

SELF-DIRECTED ENGLISH LEARNING THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

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Submitted: 2024-12-16

Accepted: 2025-04-23

Abstract: This paper presents a systematic literature review of studies on self-directed English learning through social media. Using the Systematic Literature Review method, data were gathered from three prominent journal databases: Scopus, Google Scholar, and Emerald Insight. The search strategy targeted publications from 2020 to June 11, 2024, selecting 32 relevant studies for analysis. The review identifies thirteen social media platforms, with YouTube, Instagram, and WhatsApp emerging as the most widely used. It explores how students engage in various learning activities, including following educational accounts, watching English videos, and participating in discussions. The findings underscore the significant benefits of integrating social media into self-directed English learning, such as improved language skills, enhanced engagement, and flexible learning opportunities. However, the review also highlights challenges such as distractions and privacy concerns, emphasizing the importance of educators and policymakers in developing strategies to address these issues. By promoting digital literacy and providing guidance and support, educators can help students overcome these challenges and optimize their use of social media for effective self-directed English learning.

Keywords: English learning; self-directed learning; social media; systematic literature review

INTRODUCTION

Learning independence is one of the primary keys to achieving success in education. A crucial method to foster this independence is Self-Directed Learning, where students acquire the skills to take initiative and responsibility for managing their own learning process. The term 'self-directed learning' was first coined by Malcolm Knowles, and it remains the most widely adopted definition. According to Knowles (1975), Self-Directed Learning is a process in which individuals, with or without help from others, assess their own learning needs, set learning goals, identify necessary human and material resources, choose appropriate learning strategies, and evaluate the outcomes of their learning. In today's educational landscape, especially in the context of digital learning, Self-Directed Learning (SDL, henceforth) has gained even more significance. The rapid shift to online and blended learning environments, especially post-pandemic, has made it increasingly important for students to be able to take charge of their own learning. With more learning happening outside the traditional classroom, SDL empowers students to be more adaptable and self-reliant in their educational journey.

A key resource for implementing SDL in the digital age is social media. As a rapidly growing form of online communication, social media has transformed young people's lifestyles, including how they approach learning (Ansari & Khan, 2020). The use of social media is not only for

socializing but has also penetrated the realm of education, including English language learning. According to Dabbagh & Kitsantas (2012), social media enables learning that is more personalized and suited to individual needs, which is at the core of learning independence.

Although much literature has explored the potential of social media for self-directed English language learning, many studies focus exclusively on specific social media platforms. To address this gap, this study systematically analyzes recent literature to explore the broader role of social media in supporting SDL for English language learning. This paper aims to answer the following research questions: 1) What types of social media are used by the students for self-directed English learning?, 2) How do students utilize social media platforms to support their self-directed English learning?, 3) What are the benefits and challenges of using social media for self-directed English learning?

METHOD

This research utilized a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) technique. The researchers followed the SLR method described by Lopes et al. (2019), with three phases in finding the final suitable literature: planning, operation, and dissemination (see Figure 1).

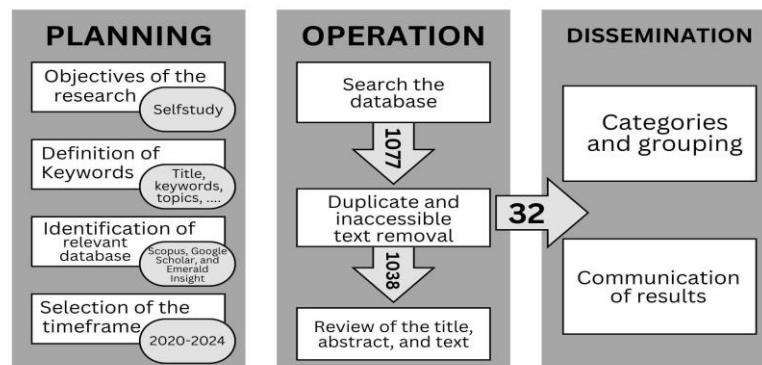


Figure 1. Phases in deciding final suitable literature

Only the papers retrieved from Scopus, Google Scholar, and Emerald Insight published between January 1, 2020, to June 11, 2024 (the date of the search), whose texts were available in the institutional repositories were considered. The selection of the three databases was based on their respective strengths: Scopus was chosen for its authoritative coverage of academic research, Google Scholar for its extensive repository of scholarly materials, particularly those not indexed in Scopus, and Emerald Insight for its high-quality articles, particularly in the field of education. The time frame of 2020–2024 was chosen to focus on the most recent studies. This period also aligns with significant shifts in digital learning practices, particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic, which accelerated the use of social media for SDL.

Table 1. Search terms and the number of papers retrieved.

Database	Search Terms	Results
Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY (Self-directed OR SDL AND English Learn* AND Social Media)	9
Google Scholar	Keywords: “Self-directed OR SDL AND English Learn* AND Social Media”	1000
Emerald Insight	Keywords: Self-directed English Learning through Social Media	68
Total		1077

Initially, 1077 papers were retrieved as shown in Table 1. After removing the duplicate entries, the total number of papers was 1070. During the title, abstract, and text screening process, relevance was determined using a clearly defined set of inclusion criteria, following the structured phases depicted in Figure 1. Studies were excluded if they did not serve the themes of SDL, English learning, social media, or if they were deemed irrelevant to the research questions. This process resulting in the exclusion of 1,038 papers. Only those that aligned closely with the research scope were retained for further analysis, leading to the final selection of 32 papers.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Types of Social Media Used by the Students for Self-directed English Learning

Students engage with various types of social media platforms for independent English learning, with each platform serving different purposes based on its unique features. These platforms can be categorized into video-based platforms, messaging apps, microblogging platforms, and other specialized platforms.

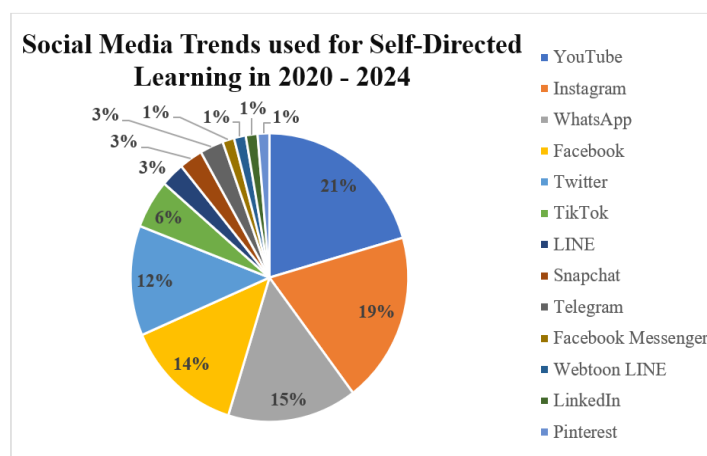


Figure 2. Social media platforms utilized by students for self-directed English learning.

Among the video-based platforms, YouTube is the most frequently mentioned, as it provides an extensive array of learning videos and tutorials, making it a highly effective tool for enhancing language skills. This has been confirmed by multiple studies, with students particularly appreciating its versatility and rich content for SDL (Akpan & Chayanuvat, 2022; Andini et al.,

2024; Ariantini et al., 2021; Dabamona & Yunus, 2022; Dincer, 2020; Ghimire, 2022; Hamdi, 2023; Maulina et al., 2022; Mohamad et al., 2023; Nasution, 2022; Nazmunissa & Rachman, 2021; Safitri et al., 2022; Tyas, 2022; Umamah & Cahyono, 2022; Widiantari et al., 2023). Similarly, TikTok is rapidly gaining popularity for its short, engaging videos, which combine entertainment with educational value, making it appealing to students who enjoy quick and fun learning experiences (Andini et al., 2024; Hamdi, 2023; Umamah & Cahyono, 2022; Yang, 2020).

In addition to video-based platforms, messaging apps like WhatsApp remain widely used for text-based communication. WhatsApp's role in fostering collaborative learning environments is critical, as it allows students to engage in group discussions, exchange ideas, and share content, making it a vital tool for peer-to-peer learning (Ariantini et al., 2021; Bin-Hady & Al-Tamimi, 2021; Hamdi, 2023; Lakhal, 2021; Maulina et al., 2022; Muftah, 2022; Muhammad & Nagaletchimee, 2023; Nasution, 2022; Safitri et al., 2022; Umamah & Cahyono, 2022). Platforms like Telegram and LINE also contribute to text-based communication but are used less frequently, perhaps due to their additional features such as file sharing and larger group capabilities, which are not always necessary for language learning (Akpan & Chayanuvat, 2022; Hamdi, 2023; Maulina et al., 2022).

When it comes to microblogging platforms, Instagram ranks as the second most popular platform. Students use Instagram primarily to follow educational accounts that offer visually engaging formats, such as vocabulary tips, daily phrases, and grammar lessons. These formats are highly appealing to students due to their visual and interactive nature (Agustin & Ayu, 2021; Akpan & Chayanuvat, 2022; Andini et al., 2024; Ariantini et al., 2021; Dincer, 2020; Hamdi, 2023; Maulina et al., 2022; Mohamad et al., 2023; Muzakky, 2023; Nasution, 2022; Safitri et al., 2022; Sitorus, 2023; Thedpitak & Somphong, 2021; Umamah & Cahyono, 2022). Twitter, on the other hand, is mainly used for sharing quick English tips, new vocabulary, and engaging with educational hashtags that allow students to participate in discussions and discover new resources (Aloraini & Cardoso, 2020; Andini et al., 2024; Ariantini et al., 2021; Husnaini, 2023; Lakhal, 2021; Malik & Haidar, 2020; Maulina et al., 2022; Melliyan & Mardiyati, 2022; Muftah, 2022).

While video-based platforms, messaging apps, and microblogging platforms dominate students' SDL strategies, other specialized platforms still play a role, albeit with less frequency. Facebook remains a popular choice for many students due to its community-building features and the ability to join educational groups where learners can interact, ask questions, and share knowledge (Akpan & Chayanuvat, 2022; Ariantini et al., 2021; Ghimire, 2022; Hamdi, 2023; Lakhal, 2021; Maulina et al., 2022; Muftah, 2022; Nasution, 2022; Thedpitak & Somphong, 2021; Umamah & Cahyono, 2022). However, LinkedIn, which focuses on professional content, is used less frequently for English learning, likely because it is geared more towards career development

and professional networking than informal learning (Maulina et al., 2022). Similarly, Pinterest is mainly used for saving learning materials such as infographics, articles, and study resources, but it does not serve as an interactive learning platform, which may explain why it is less frequently used for direct language engagement (Maulina et al., 2022). Lastly, Webtoon LINE, although mentioned in some studies, is a less frequently used platform. It is mainly utilized for accessing English-language comics and stories, which, while providing exposure to the language, do not engage students in the same way as dedicated educational platforms (Erya & Pustika, 2021).

Students' utilization of social media platforms to support their self-directed English learning

While some of the literature chosen for this review do not explicitly mention SDL, however, upon careful examination, the 32 articles meet the conditions for assuming that the learning process in question is independent learning of English outside the formal classroom. The following are the ways students use social media for their English SDL process.

Firstly, students are following as well as subscribing to the accounts that provide knowledge of English (Ariantini et al., 202; Dabamona & Yunus, 2022; and Pitaloka et al., 2021). By following these accounts, students will regularly get educational content on their feeds. This consistency helps keep students engaged in the learning process and ensures they continue to receive new English input. The next concluded finding is that social media influence students' English independent learning by enabling them to watch English video contents that lead to engaging discussions with other viewers (Agustin & Ayu, 2021; Akpan & Chyanuvat, 2022; Dincer, 2020; Maulina et al., 2022; Muzakky, 2023; Pitaloka et al., 2021; Widiantari et.al., 2023). After watching the video, students often engage in discussion through the comment section (Hamdi, 2023; Sidgi, 2021). This enables them to ask questions, share their opinions, or give responses to the content they watched. Those processes illustrate how SDL makes students play an active role in the wider community of learners.

Another finding is regarding English use in interactions to make connections. Students are found interacting with natives (Akpan & Chyanuvat, 2022; Bin-Hady & Al-Tamimi, 2021; Pitaloka et al., 2021) and non-native speakers using English verbally and in writing (Maulina et al., 2022). In their study, Malik and Haidar (2020) revealed that the students join in written interactions on Twitter by utilizing hashtag trends and engaging in various other activities by using English. Furthermore, Husnaini (2023) reported that the students through Twitter Auto-base discuss with other users if there are difficulties in learning English, and help others to solve their problems by replying to their questions so that interactions occur. Besides, students are found to join live Question-and-answer videos with native speakers on TikTok (Hamdi, 2023). In spoken interactions, students speak with native speakers privately or publicly on WhatsApp as they are members of the same groups (Bin-Hady & Al-Tamimi, 2021).

Students also make English-language posts on social media accounts. The students make posts to share information, media, and materials, as well as submit their assignments (Ariantini et al., 2021). When making posts on social media accounts, students usually use English for the captions (Agustin & Ayu, 2021), which leads them to practice writing. Students also read English posts from mutuals (Akpan & Chayanuvat, 2022; Pitaloka et al., 2021; Umamah & Cahyono, 2022), thus enhancing their English reading time.

Benefits and Challenges in Using Social Media for Self-directed English Learning

Based on the literature review, social media use for self-directed English learning offers numerous benefits, starting with improvements in various language skills. Students using social media platforms have reported enhanced vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and spelling abilities (Ariantini et al., 2021; Hamdi, 2023; Malik & Haidar, 2020; Muhammad & Nagaletchimee, 2023). Specifically, Twitter and Instagram were noted for helping students learn pronunciation and prepare for the TOEFL (Muzakky, 2023).

After that, the platforms make the learning process engaging, enjoyable, and fun (Akpan, 2021; Hamdi, 2023; Nasution, 2022; Safitri et al., 2022). The interactive nature of these platforms contributes to the enjoyment, making students more inclined to use them (Hamdi, 2023; Nasution, 2022). To add to that, the practicality and convenience of social media make it an attractive tool for learning English (Hamdi, 2023; Maulina et al., 2022). A study by Husnaini (2023) found that EFL high school students prefer using the auto-base @englishfess_ on Twitter for learning English due to its simplicity, enjoyment, and the abundance of resources available. Muftah (2022) also notes that many students have an interest in using social media for education as it facilitates interaction among learning groups, enhancing the convenience of the learning process. Additionally, social media platforms offer the flexibility to learn anytime, anywhere, allowing students to learn at their own pace (Dincer, 2020; Hamdi, 2023; Melliyanı & Mardiyati, 2022; Muhammad & Nagaletchimee, 2023; Nasution, 2022; Sidgi, 2021). On top of that, students can access high-quality content based on their preferences and repeat them as needed (Dincer, 2020), allowing students to regulate their learning experiences and tailor them to their individual needs (Mohamad et al., 2023; Umamah & Cahyono, 2022; Yang, 2020).

An authentic and interactive learning environment is another benefit of using social media for self-directed English learning. These platforms create a setting where students can practice the language in real-life contexts, which is essential for mastering colloquialisms and expressions not typically taught in classrooms (Dincer, 2020; Pitaloka et al., 2021; Sidgi, 2021; Thedpitak & Somphong, 2021). In addition, platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook encourage interactions that often involve native speakers, lead to enhancing cultural understanding and learning (Muhammad & Nagaletchimee, 2023; Nasution, 2022), also recognizing and practicing English

with different accents (Pitaloka et al., 2021). Students' confidence in using English is also boosted by the supportive environment and interactive nature of social media (Hamdi, 2023; Safitri et al., 2022). Since the use of social media fosters higher engagement and motivation among students, it improve their overall learning experience (Ariantini et al., 2021; Nasution, 2022; Thedpitak & Somphong, 2021).

Despite the many benefits offered by social media usage for SDL, some studies also reported how challenges are prevalent in the situation. During the use of social media as a source of study, students are often distracted by entertainment content, notifications, and pop-ups, causing a lack of focus (Bowles, 2024; Hamdi, 2023; Malik & Haidar, 2020; Muzakky, 2023; Nasution, 2022; Safitri et al., 2022). It is in line with Nasution (2022) who argues that students may struggle in time management when using social media platforms for education. Another issue is English learning materials are often non-specific, jumbled, and lacking in detail, making them difficult for students to follow (Andini et al., 2024). Moreover, the overwhelming abundance of information requires students to be highly selective when searching for useful content (Melliyani & Mardiyati, 2022). Concerns about privacy, data security, and the invasion of social space also interfere with the effective use of social media for educational purposes (Aloraini & Cardoso, 2020; Nasution, 2022; Safitri et al., 2022). Technical and resource limitations present other challenges. Students often experience problems connecting to the internet, leading to unequal access to learning opportunities (Hamdi, 2023; Nasution, 2022; Nazmunissa & Rachman, 2021). Lack of technological knowledge also prevents students from optimizing social media for learning (Umamah & Cahyono, 2022). In this case, students highlight the need for guidance and support, particularly in managing digital distractions and device usage, even when performing SDL methods (Tyas, 2022; Bowles, 2024). External factors, like parental attitudes, further complicate the situation, with some parents prohibiting social media use (Ghimire, 2022). In addition, the presence of inappropriate content, fake accounts, and offensive language can distract and negatively impact students' focus and motivation (Malik & Haidar, 2020; Muzakky, 2023).

CONCLUSION

The evolution of technology has leverage the use of digital tools to help students perform SDL through social media. The findings revealed that there are thirteen types of social media that the students use in English SDL, that involve YouTube, Instagram, WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, TikTok, LINE, Snapchat, Telegram, Facebook Messenger, Webtoon LINE, LinkedIn, and Pinterest. Students use social media for SDL by subscribing to accounts that provide knowledge of English, watching English videos followed by engaging in discussions with other viewers through the comment section, using English in interactions to make connections, as well as making posts using English. Social media provides significant benefits for self-directed English

learning, including improved language skills, enhanced engagement and enjoyment, greater flexibility, providing an authentic and interactive learning environment, and confidence-boosting. Nevertheless, several challenges also presents when using social media for SDL, namely distractions and time management issues, content quality challenges, privacy and security concerns, technical and resource limitations, guidance and support needs, external factors, and content appropriateness challanges. Addressing these challenges is crucial for optimizing the use of social media for English self-directed learning.

In terms of future research, longitudinal studies could provide valuable insights into the long-term impact of using social media for English SDL, particularly in assessing how students' language skills evolve over time. Additionally, platform-specific studies could identify the unique strengths and challenges of individual social media platforms, which would allow educators and students to make more informed decisions about which platforms to use based on their specific learning needs. Digital literacy also emerges as a crucial area for further investigation. As students rely more on social media for independent learning, understanding how to critically assess and navigate the vast amount of content available online becomes essential. Educators play a vital role in helping students develop these skills by guiding them to evaluate the quality and reliability of the content they encounter. By addressing these areas in future research, both educators and students can better utilize social media to maximize its potential for self-directed English learning.

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