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Social Media as a Platform for Informal EFL Learning in Algeria: Case Study of First Year Students

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a degree of
Master's in Didactics

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Declaration of Originality

I hereby declare that this submission is my work and that it contains no materials previously published or written by another person, nor material that has been accepted for the qualification of any other degree or diploma of a university or another institution.

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Dedication

First and foremost, I would like to thank Allah who led me to where I am today, a student researcher who is about to receive her master's degree soon, God willing.

To myself, I'm very proud of you, despite the illness, the crying, the hardship you believed in yourself when no one else did, you made it to this day, you pulled through with your positivity even though others kept trying to convince you that it will get you nowhere, you became a researcher even though people belittled the major you chose with love and it was the best decision you made.

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Abstract

Social media appeared as an indispensable component of daily life, serving not only as a communication medium but also as a crucial language acquisition platform. Particularly, within the framework of Informal Digital Learning of English (IDLE), it provides students with a space for casual exposure that frequently enhances the formal standardized education. This research explores the role of social media as a platform for informal EFL learning amongst first-year EFL students at the University of Dr. Moulay Tahar, Saida. In particular, this academic thesis examines how students' social media habits, like online social interaction and content consumption, assist in encouraging learner autonomy, developing sociolinguistic skills, and bridging the gap between formal academic English and informal casual English. In addition, this study employs a methodological triangulation approach within a mixed-method framework to guarantee the validity and depth of the findings. The data is collected through a semi-structured quantitative questionnaire dispensed to 57 participants from the target population, along with semi-structured qualitative interviews with both first-year EFL students and their teachers, and a complementary content analysis of the content the target population consumes. This study aims to explore the students' perception of the role of social media in their academic process of becoming fluent English speakers, how they use social media to communicate and interact in English outside of the classroom environment, and how these interactions build the target population's social English skills. The findings reveal that the target population uses their entire linguistic repertoire as a strategic cognitive resource for identity formation. By validating these consensus theories within the Algerian EFL context, this research highlights how the target population evades the restrictions of the formal educational setting through online immersion. Finally, this research highlights the importance of integrating students' online habits on social media into formal educational frameworks to encourage learner autonomy, identity construction, and the development of sociolinguistic skills, resulting in the amelioration of the teaching and learning experience.

Keywords: digital Natives, methodological triangulation, social media, translanguaging, Zone of Proximal Development.

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List of Abbreviations

SM: Social Media

Gen Z: Generation Z are those born usually between 1997 and 2012.

GRWM: Get ready with me

Q: Question

RQ: Research Question

List of Acronyms:

EFL: English as a Foreign Language

IDLE: Informal Digital Learning of English

OILE: Online Informal Learning of English

EE: Extramural English

SIP/ SIPT: Social Information Processing Theory

ZPD: Zone of Proximal Development

MKO: the More Knowledgeable Other

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General Introduction

General Introduction

Social media is a network or group of applications on our digital devices that people use to connect with others from different places around the world. It is not necessarily just for chatting; it can be getting to know new cultures, learning new skills, or even posting helpful content. This variety of content depends on the content creator; it can be a desire to help others, or it can be for making an income as a content creator who is paid by a social media platform. For example: Instagram, TikTok, etc. Some are known for travelling content, others for teaching, or making tutorials on certain things people may need in their everyday life. Everyone can most certainly find something that is to their liking or helpful in certain cases.

Social media nowadays represents a part of our social life and interactions. As everyone is mostly glued to their phones, it became an addiction because it made communication easier, and a lot of people benefited from it in so many ways. One of these advantages is learning EFL through this platform from content creators who are either skilled in communicating in English, natives from the United States of America or England, and even teachers who help students in need of a more simplified explanation of the language for academic purposes, who cannot afford to pay for a tutor.

In some other cases, people may learn the language through reading comments on a certain post or a live stream. By reading people's comments, they acquire the writing skills; through the streamer, they acquire the oral skills, pronunciation of each word, and meaning. In a way, it is seen as a more effective way to learn EFL, especially by socially anxious students who tend to be shy and get nervous during face-to-face discussions. Hiding behind a screen in the digital world gives them more time to think before expressing themselves, as well as a sense of safety, relieving them from the pressure of instant replies, quick thinking, having to mind the tone of voice they are using, or even their facial expressions.

Learning a new language like English for academic purposes is not always the easiest task for some students, especially new ones. They feel lost oftentimes since they are transitioning to a higher level of academic independence. While universities try to provide instructions and new knowledge about EFL, nowadays, in our modern era, acquiring knowledge is not restricted to the classroom environment between four walls, listening to the lecture. It developed and expanded to the digital world through social media platforms; language is not just acquired or studied, it is lived through others' posts or group chats while making social connections. This process is often called accidental or unconscious learning;

however, it is necessary to understand how this accidental learning occurs and whether social media can be a legitimate tool for EFL learning, instead of it being a distraction.

The purpose of this research is to explore whether the usage of social media as an informal platform for EFL learning by first-year students can benefit them in their academic journey. To do so, the study needs to investigate the following:

1. What is the students' perception of the role of social media in their academic process of becoming fluent English speakers?
2. How do students use social media platforms to communicate and interact in English outside of the classroom environment?
3. How do these interactions build the students' Social English skills?

In light of the previously discussed above, it is hypothesized that the majority of students view social media as a low-pressure pedagogical alternative to their traditional formal education that encourages them to be more autonomous. In addition, it is anticipated that students primarily use social media platforms for peer-to-peer intercommunication and content consumption, which enhances their exposure to English in their daily life, and these frequent interactions in English-mediated social platforms is anticipated to refine their sociolinguistic competence that gets translated into greater confidence in real-life social exchanges.

First-year students often are intimidated by learning EFL in a classroom environment, so this research is significant because it demonstrates that learning processes can be structured to reduce overwhelming feelings. Students can learn anxiety-free in the digital world through social media, which also encourages them to be independent learners while realizing that it is a powerful tool rather than just a distraction. Engaging with diverse English content on mobile devices enables teachers to modernize instructional strategies, aligning them with students' digital habits. Integrating formal classroom environments with social media platforms fosters a more comfortable and supportive learning atmosphere.

The scope of this study applies to first-year EFL students at the University of Dr. Moulay Tahar Saida during the 2025-2026 academic year. It explores how their usage of social media (e.g., Instagram, TikTok, YouTube) as an informal platform for EFL learning helps develop their vocabulary and English Social skills.

CHAPTER ONE

Literature Review

1. Chapter One: Literature Review

1.1 Introduction:

This chapter discusses relevant literature on the use of Social Media (SM) as an informal platform for EFL learning, establishing a comprehensive synthesis of the theoretical frameworks and real-life previous studies that undergird this phenomenon as well.

This chapter starts with an introduction to Informal Digital Learning of English (IDLE), which was conceptualized by Ju Seong Lee (2017) as a development of earlier theories such as Online Informal Learning of English (OILE) (Sockett, 2014). OILE is more specific in contrast to IDLE since it specifically focuses on the online medium and how it affects students' learning strategies and language development through digital socialization within the context of Extramural English (Sundqvist, 2009) - language use that happens naturally outside of the traditional classroom walls.

Additionally, 1st-year university students are "Digital Natives" (Prensky, 2001), considering their innate familiarity with technology development, making SM a primary resource for language acquisition. This process is viewed through Vygotsky's Social Constructivism, more precisely, the Zone of Proximal Development, and how the "More Knowledgeable Other" can be someone other than a teacher, while applied to the digital learning of EFL through Social media platforms.

Furthermore, this chapter also sheds light on Joseph Walther's (1992) Social Information Processing Theory (SIP), which argues that using SM is like sipping EFL through a straw; it might be slow, but not any less effective than the traditional way of learning. It also covers translanguaging theory, Ofelia Garcia and Li Wei (2014), which shows how student can use their linguistic repertoire as SM is a space where they can break language rules to create new meaning.

1.1.1 Informational Digital Learning of English

According to Dorothy M. Chun (2016) in her article *"The Role of Technology in Supporting Self-Directed Language Learning"*, language learning is no longer limited to the computer lab. Instead, it developed to be a complex "Ecology" that includes electronic devices, SM platforms, and real-life world communication. As technologies are continuously advancing, students as well as teachers are no longer chained to the traditional way of EFL learning between four walls in a classroom; they rather acquire the language through informal platforms, and this phenomenon has been coined by Ju Seong Lee (2019).

Ju Seong Lee (2021) defines IDLE as « learning English autonomously in extramural digital contexts independent of formal English instructions » (p.51). Rezai et al. (2024) highlight that SM platforms, apps, and educational websites became tools that changed the EFL teachers' learning landscape significantly. IDLE for teachers is encouraged through interactive platforms, virtual communities, and online language exchanges (Lai et al., 2015; Taherian et al., 2024).

Furthermore, IDLE encourages both teachers and students to be autonomous EFL learners by looking to acquire new knowledge of the language from these different digital tools using their phones, computers, or any other mobile device, accessing informal platforms for their academic journey, and giving them a sense of freedom through providing a self-directed, judgment-free, pressure-free environment.

Asih et al. (2024) argue that through their research in IDLE, they noticed that learning strategies used by students who are social media users were effective and allowed students to be creative. For example, creating strategies to help them acquire the language, the main strategy they relied on is setting goals, finding relevant content for learning, and managing user language settings. All the while insisting that teachers encourage their learners to use social media platforms in their learning process to be more in control of their studies, therefore making more efforts to be active, autonomous learners.

1.1.2 Online Informal Learning of English

The concept of OILE was coined by Geoffrey Sockett (2014), through which he explains it to be a complex set of online activities, which are not done primarily to acquire the English language, even though it is being developed unconsciously. They are generally done during leisure time, and the exposure is outside of a classroom setting, which explains why it is informal. This idea is not new, as Jay Cross (2006) argues that learning is that which enables you to participate successfully in life, at work, in the groups that matter to you, and that informal learning is the unofficial, unscheduled, impromptu way people learn to do their jobs (2006, 19).

Informal language learning emerged from a communicative purpose, so it does not have a specific setting and does not take place in the context of an organized learning activity, so the student is not aware that learning is taking place (Toffoli & Sockett, 2010). Since the emergence of the internet age, the global reach of English has primarily made itself felt; the informal learning of English in many western countries takes place through online activities such as scrolling through SM platforms.

Krashen (1982) suggested that a sufficient quantity of comprehensible input was a key to language learning. (Toffoli & Sockett, 2010) argued that it is also useful to consider OILE within the framework of the Output Hypothesis (Swain, 2005) and Incidental Learning (Rieder, 2003). Swain's Output Hypothesis sees engaging in communicative activities as the key to language learning, while Rieder's work underlines the fact that, at more advanced levels, language learning often takes the form of incidental vocabulary acquisition in the course of other activities and is often not a deliberate activity.

Sockett (2014) argued that informal learning of English is a process where little to no reference is made to the structure of language from a traditional or generative point of view. Formal teaching's basis is determining the language's usage through its structure, which teachers insist that their learners do in class, following grammatical structures given as examples in the classroom to later on be used in production activities. However, this deductive approach is very different from what students experience in informal contexts, since they use language in chunks during OILE paired with some contextualized meanings rather than grammatical structures. So it is important to develop cognitive approaches more than grammatical, as outlined by (Robinson and Eliss 2008 :3):

Language learning involves determining structure from usage, and this, like learning about all other aspects of the world, involves the full scope of cognition: the remembering of utterance and episodes, the categorization of experience and the determination of patterns among and between stimuli, the generalization of conceptual schema and prototypes from exemplars, and the use of cognitive models and metaphors, analogies, and images in thinking.

1.1.3 Extramural English

Sundqvist (2009, p.25) defines EE through a quote saying: " In extramural English, no degree of deliberate intention to acquire English is necessary on the part of the learner, even though deliberate intention is by no means excluded from the concept". What is important is that the learner comes in contact with or is involved in English outside of the walls of the English classroom. This contact or involvement may be due to the learner's deliberate (thus conscious) intent to create situations for learning English, but it may equally well be due to any other reason the learner may have.

In fact, the learner might not even have a reason for coming in contact with or becoming involved in extramural English. For instance, a sudden encounter with a foreigner in the street, which leads to a conversation between the learner and the foreigner, is an

example of an extramural English activity that the learner did not know about before it actually happened.

Internet access plays a huge role in engaging in extramural activities, as there are endless opportunities for those who have it. They can follow people, organizations, news, and so on, across different SM platforms, watching shorts on YouTube, reels on Instagram, or even TikTok short videos. In English, this is considered an extramural activity; however, the opportunities are limited for someone with limited access to the internet.

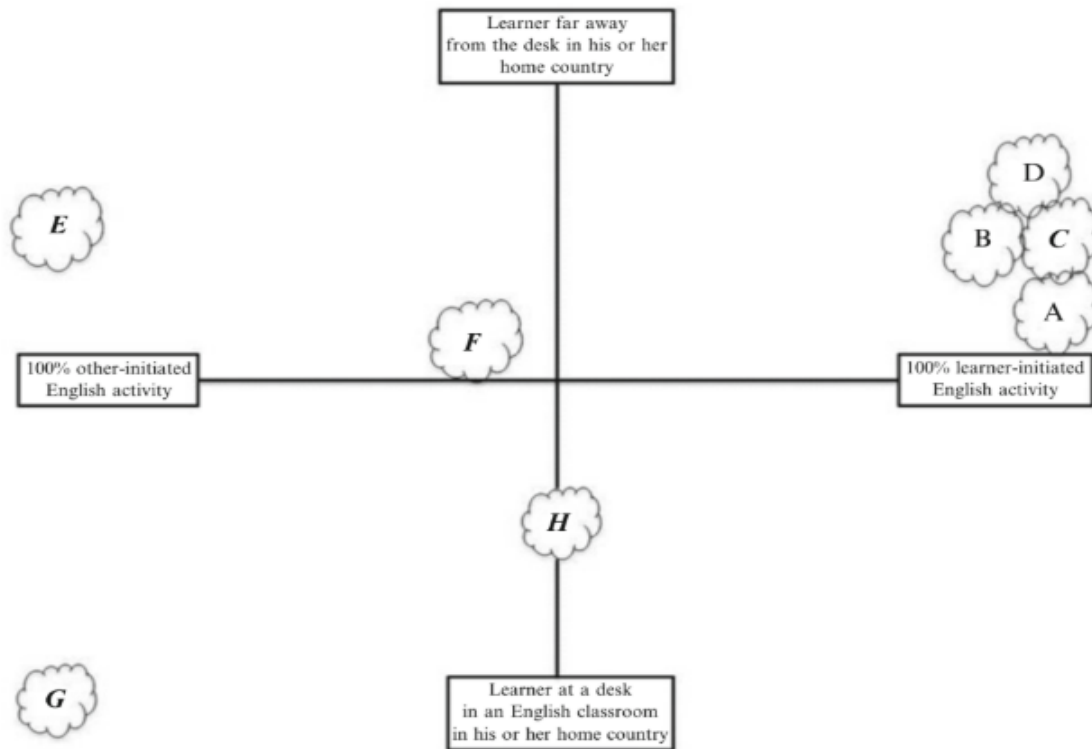


Figure 0.1 : Benson's (2011) model 4-dimension framework, adapted from Sundqvist and Sylven (2016)

The Diagram (Fig. 1.1) above was adapted from Sundqvist and Sylven (2016) is a map to simplify earlier complicated theories for teachers to understand that students can do high-level English activities without having to sit at a desk between four walls during a lecture at school. Based on Benson's (2011) model 4-dimensional framework (Location, Formality, Pedagogy, and Locus Control), which was later made into the 2-axis chart. The small clouds represent different types of learning; the most vital ones are at the top right corner, called the EE Zone (A, B, C, D). These represent activities students do on their own in the comfort of their homes (Top) and by their own free will because they want to (Right). For example, scrolling on their phones, listening to music, or chatting on SM platforms with family and friends. Then there is the bottom center known as the Classroom Zone (H), which is a mix between the traditional classroom environment and what the student wants to do. Finally, on

the left, there is The Obligatory Zone (E, G), which represents forced English activities that the student has to do even at home, such as homework, only because they have to.

1.1.4 Digital Natives

The term "Digital Native" or "The Digital Native Generation" was coined by Prensky (2001). It is the name he had given to today's youth that grew up with the development of the digital world around them, using Information and Communications Technologies. Developing higher aptitudes as they grew up exposed to new technologies, which encouraged extramural English activities and opportunities in the process for them to be autonomous, active learners.

Traditional teaching and learning methods have been challenged by the arrival of the Digital Age and the integration of ICT into educational practices. This simplified communication and networking, as well as finding new information on the net, which was a big advantage for students, obliging many educational establishments to renovate their approaches. They provided ICT tools in their classrooms and formed their teachers who are "Digital Immigrants" (Prensky, 2001) to gain knowledge of how to integrate them in class. However, despite the use of ICT's benefits, a lot of research shows that its potential is not fully exploited, as many schools would rather assimilate than accommodate a new approach to ICT use (Higgins & Moseley, 2001).

Prensky (2001a) argues that teachers who were born before the digital age and grew up without it are digital immigrants who lack technological fluency. They are unfamiliar to technological skills possessed by digital native students who, in contrast, are fast information processors, multitaskers, and learn through leisure activities such as gaming or chatting on social media which created a gap between the two, as digital native students have a range of different preferences, tools and ways of processing and using information, but their digital immigrant teachers are still applying outdated pedagogies. These need to be changed with new approaches to education that suit the students' needs.

Prensky (2001) encouraged students by calling them digital natives to be more autonomous learners and be open to acquiring knowledge from using digital tools to access the internet. They can get information by searching on the web, chatting with others, and watching videos, not only relying on the teacher to be the source of knowledge in a traditional classroom environment. Using their technological fluency to socialize in their free time through social media platforms during their leisure time can help them immensely in acquiring the English language. For example, by following content, creatures watch their

educational videos, or even see an English movie scene and read the comments on it to understand the concept.

1.1.5 Zone of Proximal Development

Zone of Aproximal Development (ZPD) is a concept that was developed to describe how students move from what they know to what they can achieve with a little help. ZPD is widely spread in developmental educational psychology textbooks and also part of Vygotsky's 1978 scientific production. Vygotsky strongly believed that ZPD can transmit the learner from the inter-psychological level to the intra-psychological level and that "The More Knowledgeable Other" (MKO) is not only the teacher who explains the lecture in class. For first-year EFL university students, it can be a content creator, a friend they chat with through social media, or even a stranger's comment on a certain reel on Instagram. All this is happening while they are on their phones, unconsciously doing Extramural English activities as a way of online informal learning of English, moving their skills from their ZPD to the zone where they can do it on their own, becoming autonomous learners in the process.

In ZPD, the MKO provides scaffolding to simplify the learner's development by facilitating their ability to build on prior knowledge and internalize new information. However, those scaffolds gradually disappear as the students' skills are developed and they can independently do their tasks (Chang, Sung, & Chen, 2002, p. 7). Hence, the aim of every teacher using the scaffolding teaching strategy is for their student to become more active, self-regulated learners and problem solvers (Hartman, 2002). Vygotsky argued that cognition gets developed through social interaction; the more the learner is engaged in social behavior, the more their ZPD and abilities are developed, exceeding what can be attained alone, thanks to the MKO, whether through IDLE, OILE, or EE.

1.1.6 Social Information Processing (SIP)

Social Information Processing theory was originally developed by Salancik and Pfeffer in 1987, but was reintroduced later by Joseph Walther in 1992. This theory focuses on how people get to know each other and develop relationships through computer-mediated communication (CMC), for example, text messaging on any social media platform.

Social Information Processing theory also shows that not everyone is comfortable talking to others face-to-face because of anxiety or overthinking. they do not want to interpreted the others nonverbal cues, such as the tone of their voice or their face expressions, starting to overthink weather what they said was bad, or a sensitive topic for the other person

which may making it hard for them to continue the conversation starting to stutter, using a lot of gap fillers such like "hum", "huh"...etc or even freezing and being at a loss for words.

Nowadays, with technological development, digital devices have evolved a lot from how they were in the past. So, nonverbal cues are not always absent with the help of some applications for example Social Media apps like: Instagram, WhatsApp, and Facebook, anyone can video call the person they want, send each other videos, and voice messages. This gives users freedom over whether they want to show nonverbal cues while socializing, or just choose texting and using only verbal cues.

Furthermore, this theory facilitated EFL learning for students while socializing on SM platforms. Students have the opportunity to talk to native speakers in their free time, commenting on someone's posts, texting friends using English, and listening to podcasts. All this is happening through a screen, which gives them a sense of security, privacy, freedom, and control over what they are learning based on their preferences.

In SIP, the EFL process is slower than when a student is learning academically through an hour or an hour and a half full of new information given by the teacher, while explaining the lesson, students lose interest fast or get bored. Therefore would not focus, and it's not guaranteed that they understood all the points explained in class. However, in their free time, scrolling on their phones through the SM platform, they learn small pieces of information at a time, for example, watching a TikTok that is only one minute long of a content creator explaining the meaning of a word and how to employ it in a sentence. Since they are doing it of their own free will, it counts as an EE activity through which new knowledge gets stored in their brain easily. EFL in the traditional classroom environment is like taking a big sip of water. However, that sip is the one-hour lecture packed with information, and using a straw to drink out of that glass of water is SIP; the amount of knowledge is little, and the process is longer but effective.

1.1.7 Translanguaging

Translanguaging is a term originally coined by William (1996). It represents a pedagogical practice where students are asked to alternate languages (Garcia & Wei, 2014; Lee & Wei, 2020; Lu & Gu, 2024). Garcia and Wei use this term to describe multilingual speakers who use their full linguistic repertoire as part of a single, integrated communicative process. However, translanguaging and code-switching are not interchangeable terms as they have many different conceptual differences. This distinction is not just a matter of terminology, but an ideology as code-switching assumes that language exists as separate

entities, whereas translanguaging challenges that separation and puts bilingual communication as controlled by lived experiences and sociocultural positioning (Garcia & Leiva, 2014).

Misir (2014) argues that communication on social media frequently crosses both linguistic and semiotic boundaries. Multilingual speakers tend to use their full linguistic repertoire while communicating in real-life situations or in digital communication as well (Cenoz & Gorter, 2022). A study by Yeh & Swinehart (2020) asserted that EFL learners are daily social media users who use the target language more than their first language to communicate, as well as switching or mixing languages.

The research of Escarda et al. (2024) has shown that students switch language while communicating on social media for reasons other than delivering meaning. This is the case both for multilinguals and bilinguals who communicate the same way on social media, where translanguaging figures in their social exchanges. Many researchers highlight that Gen Z EFL learners use Informal English while talking to peers or native speakers on social media platforms as a way of acquiring the language. This idea was supported by Lee's (2019) study, which showed that EFL learners are engaged in social media for non-academic reasons like engaging in casual conversations, and these supports acted as affective support to Gen Z EFL learners, helping them speak the target language with foreigners.

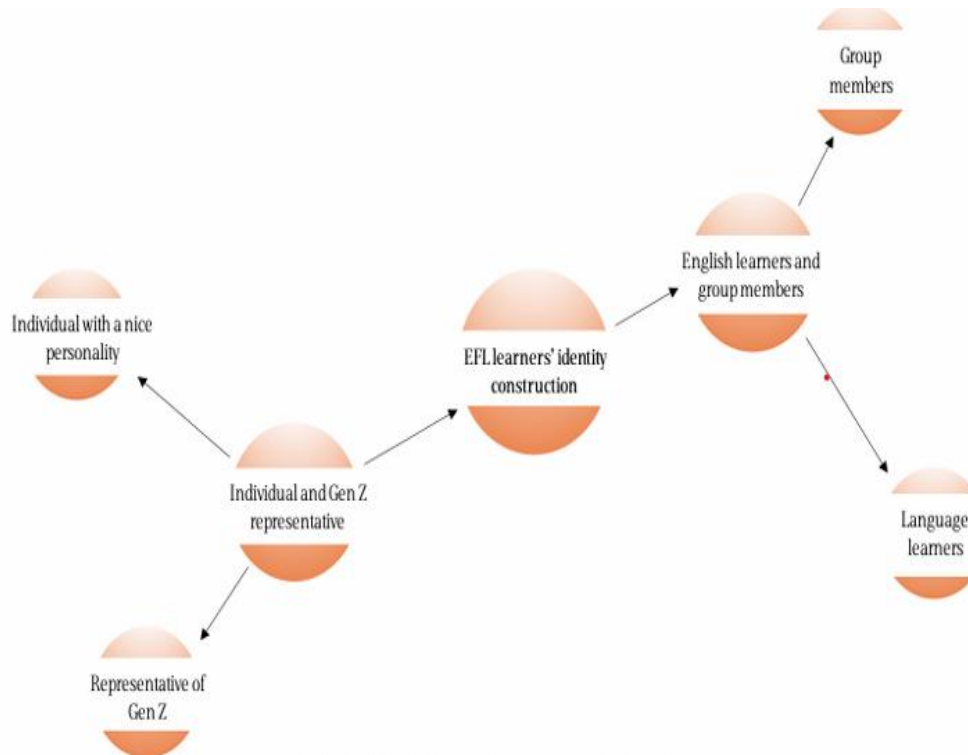


Figure 1. EFL learners' identity construction

Figure 1.2: Baran and Madiseh's (2023) EFL learners' identity construction

The diagram above represents valuable findings of (Baran & Madiseh, 2023) of EFL learners' identity construction, showing that translanguaging acts as a bridge used by students to manage their social identities on social media. Individuals with a nice personality mix between their mother tongue and English to have a softer tone while communicating which is linked to individual and GenZ representative; GenZ view social media as a natural habitat where they can be comfortable showing their identity informally without the harshness of formality, the "Group members" and "English learners and group" nodes are linked because they represent following an exclusive linguistic code, since they belong to a specific online community. Finally, the "language learners" node represents a specific role the student occupies while being aware that they are still developing their language skills.

(Baran & Madiseh, 2023) also show through their research that Gen Z mix languages just because it was part of their generation's communication; some of them use it to show off their bilingual competencies through mixing between their mother tongue and English in their posts, stories, chat messaging, etc., as it is a skill to be proud of.

1.2 Conclusion

This chapter provided the necessary comprehensive synthesis of the theoretical framework of this research undergirding the role of social media as a platform for informal EFL learning. By integrating core concepts such as Informal Digital Learning of English (IDLE), Online Informal Learning of English (OILE), and Extramural English, it has been illustrated that modern language acquisition goes far beyond the limits of the traditional classroom environment.

Additionally, within the framework of Vygotsky's Social Constructivism and the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), this literature synthesis demonstrated how online interactions, simplified by content creators and online peers from around the world acting as the More Knowledgeable Others (MKOs), provide the necessary scaffolding for the students. The review also shows that this process on social media platforms enables students to benefit from far greater guidance than that provided by traditional academic institutions.

Moreover, by analyzing Social Information Processing (SIP) theory, Digital Nativism, and the role of Translanguaging as a strategic knowledge base, this review has proven that these online platforms allow learners to actively navigate their sociolinguistic identities by using their entire linguistic repertoire to bridge the gap between the unconscious exposure to

Chapter one Literature Review

English online and their linguistic abilities development. With this theoretical foundation established, the following chapter will detail the methodological part of the research.

CHAPTER TWO

Research Methodology and Design

2. Chapter Two: Research Methodology and Design

2.1 Introduction

Following the theoretical framework previously established in the first chapter, this chapter describes the research methodology and design used to gather and analyze data. It describes the research methods, the participants, and the data collection instruments, which in this research consisted of a methodological triangulation approach to get a more in-depth insight into the complex relationship between the informal social media practices and the formal academic performance of Algerian university students, as one research instrument would be insufficient. Furthermore, this design adopted a mixed-method approach, which combines a semi-structured questionnaire, semi-structured interviews with students, and semi-structured interviews with teachers, to investigate students' self-perception of their social media usage habits and English-mediated content consumption that helped build their sociolinguistic English skills.

2.2 Research Methods

To investigate the use of social media as a tool for informal EFL learning in Algerian 1st-year EFL classrooms, this study adopted a methodological triangulation approach within a mixed-methods framework. Both qualitative and quantitative tools were involved in this approach, including a semi-structured online questionnaire to identify the trends in students' perception and usage habits among 57 first year university students, along with semi-structured interviews as support for content analysis with 10 students of the same target population's content consumption selected through the previous questionnaire to bridge the gap between their digital habits and informal learning, as well as interviews with teachers of 1st year university students. By implementing the triangulation method, the researcher was able to gather valuable in-depth insights and data on the students' perception of social media's role in their academic process of becoming fluent English speakers, their use of these platforms to communicate and interact in English in their daily life, as well as how these interactions help build the students' social English skills.

2.3 Participants

The essence of any research study is the participants, which gives the researchers the chance to convert theories into practice. This study was conducted at Saida University, and

Chapter Two: Research Methodology and Design

the researchers specifically focused on their case study of first-year license EFL students to test their hypotheses. The target population was not randomly selected, as 1st year license students were chosen because of their previous experience during their last year of secondary school preparing for their Bachelor exam often they use social media to study outside of their academic learning sessions during schools hours, as well as their advanced knowledge on communication through social media platforms therefore allowing them to provide valuable data on the use of social media as a platform for informal EFL learning.

2.4 Research Instruments

Despite the importance of research participants, it needs to be supported by well-designed research tools. Researchers are capable of achieving reliable, precise findings through them to finally draw accurate conclusions. In order to guarantee an accurate investigation, the researcher opted for three research instruments for data collection: an online semi-structured questionnaire, a semi-structured interview with students to identify their specific content consumption for content analysis, and a semi-structured interview with teachers. To get an in-depth understanding of the use of social media as a platform for informal learning in EFL classrooms, the researcher collected data from both students and teachers using triangulation to ensure fulfilling the research objectives.

2.5 Students' Questionnaire

The researcher relies on a semi-structured online questionnaire as the primary data collection instrument. This choice is due to the study's aim to investigate general trends and tendencies in informal EFL learning through social media platforms among first-year university students. That helped with the collection of quantifiable data that is important to assess the research hypotheses and examine the research questions, investigating students' perceptions and consumption patterns.

The online semi-structured questionnaire consisted of 12 questions divided into 6 sections. The researcher started with a brief explanation of the research topic and its aim to further clarify for the respondents. Since it was conducted online, he made sure to give instructions on what a questionnaire is and how they can answer each of the questions provided. Furthermore, the researcher highlighted that there are no right or wrong answers to encourage honest responses, as well as explaining that their responses will remain anonymous and for academic purposes only. The questions were both open and closed-ended, allowing

Chapter Two: Research Methodology and Design

students to voice their social English skills development, their social media habits, and the reasons behind them.

2.6 Students' Questionnaire Sections

2.6.1 Section 1: Demographic Information and English Proficiency

This section aims to identify the respondents' brief profile. The researcher collected data about the target population's age, gender, and English proficiency to make sure his sample fits the digital natives profile, since they are 1st year students.

2.6.2 Section 2: Social Media Accessibility and Students' Digital Habits

This section aims to investigate on which social media platforms students are exposed to the language more, and how much time is spent on these platforms daily. The researcher aims to investigate whether English for his target population is more of an extramural activity done during leisure time than an obligatory task given in class by the teacher.

2.6.3 Section 3: English-mediated Content Consumption

This section aims to identify whether the social media algorithm proposes English content on these students' feeds or if they intentionally follow content creators and channels to build their sociolinguistics skills. The researcher aims to investigate the level of learners' autonomy that is present in their daily habits on social media, whether they are actively looking to follow content creators to acquire the language or just being passive recipients who encounter English content by chance.

2.6.4 Section 4: Social Media's Learning Effectiveness and Content Preferences

This section aims to investigate the target population's content consumption preferences and whether they perceived that their linguistic development is more related to the use of social media as a tool than to their formal academic lectures. The researcher aimed to have an in-depth insight into which content students are consuming to develop their sociolinguistics skills and whether it is more effective than the traditional classroom environment, because they are in control of the process and it is not imposed on them.

2.6.5 Section 5: Social Media's Perceived Language Benefits and Development

This section aims to investigate the specific learning benefits of social media use that students perceive. The researcher aims to investigate whether students perceived that social

Chapter Two: Research Methodology and Design

media helped them develop their English skills and what the benefits were that helped them with this process.

2.6.6 Section 6: The Interview's Informed Consent

This section is a transition from the quantitative questionnaire to the qualitative students' interviews by asking the students' willingness to participate in follow-up face-to-face semi-structured interviews with the researcher to discuss further about what content they are consuming for a subsequent content analysis of their informal learning materials and their quality.

2.7 Students' Interview

The researcher opted for a semi-structured interview with 10 first-year university students as a secondary data collection instrument to identify their specific English-mediated content consumption for qualitative content analysis to further investigate their interactions on social media and how that helps build their sociolinguistics skills.

The semi-structured interview consisted of 12 questions divided into 4 sections, going from general to more specific. The researcher started with a brief explanation of the research topic and its aim to each interviewee while also clarifying that there are no right or wrong answers, as the researcher is only interested in their personal experiences, their habits, and their honest opinions about using social media. Furthermore, the researcher recorded each interview with the prior informed consent of every participant. The students were informed that the recording would be used only for academic purposes and were also assured of their anonymity, as their names would not be mentioned anywhere in the research.

2.8 Students' Interview Sections

2.8.1 Section 1: The Opener

This section is an introduction that aims to investigate students' social media platform preferences, how much time they spend on them every day, and if navigating through them comes naturally to them or if it was something they had to work on. The researcher aims to further investigate the digital natives' profile of his target population, as well as the extramural English Activities they are involved in on social media.

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2.8.2 Section 2: Formal vs. Informal Learning Environment

This section aims to investigate students' perception of social media as a low-stress learning environment and an effective learning tool for acquiring real-life English. The researcher aims to investigate students' perception of both social media platforms and the formal classroom environments, which are effective and would benefit their sociolinguistics skills.

2.8.3 Section 3: Learners' Autonomy and Engagement

This section aims to investigate what motivates students to engage and spend time with the English language. The researcher aims to investigate the learner's autonomy and how students' interests and their desire to express themselves on social media helped develop their sociolinguistic skills.

2.8.4 Section 4: Digital Habits and Online Relationships

This section aims to investigate students' complex learning strategies used to navigate English on social media platforms. The researcher aims to investigate the way students build relationships, express emotions, use their entire linguistic repertoire, mixing languages to communicate, and pick up new expressions from short videos and content creators on social media unconsciously.

2.9 Content Analysis

A content analysis was conducted as an additional research method during the interview; the participants were asked to mention two or three content creators or channels they follow on social media platforms that helped develop their English skills. By analyzing the exact posts, short videos, and all other digital material related to the content creators mentioned by the interviewees, the researcher can examine the linguistic input and the linguistic features, such as the use of real-world English by these content creators, as well as slang, accents, idiomatic expressions, and emotional expressions that the students are receiving. This method guarantees that the research moves beyond students' perception to a more direct examination of what they are learning through the content they consume on social media.

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2.10 Teachers' Interview

The researcher opted for a semi-structured interview with EFL teachers as the last research instrument to gain deeper insight into the teachers' perspectives on the effect of social media on their students' English academic skills

The semi-structured interview consisted of 10 open-ended questions divided into 4 sections specifically designed to encourage descriptive answers concerning 1st year university students' English sociolinguistics skills in class, including their use of internet talk, the blurring lines between formal and informal English use in class, and their autonomy as learners. This allowed for a flexible dialogue with the teachers that enabled the researcher to get deeper insight into the teachers' professional observations of their EFL students in the classroom as digital natives. All interviews with 4 teachers were recorded by the researcher after the informed consent of each participant.

2.11 Teachers' Interview Sections

2.11.1 Section 1: Initial Observation and Social Media Discussion

This section aims to investigate the target population teachers' initial observation of their use of informal English in the formal classroom environment, and their social media discussion during academic formal lectures with their students. The researcher aims to investigate the use of internet talk observed by the teachers, such as slang, specific slang, or even internet jokes, as well as how students perceive social media based on their discussions in previous lectures with their students.

2.11.2 Section 2: Emotional and motivational Effects of Social Media

This section aims to investigate how students' emotions and behavior are affected by social media. The researcher aims to investigate students' feelings and whether their affective filter is lowered on social media more than in class, as well as the students' autonomous learning and its effects on their academic and language development outcomes.

2.11.3 Section 3: Social Media Habits' Effect on Academic Performance

This section investigates the effect of students' social media habits on their academic performances. The researcher aims to investigate whether students can differentiate between formal and informal English during formal academic lectures, or are they confused because of their social media habits

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2.11.4 Section 4: Teacher's Adaptation to Students' Social Media Habits

This section investigates how teachers perceive the students' use of their entire linguistic repertoire, how they can adapt to their students' social media habits, and whether these platforms can replace or assist them in teaching. The researcher aims to investigate how teachers feel about their students' mix of languages during their lectures, and whether they perceive social media as an effective tool for language learning. If so, how can they change their traditional methods of teaching to their students' content consumption habits?

2.12 Challenges and Limitations

The researcher encountered several challenges while trying to conduct his research. First, during his data collection, the researcher wanted to distribute his questionnaire to his case study. There was a considerably reduced number of students, and later informed that all students would be absent because it was the holy month of Ramadan, so he had to contact the delegate and do the questionnaire online. Second, the students were very uncooperative, which made the researcher lose time trying to convince them to answer the questionnaire and even have an interview with them. Third, during the interview, students were passive most of the time and biased by each other's answers, especially when asked to mention content creators previously interviewed; students would suggest to the currently interviewed student to mention the same content creators.

2.13 Conclusion

This chapter dealt with the practical side of the research, providing in-depth information concerning the research methodology and design. It described the research methods, research instruments, and the participants. The next chapter will present and interpret the key findings in relation to our study's objectives.

CHAPTER THREE:

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Chapter Three: Data analysis and interpretation

3.1 Introduction

The theoretical part is crucial in every research, yet incomplete without the practical side that bridges the gap between theory and practice, which ensures valid and reliable results if conducted, analyzed, and discussed properly. In this context, the data analysis section also plays a vital role as it helps the researcher answer their research questions and confirm or reject their hypothesis.

3.2 Questionnaire Analysis

The study used a questionnaire consisting of 12 questions, which assisted the researcher in getting a deeper insight into students' views of social media as an informal platform for EFL learning and whether it really is a low-pressure pedagogical alternative to their traditional formal education that encourages them to be autonomous learners through investigating their habits and trends on social media that helped them acquire the language.

Q1: Age

While seemingly a basic demographic variable, it is very important to know each participant's age in this research. The table below shows that from the target population, all 57 participants' ages in the researcher's questionnaire range from 17 to 22 years old, which aligns with the digital native's profile, as they are not only proficient in navigating digital devices but also navigating through social media platforms easily to find English-mediated content, which helps them build their English sociolinguistics skills. In addition, they are considered Gen Z (demographic cohort born between 1997 and 2012) who are part of a peer culture where using informal English for communication is more valued than perfect grammar, fostering a sense of safety that encourages language production.

Table 3.1 Students' Age Distribution

Age of Participants	Number of Participants	Percentages
17 years old	5	8.8%
18 years old	28	49.2%
19 years old	18	31.6%
20 years old	4	7%
21 years old	1	1.8%
22 years old	1	1.8%
Total	57	100%

Chapter Three: Data analysis and interpretation

Q2: Gender

As illustrated in the table below, there is a significant female predominance with women accounting for 70.2% (n=40) of the researcher's total sample. This data shows that social media is considered a safe place where female students can lower their affective filter, like a secret classroom where they can learn through short videos and comments unconsciously, and also use English for real-life social communication.

Table 3.2 Students' gender distribution

Gender of Participants	Number of participants	Percentage
Female	40	70.2%
Male	17	29.8%
Total	57	100%

Q3: Current Level of English (Self-Assessed)

Regarding students' self-assessed English proficiency, as illustrated in the pie chart below, the majority of respondents (70.2%) identified themselves as intermediate learners; the rest of the participants were divided between the advanced level (14%) and the beginner level (15.8%). This data suggests that students have a developed linguistic repertoire, which makes them functional users who are more than capable of mixing between their native language and the English input they acquire through social media to develop not only a deeper understanding of the language but also people's feelings through Instagram reels, for example, slang, memes, or even jokes. In addition, as mentioned in the Informal Digital Learning of English (IDLE) theory, students at the intermediate level are active informal digital learners because they consider their phones their classroom. They acquire the language naturally through content consumption on social media, and so IDLE is a bridge between their academic level and real-world linguistic fluency.

Table 3.3: Students' self-assessed English proficiency

English Level	Number of Participants	Percentage
Beginner	9	15.8%
Intermediate	40	70.2%
Advanced	8	14.0%
Total	57	100%

Q4: Which social media platforms do you use daily? :

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As illustrated in the figure below, the data collected suggests that the majority of the total sample uses Instagram and TikTok on a daily basis. Both platforms are used primarily for entertainment, scrolling through short videos that are called either reels or TikToks, which can be considered an Extramural English activity done during leisure time. In addition, it is also a great example of IDLE and OILE as these digital natives are not only learning English through fun videos but also use translanguaging to express themselves, understand social cues like emojis, memes through the use of SIP theory. Essentially, these social media platforms create a digital ZPD for these students where the content creators and channels they follow act as the MKO that makes learning English easier through visual clues, making them more independent in their learning process.

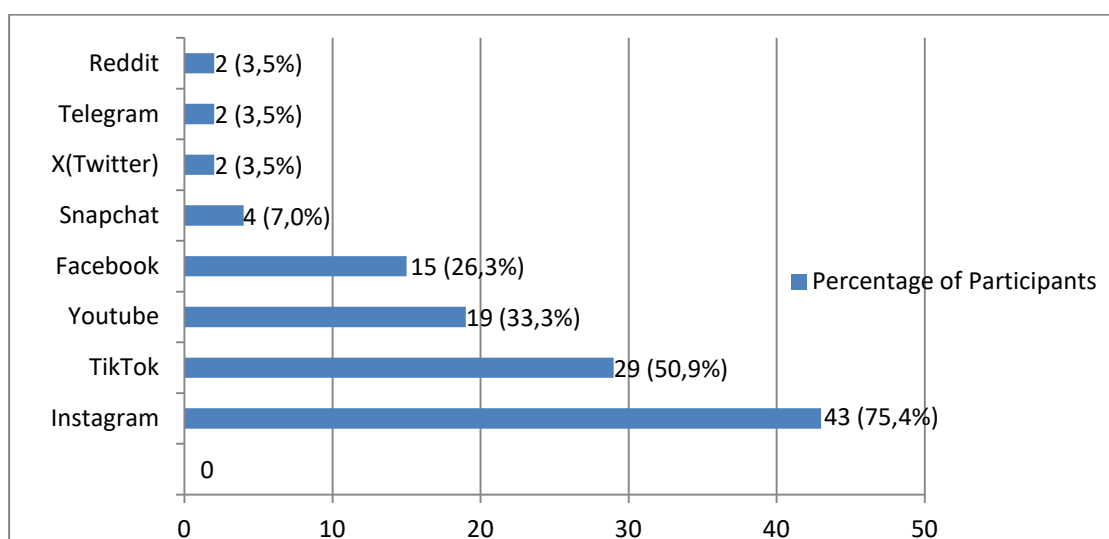


Figure 3.1: Students' daily use of social media platforms

Q5: On Average, how many hours per day do you spend on social media?

Question five aimed to know students' immersion and exposure to English. By tracking how many hours they spend on social media platforms to eventually measure the dosage of language they receive every day. The majority of the total sample (79%) spend 3 or more hours on social media platforms, making English a constant presence in these digital natives' lives, and Extramural English an unconscious habit that provides a big amount of input for OILE and IDLE to happen naturally. Furthermore, SIP theory suggests that students need these extended hours to be able to process social cues and make digital relationships, which effectively turns social media into a prolonged digital ZPD where students receive constant scaffolding from content creators and their peers.

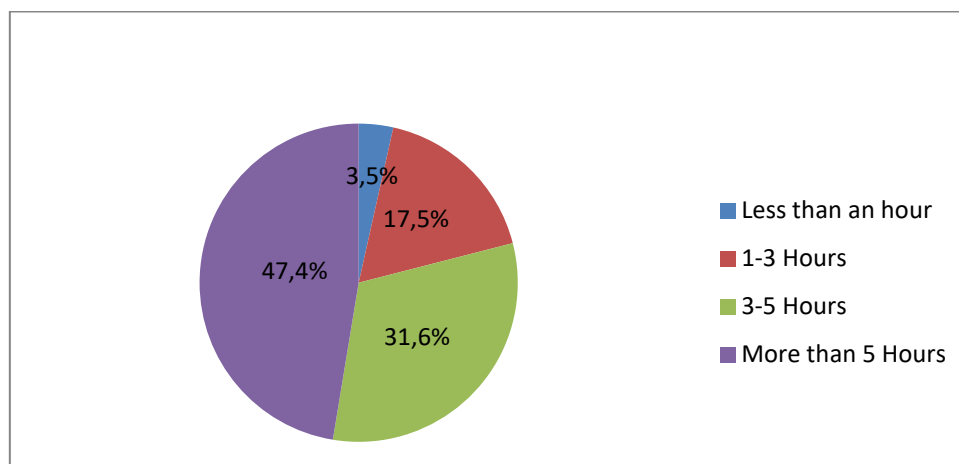


Figure 3.2 *Students' standard time spent on social media platforms*

Q6: How often do you encounter English content on your feed?

Question six aims to measure the digital linguistic prevalence within the students' content consumption. The majority of the total sample (57.9%) encounter English content on their feed frequently or almost exclusively. So this data suggests a saturation since the language is not considered a school subject only, but a constant digital environment that allows for OILE and IDLE to happen effortlessly. In addition, this saturation suggests that the social media algorithm always exposes students to new vocabulary and social cues, acting as a long-term teacher.

Table 3.4: *students' frequency of English-mediated content*

Frequency of Encounter	Number of Students	Percentages
Rarely	2	3.5%
Sometimes	22	38.6%
Frequently	18	31.6%
Almost exclusively	15	26.3%
Total	57	100%

Q7: Do you intentionally follow accounts /creators to improve your English? :

Question seven aims to measure students' intentions behind their social media habits, since the majority of the total sample (82.5%) follow accounts and creators deliberately, as shown in the table below; they are no longer considered passive users, they have become independent learners who use social media as an educational tool. This incidental acquisition engagement is fueled by fun as a motivation but results in educational growth and language acquisition, as they pick up new grammar, new vocabulary, and even social cues with the help of content creators who serve as the MKO, scaffolding these digital natives daily through real-world language and even bonding moments. SIP theory (1992) suggests that the

Chapter Three: Data analysis and interpretation

emotional attachment of a student to a content creator can strengthen their memory, which facilitates the learning process as the language becomes more memorable.

Table 3.5: Students' intentionality in engaging in English-mediated content

Intentionality	Number of participants	Percentages
Yes (intentional)	47	82.5%
No (unintentional/incidental)	10	17.5%
Total	57	100%

Q8: What type of English content do you engage with the most? (Rank 1-3)

Question eight aims to identify prioritization of content types in the students' digital habits. As illustrated in the figure below. The data collected shows that 61.4% (35/57) of students ranked entertainment as their top choice, making it the primary driver of their English exposure, resulting in incidental acquisition of the language. In addition, being in control of the content they consume makes them more submerged in the language as they learned it through their interests, their affective filter is reduced, making the learning process effortless.

Communication ranks as a second priority by 49.1% (28/57) of students' ranking, and these results support SIP theory as students use social cues to build real-world digital relationships through communication either with their peers or native speakers.

Finally, 50.8%(29/57) ranked educational "How-to" videos in third place, which shows that social media platforms serve as a digital ZPD for students where they are exposed to real-world social English rather than the usual structured grammar they learn in class.

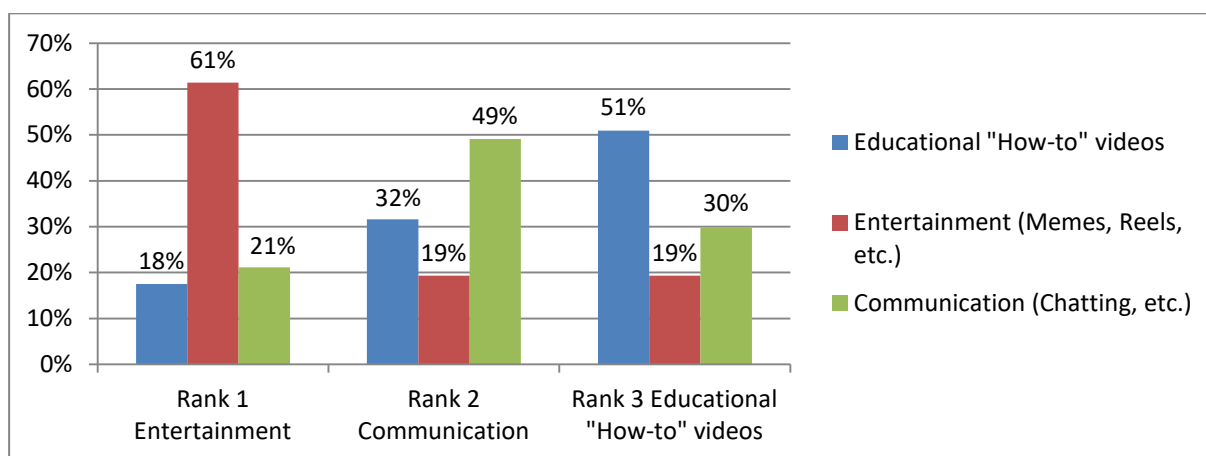


Figure 0.3: Students' preferred content on social media platforms

Q9: In your opinion, has social media improved your English more than your formal class? :

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Question nine aims to measure students' perceived educational impact of social media on their language development. The collected data reveals that 84.2% of participant (49.1% agree and 35.1% strongly agree) believe that social media platforms improved their English skills more than their formal traditional classes. This preference suggests that their digital immersion and exposure to real-world English through social media is considered as a more powerful learning environment than limited hours of lectures, and by choosing digital immersion they are acting as autonomous learners benefiting of a lower affective filter which gave them a sense of security and motivation to learn in this digital environment where they found the digital input more authentic than the original structured academic environment. Furthermore, this data indicates that students adapted to learning the language through personal social interaction on these platforms, whether with their peers while texting or content creators who can also be native speakers, which also suggests that students consider them as the MKO replacing the teachers by providing scaffolding in these digital natives' ZPD.

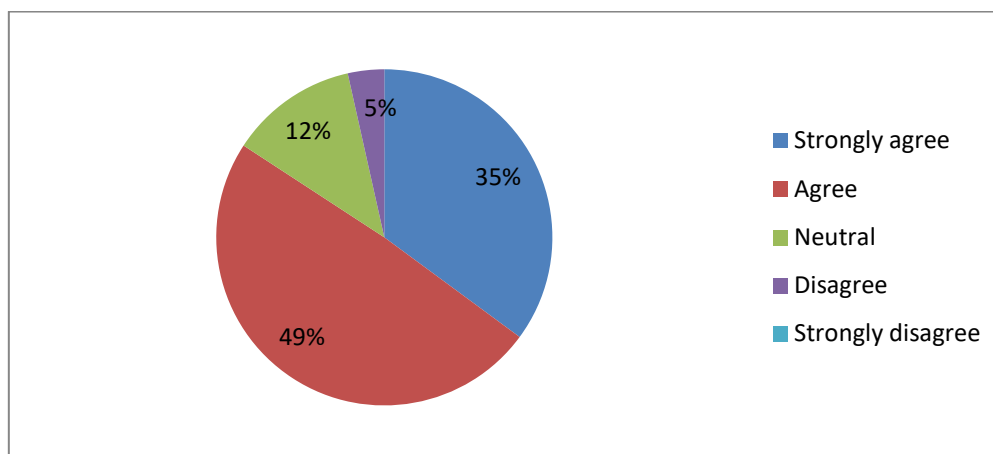


Figure 3.4: The students perceived the pedagogical value of social media on their English proficiency

Q10: If you agreed or strongly agreed, in what ways has social media helped you more than the formal classroom? :

This question aims to investigate the pedagogical and emotional factors behind students' inclination towards social media. As illustrated in figure social media's main advantage is providing students with a digital environment for incidental learning, another significant factor is the improvement of listening skills through videos and reels cited by 63.2% of participants show a reflection of OILE as it highlights how students consume the

Chapter Three: Data analysis and interpretation

language naturally online that provides a form of scaffolding through a combination of audio-visual media such as videos and reels helps students understand intricate language.

50.9% of participants value the exposure to authentic, real-life vocabulary and slang through social media platforms which highlights a bit of a shortcoming in their formal academic curriculum, this significant finding suggests that IDLE works as a bridge between “Real-life English “ and “ Formal Academic English” by consuming content on social media they are bridging the gap that their academic pedagogical university program left behind as they see how words are used in real life as their sociolinguistics skills get developed they feel more confident while interacting with new people from other countries.

35.1% of participants prefer social media to avoid fear of judgment because this digital environment is like their stress-free zone away from the formal strict classroom, within the framework of Social Information Processing (SIP) theory these social media platforms serve as a buffer because it eliminates non-verbal cues found in students’ physical classroom such as talking face-to-face in front of a strict teacher while being afraid of blurting out a wrong answer and being judged for it while on these platforms they are communicating through a screen with a content creator of their choice being the More Knowledgeable Others (MKO) who is either an influencer or one of their peers rather than a strict instructor so the pressure of being graded or wrong completely disappears there is no one to correct their paper with the infamous red pen just someone from the global community online unconsciously teaching them the language through one of their vlogs for example and so this percentage highlights how social media removes psychological barriers that are existent in the formal classroom and encourages students to be active autonomous learners.

The 31.6% of participants who cited reels and videos as a vital digital material that improved their listening skills represent the shift to multimodal learning nowadays, these significant findings suggests that short videos such as reel and TikToks serve as “mini-lectures” when they are learning through audio-visual media they see the person’s face, they hear their voice, and read captions or comments they receive “triple input” that makes language more memorable and enjoyable. While in their formal class, they listen to the teacher explaining the lesson, they feel bored and obligated to follow and take notes that overwhelm them. Eventually, students prefer incidental learning through social media as they

Chapter Three: Data analysis and interpretation

get exposed to real-life language and diverse native accents in their “self-directed laboratory” for listening comprehension, which facilitates the development of their sociolinguistic skills.

The 3.5% of participants provided qualitative self-written responses that show an important link between their linguistic development and socio-emotional growth, these significant findings when analyzed through the lens of SIP theory the mention of these students overcoming social phobia highlights that social media is a “safe space” for them that allows them to hide behind a screen and take their time building their confidence until they feel brave enough to speak up in real life. This feeling of safety helps the transition to the next benefit mentioned by these digital natives which is dynamic, cultural and interactive learning on social media they don’t learn “dead English” such as grammar rules they see the language as a “living entity” dynamic, constantly changing, combined with culture absorption makes the learning process more fun as the textbooks cannot replicate this interactive experience in their digital ZPD. Finally, the last benefit mentioned by the target population is the use of English to explore global interests, this suggests a high degree of learner’s autonomy within the context of IDLE as these students are not only studying it but using it as a tool to achieve their goals, it is a form of intrinsic motivation leading to incidental acquisition, where the languages complexity is mastered through self-directed activities. Synthetically, all these findings reinforce that social media is addressing the psychological, linguistic, cultural, and educational needs of these students.

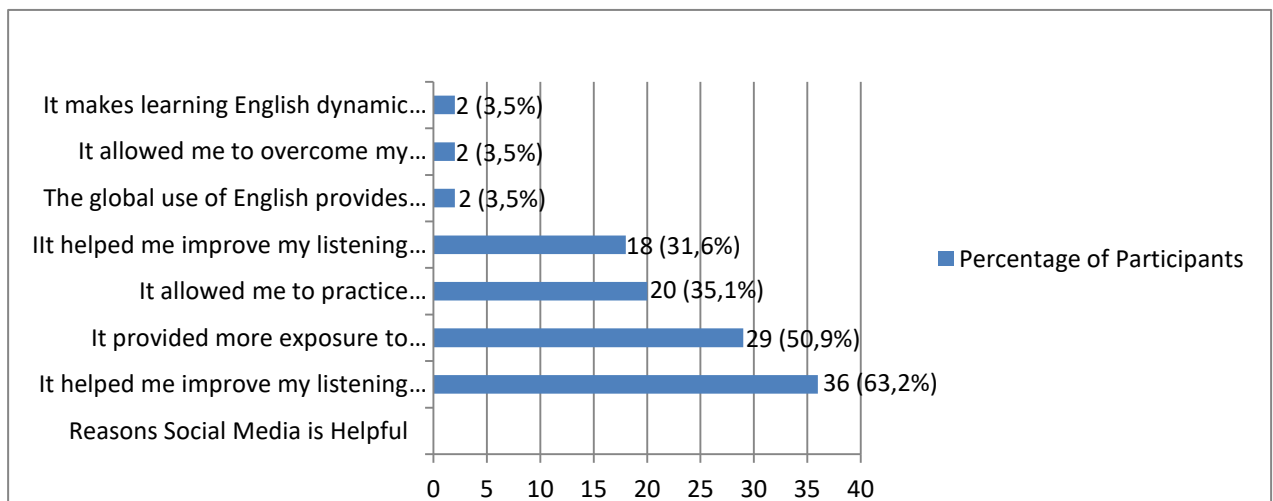


Figure 3.5: The Educational and psychological linguistic benefits of social media

3.3 Interpretation of Students' Questionnaire

The findings of this research yield a persuasive viewpoint of the role of social media as a crucial network of platforms for sociolinguistic growth for 1st year EFL students, demonstrating a distinct shift from institutionalized, teacher-centered pedagogy to autonomous interest-led learning. The data highlights that the participants view social media as a highly valid, non-restrictive educational substitute that effectively lessens the anxiety and “rigid” nature of the formal academic environment. By engaging in an informal stress-free online network, the target population can easily lower their anxiety levels, changing the language from a boring academic subject or major into a utilitarian “social passport” that fosters international integration, self-expression, growth, and benefits the target population both academically and emotionally.

In addition, since students are digital natives (Prensky, 2001) who easily manage their own linguistic curriculum during their day-to-day interactions and consumption of various content, this perceived shift is totally expected and is a type of what Ju Seong Lee (2017) terms Informal Digital Learning of English (IDLE) and Online Informal Learning of English (OILE) (Sokkett,2014). It is also considered an Extramural English activity as defined by Sundqvist (2009), since the target population focuses more on real-life input they consume outside of the classroom walls, for prolonged periods of time, and interactions on diverse social media apps during their leisure time, such as internet talk, diverse English accents, and slang, so their language acquisition is incidental.

Moreover, to achieve social goals, students decode social cues and build parasocial bonds that mimic real-life intercommunications despite the lack of physical presence to comprehend and acquire the language, which is deeply supported by Social Information Processing (SIP) theory (Walther,1992). Social media is also an active online Zone of proximal development (ZPD) following the framework of Vygotsky (1978), where content creators and their friends from around the world act as the More Knowledgeable Others (MKOs), who provide the necessary support for First-year EFL students to proficiently comprehend intricate linguistic nuances in a care-free environment.

Finally, the research reveals that first-year EFL students demonstrate a highly developed ability to navigate social media platforms thanks to their digital natives' profile and also the applications' algorithm that automatically makes English-mediated content pop on their feed based on their interests during their leisure time. Furthermore, the findings show

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that students consume entertainment and communication content more than educational content because of the nature of these platforms, which are made for entertainment. However, the majority of students follow accounts to improve their English skills even if the content they consume is far from being educational.

3.4 Students' Interview Analysis

This study employed a semi-structured interview that consisted of 13 questions divided into 4 sections, designed specifically to bridge the gap between students' academic process and their daily social media usage and habits. This interview attempts to authenticate the researcher's hypotheses that social media serves as a low-pressure pedagogical alternative for the target population, providing an in-depth insight into how reduced stress levels encourage learners' autonomy, while using these platforms for content consumption and peer-to-peer communication to increase their daily English exposure to develop their sociolinguistic skills and build their communicative confidence in real life.

3.4.1 Theme 1: The Students' Extensive Media immersion and Content preference on Social Media Platforms

The participants' responses clearly show a daily engagement which using both TikTok and Instagram most which establishes their status as digital natives who use these platforms for a significant amount of time during the day ranging from six to ten hours actively engaging in these platforms either for interactions or content consumption. This created a good environment for Extramural English activities to unconsciously happen during their leisure time, scrolling through different social media platforms for entertainment to relax after a day full of lectures, which means they are exposed to the language as it becomes a constant presence in their daily lives instead of just a university major. These daily online habits frequently lead to a state of virtual immersion that forms the bedrock for OILE modal.

Additionally, when asked about whether their ability to navigate these social media apps came naturally to them or they had to put some efforts in to find English content, they characterized it as "automatic", "natural", or even "unconscious". This collective answer suggests that due to their digital native profile, they see no problem or complications in navigating these platforms and their algorithm, as it has become an extension of their own interests on their smartphones.

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Consequently, these findings show a high level of learners' autonomy, as their ability to use these apps to find English content is like them being their own teacher and developing their own informal linguistic curriculum, which creates the perfect environment for "incidental learning" as students often just stumble upon English content on their feed. From a theoretical standpoint, as the technological barriers have been eradicated thanks to their abilities to find English content naturally, in the context of IDLE and OILE, these students are most likely to be involved in self-directed learning.

Regarding the participants' favorite content creators or channels, their responses highlight a clear preference for gaming content creators either on Youtube or TikTok for the male participants because they like their jokes and casual way of talking on their videos or lives, the female participants on the other hand reported following vloggers, and beauty gurus on Youtube, Instagram, or TikTok as they enjoy listening to them talking about trends and so on while they are busy doing something.

Finally, these participants' responses provide important evidence that their linguistic development is linked to their daily digital habits on social media and prove that these informal platforms provide 1st year EFL students with a barrier-free gateway exposure to Extramural English, as finding English became as easy as consuming it. In addition, while the researcher aimed to capture the target populations' subjective perception of their preferred content creators, channels and how it helps build their sociolinguistic skills, the online materials collected by the researcher such as: reels or TikTok of these content creators, videos of youtubers, and everything related to the mentioned content creators underwent a separate comprehensive qualitative content analysis in details in the following part.

3.4.2 Theme 2: The Affective Filter on Social Media Platforms, Autonomy, and Peer Connection Sanctuary

The majority of participants reported feeling a shift in their psyche while moving from the formal classroom setting to these platforms online, they also claimed feeling overwhelmed during lectures but as soon as they leave class and start using their smart phones going online on social media platforms, it made them more comfortable as if they were at home increasing their communicative confidence as they become active expressive participants rather than passive quiet students in a classroom.

In the context of IDLE, this shift that these participants are feeling is because on social media they learn through self-selected interactions they are in control of, away from their

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fears of being judged, graded, making a mistake while trying to participate in class, or even be ridiculed by their peers and so social media serves as a socio-emotional buffer that encourages students to focus on their social goals such as expressing opinions and making new friends.

In addition, these findings illustrate that these digital natives count on the comfort and support provided by the global digital online community they interact with in this informal digital environment that facilitates frequent use of English, where students reported feeling less anxious.

The analysis of participants' responses shows that learners' autonomy is vital for linguistic engagement, as these students reported that the freedom of choosing their own topic on social media platforms encourages them more to read and listen to English. In addition, they reported feeling the linguistic fatigue they usually experience during their formal lecture had disappeared, which allows them to consume English on these platforms for prolonged periods of time during the day while navigating through their personal interests as a hobby, and due to the reduced cognitive load, they can process more of the complex side of language without being overwhelmed.

Furthermore, the participants also mentioned that when they are in control of their content or even choosing a topic that can be related to their interests the psychological nature of the task changes as they do not perceive it as a university requirement but rather an intrinsic satisfaction as most students noticed that they get so focused on the entertaining part of the topic to the point that they don't even realize they are unconsciously practicing English on these apps which supports IDLE theory that suggests that high-interest activities result into a more effective language acquisition.

In the context of Social Information Processing theory, the analysis of participants' answers shows that these digital natives' choice of topics helps them build a specific online identity, a female participant reported that she is interested in "beauty" content and that she is not only interested in watching the tutorials, but also she felt the need to belong to the global community of beauty enthusiasts to share her passion and this motivated her to learn a specific lexicon needed to reach her goal.

This data shows that 1st year students feel that choosing their own topics exposes them to English they find more useful in their daily lives and authentic, as they see the teachers' choice of topic is often limited to a single academic style, but their style allows them to explore slang, new accents, etc., leading to robust input and a developed linguistic repertoire. Moreover, the majority of participants reported making online friends and joining group chats

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where English was the main language used, often with native speakers from the United States of America, England, or even from around the world to socialize.

These findings show that these students are joining these groups and making friends online for their natural desire to connect to people and so they use English on social media to make these connections and interactions possible, when analyzed through the Social Information Processing (SIP) theory these platforms serve as a stress-free environment where simple texting back and forth facilitates making bonds or friendships grow with time and so the socially safe circle gets created in the process for students to practice the language.

Additionally, participating in these platforms that are considered as Extramural English, IDLE, and OILE environments is voluntary away from the anxiety they experience in their formal strict classroom environment they lower their guards down allowing themselves to express their authentic personalities and interact with others comfortably, and so these interactions with other online users using English is a linguistic scaffolding from their more proficient international friends that act as More Knowledgeable Others (MKOs) in these group chats that serve as an online Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD).

Finally, as digital natives, the participants are naturally used to communicating through social media platforms as a normal part of their day, using English as an extension to voice themselves online, transforming the language from a rigid subject they study to a part of their everyday social interactions that unconsciously helps them develop their sociolinguistic skills. The findings also prove that social media provides a safe environment for students' linguistic experimentation that is often missing in Algerian formal EFL classroom and that gives them the freedom of choosing their own topics exposing them to English they find as more useful in their daily lives and authentic as they saw the teachers' choice of topic is often limited to a single academic style but theirs allows them to explore slang, new accents,...etc, leading to a robust input and a developed linguistic repertoire.

3.4.3 Theme 3: The Shift from Formal English to Real-World Informal Vernacular English

All participants reported having a preference for social media's input as they see "Academic English" as too "static," unlike real-life English that provides them with slang, diverse accents, and even cultural references. From the perspective of Social Information Processing theory, this preference for social media platforms is due to their social utility; students learn towards the online input they receive because it has more social currency, which allows them to be part of the global online community as they are now capable of

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understanding memes and even having normal conversations with natives or people from around the world more easily.

Furthermore, for these digital natives, these online social media platforms became their new social reality and functionally more superior to the academic English they learn in their formal academic lectures as they help them navigate their way through social media apps such as commenting on posts, reels, or even TikToks, and even real life as this GenZ communicate using internet talk with each other even in normal face-to-face conversations.

In addition, these findings also suggest that this interesting and barrier-free environment of Informal Digital Learning of English (IDLE) helps build a strong personal attachment to the language, as the learner is in control of their learning process, which is self-selected and fun at the same time. These students view the online vocabulary they acquire through these platforms as a considerable upgrade to their personal sociolinguistic repertoire, rather than abstract terms they learn during their formal academic lectures that they are required to learn to pass their tests or exams.

The participants' answers show a deep connection between the target population's passive language exposure on social media and their active language production, as they did report mimicking a content creator unconsciously, and they only noticed after their friends pointed it out during their conversation on the university campus and hallways. In the context of Social Information Processing (SIP) theory, this data highlights a deep psychological and emotional bond between these students and the content creator they follow, because watching their content daily creates a sense of security and relational intimacy, which gets transformed into mimicking their speech patterns, habits, and even accents unconsciously to fulfill their need for belonging to this online community.

These digital natives' behavior validates the Extramural English, IDLE, and OILE frameworks because it shows language acquisition can happen unconsciously without having to focus, attend a formal lecture, or even memorize lessons and rules. After all, the incidental acquisition is happening during their leisure time while they are passively scrolling on their phones, consuming English-mediated content that is interest-related or socializing on social media apps with their peers, family, and friends.

In this socio-cultural environment the global content creators they follow act as the More Knowledgeable Other (MKO) who provides scaffolding for these students because they are considered as GenZs who like to keep up with new trends and so they repeat viral expressions or trendy memes and jokes, some participants gave some examples of that such

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as: “my Shayla” which is a term of endearment that means adorable, “Delulu is the solulu” which means being too confident for something impossible to happen, or even “sending me” which mean uncontrollable laughter or something is too hilarious. These findings show that the target population is exposed to real-life English that they see as useful in their daily social life, which results in incidental language acquisition.

The majority of participants reported that they prioritized expressing themselves over language practice, as they are only using the language for their voices to be heard about a post or even a certain topic.

Furthermore, in the context of IDLE and OILE, commenting is seen as a linguistic production that is the result of these students’ engagement and this act is interest-driven as they preferred sharing their opinion over practicing the language but it counts as incidental learning as commenting is an Extramural English activity that is most effective when students unconsciously focus on the content rather than the form as the language becomes a tool for them to debate with and have discussions developing their sociolinguistic abilities in the process.

In addition, these digital natives are voicing their opinions in a traditional environment through texts and comments, where they cannot hear voice intonation or see facial expressions and body language. They use what is called internet talk to communicate on these platforms, where the lack of these physical social cues is compensated by emojis, memes, gifs, or even slang for their lack of physical presence. For these students, English is not merely a major or an academic subject; they study it as some sort of social passport used to connect with the rest of the world while maintaining their Algerian identity online, just strategically using English to reach a wider audience to share their interests and using whatever linguistic resources they have to reach certain communicative goals.

Moreover, the comment section on these platforms is like a form of digital ZPD for these students, where mediated peer-to-peer interactions also happen through comments. Also, while reading previous comments about the topic or post, they see how they phrased their ideas and opinions, and by doing so, they scaffold their own learning to develop their linguistic level.

All participants claimed that they use English on social media because they feel that it is a bridge that connects them to the online global community. This suggests that these students perceive English as the “lingua franca” of these online platforms. Interestingly, the majority of participants also noted that although their goal was purely social the outcome is an

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improved academic performance that represents a perfect example of both Extramural English and Informal Digital Learning of English (IDLE) since these students focus so much on their social goal that their consumption of English input increases considerably without the feeling of cognitive overload from studying resulting in an improvement of their language comprehension and benefiting of assistance for their academic journey.

In addition, the target population shifted from being English students to being “English users” as the language became a part of their daily lives, in the process of achieving their social goals they look for their own communities through which they receive the necessary linguistic materials instead of waiting for their teachers to provide it for them during their formal lectures being in control of their own learning process as autonomous learners.

Additionally, the data shows that the language acquired through these social media platforms is embraced by 1st year students as a personal identity, and that proves that this online environment is viewed as a more legitimate source of the language they need for their autonomous learning journey, while academic English is seen as a requirement and necessity to acquire strictly for their academic process. However, language production is primarily driven by their social goals and is profoundly tied to their unconscious language acquisition during their leisure time spent on social media apps in an effortless but powerful way, even more than their formal, strict lectures, because students are more motivated for language production on these platforms due to their functionality and social goals, they want to achieve rather than for academic achievements. By clearly prioritizing voicing their opinion, students get rid of any pedagogical barrier they faced during their formal lectures, as stress or anxiety that hinders their learning process does not exist.

Finally, while the academic journey of these students is important as it is a formal academic reason to learn the language, their responses lean more towards wanting to belong to a global community. This allows them to practice the language on these platforms daily, expanding their sociolinguistic boundaries.

3.4.4 Theme 4: Multimodal Decoding and Translanguaging on Social Media Platforms

The majority of students’ responses revealed a clear preference for the community-driven learning strategies; while facing linguistic ambiguity on social media platforms, students look for the meaning within these apps, which is easier for these digital natives who know how to navigate their online environment.

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In addition, the dictionary is not structured to be equipped with the evolving lexicon of internet talk that students use to communicate on social media, such as slang, memes, and gifs. So, it is easier to find the meaning in the comment section, which is considered their digital ZPD, where they learn from other internet users that serves as the More Knowledgeable Other (MKO). However, one participant did report that he preferred using a dictionary sometimes to become accustomed to finding more academic words related to the slang word he just found while scrolling and being able to use a more formal language during formal lectures.

Through the lens of Social Information Processing theory, the participants are relying on comments found in the comment section to interpret both the social and emotional nuances behind the post or reel they just saw to grasp the meaning of the new word, so these students don't perceive a text-based communication as an impediment because of the lack of non-verbal cues they adapted to these platforms ecosystem and started looking for online text clues such as: emojis, gifs, punctuation,...etc.

Furthermore, the participants' behavior while analyzed through the frameworks of IDLE, OILE, and Extramural English shows that language acquisition outside of the classroom walls for these students is autonomous because they engage with Extramural English activities on social media out of their personal interests where their underlying motivation is entertainment and within this digital environment they shift from the formal English learnt in the classroom to Informal Digital Learning of English (IDLE), and Online Informal Learning of English (OILE), that is distinguished by their independent exploration of social media's ecosystem where they solve linguistic ambiguities within these platforms and decode meanings of words, posts, or even jokes, in this environment that provides them with a sense of safety and makes the language more memorable for these students

All participants reported being able to express genuine emotions while texting on social media apps, even with the absence of non-verbal cues, and that they don't think communication via text dehumanizes them, but rather benefits them in so many ways to create new bonds and even strengthen already existing ones. In the context of Social Information Processing (SIP) theory, the target population learnt to adapt to technological development and so text-based environments are not considered a linguistic barrier for these students, as they replaced non-verbal cues with text-cues such as emojis, memes, or even specific slang as an example one of the participants did report noticing some "text behavior" from her peers that guided her to understand their emotions like short replies or

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abbreviations:(IDK, TTYL...etc) if they were mad, using capitalization in all letters of the sentence to express anger as if they were yelling through text, sending memes for laughter or even emojis like a heart to express love and all sorts of other emotions.

Additionally, the target population learned these text-based emotional expressions unconsciously as Extramural English, IDLE, and OILE environments are perfect for this incidental learning, as students text or connect with new people through social media platforms, which is also considered their friendly ZPD, where more competent online users act as the MKO who naturally provide a scaffolding for them through conversational support.

The participants' answers show a clear linguistic division depending on the context and the person they are communicating with through social media, as they reported using English while texting with international friends or commenting on their posts, reels, TikToks, and so on. However, they use their entire linguistic repertoire while chatting with their local friends because they share the same native language.

When analyzed through the lens of Social Information Processing (SIP) theory, this data indicates that 1st year students pick their linguistic code depending on who they are connecting with, and so they use a familiar language mix for their local Algerian friends, and they switch to purely using English while talking to a foreigner for better understanding. For these Algerian digital natives, mixing languages is mere child's play. After Algeria got its independence from French colonialism, Most Algerians mixed Algerian Arabic (Darija) with French while communicating with each other, and so adding English to the mix while chatting on these social media platforms is a simple extension of how they usually speak, as they claimed that this translanguaging happens naturally and unconsciously.

Furthermore, this automatic shift from using their full linguistic integrated toolkit to strictly using English shows their outstanding ability to control their multilingual repertoire and use it for their advantage as well, one participant did report reading a reddit post written in a mix of Algerian Arabic, French, and English about an interesting topic for his oral expression presentation that he had to do with a classmate whose English level is of a beginner and so he explained using his whole multilingual repertoire for him however the day of the presentation of course they purely used formal English.

Finally, these digital natives preference for the comment section while facing a linguistic ambiguity is considered a natural habit in their daily lives as they consider it a collective ZPD where other online users help them overcome these linguistic barriers and develop their sociolinguistic skills and so it encourages them to be autonomous learners that

show outstanding creative solutions proving their digital natives' profile with each linguistic barrier they eliminate their sociolinguistic abilities get developed resulting in incidental learning that helps them in their academic journey. In addition, these students' behavior highlights that their ability to balance and shift between both formal and informal English depending on the situation and the person they talk with makes them understand the complex side of the language better, in addition to knowing when to switch from the casual slang English they use on these platforms to the formal academic English during their formal lectures.

3.5 Students' Interview Interpretation

The findings of the student's interview prove that first-year EFL students perceive social media as a better educational alternative that supports the process of achieving their sociolinguistic goals in a stress-free, judgment-free environment. This helps them develop their academic English skills through their daily interactions in the process, as they become more independent learners incidentally.

Additionally, the data shows that students are immersed in consuming English-mediated short videos for prolonged periods of time during the day, showing clear signs of Informal Digital Learning of English (IDLE), Online Informal Learning of English (OILE), as conceptualized by Sockett (2014). Furthermore, shifting from the stressful formal classroom environment to a stress-free environment, such as social media, makes students less anxious, which results in incidental learning, a finding that is consistent with the advantages of Extramural English (EE), which Sundqvist (2009) highlights as a fundamental component in modern language acquisition. This habitual content consumption highlights how students act as their own teacher within social media, which works as a Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) concept deeply rooted in Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, where the target population interacts with people and content creators around the world that act as More Knowledgeable Others (MKOS).

Finally, these target digital natives (Prensky, 2001) display exceptional sociolinguistic flexibility skills that help them navigate social media platforms and process its content, as they can easily engage in Translanguaging that is perceived by Garcia and Wei (2014) as an important cognitive tool, confirming that the target population is not just a passive recipient for knowledge but an active agent that uses their multilingual repertoire to sustain effortless

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communication and construct their social identities as established in the recent research of Baran and Madiseh (2023). The findings also show that students use Social Information Processing (SIP) theory (Walther,1992) strategies to comprehend the complicated emotional and multilingual requirements of online global interactions.

3.6 Content analysis

Following the students' subjective responses on the last question of the interview with the researcher, this section shows the details of the qualitative content analysis done on the online materials (content) related to the content creators mentioned by the target population to do an in-depth evaluation of the complex reality of the informal language acquisition. The researcher moved beyond the 1st year university students' perception of what they are learning on social media platforms and directly analyzed the linguistic input they consume from the content creators and channels collected through the last question of the students' interview, specifically focusing on gamers, vloggers, and beauty content.

3.6.1 Gaming Content

A qualitative content analysis was conducted first on a popular gaming YouTube channel, "Kubz Scouts," that is run by the American content creator Robert Jay Perez. This YouTube channel was mentioned by the participants in the students' interviews as an English-mediated content they consume during their leisure time.

Jay's channel "the Kubz scouts" content is gameplay videos and real-time reaction to each video game he plays which are mostly horror video games with funny jokes and reactions such as screaming or being jump scared that results into laughter for anyone who is watching and also a form of entertainment that perfectly exemplifies the notion of both Informal Digital Learning of English (IDLE) and Online Informal Learning of English (OILE) as the primary of this content creator's content is entertainment that the 1st year university students are consuming during their leisure time unconsciously exposed to the language which is considered incidental learning that is considered interest driven-learning and an autonomous learners' behavior as well, away from their strict academic curriculum, lectures, and grammar rules.

In the context of Social Information Processing theory, Jay's interactive delivery style created a strong bond between him and his community that made them let their guards down

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and for their affective filter to be lowered, which is shown in the comment section of most of his videos, where his community explicitly expresses it. This content creator often uses hyper-expressive emotional reactions to events happening in the gameplay, showing his audience and community his genuine emotions, resulting in an online content creator-community relationship and making language more memorable due to subconscious linguistic mimicry.

This youtuber as a Native American speaker might speak very fast and his level of English is more advanced than an average 1st year EFL student's level of comprehension, however the video is the a multimodal environment that serves as an emotional and situational scaffolding for the students through the context of the game, its environmental context, the change in the content creator's tone of voice, facial expressions, and body language that helps them bridge the gap between what they can comprehend and what they can decode from the scaffolding they receive from The More Knowledgeable Other (MKO) who is the Youtuber in this case.

In addition, for these digital natives that grew up surrounded by technology and the internet, the overwhelming fast pace of gameplay and talking is nothing they can't in fact, their brains are wired to understand such chaotic content, internet talk, and real-world English naturally. While watching content on YouTube, such as Jay's videos, the students tend to employ their whole multilingual linguistic repertoire to better understand what the content creator is saying in English. Consequently, they use translanguaging, connecting a complex Native American word they heard to an equivalent of it in Algerian Arabic (Darija) or French to understand the meaning. Finally, after the students adopt the new linguistic input, they acquire while watching these videos, it builds their self-confidence and English-speaking identity, resulting in sociolinguistic fluency.

The second content creator that was mentioned most by first-year university students is the American YouTuber Mark Fischbach, also known by his YouTube channel's name "Markiplier" whose content is a bit similar to "The Kubz Scouts" that was previously analyzed gameplay-wise. However, Mark is more theatrical and narrative while he plays indie horror games.

The target population consuming this Youtuber's content during their leisure time aligns is clearly Informal Digital Learning of English (IDLE), Online Informal learning of English (OILE), and Extramural English (EE) because they engage in watching this English mediated content for the thrill of the gameplay, to feel comedic relief, being invested in the storylines and unpredictable outcomes of the indie horror game away from the lectures,

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grammar rules, overwhelming academic tasks. In this anxiety-free environment, first-year EFL students are exposed to real-life linguistic input for prolonged amounts of time, allowing them to easily acquire the complex side of the language without feeling any cognitive fatigue frequently felt during formal academic lectures.

Markiplier's communicative style provides a strong embodiment of Social Information Processing (SIP) theory. He addresses his audience directly with a prolonged eye contact, a deep, resonant, and comforting voice, very expressive facial reactions to gameplay events such as screaming because of a jumpscare, he laughs at himself and is transparent with his audience about it as he is not afraid of being vulnerable with his community that results in a comforting bond between the content creator and the audience. This perceived relational closeness lowers the students' affective filter, facilitating language acquisition, when they share an emotional experience with the content creator through their videos, such as laughing, smiling, or even crying. Any existing linguistic barrier disappears as the target language is no longer a scary academic obstacle but a linguistic tool for shared interests.

This YouTuber transforms the passive viewing experience of his videos into a fun, interactive environment for his audience. Markiplier acts as a More knowledgeable Other (MKO) who provides the real-life linguistic oral scaffolding for the target population through his sophisticated vocabulary, native accent, authentic and trendy jokes, using the game's visual context, his body language, and auditory cues during the gameplay. All this plays a huge role in filling the gap between the student's level of comprehension and the content creator's level of native linguistic input, successfully helping them acquire the language and gain sociolinguistic confidence without the need for academic lectures.

For these digital natives, Markiplier's fast content is easily processed thanks to their innate capacity to synthesize fast-paced online media, as digital interfaces are part of their daily lives. In addition, students naturally engage in translanguaging while watching this content creator's videos to better understand the target language, which in this case is English, and so by using their multilingual linguistic repertoire (Algerian Arabic, French, English), they relate the English input they acquire from Markiplier to previous concepts they already know in Algerian Arabic (Darija) and French.

Finally, 1st year university students receive rich linguistic input from Markiplier that they mimic in their daily life, such as his famous catch phrases, his native-like narrative pacing, and cultural jokes. This process allows students to shape a more culturally authentic English identity on social media platforms and develop their sociolinguistic skills.

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The third content creator in the gaming category mentioned by the target population is the British YouTuber Dan Middleton, also known by his YouTube channel's name "DanTDM", unlike the two previous content creators. This YouTuber's content is not strictly gaming but also vlogging, reaction videos, interactive internet challenges, and family-friendly content.

Unlike the previous Youtubers Dan's gaming content is not about chaotic horror games rather casual sandbox games such as Roblox, Minecraft and story-heavy indie game such as Henry Stickmin which allows the target population to focus on vocabulary and structure of the language resulting in incidental language learning that supports the frameworks of Informal Digital Learning of English (IDLE), Online Informal Learning of English (OILE), and Extramural English (EE). In addition, since DanTDM is a native British, the target population's exposure to his content will develop their phonetic skills and adaptability to a variety of accents, such as the British accent.

Within the framework of Social Information Processing (SIP) theory, DanTDM's communicative style is highly approachable, he articulates clearly, and has a friendly choice of words over time. This consistency of viewership fosters a sense of safety for the audience, creating a strong bond between it and the content creator. This safe environment that was created due to the online bond between the content creator and the audience alleviates the target population's anxiety and keeps the students relaxed, resulting in highly receptive cognitive ability. The target language changes from being an intimidating linguistic barrier to an everyday unconscious habit on social media and fosters autonomous learning.

This YouTuber's channel represents a Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) for the target population as he acts as the More Knowledgeable Other (MKO) that offers a highly structured oral scaffolding and so even if the gameplay is confusing and his British expressions sound complex the video provides explicit scaffolding to bridge the gap through: slow flow of storytelling, and coordination between words and actions throughout the video done by this content creator. All this helps students comprehend the complex side of the target language and seamlessly develop their sociolinguistic skills.

Finally, the analysis of the channel's linguistic output shows a rich world-building vocabulary related to the sandbox gaming jargon, such as: "I don't fancy building my house with all these monsters around" in Minecraft, allowing students to broaden both their vocabulary and distinction between different accents.

3.6.2 Vlogs Content

A qualitative content analysis was conducted first on the TikTok profile of Alix Earle (@alixearle) that was mentioned by the participants. Alix Earle is an American vlogger on TikTok whose content is about lifestyle micro-vlogs and “Get Ready With Me” or “GRWM”. Unlike previously mentioned, this short video format changes how the target population hears and processes the language due to this content creator’s fast speech pace that matches her actions and the youthful slang she uses to address her audience.

TikTok is known for its operation on an algorithm where users can scroll endlessly during their leisure time and so the consumption of this creator’s mini vlogs is considered Informal Digital Learning of English (IDLE), Online Informal Learning of English (OILE) because students have lectures during the day often all morning and in the afternoon they often run into this content while they are on their phones between lectures. This content creator’s mini-vlogs show that being exposed to English in small, fragmented moments and the frequency of content consumption on social media make the language part of their daily lives, resulting in incidental language acquisition.

Examining Alix Earle’s “GRWM” TikToks within the framework of Social Information Processing (SIP) theory, it showed that this content creator films her videos in a close angle while getting ready for the day and talking in complete transparency about her life in general, from the audience’s view it is almost like a video call with a friend and so a one-sided friendship gets created with time. This parasocial bond dissipates the students’ stress due to their exposure to the content creator’s vulnerability and how relatable their content is, these 1st year students, resulting in effortless language absorption.

Although Alix Earle’s content is not educational, she still acts as the More Knowledgeable Other (MKO) who guides students through her short videos that serve as a multimodal scaffolding. Through the combination of coupling her words with her actions, TikTok’s automatic on-screen text, and her editing skills erasing any blank, unnecessary moments from the videos, this content creator helps students comprehend her fast-paced, complex expressions easily and unconsciously.

Since the target population is digital natives, they have advanced cognitive abilities that help them process fast-paced content they encounter on social media platforms, and so they engage in translanguaging while watching Alix Earle’s short vlogs. These students use their entire multilingual linguistic repertoire (Algerian Arabic, French, English) to decode

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social American concepts mentioned in this content creator's videos and link them to their own cultural understanding of real-life experiences.

Finally, the frequent exposure to Alix Earle's content allows students to broaden and diversify their linguistic skills more than the academic input they receive during formal lectures. By listening to her fast-paced Native American conversational speech style, emotional expressions, and modern internet slang, first-year university students develop their sociolinguistic skills needed to communicate and interact with the global online community.

The second vlogger whose content was analyzed by the researcher and was mentioned by the participants in the previous interviews is Instagram influencer Clarke Peoples (@clarkepeoples) a Native American, her Instagram reels and stories are "Day in My Life" short videos where she shares her everyday life with her audience, and unlike the previously mentioned vlogger her speech is more sophisticated, with a measured and structured pace that provides the target population with a more professional style of linguistic input without relying on the academic lectures.

First-year EFL students' content consumption on Instagram, such as watching this content creator's reels and stories, acts as a blueprint for the Informal Digital Learning of English (IDLE) and Online Informal Learning of English. Since Instagram's algorithm combines short videos known as reels and photos posted for daily life updates called stories, the students are acquiring the language in small fragments during their day, resulting in online micro-immersion and unconscious autonomous behavior.

The analysis of Clarke Peoples' content within the Social Information Processing (SIP) theory framework shows how the parasocial bond gets created through content consumption on social media platforms and how it helps develop their linguistic skills. This content creator pairs her actions with her speech, and so she records her short vlogs while talking to her audience directly about mental peace, money management, and casually getting ready, doing unboxings, and simple daily chores at home. This synchronization creates a strong parasocial bond through time, it lowers students' affective filter and makes the language less intimidating, resulting in natural unconscious acquisition of English.

This content creator does not intentionally teach English, but it does not mean that her content cannot indirectly help 1st year EFL students develop their sociolinguistic skills. Clarke Peoples serves as a More knowledgeable Other (MKO) that can scaffold the students, through the synchronization of her spoken words and actions, the automatic captions on Instagram that correspond to her spoken words, and matching the content to the timeline, such as morning

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routines posted during morning time, and so on. This multimodal scaffolding allows students to easily comprehend the complex real-world vocabulary that the content creator uses.

In addition, these digital natives can easily navigate mixed-media layout platforms such as Instagram, and also engage in translanguaging unconsciously while watching people's vlogs, which means they use their whole multilingual repertoire (Algerian Arabic, French, and English) to comprehend their life experiences and topics she discusses in their vlogs and link them to their personal growth and life.

Finally, 1st year EFL students' daily exposure to this content creator's real-life linguistic input develops their confidence because they can use the real-world acquired vocabulary, Native pronunciation, and expressions as tools to interact with others around the world.

The next vlogger whose content was analyzed by the research and who was mentioned by the participants in the previous students' interviews is the African American Twitch streamer Kai Cenat. His vlogs fall in the category of "long lives just chatting" format, and unlike the two previously mentioned vloggers whose content is pre-recorded and provide structured linguistic input while heavily relying on American English, for Kai Cenat it is quite the opposite his vlogs are live and the linguistic input he provides is unpredictable with a fast speech pace, and the use of urban modern slang while heavily relying on African American Vernacular English (AAVE) because of his origins, which allows 1st year EFL students to be exposed to real, authentic conversational English that they cannot learn in their formal university lectures.

1st year EFL Students consuming Kai Cenat's content take their language processing to a whole new level. Through his unpredictable live streams on Twitch that can go on for hours, this content creator indirectly obliges them to internalize English at a native level. However, due to his humorous and interactive live streams, students remain invested for long periods of time, absorbing the language unconsciously in the process due to their engagement in macro-immersion instead of interacting with English for brief periods of time, and so it is a form of Informal Digital Learning of English (IDLE), and Online Informal Learning of English (OILE).

When examining this Twitch streamer's content through Social Information Processing (SIP) theory, Kai Cenat treats his viewers and community as family and friends, sitting in his bedroom, directly and excitedly looking at the camera while narrating his wild stories, reading their chats, and replying to them. All this creates a strong parasocial bond that

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fosters a sense of comfort for these students, making language acquisition incidental because of the friendly atmosphere created by this content creator, removing all linguistic barriers students may face on social media.

Kai Cenat's content is extremely chaotic and far from being educational; the layout of the Twitch platform he streams on provides robust multimodal scaffolding for the 1st year EFL students who watch his streams. This content creator's repetition of linguistic input such as native or internet slang, memes, and iconic catchphrases during his long live paired with his highly exaggerated body language that match his words, and the live chat in the stream of thousands of viewers who ask questions, type out their reactions, and repeat his jokes are considered the More knowledgeable other who help students bridge the gap and comprehend the complex native level English.

In addition, due to the 1st year EFL students Digital Natives profile they possess advanced cognitive abilities to watch multiple resources of information at the same time such as watching Kai Cenat's live vlog while keeping track of what others are typing in the live chat, and also engaging in translanguaging using their entire multilingual linguistic repertoire (Algerian Arabic, French, and Academic English) to decode his informal communicative speech and his African American Vernacular English.

Finally, the frequent exposure of 1st year EFL students to Kai Cenat's content will develop their vocabulary more than their formal academic lectures could. Furthermore, their perception of English changes drastically from a boring academic subject to a linguistic tool used for their social connections, because they were exposed to authentic urban dialect, new accents, and diverse speech delivery styles.

3.6.3 Beauty Content

A qualitative content analysis was conducted first on the Australian Chloe Morello's Instagram account content since it was mentioned by the participants during the previous students' interviews. This content creator uses Instagram reels and stories to post her makeup routines, and unlike previously mentioned content creators, her short videos are visually dense and meticulously edited, such as using voiceover. Yet, her speech is natural, not scripted, and features her Native Australian accent, which exposes students to a new side of informal English that can't be taught in their formal academic lectures.

1st year EFL students consuming Chloe Morello's short beauty tips reels and stories on Instagram is considered an advanced unconscious form of Informal Digital Learning of

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English (IDLE), and Online Informal Learning of English (OILE) practice that allows them to unconsciously acquire and decode new complex words they encounter while scrolling on their phone during their leisure time. Furthermore, students are more used to hearing American and British accents, and this content creator exposes them to her Australian accent as she shows different beauty products and teaches beauty tips. Hence, students naturally pick up the new vocabulary incidentally because they follow an account they absolutely adore.

When Chloe Morello's content is examined through Social Information Processing (SIP) theory, it shows that she builds a strong parasocial bond with her followers by being transparent and vulnerable with them through showing her true face without filters while she addresses them by looking directly at the camera, talking about makeup products she uses and her daily struggles at the same time. This newly created bond allows students to feel less anxious, the language and her accent become less intimidating, resulting in incidental language learning for the target population that follows this content creator.

Although Chloe Morello's content purpose is far from being academically educational, Instagram's interface creates a strong scaffolding to 1st year EFL students through the video editing that can be done by the content creator directly on the platform such as voiceovers and text banners in her videos, matching her actions with her spoken words such as applying color corrector under her eyes while saying: "I apply this color corrector under my eyes to neutralize my dark circles...etc", and the visual context of her recording setup such as seeing the room she usually records her beauty content in the student's can predict the vocabulary that will be used by the content creator. All this is a multimodal scaffolding for the target population that helps students comprehend the fast, complex new idioms without being confused or needing to look up the meaning.

Due to the target populations' Digital Natives profile, they can easily process multiple information resources at the same time, such as listening to Chloe's voiceover while reading the text banners on one of her beauty tips reels or stories. These students also engage in translanguaging while watching this content creator. Eventually, they use their entire multilingual linguistic background (Algerian Arabic, French, and formal Academic English) to make sense of her Australian accent, complex idioms, and content.

Finally, the target population's continuous exposure to Chloe Morello's content broadens their vocabulary and makes them flexible about learning different English accents and their catchphrases and inside jokes, depending on the country. In addition, watching her

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content shows that students perceive English as more than just a boring subject but a linguistic tool that they can use to interact with people around the world.

The second content creator whose content was analyzed by the researcher mentioned by the participants during the previous students' interviews is the American TikToker Jackie Aina (@jackieaina). This content creator is a beauty and style expert on TikTok. Her short TikToks are visually dashing, showing her self-care and makeup routines, and product reviews that are marked by her calm, confident speech style and articulate native American English accent, her heavy use of internet beauty slang and catchphrases despite her African American origins.

Jackie Aina's TikTok profile is the perfect environment for Informal Digital Learning of English (IDLE) and Online Informal Learning of English (OILE). Since most TikToks are short and mostly about their personal interests, the target population does not have to focus unlike when they are in an hour and a half lecture about a boring topic suggested by their teacher which results in incidental learning of English like the case of this content creator whose content is about beauty hacks and tips that is entertaining for these 1st year EFL students and so students implicitly assimilate modern internet slang, and native English idioms and even develop their listening skills in a fun way.

When Jackie Aina's content is examined through Social Information Processing (SIP) theory, it shows that she builds a parasocial bond with her followers through being transparent, vulnerable and relatable with them giving off "older sister vibes" that gives advices casually about her self-care routine, beauty tips and even life at times while doing her makeup and looking directly at the camera mimicking the feeling of a video call with a close friend for these 1st year EFL students lowering their affective filter and eliminating any linguistic barrier they may have faced during their formal lectures thanks to her encouraging elegant and friendly speech style, and online personality resulting in natural language acquisitions.

Although Jackie Aina's TikToks are more built for the entertainment of her audience than for their education, TikTok's interface curates strong multimodal scaffolding for the target population that consumes her content within their ZPD, with this content creator acting as the More Knowledgeable Other. Jackie Aina's vocabulary is advanced and highly descriptive in some of her luxurious product marketing TikToks for cosmetic products and fragrances, her actions are synchronized with her words (e.g., I'm blending this bronzer with my foundation to better match my skin color), then students see her blending both products

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using a makeup brush moving across her face, and she edits her TikToks using text banners for better explanations of steps of her self-care routine or writing the names of products used in her videos providing support to her audio. All of this is a strong scaffolding for the target population, allowing them to easily decode native vocabulary and modern internet slang.

In addition, since 1st year EFL students are Digital Natives who grew up with technology they can easily process the fast paced content and multiple resources of information at the same time like Jackie Aina's content, as they are used to listening to content creator's fast paced audio while reading the captions and linking it to the action that's been done in the TikTok to decode native level vocabulary, jokes, and even complicated idioms or accents. They also engage in translanguaging to connect what she is explaining to previously acquired concepts using their entire multilingual repertoire (Algerian Arabic, French, and English) and make sense of her content.

Finally, 1st year EFL students' consumption of Jackie Aina's content makes them enjoy the language more, and their perception of English changes from being a stressful and boring subject or major they chose to study at the level of the university to a tool that helps them interact with others and share their passion all around the world through social media platforms while also unconsciously developing their sociolinguistic skills.

The next content creator whose content was analyzed by the researcher because they were mentioned by the participants during the previous students' interviews is the British Instagram beauty influencer Patricia Bright (@patriciabright). This content creator uses Instagram reels and stories to post about style, beauty hacks, self-care routines, and sometimes short life updates. Furthermore, her videos are pre-recorded but with an improvisational, natural-paced linguistic style, a modern London British accent, which exposes the target population to real-life British English that contrasts with the formal one they learn during their formal lectures.

The 1st year EFL students' consumption of Patricia Bright's content is an up-to-date way for them to engage in Informal Digital Learning of English (IDLE), and Online Informal Learning of English (OILE) as they watch her reels and unconsciously decode small fragments of the language at a time instead of listening to an hour and a half boring lecture where they lose focus in the first twenty minutes or feel cognitive fatigue. Because of this beauty influencers' entertaining content about fashion, and makeup, students stay interested since they follow an Instagram account of their own choice, depending on their personal

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interest, they internalize new vocabulary, and even her modern London British accent through time and consumption of her content.

When Patricia Bright's content is analyzed through Social Information Processing (SIP) theory, it shows that her way of creating a parasocial bond with her followers is very similar to how the previous content creator Jackie Aina does by being friendly and having a "older sister" online profile with her audience while being transparent, and vulnerable which makes the 1st year EFL students' affective filter lower resulting in incidental language learning and linguistic barriers elimination.

Although Patricia Bright creates entertainment content on her Instagram account, it does not mean that it cannot be educational for the 1st year EFL students who watch her reels and stories. In fact, it is a strong multimodal scaffolding for them. This beauty influencer acts as a More Knowledgeable Other (MKO) for the students who scaffolds them in a similar way the other previously mentioned content creators do through the synchronization of her actions and spoken words in her videos (e.g., "then as a last step I spray this makeup set spray so it lasts all day", the students will see her holding the product bottle to her face and spray it which explains her words, she also edits her videos using text banners to name steps of her makeup tutorial or even names of cosmetic product, and the recording set up also give the chance for students to predict the vocabulary that she will use from the background and the clues in the environment she is in her video. All this helps the student to comprehend her native level British English without feeling lost or confused.

Thanks to the 1st year EFL students' Digital Natives profile, they can easily consume Patricia Bright's content because they assimilate multiple currents of information at the same time, like when they are watching her reels where they listen to her British English voiceover, watch her body language and actions, while reading the written captions all at the same time to understand the language and even her accent. The students engage in Translanguaging as well, using their entire multilingual repertoire (Algerian Arabic, French, and English) to better understand the content.

Finally, the 1st year EFL students' exposure to Patricia Bright's content allows them to expand their vocabulary, their knowledge of different English accents around the world, and real-world British English. Students also change the way they perceive English from a tool for their academic success to a tool that enhances their self-confidence through interactions with others all around the world.

3.7 Thematic Synthesis of the Qualitative Content Analysis

The qualitative content analysis of the three categories mentioned by the participants, which are: Gaming, vlogging, and beauty content, that are consumed by the 1st year EFL students, demonstrates a nuanced learning environment that functions independently of formal academic parameters. By synthesizing the researchers' analytical insight within the entirety of categories, four central themes are identified, clarifying how social media platforms promote language acquisition.

3.7.1 Theme 1: The Role of Parasocial Bonding on Social Media in Incidental Language Acquisition

Within the entirety of all the previously analyzed content, 1st year EFL students see the bond that gets created between them and the content creators as an imagined one-sided friendship also known as a parasocial bond that acts as a primary driver for diminishing the affective threshold. The content creator's frequency of candid disclosure, relational exposure, and establishing direct eye contact with the camera while recording their content or on a live stream promotes emotional connectedness that neutralizes the apprehensive factor that is often related to formal English instruction during lectures.

This subjective parasocial closeness optimizes English from "an intimidating educational obstacle" to a utilitarian tool for mutual human interactions on social media platforms. Shared emotional experiences between the target population and the content creators they follow such as laughing at the Kubz scouts' reaction after being jump scared while playing a horror movie, or a female student watching Patricia Bright's tips and hacks videos where she feels like her older sister advising her, facilitate unconscious natural language acquisition for these autonomous learners.

3.7.2 Theme 2: Content creators' Multimodal Scaffolding within the Learners' ZPD

The social media platforms act as a Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) by constructing a comprehensive, rigorous support mechanism with the More Knowledgeable Other, who, in this case, are content creators. As exemplified by DanTDM's interactive games, where both his actions and the oral input are synchronized, creating a support system for the learners who consume his content.

This multimodal scaffolding bridges the linguistic decoding gap for the 1st year EFL learners, enabling them to decipher complex native-level colloquialisms without the need for

direct explanations. By depending on the visual cues found in content creators' videos or lives, their body language, and the algorithmic text overlays they add while editing their videos, the students can anticipate which vocabulary will be used and absorb it naturally within their ZPD, resulting in a successful, complex, native-level linguistic input acquisition.

3.7.3 Theme 3: Translanguaging and Digital Natives' Cognitive Encoding

1st year EFL students are considered Digital Natives who use highly proficient cognitive operational processes to navigate the fast-paced, diversified input nature of the content they consume on social media. Instead of being anxious, the target population strategically mediates these online environments through engaging in translanguaging, which means they use their entire multilingual repertoire (Algerian Arabic, French, and English) to contextualize the new linguistic input acquired from the content they consume.

This is specifically apparent in the content analysis of Kai Cenat's chaotic live streams on Twitch and the TikToker Alix Earle's segmented vlogs. Students synthesize data from pluralistic stimuli synchronously, such as watching Kai Cenat's actions, listening to what he is saying, and reading the live chats at the same time to decipher his modern colloquial vernacular and link this newly acquired English input to pre-existing socio-cultural constructs.

3.7.4 Theme 4: The Learners' Sociolinguistic Identity and their Authentic-Self on Social Media

The constant exposure to this varied content changes the target population's perception of English from a boring academic major and educational subject to a multidimensional sociolinguistic tool. The recurring motifs show that 1st year EFL students are not only acquiring new vocabulary but also assimilating register-sensitive speech, native-level narrative pacing, and sociocultural complexities.

The target population is creating a more original, cultural self-concept through their engagement with "colloquial dense" social interaction on social media platforms spanning from African American Vernacular English (AAVE), modern London British accent, to even the unique Australian English accent. All this allows students to navigate their personalized sociolinguistic progression and the global online community, resulting in a substitution of the cognitive strain related to the formal academic lectures with the passion-led, incidental learning that happens through social media platforms.

3.8 Teachers' Interview Analysis

As a final research instrument, the researcher opted for a qualitative semi-structured teachers' interview with four of the target population's teachers following the previous analysis of the 1st year EFL students' data. The researcher's purpose behind opting for this research instrument is to cross-reference between the students' self-perceptions and their teachers' actual professional observation about how informal habits on social media shape their sociolinguistic skills, and affect their academic performance. By assessing the target populations' teachers' perspective, the researcher gains deeper insight into whether the informal social media habits will collide or harmonize with the formal academic pedagogy.

3.8.1 Theme 1: The Dichotomy of Self-Directed Learning in Extramural Spaces

When assessing the role of social media in this present-day pedagogical ecosystem, the 1st year EFL students' teachers concede that social media platforms have become an omnipresent catalyst that can no longer be ignored or disputed. Teachers reported frequently engaging in discussions with the target population about social media, and embracing this modern technological educational shift because they see it as a powerful and critical shaper of these Digital Natives' academic journey, as it affects them in both a positive and negative way.

These teachers' educational recognition matches the fundamental essence of Informal Digital Learning of English (IDLE) and Online Informal Learning of English (OILE) where language acquisition perimeters transcend the four walls of the formal academic classroom environment and into online and digital spaces. The teachers also reported encouraging their learners to harness this interactive ecosystem of interconnectedness, interacting cross-culturally with foreigners and native speakers around the globe to practice their English communicative skills. One of the teachers even claimed to intentionally direct the target population to use LinkedIn to find specialized training and scout for international scholarships.

However, the materialization of self-directed learning in these social media platforms reveals a fascinating discrepancy in the teacher's professional observations that highlights a clear divergence in students' profiles. On one hand, a segment of the target population's teachers perceives their learners as active, autonomous, self-regulated individuals who love to function independently. From this first point of view, students match the trait of their Digital Natives' profile and are considered a part of Generation Z (GenZ), who are familiar with

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technology and the online world, naturally independent. So they are antagonistic to authoritarian dictation from their teachers.

The teachers reported through their professional observations of 1st year EFL students, autonomous behavior, that their learners show a significant increase in self-regulated preparation at home before attending formal academic lectures, are well-informed, and at the end of the lecture, they inquire about different social media platforms where they can expand their already acquired knowledge. This self-regulated behavior mirrors the student-centered approach mentioned by the target population's teachers, where students are expected to be in charge of their linguistic and academic development journey as university students, encouraging them to be active researchers.

In diametrical opposition, the other segment of the target population's teachers characterizes 1st year EFL students as passive learners who are academically shy, heavily reliant on their teachers' explanation during formal academic lectures and their structural spoon-feeding. The teachers also reported that the majority of the target population is either shy or afraid to participate and rarely takes the initiative to look for English-related materials online unless they are told to do so by their instructors.

To counteract the students' prevailing passivity and stimulate their latent learner's autonomy, pedagogically disruptive implementations were frequently used during formal lectures. These implementations are clearly exemplified through teachers' claims, as they frequently asked the 1st year EFL students to take out their smartphones while they shared their personal internet with them to encourage them to look up information and definitions related to the lecture of the day and start participating in class. By explicitly training their learners to use skepticism as a learning strategy, which means questioning everything and trying to look for answers through research instead of relying on the rigid lecture explanations during formal academic lectures, these instructors aspire to bridge the gap between their students' passive English-mediated content consumption and self-regulated digital inquisition.

In addition, teachers acknowledge that the traditional university timetable hardly offers sufficient instructional lectures each week, which they consider fundamentally inadequate for their learners' linguistic development. Hence, out-of-class digital autonomy is perceived by the educators as a paramount pedagogical importance that should be promoted amongst their learners rather than an elective supplement or even a hindrance to their linguistic development. Teachers became aware that they should no longer take a hierarchical role in the target population's academic journey that provides them with ready-made lecture

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explanations and evolve into facilitators and monitors who wisely scaffold their learners' self-improvement as active researchers.

Through encouraging learners to self-regulate their own learning outside of the classroom walls, educators try to leverage the advantages of digital media to substantiate language practice. However, the teachers also expressed concerns about the 1st year EFL students because of their digital natives', GenZs' profile; they rarely use social media platforms for educational purposes since these apps are dominated by entertainment content.

Finally, the data reveals that 1st year EFL students' teachers might see digital platforms as a driver for autonomous learning and an encouragement to the learner centered approach they implement in their teaching journey with their learners, however the target population should have a level of self-control and internal self-discipline for Informal Digital Learning of English' (IDLE), Online Informal Learning of English (OILE) and Extramural English (EE) to be successful, teachers even gave examples about how to do so, such as: deleting certain social media apps during exam periods, or even consuming educational content on social media platforms.

3.8.2 Theme 2: The Socio-Emotional Influence of Social Media: Passive Lecture Halls and Active University Corridors

There is a distinct dichotomy between both the informal social media environment and the formal university setting, which worries the 1st year EFL students' teachers a lot. Through their constant professional observation during formal lectures with their learners, they noticed that a considerable portion of the target population is highly inhibited by deeply ingrained socio-emotional obstacles; they portrayed them as apprehensive, reticent, and impeded by acute classroom anxiety, psychological stress, and communicative reticence.

Although students rarely articulate these emotional vulnerabilities out loud to their educators due to saving face, their instructors reported that they can detect this contextual anxiety through direct conduct-related observations throughout diverse university spaces. This divergence becomes strikingly evident when comparing the students' classroom behavior to the spontaneous peer-exchanges manifesting in university hallways and corridors. The teachers also claimed that outside of the formal classroom walls, the target population converses in English with remarkable fluency as they interact with their peers, laugh, and express themselves freely. Yet, the moment the same students who were seen actively

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speaking in the university corridors become passive as soon as they step into the classroom, as if an invisible emotional barrier prevents them from expressing themselves and silences their voices.

In addition, when examined through the perspective of Extramural English (EE), Online Informal Learning of English (OILE), the informal digital habitat functions as a low-accountability, anxiety-free refuge that profoundly transforms the learner's emotional state. Teachers acknowledge that social media platforms grant the students a crucial sense of security for their learner since they provide both text and auditory-based production without feeling threatened or pressured by the teacher's observation or judged by their peers during formal lectures. This systemic anonymity behind a screen gives the target population a powerful voice while omitting an overwhelming physical and visual presence, which grants them the self-confidence to step out of their comfort zone, something they did not dare to do during their everyday formal academic lectures. On social media, the fear of instantaneously making a mistake, being graded, or peer mockery is non-existent, which creates a socio-emotional sanctuary where students feel empowered to explore and experiment with English as a target language productively, fostering an ecosystem where their attempts at communication are welcomed rather than scrutinized.

Furthermore, this online security deeply influences students' readiness to engage with multifaceted registers and linguistic varieties of English. In the educational classroom setting, 1st year EFL students are often psychologically constrained by the subjective obligation to use pure, formal, academic English, resulting in creating a high affective block to immediate speech. Inversely, the computer-mediated communication of social media allows them to freely use casual language, and even slang, without the fear of academic sanctions or punitive grading. This online communicative self-assurance arises from the fact that social media priorities pivot away from syntactic precision and towards original, utilitarian social goals. All this allows the target population to focus on expressing themselves and creating new bonds with others while viewing English as a tool to achieve their social goals and not an object for persistent evaluative observation.

To replicate this informal digital space within the traditional academic setting, the teachers reported using designated educational psychology tactics, especially during the Oral Expression lectures. Acknowledging that the chronic anxiety of being evaluated or chastised paralyzes their learners, teachers intentionally bypass correcting any grammar or pronunciation mistakes on the spot. Such as when a student utters an inaccurate phrase such

as “they leave” instead of “they left,” the strategic pedagogical intervention dictates that the instructor simply validates them by reply,” Ah, they left, alright then,” better than stopping the student’s communicative output to impose an authoritative rule. To obstruct a student’s communicative initiative mid-sentence exacerbates their view of persistent judgment and fear of failure, escalating their internal cognitive barrier and fostering communicative withdrawal during future formal classroom interactions. Hence, teachers reported that punitive corrections only encourage passivity and classroom silence.

Conclusively, the paramount goal of these modern EFL teachers is to make sure students develop a persistent tendency to participate during formal academic lectures without being constantly disrupted, corrected, or sanctioned. Teachers view that the 1st year EFL students are all trying to manage shared linguistic anxiety and glossophobia, and so it is the educators’ responsibility to create a safe environment for their learners where making mistakes is a totally normal thing, as there will be no development without experimentation and failure. By desisting from immediate corrections and encouraging the students’ abilities to share their point of view despite making structural mistakes, the instructors attempt to ignite the supportive, low-anxiety interactional patterns of social media platforms. This instructional progression aims to reshape the formal classroom environment from an anxiety-inducing place of evaluation into an interactive environment where the target population can progressively build prolonged communicative self-confidence.

3.8.3 Theme 3: Academic Formal curricular vs. Social Media’s Informal

Vernacular

The extensive exposure of 1st year EFL students to social media platforms implemented a pervasive linguistic tension between the stagnant, formal criteria of the university’s syllabi and the fluid, informal English conventionalized on social media. The teachers reported that the target population attends formal academic lectures heavily saturated with internet talk, slang, content creators’ catchphrases, and even the native American accent due to incessant online immersion. This heavy exposure to informal vernacular English creates a peculiar educational phenomenon: while students feel intimidated most of the time to participate during formal academic lectures, a teacher reported that they react with instant smiles and earnest recognition when he asked them if they knew the modern internet terms called “brain rot”. The target population’s reactions show that they might not use these modern internet terms during formal lectures, but they do have a deep understanding and

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knowledge of today's online lexicon, highlighting that their exposure to English is constant and omnipresent.

Additionally, a teacher claimed that the highly proficient students from the target population regularly use informal English they consume on social media, like “gonna” and “wanna” during listening and speaking tasks, to show off their mastery of a native-level American accent to their educator and peers as well. Teachers also noticed from the students' reactions a sense of honor, pride, and cultural particularity when mimicking native American speakers' vernacular styles, and they often argue back if corrected, that communicating using authentic, informal English is more comfortable than using the rigid formal academic English.

Furthermore, some teachers advocate for the informal vernacular English frequently found on social media platforms as an authentic form of the English language, exemplifying the true mother-tongue of native American speakers, a vital yet missing component in the invariable formal academic English that is taught in the university, which tends to privilege the outdated materials over interactive exchange. This creates an observed phenomenon where the target population privileges the symbolic prestige of social media's informal vernacular over the institutional standing of formal academic English.

Through the lens of Social Information Processing (SIP) theory and Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), social media operates as a hyper-personal More Knowledgeable Other (MKO). Rather than delivering a text in a cold, stoic way, these platforms enable students to utilize a highly developed system of social exchange. (SIP) Theory supports this dynamic by showing how online spaces allow the 1st year EFL students to form deep interpersonal bonds and develop exposure-based familiarity over time, even in the absence of in-person communication.

Interestingly, even though the target population is noticeably engrossed in this social media culture, teachers claim that explicit written form abbreviations like (TTYL and IDK) rarely transgress into formal academic activities, indicating that the impact of the (MKO) is primarily audio-based and vocabulary-related rather than solely typographic. For the target population's teachers, this new vocabulary acquisition happens naturally because casual language shares fundamental lexical, grammatical, and pronunciation cornerstones with formal academic English, which means that the relaxed online immersion within the learner's ZPD can provide them with significant capabilities to enhance their underlying formal language skills.

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Nevertheless, this intensive dependence on social media introduces systemic dissonance and acute cognitive concerns within the 1st year EFL students' teachers. Some teachers expressed worry that an excessive consumption of algorithmic feed-based English-mediated content may attenuate the analytical thinking, empathetic reasoning, and focus of their young learners, which compromises their cognitive processing of formal academic lectures. A teacher also reported that certain "brain-rotting" cartoons and social media platforms these digital natives grew up with impacted their capacities to show reciprocal empathy or maintain cognitive engagement during the explanations of complex formal academic lectures. A consequential linguistic erosion lies in the complete deficiency of quality control on those apps. Furthermore, the teachers warned that numerous content creators spread erroneous knowledge, pronunciation inaccuracies, morphological derivation errors, and even deceived naïve students into believing that casual, informal slang is suitable for academic discourse.

Finally, since the lines between the casual informal English and the formal academic English became consistently blurred for the 1st year EFL students, however, their teachers stress that social media platforms cannot replace formalized education. In addition, these educators also realize that disregarding what their learners are living with on these platforms triggers an acute educational clash and obstructs the institutional knowledge they are supposed to acquire during formal academic lectures. The teachers claimed that through continuous updates on online trends and consolidating it with using educational platforms like Moodle, they can productively be a directing figure that guides the target population to methodically link online vernacular interactions with formal academic criteria. The content creators on social media can significantly contribute to language acquisition, but only if their teachers scaffold them and educate them about how they can safely navigate the path towards comprehensive register competence.

3.8.4 Theme 4: Educational Flexibility and Translanguaging Boundaries in the Hybrid ZPD

First-year EFL students' teachers noted that when the target population finds themselves linguistically challenged, facing a mental block, or anxious during a classroom interaction, they automatically engage in translanguaging. Instead of maintaining passivity and silence or shutting down fully, learners adaptively employ their entire multilingual repertoire, tactically mixing Algerian Arabic (Darija), French, and English to maintain the communicative fluidity to express their ideas. This use of linguistic fluidity highlights that the

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students' cognitive-linguistic systems are not isolated from one another into rigid compartments; instead, they function as a unified cognitive network.

When analyzed through the lens of the current sociolinguistic frameworks, these trans linguistic practices are substantially viewed by the target population's educators as a highly sophisticated management mechanism, and an intelligent move, instead of an indicator of linguistic failure. The educators explicitly validate this behavior from their learners, especially during the Oral Expression module, a teacher reported directly instructing them, saying: "If you don't know a word in English, you can say it in another language, like French or Arabic. What is important is that you speak".

Permitting the target population to seamlessly operate within their integrated inventory acts as a fundamental cognitive conduit within the students' Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and simultaneously navigates the intricate synergy between their internalized conceptualization and how they implement it effectively. Teachers also added that they would prefer that the 1st year EFL students define something using a mix of Arabic, French, and English, and continue participating while they help them later to develop their English linguistic skills, rather than have a silent passive class that does not even try to participate due to a linguistic block or lack of vocabulary.

Additionally, the educators themselves trigger and even authorize their learners to engage in translanguaging during the formal academic lectures to support their cognitive processing of new concepts and ameliorate emotional constraints. After their professional observation during the process of teaching the target population, they also noticed that the learners find it temporarily unfeasible to express a complex concept during formal lectures using only English, and so they bolster their communicative abilities by advising them to use their entire multilingual repertoire to make sure that the core semantic meaning is correctly understood and internalized. This fluid adaptation corroborates that 1st year EFL students have not yet achieved unconscious automaticity in their information acquisition processes. Instead of imposing a formalized English-only rule that obstructs beginner-level students, the instructors treat translanguaging as a valid and momentary scaffolding that maintains the intellectually enriching, utilitarian, communicative flow during formal lectures.

Moreover, to enhance these progressing learner profiles, these innovative educators are strategically gravitating towards a dual-modality teaching approach, integrating technology directly with the formal classroom environment to broaden the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The educators reported using a convergent pedagogical methodology

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via educational university platforms such as Moodle, while students are instructed to use social media to prepare for their presentation, perform it at home, and record it to autonomously self-evaluate it by themselves and see what needs to be ameliorated. This integration of ICTs makes sure that the classroom is far from being detached from social media platforms; on the contrary, it is an expansion of the learners' daily online environment, where a balanced equilibrium between formal and informal pedagogical modalities

Finally, this dynamic approach generates substantial linguistic advancements progressively, as witnessed throughout the academic semesters. The teachers observed that whereas the 1st year EFL students may have started their first semester heavily depending on translanguaging and were hardly able to generate consistent English sentences proficiently, this lenient, blended educational environment enabled them to improve their linguistic skills drastically by the second semester. By centering communication over instantaneous formal specificity, the learners are given a dedicated educational environment to train their autonomous cognitive mechanisms, progressively diminishing their dependence on both Arabic and French as their English vocabulary augments and gets internalized through persistent practice. Highly proficient digital natives exhibit an outstanding competence for this register fluidity; the teachers even proudly mention specific cases of 1st year EFL students who heavily engage in casual, vernacular-rich English with their classmates in the university corridors, yet switch seamlessly to formal academic English the moment they need to participate in class, do a presentation, or even write an essay.

3.9 Interpretation of Teachers' Interview

The interviews with the first-year EFL students' teachers reveal that their perception is quite different from that of their learners, as they do acknowledge that social media helps shape and develop the students' academic English skills; however, it cannot replace the traditional formal academic lectures they teach them during their academic journey.

The teachers are shifting from being traditional instructors who spoon-feed their learners to being facilitators who help them bridge the gap between the rigid academic curriculum and the flexible informal, colloquial English students encounter on social media platforms, this educational shift mirrors the concept of a Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) as defined by Vygotsky (1978) where the teachers act as the ultimate More Knowledgeable others (MKOs) who scaffold their learners to navigate both formal and informal registers. By utilizing "pedagogically transformative" strategies, for instance,

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avoidance of direct mistake corrections, educators seek to replicate the encouraging, relaxed environment of social media in the classroom during formal academic lectures to encourage their learners to be more active, as it is similarly seen in their Informal Digital Learning of English (IDLE) habits (Sockett, 2014).

The educators also corroborate translanguaging now; the mix of Algerian Arabic, French, and English utilized by the target population as an advanced communicative tool is seen as a strategic move rather than a linguistic failure, which aligns with Garcia and Wei's (2014) conceptualization of Translanguaging. This flexibility serves as a momentary support, which helps students maintain conversational fluency while progressively ameliorating their linguistic competency needed for academic automatism.

Finally, the findings indicate that the academic future of teaching EFL resides in a dual-modality approach that spreads the students' Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) beyond the traditional classroom walls. Teachers can successfully transform the passivity in the classroom during lectures into autonomous learners who are more than competent to navigate both informal and formal registers by consolidating their traditional teaching methods with technology and scaffolding the learners' online habits.

3.10 Conclusion

The analysis of this research investigated the role of social media in the first year EFL students' lives, providing insight and a substantial shift from the traditional instructor-led teaching to independent, autonomous, interest-driven learning. The findings indicate that the target population perceives social media as an informal, low-stress educational substitute that efficiently lessens the anxiety and "strict" natures of the formal academic environment.

The empirical findings from both the questionnaire and students' interview data reveal that for these learners, social media platforms act as a fundamental "social passport" for globalization, expressiveness, and linguistic advancement. Students lower their anxiety levels and successfully alter the language from a formal academic subject to an informal operational sociolinguistic tool by engaging in the informal, pressure-free social media platforms. This procedure is marked by Informal Digital Learning of English (IDLE) and Online Informal Learning of English (OILE), where the social media's feed system functions as a long-lasting teacher, familiarizing students with authentic, real-world English input, for instance, colloquial English, internet talk, a variety of English accents, and slang that is frequently lacking in traditional academic lectures.

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Additionally, the study highlights the crucial role of social media as a digital Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where content creators and people all around the world act as the More knowledgeable Others (MKOs), which supports the learners to apprehend complex linguistic variations. The content analysis further bolsters this by defining how parasocial relations, inter-semiotic scaffolding, and dynamic translanguaging allow students to bridge the gap between their current knowledge and near-native linguistic proficiency.

Finally, the teachers' interview findings validate that social media's influence on the first-year EFL students is indisputable; however, it does not replace the traditional education; thus, a modernization of educational approach, such as a dual-modality approach, is necessary for encouraging autonomous learning.

General Conclusion

General Conclusion

This research investigated the evolutionary relationship between the use of social media platforms and the EFL acquisition among first-year EFL students at Dr. Moulay Tahar Saida University. By employing a quantitative questionnaire and qualitative interviews with both the target population and four of their teachers, the researchers gained valuable insight into how these GenZs navigate the convergence of formal educational standards and colloquialism. The results demonstrate a substantial shift and a pedagogical progression from traditional, teacher-led instructional strategy to an autonomous interest-led language acquisition.

Concerning the first research question and its related hypothesis, the data decisively confirm that first-year EFL students view social media platforms as a low-anxiety educational substitute to academic education. The findings reveal that social media operates as an “educational haven” where the target population efficiently lowers their stress levels. By using these online platforms, students easily and successfully diminish their anxiety levels that are usually related to the formal classroom environment, allowing them to change English from a strictly educational subject to a sociolinguistic tool that promotes independence and self-autonomy. The evidence also clearly shows that the target population uses these platforms during their leisure time for Informal Digital Learning of English (IDLE), Online Informal Learning of English (OILE), and as Extramural English activities as well

Pertaining to the second research question, the research substantiates the hypothesis that first-year EFL students use social media mainly for content consumption and peer-to-peer intercommunication, which considerably boosts their sociolinguistic competence. The study attests that social media apps work as a Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) where the More Knowledgeable Others (MKOs) are the content creators, who support the learners through visual indicators, internet vernacular talk, and captions found in their reels, videos, TikToks, live streams, etc. That is a form of multimodal scaffolding to bridge the gap between the already acquired knowledge and the target language fluency.

Moreover, the findings also validates the third hypothesis that frequent interactions in English-mediated social media platforms, is anticipated to refine their sociolinguistic competence that gets translated into greater confidence in real life social exchanges, because those of their use of Social Information Processing strategies, and engaging in Translanguaging to decode the native-level vernacular they encounter on their feed, or

General Conclusion

through texting the target population acquires authentic English that boosts their confidence to use during real-life social exchanges.

Finally, the research highlights that the first-year EFL students' teachers need to shift to a dual-modality approach instead of "spoon feeding their learners", since social media habits have a powerful impact on the target population, integrating them into the formal academic instructions to bridge the gap between formal and informal English, and transform the students' passivity into active autonomous learning.

Recommendations

Recommendations

For future studies, it is highly recommended to employ a quasi-experimental design to assess the effectiveness of the implementation of the dual-modality approach by initiating an intervention, where teachers actively guide their learners through their social media habits. Future researchers can compare the academic outcomes of the integrated group against a normal group, thus providing empirical evidence of the impact of the dual-modality approach on students' autonomy and communicative skills.

Additionally, future researchers should also consider conducting an in-depth cross-platform comparative study, such as comparing audio-visual-based content that can be found on Instagram or TikTok and the purely text-based content they may find on Reddit, to acquire a deeper understanding of how different types of social media platforms affect students' linguistic acquisition.

To conclude, further attention should be given to the impact of social media on Algerian EFL students' linguistic performance, and researchers are encouraged to consider this and conduct further studies.

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Appendices

Appendices

Appendix A: Students' Questionnaire

This questionnaire is part of a Master's research project on informal English learning via social media. Your answers are confidential and will be used for academic purposes only. By completing this form, you consent to participate.

1. Age :
2. Gender : ()Male – ()Female
3. Current Level of English (Self-Assessed) :
()Beginner – ()Intermediate – ()Advanced
4. Which social media platforms do you use daily? (Check all that apply) :
()Facebook - ()Instagram – ()TikTok – ()Youtube – ()X(Twitter) –
Other Platform :.....
5. On Average, how many hours per day do you spend on social media? :
()Less than 1 hour – ()1-3 hours – ()3-5 hours – ()More than 5 hours.
6. How often do you encounter English content on your feed? :
()Rarely – ()Sometimes – ()Frequently – ()Almost exclusively.
7. Do you intentionally follow accounts/creators to improve your English? :
()Yes – ()No.
8. What type of English content do you engage with the most (Rank 1-3) :
Educational “ How-to “ videos (Grammar/Vocabulary tips):.....
Entertainment (Memes, Vlogs, Movies, Podcasts, Instagram reels,
TikToks):.....
Communication (Chatting with foreigners/native speakers or friends):.....

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9. In your opinion, has social media improved your English more than your formal class? :

() Strongly Disagree – () Disagree – () Neutral – () Agree –
() Strongly Agree.

10. If you agreed or strongly agreed, in what ways has social media helped you more than the formal classroom? (You may check more than one):

() It provided more exposure to authentic, real-life vocabulary/slang.

() It helped me improve my listening skills through videos and reels.

() It allowed me to practice speaking/writing with native speakers without fear of judgment.

() It offered shorter, more engaging explanations than a long lecture.

() Other: _____

11. Are you willing to participate in a short interview to discuss the specific pages and creators you follow for English learning? : () Yes – () No.

12. If yes, please provide your email and phone number:.....

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Appendix B: Students' Interview

Hello and welcome! First of all, thank you so much for taking the time to participate in this interview today. Your help is incredibly valuable to my research.

My name is Adjel Meisse, and I am conducting this interview as part of my Master's thesis. I am looking at how 1st-year university students in Algeria use social media as a platform for informal English learning. There are no right or wrong answers here today. I am simply interested in your personal experiences, your habits, and your honest opinions about using social media.

To make sure I capture everything accurately without missing any of your valuable insights, I will be voice recording our conversation. Please rest assured that this recording is strictly for my own academic analysis. Your identity will remain completely anonymous, and your name will not be mentioned anywhere in my thesis.

Q1 : Being part of a generation that grew up with smartphones, which social media platforms (TikTok, Instagram, YouTube) do you use the most, and roughly how many hours a day are you on them? [Concept: Digital Natives / Extramural English]

Q2: Do you feel that your ability to navigate these apps and find English content comes naturally to you because you've used tech your whole life, or is it something you actively have to work on?

Q3: Do you feel more comfortable and less anxious when reading or writing in English on social media compared to participating in a physical English classroom? Why do you think that is?

Q4: If you learn a new English word from a TikTok/Reel and a different one from a university textbook, which one do you feel is more "real" and useful for daily life?

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Q5: Does having the freedom to choose your own topics on social media (like gaming, sports, or beauty) make you want to spend more time reading and listening to English than if a teacher assigned you the topics?

Q6: What actually drives you to leave a comment or reply to someone in English online? Is it a desire to practice your English, or do you just really want to share your opinion on the topic?

Q7: Do you use English on social media because you feel it connects you to a global community, or is your main goal just to improve your English skills for your academic journey?

Q8: When you don't understand a slang word or a meme in English, do you use a dictionary, or do you look at the comments section to figure out what it means based on how other people are using it?

Q9: Have you made any online friends or joined group chats where English is the main language used? How has that shaped your confidence in expressing your real personality?

Q10: Some people say that communicating through a screen makes people cold or "dehumanized" because we can't see faces or hear voices. Do you feel you can express real, warm emotions in English on social media using things like emojis, caps lock, or specific slang?

Q11: When you are searching for something or commenting on social media, do you find yourself typing a query in a mix of Algerian Arabic, French, and English? Why is that easier for you?

Q12: Do you ever find yourself repeating a specific phrase or accent from a TikToker or YouTuber without even realizing you are doing it?

Q13: Can you give me two or three English-mediated content creators or channels you follow?

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Appendix C: Teachers' Interview

Q1: Did you ever talk about social media with the 1st year students during any of your previous sessions with them?

Q2: Do you notice students using specific slang, accents, or "internet talk" that they clearly didn't learn from your lessons?

Q3: In your view, do students feel more "safe" or less judged when practicing English on social media than they do in your classroom?

Q4: Do you feel students are becoming more independent (acting as their own teachers) because they have English in their pockets 24/7?

Q5: When students speak or write in class, do they use "online" tones (like being very informal, using internet catchphrases, or sarcasm) that suggest they spend a lot of time in English digital spaces?

Q6: Have you noticed students using "text-speak" or digital abbreviations (like "IDK" or "TBH") in their classroom notes or rough drafts?

Q7: When students don't know a word in English, do they "mix" it with their native language to keep the conversation going? Do you see this as a smart strategy or a mistake?

Q8: Since students are "Digital Natives," do you find yourself changing how you teach to keep up with the way they consume English online?

Q9: Can students who are very "fluent" on social media easily switch back to formal academic English, or is the line between the two getting blurry?

Q10: Do you feel like the content on social media could be more knowledgeable for students to learn English from?