ESTEEM Journal of English Study Programme
E-ISSN: 2622-2213
P-ISSN: 2622-9323

THE STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF SOCIAL MEDIA AS A TOOL FOR IMPROVING ENGLISH WRITING SKILLS

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Accepted :
10 May 2023

Published :
7 July 2023

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ABSTRACT
This study investigates students' perceptions of social media as an instructional tool for enhancing English writing competency. The widespread penetration of digital platforms into academic settings has reshaped conventional approaches to language learning, prompting educators and researchers to examine their pedagogical implications more systematically. Employing a descriptive qualitative research design, data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and an open-ended questionnaire administered to 30 undergraduate students enrolled in an English language education program. The findings reveal that the majority of participants hold favorable views of integrating social media into writing practice, particularly platforms such as Instagram, Twitter/X, and WhatsApp. Students reported that consistent engagement with these platforms contributes to vocabulary enrichment, heightened motivation, greater exposure to authentic language use, and increased willingness to communicate. However, participants also acknowledged notable limitations, including informal linguistic registers, a tendency toward abbreviated writing styles, and susceptibility to distraction. These results suggest that social media can serve as a meaningful supplementary resource in English writing instruction when implemented with structured pedagogical guidance.

Keywords: Social media, English writing skills, students' perceptions, language learning, digital literacy.

1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid evolution of digital communication technology has fundamentally altered the landscape of language learning and education. In the contemporary era, social media platforms have transcended their original function as casual networking tools and have emerged as prominent channels for information exchange, community building, and even formal and informal learning (Greenhow & Lewin, 2016). Among learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), the ubiquity of platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter/X, YouTube, and WhatsApp offers both promising opportunities and potential challenges for developing writing proficiency.

Writing in English remains one of the most cognitively demanding skills for non-native learners. Unlike oral communication, writing requires learners to apply grammatical rules, organize ideas coherently, select appropriate vocabulary, and adhere to genre-specific conventions—all at once (Graham & Perin, 2007). Traditional classroom instruction, constrained by limited contact hours and standardized curricula, often fails to provide learners with adequate opportunities for authentic, extended writing practice. Consequently, there is a growing need to identify supplementary learning environments where writing can be practiced in contextually meaningful and motivating ways.

Social media offers a distinctive pedagogical potential in this regard. These platforms demand continuous written interaction, expose learners to diverse varieties of English, and create audiences beyond the classroom—factors that have been associated with increased writing motivation and engagement (Blattner & Fiori, 2009). When students write posts, respond to comments, or participate in online discussions, they engage in real communicative acts that mirror many of the pragmatic and structural demands of academic writing. Researchers have begun to explore the extent to which such informal digital writing practices transfer to more

Vol 6 No 2 (2023): ESTEEM

formal academic contexts (Mills, 2011; Warnock, 2009).

Despite the widespread use of social media among university students, empirical research specifically examining how students perceive these platforms as instruments for improving English writing skills remains limited, particularly within Indonesian higher education contexts. A substantial portion of existing studies has focused on general technology integration in EFL settings (Yunus et al., 2012; Melor, 2007), while fewer investigations have foregrounded students' subjective evaluations of social media's contribution to their writing development.

Previous studies have contributed valuable insights into the relationship between digital media and language acquisition. Bicen and Cavus (2011) demonstrated that the use of social networking sites in educational settings enhanced student participation and collaborative learning. Similarly, Lomicka and Lord (2012) found that Twitter facilitated vocabulary development and interpersonal engagement among EFL learners. Kabilan, Ahmad, and Abidin (2010) conducted a survey-based investigation among Malaysian university students and reported that Facebook was perceived as a supportive environment for English language practice, particularly for reading and writing. Their study highlighted that learners valued Facebook for enabling them to write informally and receive immediate feedback from peers.

Extending this line of inquiry, Shafie, Yaacob, and Singh (2016) examined the role of blogging as a platform for EFL writing. It concluded that sustained blog writing positively influenced students' writing fluency and confidence. Meanwhile, Dippold (2009) found that peer feedback in online writing environments promoted critical thinking and rhetorical awareness skills central to effective academic composition. Warschauer (2010) emphasized that digital writing tools, when properly scaffolded, could support the development of complex writing abilities far beyond what traditional pen-and-paper tasks allow.

Research by Yunus and Salehi (2012) specifically investigated the impact of Facebook on EFL writing performance in Malaysian secondary schools, finding statistically significant improvements in students' writing scores following a Facebook-based writing intervention. Hattem and Lomicka (2016) explored Twitter-based micro-blogging activities and found that the brevity of the platform encouraged students to practice concise and precise language use. However, they also noted a tension between informal digital communication norms and the conventions expected in academic writing.

Studies in Indonesian EFL contexts have produced complementary findings. Ariyanti (2016) reported that Indonesian university students frequently utilized social media for informal English practice, though they acknowledged difficulty in translating these habits into formal writing tasks. Rachmawati (2020) found that Instagram-based writing tasks increased student motivation and writing frequency but did not always improve grammatical accuracy without teacher intervention. Harahap (2021) similarly noted that while students engaged enthusiastically with social media writing tasks, sustained improvement in coherence and organization required structured instructional support.

More recent investigations have examined the pandemic-era shift toward online learning. Purwandari and Yusuf (2022) found that the transition to digital instruction during COVID-19 intensified student reliance on social media for English practice, with many students reporting that platforms such as WhatsApp and YouTube served as their primary sources of English input. Fitria (2021) conducted a comprehensive review of social media studies in EFL writing and identified recurring themes: increased engagement, expanded vocabulary, and improved communicative confidence, alongside persistent concerns about accuracy and formality.

Despite these contributions, a research gap persists concerning how students themselves articulate and interpret the relationship between their social media practices and their writing skill development. Most prior studies have employed quantitative measures or product-focused analyses, leaving the nuanced ways in which learners perceive, navigate, and ascribe meaning to their digital writing experiences underexplored. Understanding learners'

Vol 6 No 2 (2023): ESTEEM

perceptions is critical because perception influences behavior, motivation, and the extent to which informal learning is integrated into formal academic contexts (Dörnyei, 2005).

Furthermore, few studies have adopted a holistic qualitative approach that captures both the affordances and the constraints that students associate with social media-based writing practice. This study therefore aims to address this gap by exploring in depth undergraduate EFL students' perceptions of social media's role in developing their English writing skills. The findings are expected to provide practical insights for EFL educators seeking to harness digital platforms within instructional frameworks and to contribute to the growing body of literature on technology-enhanced language learning (TELL).

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design, which is appropriate for investigations seeking to understand individuals' perspectives, experiences, and interpretations of a particular phenomenon (Creswell, 2014). Qualitative methodology was selected because the primary objective was not to quantify the prevalence of specific behaviors but to explore the depth, diversity, and texture of students' perceptions regarding social media and English writing skill development. This approach allowed the researcher to capture the contextual and subjective dimensions of participants' experiences that quantitative instruments would obscure.

2.2 Research Participants

Participants consisted of 30 undergraduate students enrolled in the English Language Education program at a state university in Indonesia. Purposive sampling was employed to ensure that all participants had prior experience using social media in English and had completed at least one academic writing course. The sample comprised 18 female and 12 male students aged between 19 and 23 years. All participants provided informed consent and were assured of confidentiality and anonymity throughout the research process.

2.3 Data Collection Instruments

Data were collected through two complementary instruments. First, a semi-structured interview protocol was developed based on a review of relevant literature and refined through expert validation. Each interview lasted approximately 30 to 45 minutes and was conducted in a comfortable setting to encourage candid reflection. Interview questions explored participants' social media usage patterns, their self-assessed improvement in writing skills, specific affordances and limitations they associated with these platforms, and their recommendations for instructional integration.

Second, an open-ended questionnaire was administered to supplement interview data and to gather more structured responses from all participants simultaneously. The questionnaire included items addressing frequency of social media use, types of writing activities performed on these platforms, and perceived influence on vocabulary, grammar, style, and motivation. Responses were collected in written form to allow participants adequate time for reflection.

All interview recordings were transcribed verbatim and, together with questionnaire responses, subjected to thematic analysis following the framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). Data were coded inductively, with codes subsequently grouped into broader themes and sub-themes. Member checking was conducted

Vol 6 No 2 (2023): ESTEEM

with a subset of participants to enhance the credibility of the analytical findings.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Positive Perceptions of Social Media for Writing Development

The thematic analysis yielded four principal themes from participants' responses: (1) vocabulary enrichment, (2) motivational enhancement, (3) exposure to authentic language, and (4) improved communicative confidence. These themes converge to suggest a positive overall perception of social media as a tool for writing development, though qualified by important caveats.

Regarding vocabulary acquisition, a substantial majority of participants (23 out of 30) reported that regular engagement with English-language content on social media had expanded their active and passive vocabulary. One participant stated that encountering new words in natural, conversational contexts made them easier to retain than vocabulary encountered in textbooks. This finding aligns closely with the research of Lomicka and Lord (2012), who observed that Twitter-based activities contributed to lexical development among EFL learners. Similarly, Kabilan, Ahmad, and Abidin (2010) identified vocabulary growth as one of the key perceived benefits of Facebook use among Malaysian EFL students. The exposure to authentic, varied, and contextually embedded language on social media appears to facilitate incidental vocabulary learning more effectively than decontextualized instruction.

Motivational enhancement emerged as the second prominent theme. Participants consistently articulated that the interactive, responsive, and audience-oriented nature of social media writing generated greater enthusiasm than conventional written assignments. The immediacy of peer feedback, the opportunity to reach real audiences, and the freedom to choose topics were cited as particularly motivating features. These observations are consistent with the conclusions of Shafie, Yaacob, and Singh (2016), who found that blog writing elevated EFL students' intrinsic motivation, and with those of Rachmawati (2020), who documented heightened writing frequency among Indonesian students engaged in Instagram-based tasks. The motivational dimension of social media is particularly significant given Dörnyei's (2005) argument that motivation is among the most powerful determinants of language-learning success.

Authentic language exposure constituted the third major theme. Many participants expressed appreciation for the opportunity to encounter English as native and proficient speakers actually use it across a range of registers, genres, and cultural contexts. This naturalistic exposure was perceived as broadening their stylistic repertoire and sensitizing them to pragmatic and cultural dimensions of written communication that formal instruction rarely addresses. This finding resonates with Warschauer's (2010) emphasis on the value of digital environments for exposing learners to authentic, purposeful writing and with Warnock's (2009) claim that online writing spaces cultivate awareness of audience and rhetorical context.

Participants reported improved communicative confidence, describing overcoming psychological barriers to writing through frequent low-stakes social media interactions. The informal, non-evaluative nature of most social media writing was perceived as reducing writing anxiety and fostering a willingness to experiment with language. This is consistent with findings by Ariyanti (2016), who noted that Indonesian students felt less inhibited when writing in informal digital spaces, and by Fitria (2021), whose review identified reduced writing apprehension as a recurring benefit across multiple social media studies.

3.2 Limitations and Challenges Perceived by Students

Notwithstanding these positive perceptions, participants identified several significant limitations. The most frequently cited concern was the prevalence of informal and abbreviated language on social media, which students feared might compromise their capacity to produce formal academic

writing. Many participants noted that habitual use of abbreviations, emoticons, and colloquial expressions could undermine grammatical accuracy and stylistic appropriateness in academic contexts. This tension between informal digital communication norms and academic writing conventions has been identified as a central concern in the literature (Hattem & Lomicka, 2016; Purwandari & Yusuf, 2022).

Distraction was the second-most-commonly cited challenge. Participants acknowledged that the multimodal, notification-driven nature of social media platforms frequently disrupted focused writing practice. Rather than composing extended, coherent texts, students reported a tendency to engage in brief, fragmented interactions that did not develop sustained writing ability. This finding aligns with Harahap's (2021) concerns, who cautioned that without structured instructional intervention, social media engagement may reinforce superficial rather than deep writing habits.

A third limitation concerns the lack of systematic feedback on linguistic accuracy. While peer interaction on social media provides communicative feedback, it rarely addresses grammatical errors, organizational weaknesses, or rhetorical deficiencies. Several participants expressed a desire for more structured guidance when using social media for writing practice. This underscores Dippold's (2009) conclusion that peer feedback in digital environments, although valuable for communicative development, must be complemented by expert feedback to yield meaningful gains in formal writing proficiency.

3.3 Implications for EFL Writing Instruction

The findings of this study carry meaningful implications for EFL educators and curriculum designers. The predominantly positive perceptions reported by participants suggest that social media platforms hold genuine potential as supplementary tools for writing development. However, the limitations identified underscore the importance of pedagogical mediation. Social media should not be treated as a standalone instructional resource but rather as one component within a broader, scaffolded writing curriculum.

Instructors are encouraged to design tasks that leverage the motivational and authentic-language affordances of social media while providing explicit instruction in the conventions that distinguish informal digital writing from academic writing. Activities such as guided blogging, structured micro-writing on Twitter, or Instagram-based writing prompts with follow-up classroom discussion can bridge informal and formal writing contexts in productive ways. These recommendations align with the pedagogical frameworks proposed by Blattner and Fiori (2009) and Bicen and Cavus (2011), who advocated for deliberate, theory-driven integration of social media into language curricula.

4. CONCLUSION

This study explored how undergraduate EFL students perceive social media as a tool for developing English writing skills. The findings demonstrate that students generally hold positive attitudes toward social media-based writing practice, emphasizing its contributions to vocabulary growth, motivational enhancement, authentic language exposure, and communicative confidence. At the same time, participants acknowledged meaningful limitations concerning informal language norms, distractibility, and the absence of targeted linguistic feedback.

These findings contribute to the growing body of research on technology-enhanced language learning by providing an in-depth qualitative account of learner perceptions within an Indonesian EFL context. They reaffirm the value of considering students' subjective experiences when evaluating the pedagogical utility of digital tools. Future research should examine whether the perceptions reported in this study

translate into measurable gains in writing performance and should also explore comparative studies across different social media platforms and demographic groups.

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Vol 6 No 2 (2023): ESTEEM

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