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## CHALLENGES IN LEARNING ENGLISH AND THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AMONG SABRATHA UNIVERSITY EFL STUDENTS

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### ABSTRACT.

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In today's globalized world, English proficiency is essential for academic and professional advancement, particularly for non-English-speaking contexts like Libya. Despite years of study, many third-year university students still struggle with core language skills, especially writing, vocabulary, and grammar. This study examines the linguistic challenges faced by third-year EFL students at the Faculty of Education Surman, University of Sabratha, and explores how social media supports their learning. Using a quantitative descriptive design, data were collected from 20 students through an online questionnaire. The findings show that although students experience persistent difficulties with traditional aspects of English learning, they frequently use platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok, which they perceive as helpful, particularly for improving vocabulary and listening skills. Students also reported that social media made learning more engaging and motivating. The study concludes that when used purposefully, social media can enhance language acquisition and serve as a valuable supplement to classroom instruction. Recommendations and directions for future research are provided.

**Keywords:** EFL : English foreign language Students social media. Learning challenges, Vocabulary development, Listening skills)

### الملخص:

في عالم اليوم وبطابع العولمة، يُعدّ إتقان اللغة الإنجليزية أمراً ضرورياً للتقدم الأكاديمي والمهني، وخاصة في السياقات غير الناطقة بالإنجليزية مثل ليبيا. وعلى الرغم من سنوات طويلة من الدراسة، لا يزال العديد من طلاب السنة الثالثة في الجامعة يواجهون صعوبات في المهارات اللغوية الأساسية، وخصوصاً في الكتابة والمفردات والقواعد. وتهدف هذه الدراسة إلى فحص التحديات اللغوية التي يواجهها طلاب السنة الثالثة بقسم اللغة الإنجليزية بكلية التربية صرمان، جامعة صبراتة، بالإضافة إلى استكشاف كيفية مساهمة وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي في دعم تعلمهم للغة الإنجليزية. حيثُ استخدمت الدراسة منهجاً وصفيّاً كمياً، وبهذا تم جمع البيانات نحو 20 طالباً من خلال استبيان إلكتروني. و أظهرت النتائج أن الطلاب ما زالوا يواجهون صعوبات مستمرة في الجوانب التقليدية لتعلم اللغة، إلا أنهم يستخدمون منصات مثل يوتيوب وإنستغرام وتيك توك بشكل متكرر، ويرون أنها مفيدة خصوصاً في تحسين المفردات ومهارة الاستماع. كما أشار الطلاب إلى أن وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي تجعل عملية التعلم أكثر تفاعلاً ومتعة وخُصت الدراسة إلى أنه عند استخدام وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي بشكل هادف ومنظم، فإنه يمكن أن تُسهم في تعزيز اكتساب اللغة الإنجليزية وتُمثّل أداة مساندة فعّالة للتعليم داخل الفصل الدراسي. كما تقدم الدراسة مجموعة من التوصيات والمقترحات للبحوث المستقبلية

### INTRODUCTION

In this age of worldwide integration, English proficiency is essential for academic and professional advancement, especially in non-English-speaking countries such as Libya. Although English is introduced early in the Libyan education system and taught throughout primary, secondary, and university levels, many students still struggle to reach the expected proficiency level . As an example, third-year students at Sabratha university in surmman challenge, in particular, continue to face challenges in core language skills including speaking, listening, reading, and writing. These difficulties often stem from limited opportunities to use English outside the classroom, traditional teaching methods that

prioritize memorization over communication, insufficient resources, and low confidence or motivation among learners.

At the Faculty of Education - Surman, University of Sabratha, many third-year EFL students remain below the intermediate advanced level despite years of formal instruction. This gap highlights the need to explore alternative or supplementary learning strategies that can support students beyond conventional classroom settings. One such an approach is the use of social media, which has become an integral part of students' daily lives. Platforms like YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook provide continuous exposure to authentic English content and offer flexible, engaging opportunities for vocabulary development, listening practice, and informal communication.

While social media holds promise as a supplementary learning tool, its actual impact on English language acquisition in the Libyan university context remains under researched. Therefore, this study investigates the linguistic challenges faced by third-year EFL students and examines how social media platforms may support or hinder their language development. Understanding these factors can help educators and policymakers develop more effective strategies to enhance English language learning in Libya.

#### Research Statement

Despite years of English instruction and according to my experience as a teacher it is obvious that, many Libyan university students continue to struggle with core language skills such as speaking, listening, reading, and writing, which limits their academic performance and future opportunities. At the same time, social media is widely used by students and offers potential exposure to English through videos, posts, and interactions. However, it remains unclear whether these platforms genuinely support English language development or serve mainly

as sources of entertainment. This study addresses this gap by examining how social media use relates to English learning among third-year students at Surmman Faculty of Education

### **Objectives of the Study**

This study aims to:

1-Identify the main linguistic and academic challenges faced by students in learning EFL at Faculty of Education- Surmman focused on vocabulary learning, grammar usage.

2-To examine the extent to which social media platforms contribute to the development of core English language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing.

3-To explore students' perceptions of the effectiveness of social media in enhancing their English language proficiency in comparison to traditional classroom-based learning methods.

### **Research Questions**

Q1. What are the main linguistic and academic challenges faced by third-year students in learning English as a foreign language at Faculty of Education - Surman?

Q2. To what extent do social media platforms contribute to the development of English language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) among these students?

Q3. How do students perceive the effectiveness of social media in enhancing their English proficiency compared to traditional classroom methods?

### LITERTURE REVIEW

### 1- Social Media and EFL Skill Development

Alghasab and Alfadley, 2018 examined the perceived impact of social media on English learning among 453 pre-service EFL teachers in Indonesia. Their quantitative findings revealed that social media strongly enhanced vocabulary, listening, and reading skills. However, speaking received the lowest improvement because learners primarily consumed content rather than engaging in real-time communication. This study highlights the potential of social media as a supplementary tool particularly for vocabulary, which is relevant to Libyan learners who also have lack of consistent exposure to authentic English.

### 2-Social Media for Informal Language Learning

(Mahmud, 2018) **used a mixed-method approach with 120 university students to explore how platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and YouTube support EFL learning. Students reported improvements in vocabulary, listening, and confidence, especially when using Facebook groups for peer support. However, distraction and lack of teacher supervision were significant challenges. These findings reflect the Libyan context, where social media is widely used but not always for structured learning.**

### 3- Social Media and Student Engagement

(Li, 2017) , Li's qualitative study of Hong Kong university students found that YouTube, blogs, and wikis supported listening, pronunciation, and writing through peer interaction and collaborative activities. Students preferred peer communication over teacher involvement because it felt more relaxed and motivating. For Libyan EFL learners, this

suggests that social media may increase engagement, but teacher guidance is still necessary to ensure accuracy and meaningful learning.

#### 4- Social Media to Enhance Writing Skills (Sakkir, Rahman & Salija, 2016)

A research by Sakkir et al. with 80 EFL students showed that platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp improved writing through sharing drafts, receiving peer feedback, and engaging in informal communication. Students appreciated the reduced anxiety and greater freedom to express ideas. However, inconsistent peer feedback and limited teacher monitoring posed challenges. This study is particularly relevant given the persistent writing difficulties reported among Libyan EFL students.

#### 5-Advantages and Risks of Social Networking in EFL (Alnujaidi, 2017)

According to Alnujaidi in his study by conducting a critical review of literature on social networking sites for language learning. The review highlighted benefits such as authentic input, increased motivation, and learner autonomy, but also noted risks including distraction, linguistic inaccuracies, and privacy concerns. The author stressed the need for structured and pedagogically guided use. For the Libyan context where institutional integration of technology is still developing this study provides important cautionary insights.

#### Summary of the Reviewed Studies

Across these studies, social media consistently appears beneficial for vocabulary development, listening skills, motivation, and informal communication. However, challenges such as distraction, limited teacher supervision, and inaccurate language input remain concerns. These findings directly inform the current study, which examines how social media influences English learning among third-year EFL students at the University of Sabratha and whether these platforms can effectively complement traditional classroom instruction.

### **Research Design**

This study employed a quantitative descriptive research design to investigate students' experiences, challenges, and perspectives regarding learning English and the use of social media as a learning tool . A quantitative approach is suitable for this research because it allows for the collection of numerical data to identify patterns in student behaviors and perceptions (Creswell, 2014).The online questionnaire designed to assess students' challenges, and perspectives regarding learning English and the use of social media as a learning tool.

### **Participants**

The participants in this study were third-year undergraduate students enrolled in English language programs at the Faculty of Education - Surmman . All participants were studying English as a foreign language and had prior experience with English instruction across various skills, including reading, writing, listening, and speaking. The students were selected based on their availability, willingness to participate, and accessibility via online communication platforms. Their participation was entirely voluntary, and they were informed that their responses would remain anonymous and used solely for academic research purposes. The students provided valuable insights into their challenges in learning English and their experiences using social media as a learning tool. Creswell (2014) emphasize that voluntary participation encourages students to express their experiences more openly, ultimately leading to richer and more reliable data, an outcome reflected in the responses collected in this study..

### **Data Collection Instrument: Questionnaire**

The primary quantitative data collection instrument was an online questionnaire designed to assess students' challenges, and perspectives regarding learning English and the use of social media as a learning tool. online questionnaire designed to assess students' challenges, and perspectives regarding learning English and the use of social media as a learning tool.

### **Processing and Analyzing Data**

The data collected through the online questionnaire were processed and analyzed using quantitative methods. After collection, the responses were reviewed for completeness and accuracy. Incomplete or inconsistent entries were excluded from the analysis to ensure data reliability. The valid responses were then coded and entered into a spreadsheet for organization. Descriptive statistical techniques were employed to analyze the data, including the calculation of frequencies, percentages, and distributions of responses. This allowed for a clear understanding of the participants' challenges in learning English and their use of social media as a learning tool.

### **Data Analysis: Questionnaire**

The questionnaire data were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods, which are suitable for summarizing quantitative data collected through close-ended questions.

### **Results of the study**

The results of the study based on the data collected from a structured online questionnaire answered by 20 third-year students at the Faculty of Education , University of Sabratha. The findings are organized in alignment with the study's research questions and are divided into three main sections: demographic information, challenges in learning English, and the use of

social media in learning English. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages), and key trends are discussed in detail to provide insight into the students' experiences and perspectives.

Students' Responses to the Questionnaire Statements

Table1: Questionnaire Items

Section	Questionnaire Item	Response Options	Main Findings
<b>Demographic Information</b>	Gender	Female, Male	75% Female, 25% Male
	Age	Under 20, 20-22, Over 22	7.7% Under 20, 76.9% 20-22, 15.4% Over 22
	English Proficiency Level	Beginner, Intermediate, Advanced	72.7% Intermediate, 27.3% Advanced
	Years of Studying English	<3 years, 3-5 years, >5 years	7.7% <3, 76.9% 3-5, 15.4% >5
<b>Challenges in Learning English</b>	Most Difficult Skill	Reading, Writing, Listening, Speaking	61.5% Writing, 15.4% Speaking, 15.4% Listening, 7.7% Reading
	Main Learning Challenges	Vocabulary, Grammar, Pronunciation	61.5% Grammar & Vocabulary, 30.8% Vocabulary, 7.7% Pronunciation
	Frequency of Practice Outside Class	Daily, Few times/week, Rarely, Never	53.8% Few times/week, 7.7% each for other options
	Confidence in Speaking	Always shy, Sometimes shy, Rarely shy	7.7% Always, 53.8% Sometimes, 38.5% Rarely
	Class Effectiveness	Very effective, Somewhat effective, Not effective	30.8% Very, 53.8% Some what, 15.4% Uncertain/Dissatisfied

	Preferred Teaching Method	Interactive, Online, Traditional, Multimedia	46.2% Interactive, 30.8% Online, 15.4% Traditional, 7.7% Multimedia
<b>Social Media Use</b>	Use Social Media for Learning	Yes, No	100% Yes No%0
	Most Used Platform	YouTube, Instagram, Tik Tok, Facebook, Others	53.8% YouTube, 15.4% Instagram, 15.4% Tik Tok, 7.7% Facebook, 7.7% Others
	Frequency of Use	Daily, Weekly, Occasionally	38.5% Daily, 38.5% Weekly, 23.1% Occasionally
	Most Helpful Content	Videos, Reels, Infographics, Podcasts	46.2% Videos, 23.1% Reels, 15.4% Infographics, 15.4% Podcasts
	Perceived Helpfulness	Very helpful, Somewhat helpful, Not helpful	76.9% Very, 23.1% Somewhat, 0% Not helpful
	Follow English Pages	Many, Few, None	53.8% Many, 38.5% Few
	Most Improved Skill	Vocabulary, Listening, Speaking, Grammar	46.2% Vocabulary, 15.4% each for others
	Frequency of Interaction in English	Frequently, Sometimes, Rarely, Never	23.1% Frequently, 38.5% Sometimes, 30.8% Rarely, 7.7% Never
	Social Media Motivation	Strongly agree, Agree, Disagree	61.5% Strongly agree, 30.8% Agree, 7.7% Disagree
	Recommend Social Media for Learning	Yes, Maybe, No	61.5% Yes, 30.8% Maybe, 7.7% No

The findings show that students continue to struggle with writing, vocabulary, and grammar, yet they view their classroom instruction as only moderately effective and express a strong preference for interactive and digital learning methods. Social media particularly, YouTube is widely used and highly valued for improving vocabulary and listening skills, and students

consistently describe it as both enjoyable and educational. Overall, the results suggest that social media serves as a motivating and accessible supplement to formal instruction, though students would benefit from greater guidance to ensure more productive and interactive use of these platforms.

## Results

The findings of this study show that third-year students at the Faculty of Education - Surman continue to struggle with writing, vocabulary, and grammar. These results align with Sakkir et al. (2016) and Alfaki & Alharty (2014), who reported that writing is one of the most challenging skills for EFL learners, especially in formal academic contexts. Similar to their conclusions, this study suggests that informal exposure to English on platforms such as Facebook or WhatsApp may help reduce anxiety and improve students' confidence in writing.

Vocabulary and listening emerged as the skills most positively influenced by social media use, particularly YouTube. This finding is consistent with Alghasab & Alfadley (2018), who identified vocabulary as the most affected skill through social media, and with Mahmud (2018), who found that platforms like YouTube enhance learners' listening comprehension through authentic content.

Furthermore, students expressed a clear preference for interactive, digital learning approaches over traditional classroom methods. This supports Li's (2017) observation that learners are more engaged and motivated in informal, peer-supported online environments. However, as Mahmud (2018) cautioned, the benefits of social media can be limited by

distraction and inconsistent language input, an issue reflected in this study, where some students used social media only occasionally for educational purposes.

Overall, the results reinforce previous research while highlighting the need for more structured and purposeful integration of social media into the EFL curriculum to maximize its positive impact on students' language development.

### **Conclusion**

The study concludes that social media, particularly YouTube, plays a significant role in supporting English language learning among third-year students. Despite challenges in writing, grammar, and vocabulary, students demonstrated a clear preference for using these platforms to enhance their skills, as they offer engaging, flexible, and informal exposure to English that complements classroom instruction. However, the study faced limitations, including a small sample size of 20 students from a single university, reliance on self-reported data, and the absence of long-term language improvement tracking. Based on the findings, it is recommended that instructors incorporate social media into lessons through guided tasks, curriculum designers provide training on effective digital platform use, and institutions promote blended learning models while ensuring monitoring and feedback to prevent misinformation and passive consumption. Future research should involve larger and more diverse samples, employ qualitative methods for deeper insights, examine long-term effects on language proficiency, compare different platforms, and explore formal integration of social media into university curricula under teacher supervision.

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