

# Social Media for Learning English: The Views of Pre-service EFL Teachers

Nova Lingga Pitaloka<sup>1\*</sup>, Hesti Wahyuni Anggraini<sup>1</sup>, Armilia Sari<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>English Education Study Program, Universitas Sriwijaya, Indonesia

<sup>2</sup>Indonesian Education Study Program, Universitas Sriwijaya, Indonesia

\*Corresponding author. Email: [novalinggapitaloka@fkip.unsri.ac.id](mailto:novalinggapitaloka@fkip.unsri.ac.id)

## ABSTRACT

Social media can help learning English because the basic principles of social media are in line with language theory which emphasizes collaboration and social interaction in the construction of knowledge. The aims of this study were to find out whether pre-service EFL teachers get the effects of social media to learn English based on their perceptions and on which themes of English they get the most effect. The research method was a cross sectional survey study. A readymade closed-ended questionnaire was used to collect the data. The collected data were analysed by percentages and descriptive statistics. The result showed that 73.07% of the samples perceived high effect of using social media to learn English, 26.7% of them experienced moderate effect and 0.22% of the samples felt low effect. Furthermore, among the six themes, vocabulary development was affected mostly by students' use of social media to learn English with the highest mean 4.22 and standard deviation 0.68. This study also gave some implications for ELT and further research.

**Keywords:** Social media, Pre-service EFL teachers, Learning English, Views.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Social media has been used successfully by millions of people in the world as a medium for communicating and socializing virtually without limitation of space and time. More than that, social media has also gained a place in the world of education as a medium of learning. According to the 2013 annual report of Pearson Learning Solutions and Babson Survey Research Group on social media use by higher education, it was found that the use of social media in teaching has increased by 21% from 2012 to 2013 in the United States [1]. This shows that social media has become a tool or source of teaching and learning.

When it comes to learning English, social media also has a strategic place. Many studies have been conducted to investigate the role of social media in English language learning [2], [3], [4]. Based on the results of a study, it was reported that learning through social media is much more effective than traditional learning without social media, and collaboration is a learning strategy that is useful for improving one's second foreign language [3].

Social media can help learning English because there is active participation, collaboration, and exchange of opinions, ideas, information, or messages between social media users. The basic principles of social media, namely social interaction between users, are in line with language theory from cognitive theory to socio-cultural theory, which emphasizes collaboration and social interaction in the construction of science. With this theoretical assumption, there are many uses of social media to improve English language skills. However, this role has not been widely known, especially at the higher education level [5]. Many students use social media for personal interaction and learn English, but the extent and how they use social media to improve their English skills is still relatively unknown.

The urgency of this research is based on the fact that analyzing student needs in learning is very important. By ignoring what students do with English outside of the classroom or not engaging with students on social media, teachers will never really understand their needs and realize the potential of social media as a language learning tool [6]. Through a detailed understanding of perceptions and how students use social media to improve English language skills, lecturers, stakeholders and policy makers can make the right policies to

encourage lecturers to use more technology, especially social media in classroom teaching and additional teaching outside the classroom. This study also provides an overview and information about the views of pre-service EFL teachers on learning English through social media so that lecturers can use it as a reference in designing teaching and learning activities according to student needs through the use of social media. The results of this study can also be used as a rich source of empirical data on the use of social media by students so that they can be used as a basis for developing appropriate materials, teaching materials, or media to enrich online teaching and learning. In addition, lecturers and policy makers can find out which skills or aspects of English have the least effect from the use of social media so that the design or development of learning for this skill or aspect is specifically designed for learning through social media to help students improve their abilities in that skill or aspect.

Based on the background above, the aims of this study were to determine whether pre-service EFL teachers get the effect of using social media to learn English based on their perceptions; and to know on which skill or aspect of English they got the most from learning English through social media.

## ***1.1. Literature Review***

### ***1.1.1. Social Media***

Social media is social networking site in the form of websites or other online forms such as social networking and microblogging which is created by a group of people (users) to have conversations and share ideas, information, and messages or to make social and professional contacts [7]. Social media is an online community where people who have the same interests, opinions, activities and experiences gather in a community and share their news, photos, videos and activities. In social media, there are generally user explanations (user profiles), social links and also various other features. This online community also provides tools to interact between users across the internet network, such as electronic mail and instant messaging features [8]. In other words, social media can be defined as a network system that is used by people to gather in an online community to interact with one another, such as sharing ideas, opinions, messages, information, and sharing photos, videos, and their activities.

Social media has a variety of different platforms that have been widely used by the world community, such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Youtube, Whatsapp, and others. Based on data findings from the Pew Research Center's Internet Project in 2013, a number of adults currently use social media on various websites, Facebook is the most dominant social media platform

used by many users, but a number of other users are now also spread across other platforms. There are 42% of adults using various social media sites or platforms. It is also known that the number of Instagram users almost equals the number of Facebook users on a daily basis [9]. This indicates that the use of social media has become a new culture in the 21st century where one person can use many social media platforms to socialize in their community.

### ***1.1.2. The Use of Social Media in Education and Language Learning***

The world of education is currently experiencing significant changes in its application because education is always adapting to world developments and needs. Students in the 21st century, or Generation Y, also known as "digital natives", are a generation that grew up with digital technology, carrying out a number of activities simultaneously. They have different ways of thinking and processing material, which makes Web 2.0 technology invaluable in assisting changes in teaching and learning methods [9]. In the 21st century, students need ICT skills. The Internet provides ample opportunities for teaching and learning English [10].

21st century students represent a generation that is tech savvy and motivated by social media. Given this fact, facilitating their preference for the use of social media can engage them in authentic and meaningful learning of English which makes them practice reading, writing, speaking and listening through familiar and motivating contexts [10]. Social media, such as Instagram, provides context for visual data and elements that aid language learning, and encourages socially connected student communities who communicate and socialize with other learners outside of classroom interactions [11].

Regarding the use of social media as a means of learning language, a study shows that students feel comfortable when social media is used as a learning tool in lessons. One of the reasons is the use of Facebook, which is the most popular social media they use in their daily life, so they find it easy to communicate via Facebook. Facebook is seen as a great place where members can study independently or together. These students also have positive attitudes towards using Facebook as a learning tool [12].

### ***1.1.3. Other Relevant Previous Studies***

Nowadays, significant changes in the world of education are influenced by the use of ICT for both learning and teaching. This has triggered the emergence of a new trend in the world of research in the field of education, especially in learning English, both as a second language and as a foreign language.

Several studies investigating the use of technology, especially social media in learning English. In Li's study in Hongkong, YouTube, Blogs, Forums and Wikis are the most widely used. The most frequent activity on social media is looking for lecture materials that are assigned or not in terms of informal learning. Students prefer to use social media with classmates than teachers, and students exchange material to work on assignments via social media [2]. Next, Sakkir, Rahman, and Salija in their study in South Sulawesi, Indonesia found that the majority of students showed a positive attitude towards the use of social media in English writing classes. However, factors such as large classes, lack of training, and lack of facilities are barriers to using social media in the classroom [4]. In another study in Arab context, Alfaki and Alharty found learning through social media is more effective than learning the traditional way without access to social media. Collaboration is a useful strategy for improving one's foreign second language [3]. The three studies above investigate the use of social media in learning English in different contexts, namely Hong Kong, South Sulawesi (Indonesia), and Arabic. This study is different from the three studies above, namely in the research context. This study investigates students' perceptions about the use of social media to learn English in the context of public universities in South Sumatra because there has been no research on this topic in South Sumatra, Indonesia.

## 2. METHOD

The method used in this study was cross-sectional survey study as the researchers collected the data at onepoint time. The population of this study was all pre-service EFL teachers in English Education Study Program of two government-owned universities in South Sumatera, Indonesia. To obtain a large number participants, a questionnaire was distributed by using Google Form to several representatives of the pre-service EFL teachers from each semester (i.e.: semester 1,3,5, and 7) and lecturers teaching them. The link of this questionnaire was then spread to all the pre-service EFL teachers by the representatives and lecturers. The total number of the participants who gave their responses on the questionnaire were 453 pre-service EFL teachers whose ages ranging from 17-24 years old.

The instrument used in this study was a ready-made closed ended questionnaire [5]. It consists of 6 themes, namely vocabulary development, reading, communication and speaking, listening, writing, and the nature of the studying context. In these themes, there are a total of 30 items used to find out whether students acquire their language skills through social media. The responses for each item are totally disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, totally agree. This questionnaire had been tested on 40 students and the results of statistical tests

showed all valid and reliable items with alpha values above 0.70 for each theme [5].

The data obtained from the questionnaire was analysed by using percentages and descriptive statistics. To determine the level of the effect of social media for learning English, the participants' responses were categorized into three levels, namely high, medium, low [5] with the following mean score ranges:

**Table 1.** The level categories of Effect of using social media for learning English

No	Mean	Level of effect
1	3.67 - 5.00	High
2	2.34 - 3.67	Moderate
3	1.00 - 2.33	Low

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the results of the study using percentages and descriptive statistics. To answer research questions, sample responses were collected; percentages were calculated and analysed using the SPSS program to obtain the mean and standard deviation of each respondent. Themes were analysed separately to clarify the level of social media influence on each theme.

**Table 2.** Effect of Social Media for Learning English

N o	Mean	Effect	Number of Sample	Percentage
1	3.67 - 5.00	High	331	73,07%
2	2.34 - 3.67	Moderate	121	26,71%
3	1.00 - 2.33	Low	1	0,22%
TOTAL			453	100%

Table 2 shows in general the level of effect of using social media to learn English according to the pre-service EFL teachers' perceptions based on the results of a survey questionnaire. From Table 3, as many as 73.07% of the sample felt the high influence of the use of social media to learn English. In other words, they had the perception that the use of social media offered them benefit for learning English. Meanwhile, only 26.1% and 0.22% of students felt the moderate and low impact of using social media to learn English.

After knowing their perceptions on the effect of using social media to learn English, it was necessary to investigate further how the social media use affected each skill or aspect of English based on their perceptions.

**Table 3.** The effect of social media use for vocabulary development

No	Statements	Mean	Std. Dev.	Effect level
1	Social media could help me to develop my vocabulary knowledge.	4,34	0,67	High
2	I search for the meaning of the vocabulary I encounter when I struggle to understand something written in a comment on social media sites	4,20	0,69	High
3	Interacting via social media has helped me to use the new vocabulary that I have learned in meaningful communications.	4,13	0,68	High
The mean of the theme		4,22	0,68	High

Table 3 shows that the level of effect of using social media for learning on vocabulary development was in the high category with a mean of 4.22 and a standard deviation of 0.68. Furthermore, the mean range is 4.13-4.34 with a standard deviation of 0.67-0.69. Of all the statements, students felt the highest effect on the statement "Social media could help me to develop my vocabulary knowledge.

**Table 4.** The effect of social media use for reading

No	Statements	Mean	Std. Dev.	Effect level
1	Social media could help me to develop my reading skills	4,12	0,68	High
2	I read other people's comments when they are written in English.	4,01	0,77	High
The mean of the theme		4,07	0,72	High

Table 4 shows that the level of effect of using social media for learning English on reading was in the high category with a mean of 4.07 and a standard deviation of 0.72. Furthermore, the mean range was 4,01-4,12 with a standard deviation of 0,68-0,77. Of all the statements, students felt the highest effect on the

statement "Social media could help me to develop my reading skills"

**Table 5.** The effect of social media use for communication

No	Statements	Mean	Std. Dev.	Effect level
1	Social media could help me to develop my communication skills.	4,09	0,73	High
2	I like to communicate frequently with my teacher in English using social media.	3,33	0,82	Mode rate
3	I like to communicate frequently with my peers in English using social media.	3,43	0,85	Mode rate
4	Social media could help me to develop my speaking skills	3,91	0,79	High
5	Social media could help me to develop my pronunciation.	4,00	0,83	High
The mean of the theme		3,75	0,81	High

Table 5 shows that the level of effect of using social media for learning English on reading was in the high category with a mean of 3,75 and a standard deviation of 0,81. Furthermore, the mean range was 3,33-4,09 with a standard deviation of 0,73-0,85. Of all the statements, students felt the highest effect on the statement "Social media could help me to develop my communication skills."

**Table 6.** The effect of social media use for listening

No	Statements	Mean	Std. Dev.	Effect level
1	Social media could help me to develop my listening skills.	4,12	0,77	High
2	I usually listen to English music posted on social media.	4,29	0,79	High
3	I usually watch English videos posted on social media.	4,17	0,77	High

No	Statements	Mean	Std. Dev.	Effect level
	The mean of the theme	4,20	0,78	High

Table 6 shows that the level of effect of using social media for learning English on reading was in the high category with a mean of 4,20 and a standard deviation of 0,78. Furthermore, the mean range was 4,12-4,29 with a standard deviation of 0,77-0,79. Of all the statements, students felt the highest effect on the statement “I usually listen to English music posted on social media.

**Table 7.** The effect of social media use for writing

No	Statements	Mean	Std. Dev.	Effect level
1	Social media can help me to develop my writing skills.	3,82	0,80	High
2	I usually consider the audience when I write on social media	3,74	0,78	High
3	Social media could help me to develop my grammar.	3,83	0,80	High
4	I check my grammar before I post my comments on social media	4,40	0,74	High
5	I check the grammar of the posts posted by other people on social media.	3,79	0,87	High
6	I interact more with my friends using English when using social media	3,08	0,89	Mode rate
	The mean of the theme	3,78	0,81	High

Table 7 shows that the level of effect of using social media for learning English on reading was in the high category with a mean of 3,78 and a standard deviation of 0,81. Furthermore, the mean range was 3,08-4,40 with a standard deviation of 0,74-0,89. Of all the statements, students felt the highest effect on the statement “I check my grammar before I post my comments on social media”.

**Table 8.** The effect of social media use for studying context

No	Statements	Mean	Std. Dev.	Effect level
1	Learning a language through	3,94	0,71	High

No	Statements	Mean	Std. Dev.	Effect level
	social media can help me to improve my studies.			
2	I exchange comments and information in English using social media.	3,49	0,81	Mode rate
3	Social media provides learners with access to more real life language use.	3,83	0,80	High
4	I follow language teachers on social media.	3,75	0,89	High
5	I feel more confident when I interact with my language teacher via social media.	3,38	0,87	Mode rate
6	Social media can make language learning more accessible.	4,06	0,74	High
7	Social media can help me to learn wherever I wish.	4,42	0,62	High
8	I am skeptical about the usefulness of social media in the language classroom.	3,59	0,90	Mode rate
9	Social media provides a more relaxed and stress-free language learning environment.	3,87	0,85	High
10	The language learner is more self-directed and flexible when employing social media.	3,87	0,78	High
11	Social media could help me to learn in ways that align with my personality and needs.	3,89	0,75	High
	The mean of the theme	3,83	0,79	High

Table 8 shows that the level of effect of using social media for learning English on reading was in the high category with a mean of 3,83 and a standard deviation of 0,79. Furthermore, the mean range was 3,38-4,42 with a standard deviation of 0,62-0,90. Of all the statements, students felt the highest effect on the

statement “Social media can help me to learn wherever I wish.”

After comparing the effect level of using social media to learn English against the six themes of the survey questionnaire, namely the vocabulary development, reading, communication, listening, writing, and studying context, it can be seen on which themes students obtained the most benefit.

**Table 9.** Means and standard deviation of the 6 themes

Theme	Mean	Standard Deviation	Order to mean	Effect level
Vocabulary development	4,22	0,68	1	High
Reading	4,07	0,72	3	High
Communication	3,75	0,81	6	High
Listening	4,20	0,78	2	High
Writing	3,78	0,81	5	High
Studying context	3,83	0,79	4	High

Table 9 shows the means and standard deviations of the responses to the overall themes. the pre-service EFL teachers perceived that the use of social media to learn English had a high effect on their English skills in all aspects, namely the development of vocabulary, reading, communication, listening, writing, and studying contexts with a mean range of 3.75-4, 22 and a standard deviation of 0.68-0.81. By comparing all these themes, it can be concluded that students benefited the most from the use of social media for the development of their English vocabulary with the highest mean of 4.22 and standard deviation of 0.68 with a high effect level.

The results of this study revealed two important things. First, students confirmed that they felt various benefits of using social media for learning English. Participants of these study reported that they experienced improvement on four English skills, indicated by the theme of reading, communication (speaking), listening, and writing in the questionnaire, English aspect, i.e, vocabulary, and studying context. This is because social media platforms facilitate users to develop their networks all across the world for academic matters as social media platforms allow for direct communication and collaboration. These two features of social media are in line with social constructivism theory and computer-mediated learning (CMC) perspective. Social constructivist theory put emphasis on the social interaction and collaboration while CMC offers the flexibility of place [17] It means social media facilitate EFL learners to communicate and collaborate with other users using English which support English learning. The benefits of social media for learning English skills and aspect also conforms other studies' findings, like listening in a study conducted by Anwas et al [18], reading in a study by Looi and Yusop [19] and Min [20], writing in Sakkir, Rahman and Salija [4],

and Al-Jarrah, Al-Jarrah, Talafhah, & Mansor [21], and speaking in Anwas et al [18].

Second, learning English through social media can facilitate students to learn various English skills/aspects, specifically the highest impact on their vocabulary development. These results are in line with what were reported in the study conducted by Alghasab, and Alfadley[5] and Basoz[16] in which they highlighted their findings that social media served important roles in developing participants' English skills and the participants also reported the most benefits of social media on their vocabulary development. These happened because the use of social media for learning English can be included as a personal learning environment as students regulate their learning in their personal social media and control their own learning in their social media environment. It is supported by Dabbagh and Kitsantas [15] who state that a personal learning environment is likely to be a potential pedagogical approach for both an integration of formal and informal learning by utilizing social media and a promotion of students' self-regulated learning in higher education settings.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The study revealed two findings. Firstly, the study found that the pre-service EFL teachers reported that they experienced high effect of the social media use for learning English in. It was proven from the result that as many as 73.07% of the sample felt the high influence of the use of social media to learn English. In other words, they believed that the use of social media offered them benefits for learning English. Meanwhile, only 26.1% and 0.22% of students felt the moderate and low impact of using social media to learn English. The second finding was that pre-service EFL teachers had the highest effect of social media use on their English vocabulary development, even though they also experienced its high effect on other English skills like reading, listening, writing, and communication, and studying context. These results can be a reference for course designers or teachers to include social media in their instruction or even design and develop a social-media based English learning material as students admitted its positive roles in developing their English skills, especially vocabulary development. This study also has some limitations such as limited participants and descriptive data collected from questionnaire. Further study is suggested to do another similar research which explore deeper understanding of the effect of social media use for learning English with larger sample or different research approach such as qualitative research.

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