# Social Media as a Source of Linguistic Input in Second Language Acquisition among Sixth-Semester Students at FBMB UNDIKMA

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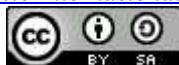[12]English Education Department, FBMB UNDIKMA

| Article Info | Abstract |
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| *Article history:*<br>Received: 17 May 2025<br>Publish: 1 July 2025<br><br><br>*Keywords:*<br>*Second Language Acquisition;*<br>*Linguistic Input, Social Media;*<br>*Informal Learning;*<br>*Digital Literacy;*<br>*English Education.* | *This study explores how social media contributes to second language acquisition (SLA), focusing on sixth-semester English education students at FBMB UNDIKMA. Using a mixed-methods approach, the research gathered data through surveys and interviews to understand how students interact with English-language content on platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok. The quantitative results showed a clear connection between how often students used social media and how much they felt their vocabulary and grammar had improved. Meanwhile, the qualitative findings painted a richer picture: students often picked up new vocabulary by accident, became more attuned to grammar use, and felt more motivated to engage with the language. These findings are consistent with well-established SLA theories, such as Krashen's Input Hypothesis and Schmidt's Noticing Hypothesis, which emphasize the value of exposure and awareness in language learning. Overall, the study suggests that social media, while informal, can effectively complement classroom learning—especially when teachers recognize and incorporate students' existing digital habits into their teaching practices.*<br> |

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In today's highly connected world, social media plays a central role in how people communicate, share, and even learn—especially when it comes to acquiring new languages. Platforms like Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, and what was formerly Twitter (now X) have transformed the way learners, particularly those studying English as a foreign language (EFL), access authentic linguistic input. For many students in countries where English is not the primary language—such as Indonesia—exposure to natural, everyday English can be limited in formal classrooms. As a result, students increasingly turn to digital platforms where English is present in real-life contexts, whether they're consciously studying or simply engaging with content for entertainment (Kabilan et al., 2019; Soyoof et al., 2021).

The field of second language acquisition (SLA) has long emphasized the importance of exposure to meaningful input in language learning. One of the most influential theories, Krashen's Input Hypothesis, argues that learners need to receive input slightly beyond their current language ability to make progress (Krashen, 1982). Social media fits well into this idea. Its interactive, multimedia-rich environment allows learners to encounter English in ways that are relevant and personalized. Previous research has highlighted that social media offers language learners a wide variety of authentic input—from native speaker posts and videos to informal conversations and real-time comments (Sockett, 2014; Lai, 2017).

Unlike textbook-based input, this content is unscripted, spontaneous, and often more engaging.

What's especially interesting is that much of this learning happens incidentally. Students don't always set out to study English—but they pick up new vocabulary, improve their listening skills, and get a feel for how grammar works just by following content creators, watching subtitled videos, or reading comment threads (Perrin et al., 2020). For learners in the EFL context, where classroom time is limited and interaction with native speakers is rare, this kind of exposure can be extremely valuable.

In Indonesia's EFL landscape, this topic is especially relevant. While the formal education system provides structured instruction, students are actively supplementing their learning through informal engagement with English online. This helps bridge the gap between what is taught in classrooms and how English is actually used in the real world. It also supports the development of not just linguistic competence but cultural awareness and pragmatic skills (Jang et al., 2022). Sixth-semester students at the Faculty of Languages and Arts (FBMB), UNDIKMA, are particularly noteworthy in this regard. They are nearing the completion of their undergraduate studies and are often active on social media platforms where English is commonly used. As future English teachers, their experiences using English socially may also shape their teaching methods and attitudes toward language learning.

Despite the growing presence of social media in students' daily routines, there is still limited research on how Indonesian university students use these platforms specifically as sources of linguistic input. Much of the existing literature focuses on general internet use or learners' attitudes toward English, rather than examining the specific types of content students interact with or how that content might support language development. Moreover, students may spend hours on social media without necessarily noticing or internalizing the language being used. This raises an important question: Does all that time online actually help them acquire English, or is it mostly passive consumption? (Soyoof et al., 2021).

The kind of content students engage with also makes a difference. Watching vlogs or English tutorials offers different input than following meme accounts or scrolling through celebrity news. To truly understand the educational potential of social media, it's important to examine not just how often students use it, but what they use it for, and how it relates to their language learning goals (Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2016). Equally important is how students themselves perceive the value of social media in their learning. Do they see it as a helpful tool? Do they feel more motivated to learn because of it? Some studies suggest that learners find social media enjoyable and accessible, which can lead to more frequent exposure and, eventually, improvement in language skills (Lai, 2017; Jang et al., 2022).

Learner motivation and autonomy also play major roles. Students who are self-motivated to seek out English content outside of class tend to develop stronger language skills over time (Sockett, 2014). This aligns with a growing interest in promoting autonomous learning strategies in EFL education.

Understanding how students use social media for language learning can help educators create more relevant and engaging teaching approaches. If these platforms truly offer meaningful input, there may be ways to integrate them into the curriculum more deliberately. With this in mind, the present study seeks to explore how sixth-semester English education students at FBMB UNDIKMA use social media as a source of linguistic input. It aims to identify the platforms they prefer, the kinds of content they engage with, and the ways this input supports their development in English.

Ultimately, the findings of this study are expected to provide valuable insights for teachers, curriculum developers, and policymakers. As we continue to navigate the intersection of education and technology, it becomes increasingly important to understand

how informal learning spaces like social media can support formal second language acquisition in meaningful and sustainable ways.

## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopted a convergent mixed-methods design to explore how social media serves as a source of linguistic input in the process of second language acquisition (SLA) among sixth-semester students in the English Education Department of FBMB UNDIKMA. The decision to combine both quantitative and qualitative approaches was grounded in the need to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. This approach allowed the researchers to cross-validate the findings, add depth to the data interpretation, and enhance the credibility of the conclusions (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

The population of this study included all sixth-semester students from three classes in the English Department of FBMB UNDIKMA Department, comprising approximately 90 students. These students were selected because they had completed essential courses in linguistics and pedagogy, indicating a foundational competence in English. Moreover, their frequent use of social media platforms made them an appropriate group to examine the intersection between digital habits and language acquisition.

For the quantitative phase, a total sampling technique was employed, involving all students across the three classes. Meanwhile, the qualitative phase involved purposive sampling, where 12 students were selected based on their high frequency and diversity of social media use. This ensured that the qualitative data came from individuals with substantial engagement with English content on platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok.

Quantitative data were gathered through a structured questionnaire designed and adapted by the researchers based on previous studies examining digital language input (Lai, 2017; Jang et al., 2022). The questionnaire consisted of 25 items grouped into four key areas: (1) frequency and types of social media use, (2) linguistic features noticed during use (e.g., vocabulary, grammar), (3) perceived learning outcomes, and (4) motivation and attitudes toward learning via social media. Responses were rated on a five-point Likert scale from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." A pilot test was conducted with a different group of students to check for clarity and reliability. The instrument achieved a Cronbach's alpha of 0.86, indicating high internal consistency. In the qualitative phase, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the selected 12 students. These interviews aimed to uncover students' personal experiences, learning strategies, and perceptions regarding English exposure through social media. Guiding questions focused on the types of content they frequently engaged with—such as video clips, captions, and comments—and the specific aspects of language they believed they had learned through this exposure. Interviews were conducted in a mix of English and Bahasa Indonesia, depending on the participant's comfort, and lasted between 30 to 45 minutes. All sessions were recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

For data analysis, the quantitative responses were processed using SPSS Version 25. Descriptive statistics (means, frequencies, standard deviations) were used to summarize patterns in social media use, while Pearson correlation analysis was employed to investigate the relationship between social media engagement and perceived language gains. Qualitative data were examined through thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework. The transcribed interviews were manually coded to identify recurring themes, such as types of linguistic input noticed, instances of incidental learning, and motivational factors. The findings from the qualitative phase were then compared with

the quantitative results to uncover converging or diverging trends, enabling a more integrated interpretation of the data.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, multiple measures were implemented. The questionnaire was reviewed by experts for content validity, and its reliability was confirmed through pilot testing. In the qualitative phase, member checking was applied by allowing participants to review their interview transcripts. Furthermore, triangulation across data types helped to reinforce the accuracy and depth of the conclusions. All ethical considerations were addressed prior to and during the research process. Participants provided informed consent, and confidentiality was strictly maintained. Students were made aware of their right to withdraw from the study at any time. Ethical approval was secured from the institution's research ethics committee.

In summary, this research design allowed for a rich and layered understanding of how sixth-semester English Education students at FBMB UNDIKMA engage with social media as a source of linguistic input. By integrating statistical trends with personal narratives, the study aimed to capture both the scope and depth of informal language learning in today's digital environment.

## 3. RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION
### Quantitative Findings

The quantitative results show a clear trend: the majority of students—83%—reported that they engage with English-language content on social media daily. Among the platforms they used most frequently, YouTube ranked highest (92%), followed by Instagram (76%) and TikTok (65%). When asked about their reasons for using these platforms in English, students cited a range of motivations. The most common was entertainment (58%), followed by learning purposes (27%), and communication with peers or influencers (15%).

To explore the relationship between this usage and perceived language development, a Pearson correlation analysis was conducted. The findings revealed a moderate positive correlation between the frequency of using social media in English and students' self-reported improvement in vocabulary ($r = 0.56$, $p < 0.01$). Similarly, there was a statistically significant correlation between social media engagement and improved grammar awareness ($r = 0.48$, $p < 0.01$). These results suggest that social media serves as a valuable supplementary source of linguistic input, particularly in informal learning settings outside the classroom.

### Qualitative Findings

The qualitative phase of this study offered valuable insights into how students experience and interpret their English learning through social media. Through in-depth interviews with 12 sixth-semester students, four central themes were identified: incidental vocabulary learning, grammatical intuition, authentic input exposure, and increased motivation and confidence. Each of these themes highlights the nuanced ways in which informal digital environments can support second language development.

First, incidental vocabulary acquisition emerged as a prominent theme across interviews. Students frequently reported learning new words and expressions simply by engaging with content such as short videos, memes, video captions, and comments sections. They described instances where repeated exposure to certain terms led them to understand and eventually adopt those words into their active vocabulary. For example, one participant mentioned, *"I didn't plan to learn new words, but after seeing the word 'cringe' so many times on Instagram and TikTok, I started using it naturally in my own conversations."* This incidental learning aligns with the idea that vocabulary acquisition can occur in a

subconscious and effortless manner, especially when learners are immersed in enjoyable, meaningful contexts.

The second theme that emerged was the development of grammatical intuition. Rather than learning grammar rules through explicit instruction, students reported developing a sense of what "sounds right" through repeated exposure to sentence patterns in native-speaker content. Several participants noted that, while they could not always articulate the grammatical rule, they had developed an intuitive grasp of structure and usage. One student explained, *"I don't always remember the grammar rule, but I just know something is correct because I've seen it so often on YouTube."* This reflects a naturalistic learning process, where learners internalize grammar implicitly through exposure and pattern recognition—consistent with the way children acquire language in immersion environments.

The third theme centered around students' appreciation for the authenticity of the language input they encountered on social media. Unlike textbook dialogues or scripted classroom exercises, content on platforms like YouTube and TikTok was perceived as spontaneous, real, and culturally rich. Students highlighted their exposure to slang, idioms, and pragmatic expressions that would rarely appear in formal learning materials. They noted how these expressions helped them better understand real-life conversations and cultural nuances. One participant shared, *"From watching English vlogs, I learned how people really talk—not just the formal sentences we learn in class."* This kind of input, rooted in real-world usage, was seen as both engaging and educational, fostering not just linguistic growth but also intercultural awareness.

Finally, a strong sense of motivation and increased confidence was expressed by many of the interviewees. Learning through social media was described as enjoyable and self-directed, which made the process feel less like a task and more like a personal interest. Students felt empowered by the freedom to choose what content to engage with, and many said they felt more confident using English after regularly consuming it in casual, digital environments. One student remarked, *"Watching English content on social media doesn't feel like studying. It's something I enjoy, and I notice that my English has improved because I do it every day."* This reflects the importance of learner autonomy and emotional engagement in language learning, elements that are often underemphasized in formal settings but are central to sustained acquisition.

Overall, the qualitative findings deepen our understanding of how social media can function as a meaningful and motivating source of linguistic input. Students are not only encountering language, but actively internalizing and applying it—often without conscious effort. Their experiences suggest that social media, when used with intention, can bridge the gap between formal instruction and authentic language use in ways that are both effective and enjoyable.

## 4. CONCLUSION AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS
### Conclusion

This study set out to explore how social media platforms function as a meaningful source of linguistic input for sixth-semester students in the English Education Department at FBMB UNDIKMA. What emerged from the research was a nuanced picture of how students engage with platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok—not just for entertainment, but as informal learning spaces where English is encountered, absorbed, and, in many cases, actively processed.

Quantitative findings pointed to a moderate but significant correlation between students' frequency of English-language social media use and their perceived improvements in vocabulary and grammar. These insights were further enriched by qualitative interviews, where students shared personal anecdotes of learning new

expressions, developing grammatical awareness, and building confidence in using English beyond the classroom. Many students did not set out to "study" while on social media, yet they found themselves picking up language naturally through repeated exposure and contextually rich interactions. These patterns align well with Krashen's Input Hypothesis and Schmidt's Noticing Hypothesis, both of which emphasize the importance of meaningful, comprehensible input in second language development.

What is particularly noteworthy is the role of motivation and autonomy. Students described their social media use as self-driven and enjoyable—an experience far removed from the pressures of formal instruction. This suggests that informal digital environments, though unstructured, may serve as fertile ground for incidental learning and sustained language engagement.

### Pedagogical Implications

Rather than viewing social media merely as a source of distraction, educators are encouraged to explore its potential as an instructional tool. When used purposefully, social media can serve as a bridge between formal language instruction and the digital spaces students already occupy daily. For instance, assignments might ask students to analyse language use in influencer videos, compare the tone and structure of captions across platforms, or even create their own English-language content. These activities not only promote authentic language use but also enable students to apply classroom knowledge in personally meaningful contexts.

However, access alone is not enough. With the vast array of content available online, not all digital input is linguistically appropriate or accurate. This places teachers in a key position to foster students' critical engagement with online material. Lessons in digital literacy should be integrated into the curriculum, helping learners identify credible sources, understand the distinction between informal slang and standard usage, and avoid adopting inaccurate forms of expression. By doing so, educators help shape learners into discerning and strategic users of digital input.

Equally important is empowering students through choice and autonomy. When learners are given the freedom to engage with content aligned with their personal interests—such as travel vlogs, gaming streams, cooking tutorials, or literature reviews—they are more likely to find joy and relevance in their language practice. This sense of ownership enhances motivation and deepens their investment in learning, ultimately leading to more meaningful and retained acquisition.

Institutions are also encouraged to adopt blended learning models that view social media not as peripheral but as a legitimate extension of formal education. Rather than separating academic and informal learning, curricula should be designed to integrate both. For example, reflective journals based on students' social media experiences in English, or discussions around popular digital trends, can be used to promote language awareness and metacognitive reflection. Such hybrid approaches cater to the realities of today's learners while maintaining pedagogical rigor.

Finally, the evolving digital landscape necessitates a parallel evolution in teacher education. Many current language teachers may be unfamiliar with how deeply social media shapes students' language experiences. As such, professional development programs must include training on digital pedagogy, the evaluation of online content, and strategies for incorporating technology meaningfully into instruction. By equipping teachers with these skills, institutions ensure that educators are not only responsive to current trends but also proactive in guiding learners through them.

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