

The Impact and Strategies of EFL Students Using Social Media Platforms in Overcoming Online Learning Challenges

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how EFL students at two public universities in Banda Aceh, Indonesia, utilize social media platforms to support their English language learning. Employing a mixed-method approach, the research integrates both qualitative and quantitative methods. Data were collected through a questionnaire completed by 100 students and interviews conducted with 10 participants. Fundamental statistical analysis was used to evaluate questionnaire responses, while interview data were analyzed through data reduction, display, and conclusion verification. The findings reveal that students frequently use social media to study, complete assignments, and access current information. They perceive improved vocabulary, pronunciation, and listening skills through online learning. However, the study also identifies technical issues, shared gadget usage, and time management. To address these obstacles, students adopted strategies such as informing lecturers about technical problems, maintaining communication with classmates, ensuring adequate Internet quota, and developing effective time management and discipline. This research highlights the benefits and challenges of integrating social media into EFL learning and yields important findings on strategies students employ to navigate these difficulties. The study contributes to a deeper understanding of the role of social media in language education and offers practical implications for educators seeking to enhance EFL learning through digital platforms.

KEYWORDS:

EFL students;
Impact;
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Introduction

The arrival of websites and apps has fundamentally altered how individuals communicate and share information in today's interconnected digital world. Social media platforms, which have evolved into powerful tools for connection and communication, stand out as significant advancements in this context. These platforms are designed to enable individuals to share

content swiftly, efficiently, and in real-time (Edosomwan et al., 2011). Their adaptability and user-friendly interfaces have made them particularly valuable in teaching and learning, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic when traditional classroom settings were disrupted. During this period, educators and students relied heavily on Zoom, Google Classroom, Edmodo, Google Meet, Email, and WhatsApp to facilitate online learning (Amin & Sundari, 2020; Apriani et al., 2022). These tools offered practical ways to support real-time (synchronous) and flexible (asynchronous) learning. They enabled students to access learning materials, interact with classmates and teachers, and complete their assignments successfully. Additionally, they helped overcome distance and time differences, ensuring that education could continue without interruption.

Some media, such as Zoom and Google Meet, are practical as they facilitate virtual face-to-face meetings. Meanwhile, other applications like Edmodo and Google Classroom allow teachers to share learning materials, and administer tests, and quizzes to their students online. There are also Facebook (Santoso, 2021), Twitter (Junco et al., 2011), YouTube (Muslem et al., 2022; Silviyanti, 2014), WhatsApp (Wulandari & Mandasari, 2021), and TikTok (Hasby & Angrum, 2023), other applications that can also be used as platforms for learning. Despite the inability to meet face-to-face, these platforms have significantly aided teachers in creating interactive and convenient environments for online learning during the pandemic (Sasongko et al., 2022). Students have found synchronous online discussions beneficial as they enable them to easily engage in tasks such as negotiating assignments, planning tasks, expressing opinions, and asking and answering questions (Rinekso & Muslim, 2020).

Numerous studies have assessed the impact of technology on the English learning process. Amin and Sundari (2020) gathered information from three groups of Indonesian EFL students using three different digital learning platforms: Cisco WebEx Meeting video conferencing, Google Classroom learning management system (LMS), and WhatsApp mobile messenger app. According to the questionnaire results of their study, Cisco WebEx Meeting, Google Classroom, and WhatsApp all received high ratings across all parameters, with Cisco WebEx Meeting receiving top marks for authenticity and focus on meaning. Despite the effectiveness of these platforms in learning, students still preferred face-to-face learning, considering it more beneficial to their learning process. Another study by Mulyani et al. (2021) explored students' perspectives and preferences regarding English instruction through e-learning implementation. The study found that factors such as internet connectivity issues, high internet data usage, limitations in material explanation and absorption, and the impact of social media were viewed unfavorably by half of the student respondents in this qualitative study. However, more than half of the students agreed on the benefits of e-learning, citing novel learning experiences, engagement, flexibility in time and location, and the advancement of digital technology usage and adaptability. Similarly, Wulandari and Mandasari (2021) focused specifically on using WhatsApp as a learning medium in online English learning and found that students perceived this platform positively for learning. Finally, Apriani et al. (2022) researched this phenomenon quantitatively. During the pandemic, female students evaluated ICT use in language learning more favorably than male students. Despite their more optimistic view of ICT, female students in this study encountered more difficulties using ICT platforms than male students. In emergencies, teachers can use all available features in various online learning platforms to facilitate meaningful learning.

Problem of Study

Online learning encounters numerous obstacles in its implementation, spanning the delivery of materials, activities, teaching design, and interaction (Efriana, 2021). However, assistance from social media can help in surmounting the shortcomings inherent in the teaching-learning process (Dhawan, 2020). In a student-centered constructivist setting, Ferdig (2007) asserts that social networking facilitates interaction among learners and potentially enhances active learning. Dhawan (2020) also notes that social media and various group forums can be utilized to engage with students effectively, as communication is as the most efficient means to connect with them. Previous studies have extensively explored the effectiveness of social media in the online learning process (Amin & Sundari, 2020; Hasby & Angrum, 2023; Junco et al., 2011; Muslem et al., 2022; Santoso, 2021; Silviyanti, 2014; Wulandari & Mandasari, 2021). Thus, this study aims to examine the impact of online learning on students of English education through social media, particularly those enrolled at two universities in Banda Aceh, Indonesia. The following research questions will guide the investigation:

1. What are the impacts of online learning for students via social media?
2. What strategies do students employ to overcome the obstacles/challenges of online learning?

Literature Review

The Effect of Social Media on Students' Engagement

Social media has evolved into both a communication and learning tool. Information and communication technology advances are increasingly integrated into teaching and learning applications (Tarantino et al., 2013). For learning English as a second language, merely understanding social media is insufficient; educators must know how to apply it effectively and prepare adequately for teaching and learning (Mubarak, 2016). Johnson et al. (2016) emphasize the benefits of incorporating new technology into assessments, stressing the importance of thorough planning to prevent complications in the learning process. Technology has become an integral part of the learning process, posing a significant concern for educators (Eady & Lockyer, 2013). Additionally, utilizing technology for completing assignments can foster creativity among students, allowing them to build upon existing knowledge.

Accommodating students' diverse learning styles using technology challenges educators (Prieto, 2016). Murthy and Gross (2017) suggest that distinguishing meaningful communication from other online interactions on web-based social networks can be challenging for teachers and students in online learning. However, social media applications offer various strengths; these tools can assist learners in blending resources to suit their learning styles and academic goals (Raut & Patil, 2016). Furthermore, learners can communicate and collaborate beyond institutional boundaries and gain practical workforce experience through social media (Coleman, 2013).

For instance, social media facilitates easy communication regarding projects and assignments. It allows them to collaborate on group projects remotely, increasing accessibility. Moreover, students who struggle with in-person expression in the classroom have shown increased participation and confidence by engaging in discussions on social media platforms utilized in teaching and learning (e.g., Facebook) (Santoso, 2021). Besides

students acquiring social networking skills, social media enables teachers to communicate with parents about their children's progress (Reimers et al., 2020).

The Impact of Online on Students and Teachers

Previous research has indicated that online learning has a positive impact on students. To enhance student interaction during learning, teachers can provide platforms that support the process, such as Zoom, Google Meet, Google Classroom, Edmodo, and other applications (Amin & Sundari, 2020; Apriani et al., 2022). For example, using Google Classroom as an online learning medium was found to simplify learning due to its affordability and user-friendliness (Kumar et al., 2020). This finding was supported by Hussaini et al. (2020), who found that Google Classroom effectively improves students' access, attentiveness, and activeness in learning. Parents can monitor their children's performance and progress at their convenience, as students and parents can easily track progress using online exams in Google Classroom. Parental involvement plays a crucial role in children's achievement, as their support significantly impacts students' achievement in a virtual learning environment (Garbe et al., 2020).

Despite the advantages online learning offers students, it also poses challenges for students and teachers. Yusuf and Al-Banawi (2013) identified obstacles in students' learning processes through online learning, such as decreased student motivation, less interactive communication, and delayed feedback due to teachers' inability to respond directly to all student inquiries. Another challenge in online learning is limited access to information due to signal/internet connection issues, leading to slow information retrieval (Silviyanti & Yusuf, 2014). In Indonesia, for instance, Devanesan (2020) reported that approximately 61 million Indonesians lack internet access, leaving teachers and students in predicaments in these areas. This situation becomes more pronounced during the COVID-19 pandemic, as internet access and the availability of gadgets (such as smartphones, computers, or laptops) are essential for teaching and learning. Moreover, setbacks arise from schools (in terms of inadequate facilities for online learning) and teachers themselves (in terms of insufficient knowledge and skills to use ICT in teaching) (Rasmitadila et al., 2020).

In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, recent studies have shed light on the multifaceted effects of social media on language learning. Social media platforms provide invaluable opportunities for language learners to communicate, contribute, and thrive, from fostering communicative competence through authentic interactions to providing access to a many multimedia resources (Sipra, 2013). Integrating these digital technologies into EFL teaching can effectively support traditional classroom education, helping students become proficient, confident, and independent English language users. However, Crook (2012) noted that many teachers remain uncertain about meaningfully integrating this technology or assessing its impacts. Even for experienced teachers who use content and technology, assessing the processes and outcomes of students' thinking in projects utilizing the Internet, or understanding how online tools could assist them in improving their capacity for such assessment, can be challenging (Greenhow, 2006).

Method

The participants in this study consisted of 100 English Department students from two public institutions in Banda Aceh, Indonesia. Purposive sampling, as outlined by Whitehead and Violeta (2016), was employed to select these students. Purposive sampling involves

deliberately selecting a sample based on specific qualities of the informants (Tongco, 2007). The participants ranged in age from first to final years.

Data collection utilized both questionnaires and interviews. The questionnaire comprised closed-ended questions using a Likert scale (i.e., strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree on a four-point scale), designed to assess attitudes, opinions, and perceptions of a social phenomenon (Sugiyono, 2016). It covered various aspects, including students' use of social media in learning English, perceptions of using it for learning English, and improvements in language skills attributed to learning with social media. The questionnaire statements were adapted from Sharma (2019), Altam (2020), Chueinta (2017), and Ngonidzashe (2013), and distributed via Google Form.

Interviews complemented the questionnaire data, particularly regarding strategies to overcome challenges in using social networks to learn English. Seven students were selected from the 100 participants with their consent, and each interview lasted approximately 15 minutes. Following Braun and Clarke (2022), a semi-structured interview approach provided a flexible framework for open-ended conversations while maintaining some structural guidance. The interviews focused on perceptions, advantages, and tactics for overcoming problems associated with utilizing social media in English studies, with questions adapted from the questionnaire.

Data analysis involved examining both questionnaire responses and interview transcripts. The questionnaire data were analyzed using frequencies and percentages. For the interview data, Miles and Huberman (2014) analysis theory was applied, consisting of data condensation (selection, categorization, and coding based on research questions), data display (transcription to address research questions), data conclusion (drawing conclusions to address research questions), and data verification (interpreting data through patterns, explanations, causal flows, and propositions).

Results

The Impact of the Learning Process for Learning English through Social Media: Results from the Questionnaire

Purposes of using social media

Based on Table 1, social media for educational purposes was the second most used by the students. They spent more time accessing information and knowledge on it than on other purposes such as communicating, studying, or just seeking entertainment.

Table 1. *Purposes of using social media*

Purposes	Percentage
Communicate with family and friends	18,8
Entertainment and lifestyle	10,4
Educational purposes	29,2
Update information or news	30,2
Other reasons	
*Communication, entertainment, education	1
*Information, entertainment, education	1
*Social media is a life	1

The findings in Table 1, indicate that educational purposes ranked second among the students' reasons for using social media. This suggests that a significant portion of the students utilize social media platforms to access information and knowledge about their English learning. Thus, they dedicated more time to accessing information and knowledge through social media for educational purposes than other activities such as communication, entertainment, or general studying. This highlights the importance and relevance of social media as a supplementary educational tool for learning English.

The data also suggest that students use social media for a various purposes beyond education. These include communication with family and friends, entertainment, and staying updated with information or news, among others. This indicates the multifunctional nature of social media platforms in fulfilling the different needs and interests of the students.

Students' Perception of Social Media Usage for Learning English

The second part of the questionnaire inquired about the students' perception of social media usage for learning English during the pandemic. This answers the first research question on the impact of learning through social media on learners' English skills. The results are displayed in Table 2.

Table 2. *Students' perception of social media usage for learning English (in percentage)*

No.	Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Total
1.	Learning using social media is fun	34	39	17	10	100
2.	Social media creates a relaxed and stress-free English learning	32	38	19	11	100
3.	Social media provides many resources for learning English	55.6	28.3	5.1	11.1	99
4.	I can use social media anytime and anywhere	59	26	6	9	100
5.	It is easy to communicate with other people through social media.	54	23	13	10	100
6.	Learning through social media reinforces self-independent learning.	40.4	37.4	14.1	8.1	99
7.	I feel confident when speaking English through social media.	31	40	22	7	100
8.	Learning English using social media reduces worries when participating in English classes	34	43	13	10	100
9.	Social media is easy to use to learn English	42	38	12	8	100

The findings from Table 2 indicate that students generally hold positive views towards utilizing social media for educational purposes. Key perceptions highlighted include the belief that learning via social media is enjoyable, creates a relaxed and stress-free environment, offers abundant resources for learning English, facilitates convenient and unrestricted access, enhances communication with others, reinforces self-independent learning, boosts confidence in speaking English, and reduces worries about participating in English classes. Notably, the most prevalent perceptions among students revolve around the convenience of being able to use social media anytime and anywhere (59%), the abundance of resources available for learning English (55.6%), and the ease of communication with others through social media (54%). These findings stress the perceived benefits of social media in English learning, emphasizing its convenience, resourcefulness, and communicative advantages.

English Language Skills are Believed to Improve by Learning through Social Media

The third part of the questionnaire inquired about the English skills students believed improved by learning through social media. The findings are displayed in Table 3.

Table 3. *English language skills believed to improve by learning through social media*

No.	Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Total
1.	It allows me to improve my English listening skill	46	39	8	7	100
2.	It allows me to improve my English-speaking skill	29	45	18	8	100
3.	It allows me to improve my reading skill	40	43	7	10	100
4.	It allows me to improve my English writing skill	36	42	14	8	100
5.	It allows me to enhance my vocabulary	52.2	30.3	8.1	9.1	99
6.	It allows me to enhance my grammar knowledge.	36	45	10	9	100
7.	It allows me to enhance my pronunciation	42	41	8	9	100

Table 3 of the questionnaire reveals the English language skills students believe are improved through learning via social media. Across various language competencies, they predominantly perceive social media as beneficial for skill enhancement. Notably, most of them agree that social media provides opportunities to improve their listening, speaking, reading, writing, vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation skills. Particularly high percentages indicate belief in enhancing vocabulary (52.2%) and speaking skills (45%). This suggests that students recognize social media as a valuable platform for honing a wide range of language abilities. The results emphasize the multifaceted role of social media in language learning, catering to different aspects of language acquisition and proficiency development.

The Strategies Used by Students to Overcome the Challenges of Online Learning: Results from Interviews

The Use of Social Media Learning Platforms

The questionnaire results indicated that Zoom was the most widely utilized platform during the learning process, followed by Google Classroom and WhatsApp. Additionally, insights from the interviews revealed that students favored Zoom as the most compatible e-learning platform. They expressed that Zoom facilitated interaction with numerous peers simultaneously in a virtual environment. Furthermore, students noted that Zoom remained functional even during unstable internet signals. Conversely, WhatsApp and Google Classroom were perceived as user-friendly applications regarding internet data usage but were deemed less conducive for discussions involving multiple friends.

E1: Zoom is effective because I can see all of my classmates virtually in a meeting. I can see my lecturers explain things through their presentations such as PPT or when they 'share screen' of the materials from other screens in their laptops. (S1)

E2: Google Classroom is simple because it gives several accessibility options. If I fail to install the application on my phone, I can still access it through my email and web

browser. If there was no signal or electricity, all the given materials and quizzes from the lecturers are still available when I can access them. (S3)

E3: WhatsApp is my favorite because I had it installed on my phone long before this online learning happened. I am already familiar with how to use it. It also does not take up much internet quota. It still works even if the signal is poor. (S4)

Moreover, the interviews highlighted that utilizing social media for learning during the pandemic was perceived as comfortable, easy, and entertaining. Additionally, these platforms offer a wide range of English content for learning.

E4: Using technology to learn, especially in this modern era, there are many creative ideas and innovative applications that really support learning English. We learn many new words during the process. (S2)

However, not all students found online learning platforms beneficial. Issues such as internet connection problems, discipline concerns (as noted by S5), challenges in keeping up with technological advancements in learning (as expressed by S3), and difficulties in student-teacher interactions (as highlighted by S4) were reported.

E5: In my opinion, the impact of online learning is still less effective, because there is no face-to-face consultation for further courses and difficulties in dealing with signal networks that are often slow, or broken, or weak. (S5)

E6: Students are less able to socialize and lack discipline when learning online at home. So, the learning goals are not achieved, among them is the reciprocal relationship between the teacher and the students. (S2)

E7: Speaking of the positive and negative impact of online learning, in this case, the tendency is more towards negative things, ranging from inadequate internet networks, limited internet quotas, and some teachers and students still being unable to keep up with the existing technological developments. (S3)

E8: We are learning a foreign language, and sometimes the lecturer transfers information, and the students misunderstand. Maybe because it is difficult for the students to make out the words said by the lecturer. If face-to-face, it is easier to ask the lecturer when we encounter this problem, but if online, it is difficult. (S4)

The interviews revealed several strategies employed by students to overcome the obstacles and challenges of online learning. They emphasized the importance of maintaining discipline and motivation, managing time effectively, and seeking assistance from teachers and peers when facing difficulties. Some also utilized technology-related solutions, such as finding alternative internet connections or optimizing their study environments for better concentration. Additionally, their flexibility and adaptability were evident as they adjusted their learning approaches to suit the online format. However, internet connectivity and technological proficiency challenges were acknowledged as ongoing concerns. Generally, the findings highlight the proactive efforts of students in steering the complexities of online learning, while also stressing the continued need for support and resources to address persistent challenges.

The Strategies Used by the Students to Resolve the Obstacles of Online Learning

Building on the previously mentioned obstacles in online learning, the researchers inquired about the strategies students employed to address these challenges. The responses yielded several approaches. Firstly, students opted to inform the lecturer directly through Zoom's chat menu if they encountered issues such as being unable to hear the lecturer's voice due to technical or connection problems while using Zoom for learning.

E9: If there are problems when using G-Meet or Zoom, such as the lecturer's voice being interrupted or not being heard, and the materials she displayed cannot be seen, I will notify the lecturer of the problem through the chat menu. Usually, the lecturer would share the materials via Google Classroom or our class WhatsApp group once the meeting is over. (S8)

The second strategy, as described by S2, involved using Zoom solely for discussing the materials covered in online learning sessions or for collaborating on assigned assignments with friends. Additionally, WhatsApp emerged as a commonly utilized platform among students for sharing information.

E10: If the obstacle I experience is that I do not understand the materials given, I will ask my friends, and we will study it together. Sometimes, I do Zoom with my friend, just two or three of us, to discuss our assignments. Sometimes we WhatsApp each other, through texting, calling, or video calling. And if the lecturer is friendly, and I have the courage, I will directly ask the lecturer via WhatsApp, and usually she replies. (S7)

S9 emphasized the importance of always checking the internet quota before class, particularly before an exam. This constituted the third strategy gleaned from the interview data. Consequently, if the quota was limited, he ensured to allocate time to replenish it before the class or exam commenced.

E11: Before class starts or taking the final exam, I will also check the internet quota first" (S9)

The fourth strategy involved time management. According to S5, achieving effective outcomes in online learning necessitates proper time management. Given the virtual nature of learning, it was easy to lose track of time. Therefore, it was crucial to allocate time for learning, prepare the necessary gadgets for online learning, and maintain communication with lecturers and peers, even during challenging times.

E12: The strategy for online and distance learning to be carried out effectively is to establish time management, which involves organizing study times regularly. Then prepare the technology needed, study seriously because students need to try to focus and be consistent during the allotted study time, and lastly, maintain communication with teachers and classmates. (S5)

Finally, S10 shared the fifth strategy, which involved sharing gadgets with siblings at home during online learning. Coming from a large family with five siblings, there were only four available gadgets that his parents could afford. Therefore, sharing and managing the gadgets for maximum utilization became essential in his household.

E13: I have a big family, five of us are studying online at home and we only have three cellphones and one laptop. For us to efficiently study and follow our online classes, we make a schedule on who will use the gadgets during certain times...for classes or to do our assignments. When it gets too tight and if we really need a gadget all at once, usually we will borrow our uncle's or aunt's phone to follow our online classes.

The strategies employed by students to address the obstacles of online learning show their proactive approach and adaptability in navigating challenges. Direct communication with lecturers through platforms like Zoom's chat menu allows for immediate resolution of technical issues, ensuring uninterrupted learning. Collaborative platforms such as Zoom and WhatsApp facilitate group discussions and information sharing among peers, enhancing collaborative learning experiences. Furthermore, initiatives like checking internet quotas before class and managing time effectively demonstrate students' awareness of practical considerations and commitment to optimizing their learning environments. Sharing gadgets with siblings reflects a pragmatic response to resource limitations, highlighting students' resilience and creativity in overcoming obstacles. Overall, these strategies emphasize the importance of proactive communication, collaboration, resource management, and adaptability in facilitating successful online learning experiences.

Building on the previously mentioned obstacles in online learning, the researchers explored the strategies employed by students to address these challenges. The responses revealed several approaches. Firstly, students opted to inform lecturers directly through Zoom's chat menu if they encountered technical or connection issues during sessions, ensuring prompt resolution (S8). Secondly, students utilized Zoom for collaborative discussions on course materials or assignments, alongside sharing information through platforms like WhatsApp (S7). Moreover, students emphasized the importance of checking internet quotas before classes or exams to ensure uninterrupted connectivity (S9). Additionally, effective time management emerged as a key strategy, with students allocating time for learning, preparing gadgets, and maintaining communication with peers and lecturers (S5). Finally, sharing gadgets among siblings at home showed a pragmatic response to resource limitations, underscoring students' resilience and adaptability in navigating challenges (S10).

These findings highlight students' proactive approach and adaptability in overcoming obstacles in online learning. Direct communication channels with lecturers, collaborative platforms for group discussions, and proactive management of resources reflect students' commitment to optimizing their learning experiences (S8, S7). Moreover, initiatives such as checking internet quotas and managing time effectively demonstrate students' awareness of practical considerations and their dedication to ensuring uninterrupted learning (S9, S5). Furthermore, sharing gadgets among siblings demonstrates students' creativity in maximizing available resources, showing their resilience in adapting to evolving learning environments (S10). Overall, these strategies show the importance of proactive communication, collaboration, resource management, and adaptability in facilitating successful online learning experiences.

Discussion

The findings from this study showed the significant role that social media platforms play in English language learning, particularly in the context of the pandemic, when traditional face-to-face instruction was disrupted. As indicated by the questionnaire results, the use of social

media for educational purposes reveals that a substantial proportion of students (29.2%) rely on these platforms to access educational content. This reflects a broader trend towards digital learning, where students increasingly turn to online resources to complement their formal education (Amin & Sundari, 2020; Apriani et al., 2022).

A noteworthy point from the data is the multi-functionality of social media, with students using it not only for educational purposes but also for communication, entertainment, and staying updated with the latest news. This is consistent with previous studies that argue social media offers a versatile and interactive environment, which can provide to diverse learner needs (Raut & Patil, 2016; Sasongko et al., 2022). However, the fact that educational purposes ranked second suggests that while students acknowledge the benefits of social media for learning, other non-educational functions may still take precedence in their daily usage. This is in line with research that emphasizes the dual role of social media as both a tool for learning and a platform for personal engagement (Hasby & Angrum, 2023; Junco et al., 2011; Santoso, 2021; Silviyanti, 2014; Wulandari & Mandasari, 2021).

In terms of students' perceptions of social media's effectiveness for learning English, the results were overwhelmingly positive. Most students reported that learning via social media was fun, relaxed, and accessible, with 59% acknowledging the convenience of learning anytime and anywhere. This is supported by earlier studies, which emphasize the flexibility and ease of access that online platforms provide, allowing learners to study at their own pace and according to their schedules (Elliott, 2010). Furthermore, the ease of communication and availability of resources on social media were highlighted as significant advantages, reinforcing the idea that these platforms serve as rich repositories of educational content, which can be accessed freely (Silviyanti, 2014).

The data also suggest that social media contributes to a sense of autonomy in learning. Over 40% of respondents agreed that social media encourages self-directed learning, a finding that aligns with previous research on the positive impact of technology on learner autonomy (Suwastini et al., 2023). Students' confidence in using English, especially in speaking and writing, also appeared to improve through their interactions on these platforms. This corroborates the view that online communication fosters language practice and enhances learners' fluency and confidence (Santoso, 2021). The results also show a strong belief among students that social media helps them improve various aspects of their English language skills, particularly listening, vocabulary, and speaking. This reflects the diverse opportunities that platforms like YouTube, podcasts, and language learning apps provide for language learners to enhance their skills outside the classroom setting (Silviyanti, 2014).

The third section of the questionnaire focused on the specific English language skills students believed were improved through social media. The majority of respondents cited vocabulary (52.2%) and speaking skills (45%) as areas where they felt the most improvement. This agrees with earlier research that social media facilitates vocabulary acquisition and spoken language practice (Delos Santos & Ilustre, 2022). Social media platforms often expose learners to authentic language use, which helps them expand their vocabulary and improve pronunciation through interaction with native speakers and other learners. Moreover, engaging in conversations and watching videos or listening to podcasts in English provides ample opportunities to enhance speaking skills, as students can imitate and practice real-world language use (Tran et al., 2024).

While the benefits of using social media for language learning are evident, the challenges associated with online learning platforms must also be considered. The interviews revealed that students faced significant obstacles such as unreliable internet connectivity, difficulties in maintaining discipline and focus, and challenges in navigating new technological tools. These issues echo findings from previous studies on the limitations of online learning, particularly in regions with inconsistent internet infrastructure (Devanesan, 2020). Students reported that these challenges often hindered their learning experience, making it difficult to fully benefit from the resources available on social media platforms.

To address these challenges, students employed several strategies to optimize their online learning experience. One of the most common approaches was ensuring clear communication with instructors and peers, particularly when technical issues arose during lessons. This reinforces the findings from other studies, which suggest that effective communication can mitigate some of the drawbacks of online learning and enhance the overall learning experience (Betts, 2009). Additionally, students took proactive measures to manage their internet usage, such as checking their data quota before classes and preparing alternative study environments when technical issues arose.

Furthermore, students emphasized the importance of time management and maintaining consistent study routines. This finding affirms earlier research on self-regulated learning, which suggests that effective time management is crucial for success in online education (Miertschin et al., 2012). Students who managed their time effectively were better equipped to navigate the demands of online learning, especially in a context where distractions and lack of physical presence could undermine focus. Additionally, students reported that peer support and collaboration were essential for staying motivated and overcoming difficulties. Many students turned to their classmates for assistance and used platforms like WhatsApp and Zoom to collaborate on assignments, which helped them stay engaged and maintain a sense of community (Amin & Sundari, 2020; Apriani et al., 2022).

Finally, using social media to connect with others in the learning process played a significant role in overcoming the isolation often associated with online education. Interacting with classmates and instructors in virtual environments like Zoom allowed students to maintain social connections and replicate some of the benefits of in-person learning. This is consistent with research that highlights the importance of social presence in online learning environments, where students' engagement and motivation are enhanced when they feel part of a learning community (Miao & Ma, 2022).

Conclusion

This study investigated the impact of social media on English language learning and the strategies employed by EFL students at two public universities in Banda Aceh, Indonesia. The findings revealed that Zoom, Google Classroom, and WhatsApp were the most commonly used platforms due to their ease of use. Students reported spending significant time online for studying, completing assignments, and staying updated with news, which they believed improved their English skills, particularly vocabulary, pronunciation, and listening. However, technical issues, limited internet access, and shared device usage were also identified. To overcome these obstacles, students adopted strategies including informing lecturers about technical problems, collaborating with classmates, managing their internet quota effectively, practicing time management and discipline, and scheduling shared device usage at home.

While the study offers important perspectives on the use of social media in EFL learning, it is limited by its relatively small sample size and the use of self-reported data through questionnaires and interviews. Future research should expand the sample size to include diverse educational contexts and employ additional methods such as classroom observations or longitudinal studies to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the long-term impact of social media on language learning. Moreover, studies could explore the potential of integrating social media tools with traditional teaching methods to optimize learning outcomes. These findings emphasize the importance of using social media platforms effectively to support EFL learning in both regular and challenging situations.

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