done online. in order to properly utilize this flexibility. Among the things that impact learning motivation is procrastination, procrastination is easier in social media than in traditional in-person classrooms. Self-directed learning can result in procrastination if there is no set study timetable, particularly in an online setting. (Delos Reyes & Caballes, 2022)

Too Many Things to Distract from Studying

This study found that social media distractions make it difficult for many individuals to learn on their own. According to one participant, social media allows them to interact with a wide range of content, but this feature can make it difficult for EFL students to maintain focus on their learning goals because sometimes the recommended content diverts them from their studies or leads them to follow irrelevant content.

"For instance, there are times when I am told to watch other things if I want to learn English.... so sometimes it is also a distraction from learning." P1

"I lost an hour watching funny stuff while I was supposed to be watching a video to learn English. I occasionally get sidetracked when I open an app to study English because of notifications from my phone and other information. P2

"I feel hungry after feeling drowsy all of a sudden. That might cause me to lose focus." P3

The participants' inability to distinguish between educational and entertainment content when using social media for SDL is one of the challenges they face. Some reported that, although they initially intended to learn, they ended up watching content that was outside of their initial learning goals, rendering time management and learning objectives ineffective. Participant 2 also mentioned that notifications and other content on social media frequently divert them from their initial learning objectives. When the student takes the initiative to learn English independently on social media, they are often tempted by other content that is not related to learning, which is recommended by the history algorithm or simply by notifications that keep popping up.

This is especially problematic for SDL learners, who are responsible for their own motivation and social media monitoring. EFL students in SDL need to be able to overcome this difficulty in the way they make basic decisions related to the selection of content that is consumed. This means that the success of SDL greatly depends on the individual's ability to manage and prioritize their learning goals. Without good self-management, social media can be detrimental or shift the focus away from the original goal, which was initially to support self-directed learning.

Not All Content Is Reliable or Accurate

EFL students can learn independently thanks to social media, but they also have a responsibility to select information or learning objectives that could be detrimental to their education. On social media, they can connect with a wide range of people and get information straight from other users, but they can't ask or coerce other users to continue having good conversations.

"The information is not accurate... Lack of facts or evidence, in my opinion, occurs frequently and requires particular attention. P1

"... the incorrect-sounding grammatical explanations on TikTok, I looked up better sources on Google and ChatGPT, particularly when I hear slang or casual grammar. I'm concerned about whether it's suitable for usage in an academic setting. P2

"Misleading content... suddenly there are other content creators who revise their videos and say that it turns out to be incorrect." P3

They can interact with a variety of people on social media and receive information directly from other users, but they are also unable to ask or pressure other users to stay on the path of positive interaction. EFL students ultimately encounter a lot of diverse interactions from many people, which can leave them feeling overwhelmed or confused about how to sort through the information that is

necessary and unnecessary.

In the Information Overload Theory, which states that when individuals are inundated with information from sources such as social media, it will be extremely difficult for them to select the information that is appropriate for them, evaluate its accuracy because no expert (teacher) can provide them with direct feedback, and then make good learning choices. Since not all social media content follows academic guidelines. Their learning results can suffer as a result. For them, comprehension is hampered by the overloading of their cognitive processes caused by EFL students in SDL receiving inaccurate, redundant, or contradicting material. This occurs because social media offers a wide range of unstructured, uncontrolled, or inaccurate information from numerous users, which can impair EFL students' ability to navigate their knowledge effectively. (Eppler & Mengis, 2004) & (Sweller, 1988).

Problems with Networks and Technology Access

One of the main challenges most often encountered by students in learning about social media is network limitations. This condition most often hinders the learning process because of the dependence on the internet, meaning that if the available internet is not good, the learning process will also be greatly disrupted, especially on social media, where access to learning is very dependent on access to video content.

"Although there is now an application that it has provided offline, the access that can be opened is still quite limited... that's why premium access is still needed." P1 & "Suddenly the network doesn't support it, or the website is experiencing an error." P1

"Sometimes the Wi-Fi in my home is slow or the app crashes, making it hard to access the videos smoothly." P2

Even though there are apps that offer offline learning, their features are occasionally limited and they are unable to finalize the learning process. Additionally, EFL students are unable to attempt these internet and network issues because they only use them until the network is operational again, which hinders the seamless use of social media for SDL.

The learning process does not include immediate feedback.

One participant had negative feelings about using social media for SDL due to the lack of direct feedback. While social media provides information, social interaction with teachers or lecturers is often absent or meaningless for EFL learners. Yet, such interaction offers essential feedback for metacognition the ability to organize, monitor, and evaluate learning. Without feedback, self-reflection becomes difficult, especially in SDL, where EFL students must assess their own learning on social media.

"Difficulty is a factor like... nobody gives direct corrections. I am now aware of ChatGPT's potential as a partner" P1.

Additionally, this makes it more difficult to determine whether social media in SDL is a really effective technique. since it is challenging to consider their progress on social media. Furthermore, social media in SDL turns into an informal English language learning environment that depends heavily on individual initiative; not everyone possesses the high level of self-motivation and introspective skills to keep learning on course. EFL students struggle to track and rectify learning errors and to see how far they have come in the absence of any reflective or evaluative engagement. This is in keeping with Lu et al. (2024) assertion that students do not have access to prompt feedback or conversations that would enable them to consider their comprehension or implementation of strategies.

The most significant challenges felt by participants were the lack of a focused, planned learning process, and the distraction of content out of the material, which often led students to discontinue the learning process and instead watch content out of the learning material. EFL students found a way to overcome this by saving learning content to features or creating special playlists of English learning content. This ensures that no content can appear as a distraction and the learning process is more structured. This shows that the success of SDL is highly dependent on the EFL student's self-control ability, from reflecting, managing time, utilizing features, and how to independently select accurate learning resources.

Conclusion

Social media in this study has a positive and significant impact on EFL students who still want to develop their English skills and knowledge independently outside of class. Social media applications such as WhatsApp, TikTok, Twitter/X, Instagram, YouTube, etc., provide a supportive space and community along with unlimited authentic material sources that can be used at any time. With this flexibility, EFL students can access the material easily and enjoyably and manage their learning autonomy by choosing, setting learning speed strategies and learning goals, evaluating their respective learning processes. This type of learning has been proven to support the addition of lexical knowledge that is rarely or never found in the classroom, build confidence, motivation, and interest, and can become a space for interacting with fellow English learners and even native English speakers, which is not possible in a formal classroom environment.

When linked to the success of SDL, social media here must be utilized in accordance with its original learning objective because its success greatly depends on the students themselves, how they think critically, reflect, and remain focused on their learning objectives. All of this is greatly influenced by how EFL students can control their learning process and all the obstacles they face, such as managing time, strategies, filtering irrelevant content, etc. If not, the function of social media as well as SDL here can shift to something negative, specifically becoming a source that disrupts the effectiveness of their learning. Internet limitations can also hamper the learning process, which indirectly causes dependence on the internet.

The absence of teachers or tutors on social media, especially in independent learning, makes it difficult for EFL students to choose accurate sources. This uncertainty also means that sometimes their studies are unstructured or unplanned, which can cause them to deviate from their learning objectives. In addition, the lack of direct feedback from experts makes this independent learning process even more challenging. Therefore, teachers have a role as guides in helping EFL students utilize social media wisely, evaluate it, and provide feedback. For EFL students, it is suggested that they must be able to strengthen self-control and self-management, which is assessed from time management, schedules, and learning resources. For institutions, they can provide training on the wise and positive use of social media (digital literacy) and can create a habit of utilizing social media as an additional support medium in the EFL context.

In general, the results of this study can add new insights into social media, which is not only a tool for interaction and entertainment, but also a learning resource that is not limited, where students can interact and support each other's learning processes by providing a supportive environment, unlimited resources, and communicating easily with other English users. However, this study also states that the role of teachers is also very important in the success of SDL through social media in providing direction, guidance, and digital literacy so that learning does not deviate from the learning objectives and is not distracted by content outside of learning.

This study is limited by the small number of participants, who come from the same institution, however, the results of this finding can also be relevant to many institutions in Indonesia out there, and the narrative and effective nature of the data, which depends on the honesty of the participants. Therefore, it is recommended that future studies select a diverse and large number of participants from various contexts or institutions and cover other social media to obtain a broader picture. Future research could also use quantitative or mixed methods, which are expected to measure the improvement in English language proficiency of EFL students. Overall, if social media is utilized well, wisely, positively, and according to its objectives, it will have the potential to greatly assist EFL students during their future learning process, which will be more digital and modern based on the concept of self-directed learning in the future.

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