



Role of Social Networking Platforms in EFL Learning Outcomes in Sudanese Universities

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Abstract

This study explores how social media platforms—WhatsApp, YouTube, and Facebook—support English language learning among third-level EFL students at Nile Valley University during the 2024–2025 academic year. Using a mixed-methods case study (surveys, interviews, and classroom observations), researchers found that 87% of students used social media daily for language learning. Self-reported improvements were highest in vocabulary (82%), listening (76%), and speaking fluency (69%). Statistical analysis confirmed significant proficiency gains ($p < 0.05$). Social media also boosted motivation, peer interaction, and classroom engagement. The findings suggest that purposeful integration of digital platforms enhances EFL outcomes by offering authentic exposure, real-time practice, and learner autonomy. The study recommends structured inclusion of social media in curricula, supported by teacher training and institutional reforms to maximize its educational potential.

Keywords : Social Media, Language Acquisition, English Language Learning, Digital Tools, EFL Learners

المستخلص:

تناولت هذه الدراسة دور منصات التواصل الاجتماعي مثل واتساب ويوتيوب وفيسبوك في دعم تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية لدى طلاب المستوى الثالث في جامعة وادي النيل خلال العام الأكاديمي 2024–2025. وباستخدام منهج دراسة حالة متعدد الأساليب (استبيانات، مقابلات، ولاحظات صافية)، كشفت النتائج أن 87% من الطلاب يستخدمون وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي يومياً لأغراض تعليمية. وقد أبلغ الطلاب عن تحسن ملحوظ في المفردات (82%)، مهارات الاستماع (76%)، والطلاقة في التحدث (69%). وأكد التحليل الإحصائي وجود تقدم كبير في الكفاءة اللغوية ($p < 0.05$). كما ساهمت هذه المنصات في تعزيز الدافعية، التفاعل بين الأقران، والمشاركة الصافية. وتشير النتائج إلى أن دمج وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي بشكل هادف يعزز نتائج تعلم اللغة من خلال توفير تعرض واقعي، ممارسة فورية، واستقلالية للمتعلمين. وتوصي الدراسة بإدراج هذه الأدوات الرقمية ضمن المناهج الدراسية، مع دعم ذلك بتدريب المعلمين وإصلاح السياسات المؤسسية.

1. Introduction

As digital technologies increasingly permeate everyday life, the boundary between online and offline spaces has become less distinct, particularly in education. Language learning, once rooted in textbooks and rigid syllabi, is now shaped by digital exploration, expression and global communication. This shift is especially pronounced in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, where context, interactivity, and community play essential roles.

In Sudanese higher education, digital transformation is still taking shape. At Nile Valley University, third-level EFL students are gradually integrating platforms such as WhatsApp, YouTube and Facebook into their academic routines. These tools, which are familiar, accessible, and widely used for social interaction, are now influencing how learners build vocabulary, develop listening comprehension, and gain communicative confidence.

This study investigates whether such platforms can evolve beyond recreational use to serve as educational tools. Grounded in the lived experiences of Sudanese students during the 2024–2025 academic year, this research explores how social media fosters learner motivation, collaboration, and engagement in and beyond the classroom.

Using a mixed-methods approach, this study examines measurable learning outcomes and captures the personal and communal dimensions of language learning in digital spaces. It aims to understand how the integration of social media might redefine traditional pedagogies and contribute to more dynamic, student-centered English language instruction in Sudanese universities.

1.1 Background of the Study

As digital interaction becomes increasingly integrated into daily life, the educational landscape is transforming significantly. Traditional approaches to language learning, once centered around textbooks and classroom instruction, are giving way to dynamic, tech-driven methods. Social media platforms such as WhatsApp, YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok have emerged as rich, interactive environments that provide English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners access to authentic content, immediate peer feedback, and immersive language experiences.

These platforms offer a diverse range of multimodal resources and real-time communication opportunities that promote deeper language learning. Drawing on constructivist learning theory, this shift encourages learner autonomy, collaborative interactions, and experiential engagement. The classroom has expanded into digital spaces where students no longer learn in isolation but become active participants in global learning communities, gradually building their linguistic confidence through everyday use.

1.2 Statement of the Study

Despite the global prevalence of social media in educational settings, its application in Sudanese higher education, particularly in the area of language acquisition, remains underutilized. At Nile Valley University, students face persistent challenges such as limited access to authentic English

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content, low levels of classroom interaction, and a lack of motivation. This study seeks to determine whether social media can address these challenges by creating a more engaging, interactive, and inclusive environment for EFL learners.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

- To examine how third-year EFL students at Nile Valley University utilize social media as a tool for English language learning.
- To identify the specific platforms and digital activities that most effectively support language skill development.
- To evaluate students' perceptions of the influence of social media on motivation, vocabulary acquisition, grammatical accuracy, and overall fluency.

1.4 Questions of the Study

-What is the frequency of social media use among students for English language learning?

Which platforms and types of engagement contribute most to language perception?

How do students perceive the effectiveness of these tools in their language perception?

Is there evidence of measurable proficiency gains associated with social media use?

1.5 Significances of the Study

This study contributes to the growing discourse on the integration of digital technologies in language education. It offers insights not only for academics and policymakers but also for educators and learners seeking innovative approaches to English language instruction. By examining the educational potential of social media, the study aims to inform institutional strategies that promote learner autonomy, inclusivity, and academic growth-both within Sudan and in broader educational contexts

2. Literature Review

The accelerated growth of digital technologies has profoundly influenced the global landscape of language education. What was once peripheral—social media—has now become central to students' academic routines, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. Recent scholarship emphasizes that social platforms are not merely tools for casual interaction but serve as dynamic spaces for collaborative learning and increased student engagement (Manca & Ranieri, 2016; Benek, 2025). These technologies enhance access to authentic language input and foster learner confidence, especially in settings where traditional resources are limited.

In EFL education, the pedagogical potential of social media has garnered increasing attention. Platforms such as YouTube, WhatsApp, and Facebook have been shown to support vocabulary development, listening comprehension, and cultural awareness (Chen & Shu, 2024; Alkamel, 2024). For instance, studies among Saudi and Algerian learners reveal that mobile-based interactions and social media engagement significantly improve spoken fluency and learner

autonomy (Idries & AbdAlgane, 2024; Belhouchet, 2025). These findings suggest that informal digital environments can transform learners from passive recipients of content into active participants in global communication.

However, research focused on African and Arab regions—particularly Sudan—remains limited. Elbashir (2025) and Roy & Gandhimathi (2025) highlight the growing use of mobile-assisted language learning tools but stress the need for localized studies that account for infrastructural disparities. In Sudanese universities, where internet access and digital infrastructure vary widely, students often turn to platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook to supplement their learning. These tools provide immediate peer feedback, foster collaboration, and reignite motivation among learners who may feel disconnected from conventional classroom practices.

This pedagogical shift aligns with constructivist learning theory, which emphasizes the role of social interaction and contextualized experience in cognitive development (Vygotsky, 1978). Social media naturally supports this framework by enabling learner autonomy, facilitating shared knowledge creation, and exposing students to diverse linguistic and cultural contexts. Activities such as commenting, engaging with native speakers, and participating in online discussions are now integral to the language learning process.

Despite these advantages, challenges persist. Junco (2012) cautions that without intentional integration, social media may lead to distraction and superficial engagement. Additional concerns include misinformation, unequal access, and inconsistent digital literacy. As such, there is a pressing need for well-structured digital learning strategies that address local constraints while aligning with broader educational innovations (Devasena et al., 2025; Kadel & Tiwari, 2025).

This study builds upon existing literature by examining the lived experiences of Sudanese EFL students who use social media as part of their learning journey. Rather than focusing solely on outcomes, it seeks to understand how these platforms shape daily academic practices, contributing to a more inclusive and context-sensitive vision of digital pedagogy in higher education.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

In seeking to understand how social media transforms language learning, this study embraced a mixed-methods case study approach, not simply to quantify outcomes but to listen deeply to students' voices and trace the ripple effects of digital engagement in their academic lives. By blending structured data with lived stories, this research captured both the measurable and the meaningful, reflecting the realities of third-level EFL learners at Nile Valley University during the 2024–2025 academic year.

3.2 Participants

This study focused on third-level EFL students in the Faculty of Education. Stratified random sampling ensured that diverse learners across gender, achievement levels, and language confidence were represented. A total of 120 students participated in the survey, and five dedicated EFL instructors shared insights from their teaching practices, creating a rich tapestry of experiences and expertise.

3.3 Instruments

To account both the numbers and narratives, three core tools were used:

- A structured questionnaire was carefully designed to capture how often, why, and through which platforms students engaged in language learning.

Semi-structured interviews invited students and instructors to speak candidly about their experiences, challenges, and hopes.

An observation checklist captured real-time classroom dynamics, noting how students interacted when social media became part of their learning environment.

3.4 Data Collection Procedures

Surveys were administered electronically via Google Forms to ensure access and comfort for the participants.

Interviews were conducted face-to-face in respectful and conversational settings and recorded with consent.

- Observations spanned four weeks and focused on sessions where digital tools were integrated, watching how learning unfolded moment by moment.(See Appendix D and E)

4. Data Analysis

- Quantitative responses were processed using SPSS software, generating descriptive statistics and exploring relationships through t-tests and ANOVA.

Qualitative narratives were transcribed, coded, and examined using NVivo, revealing themes around motivation, voice, curiosity, and connection.

Ethical Considerations

In every step, the dignity and privacy of the participants were upheld.

Informed consent was obtained from all participants.

- Data were anonymized and confidentiality was maintained.

Ethical approval was granted by the Nile Valley University Research Ethics Committee, reinforcing the study's integrity and trustworthiness.

5. Results

5.1 Digital Presence with Purpose

The data illuminated a compelling truth: social media is far more than a passing distraction for Nile Valley University's EFL learners; it is a vibrant part of their academic rhythm.

A strong majority (87 %) reported daily use, not just for entertainment but also for meaningful interaction with English content. Platforms like: WhatsApp (92%), YouTube (78%), Facebook (65%)

Table 1: Social media platforms among EFL Students

Social media platform	Percentage of students usage(%)
WhatsApp	92%
YouTube	78%
Facebook	65%

emerged as digital companions in their journey, shaping how they learn, connect with others, and express themselves.

Students shared stories of WhatsApp groups alive with vocabulary exchanges, spontaneous grammar help, and even late-night audio messages practicing pronunciation in the target language. YouTube has become a bridge to real-world English, and Facebook has transformed into a community for reading and reflection.

5.2 Language Gains Rooted in Engagement

When asked how social media impacted their skills, the students responded confidently.

- 82% noticed a richer vocabulary.
- 76% felt more attuned to listening.
- 69% spoke with greater fluency than before.
- 58% saw improvement in grammar.

Teachers echoed these perceptions, describing learners who once hesitated to volunteer answers, embrace speaking tasks, and dare to make mistakes, knowing that they were learning.

Table 2: Improvement percentages for various English language skills among EFL students

Skill Area	Reported Improvement (%)
Vocabulary Acquisition	82%
Listening Comprehension	76%
Speaking Fluency	69%
Grammar Usage	58%

5.3 Transformation Inside the Classroom

Four weeks of observation revealed that when social media was introduced into the lesson, something shifted.

Silent learners have found their voices. Group chats spilled over into live discussions. WhatsApp became a warm-up before class, and YouTube clips sparked spontaneous debates.

Teachers described classrooms where curiosity replaced hesitation and student-led learning began to bloom.

5.4 Numbers That Tell a Story

Statistical analysis did not just validate these changes; it celebrated them.

A paired-sample t-test revealed a significant improvement in overall language proficiency ($p < 0.05$) among students who used social media as part of their learning toolkit.

Those spending ≥ 5 hours per week showed even higher gains, indicating a strong link between frequency and impact.

6. Discussion

The integration of social media into EFL learning at Nile Valley University reveals a dynamic shift in how students engage with language acquisition. The data underscores that platforms like WhatsApp (92%), YouTube (78%), and Facebook (65%) are not merely recreational tools but have evolved into informal learning environments that support linguistic development.

6.1 Social Media as a Learning Ecosystem

The overwhelming daily usage (87%) of social media among students highlights its embedded role in their academic lives. WhatsApp groups facilitated peer-to-peer vocabulary exchanges and pronunciation practice, while YouTube offered authentic listening experiences and Facebook fostered reflective reading and community interaction. These platforms collectively created a rich, multimodal learning ecosystem.

6.2 Language Skill Development

Students reported notable improvements across key language domains:

1. Vocabulary Acquisition: 82%

2. Listening Comprehension: 76%

3. Speaking Fluency: 69%

4. Grammar Usage: 58%

These self-reported gains were echoed by instructors, who observed increased student participation, confidence, and willingness to engage in speaking tasks. The transformation was

particularly evident in classroom dynamics, where formerly passive learners became active contributors, and digital interactions spilled into face-to-face discussions.

6.3 Statistical Validation

Quantitative analysis using a paired-sample t-test confirmed a statistically significant improvement in overall language proficiency ($p < 0.05$). Furthermore, students who engaged with social media for ≥ 5 hours per week demonstrated even greater proficiency gains, reinforcing the positive correlation between usage frequency and learning outcomes.

7. Recommendations

To maximize the positive impact of social media on EFL learning at Nile Valley University and similar institutions, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Curriculum Integration of Social Media Tools

Embed platforms like WhatsApp, YouTube, and Facebook into lesson plans and assignments. Design

activities that leverage these platforms for vocabulary building, listening practice, and speaking fluency.

2. Teacher Training and Digital Pedagogy

Conduct workshops to equip instructors with strategies for using social media effectively in language instruction. Encourage teachers to moderate online discussions, share curated content, and guide students in digital literacy.

3. Institutional Policy Reform

Develop formal guidelines for the academic use of social media, ensuring ethical and productive engagement. Recognize digital participation as a legitimate component of language learning assessment.

4. Student-Led Initiatives and Peer Collaboration

Support student-created WhatsApp groups, YouTube playlists, and Facebook forums focused on language practice. Encourage peer mentoring and collaborative learning through digital platforms.

5. Monitoring and Evaluation

Implement regular feedback mechanisms to assess the effectiveness of social media integration. Use tools like SPSS and NVivo to track progress and refine strategies based on data-driven insights.

6. Time Management and Usage Awareness

Promote balanced usage by encouraging students to dedicate at least 5 hours per week to purposeful language learning via social media, as higher engagement correlated with stronger proficiency gains.

These recommendations aim to transform informal digital habits into structured, impactful learning experiences—bridging the gap between traditional instruction and modern student behavior.

8. Conclusion

This study affirms that social media, when purposefully integrated into EFL learning, serves as a powerful catalyst for language development. The platforms not only enhance vocabulary, listening, and speaking skills but also foster learner autonomy, motivation, and peer collaboration.

Key takeaways include:

- 1.WhatsApp as a real-time practice tool and peer support hub.
- 2.YouTube as a gateway to authentic English exposure.
- 3.Facebook as a reflective and community-driven space.

The findings advocate for the structured inclusion of digital tools in the EFL curriculum, supported by:

- 1.Teacher training to harness social media pedagogically.
- 2.Institutional policy reform to legitimize and guide digital integration.

By embracing the digital habits of students, educators can transform informal engagement into formal learning gains—making language education more relevant, interactive, and effective in the 21st century.

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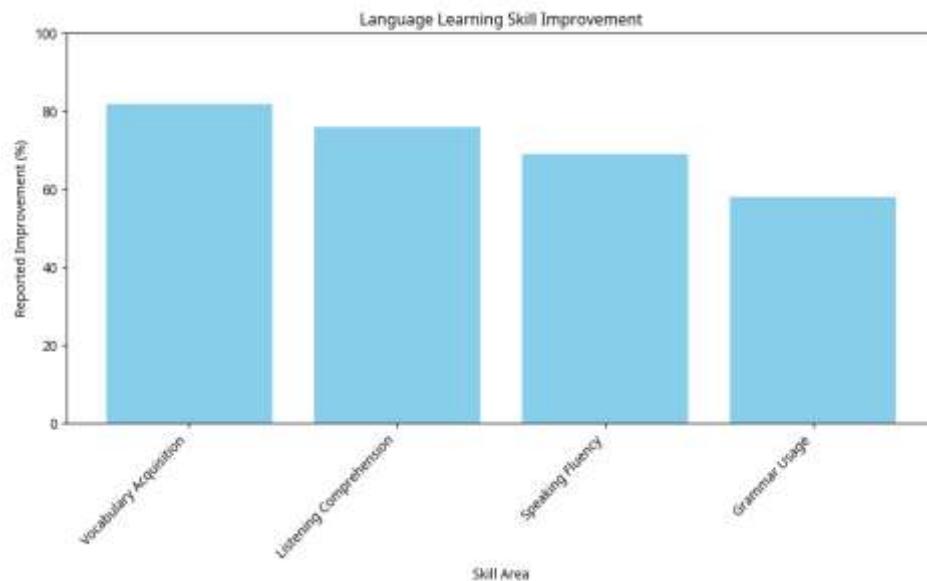
Appendices

Appendix A:

Improvement percentages for various English language skills among EFL students

Skill Area	Reported Improvement (%)
Vocabulary Acquisition	82%
Listening Comprehension	76%
Speaking Fluency	69%
Grammar Usage	58%

Figure A

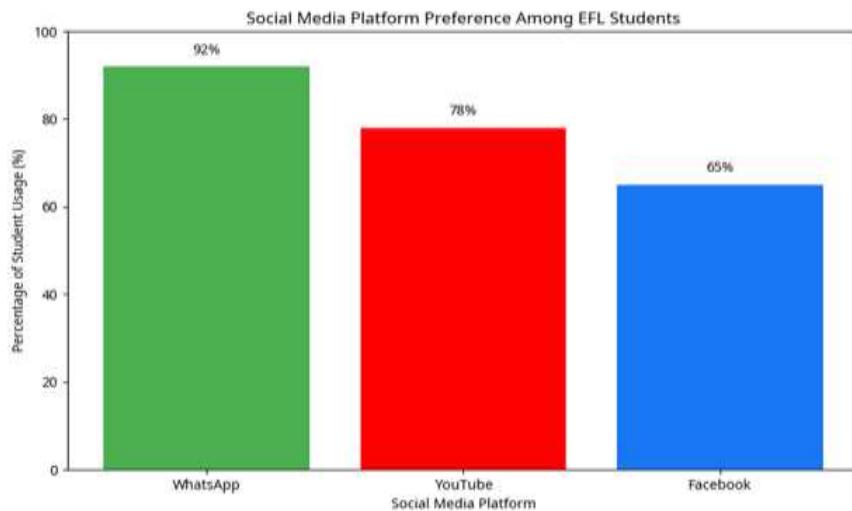


Appendix B:

Social media platforms among EFL Students

Social media platform	Percentage of students usage(%)
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Figure B

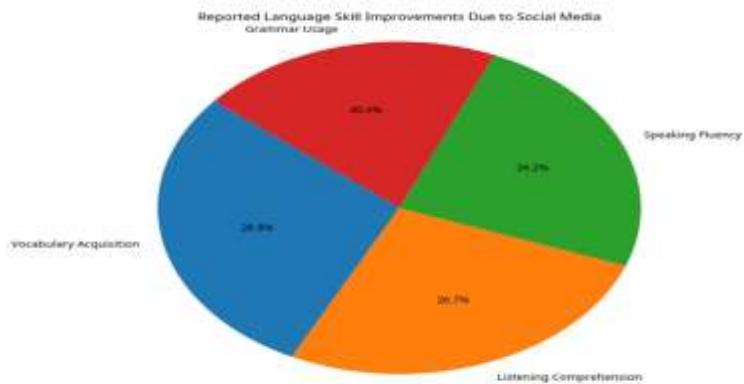


Appendix C:

Language Skill Improvement Due to Social media Grammar usage

Skill Area	Reported Improvement
Vocabulary Acquisition	28%
Listening Comprehension	26%
Speaking Fluency	24%
Grammar Usage	20%

Figure C



Appendix D:

The Questionnaire

Appendix D The Questionnaire